ABSTRACT

Soviet Religion Policy through Religious Dissidents from Leonid Brezhnev to Mikhail Gorbachev: A Comparative Study of Aida Skripnikova and Valeri Barinov

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In an attempt to eradicate belief in God and religion from the lives of its citizens, the Soviet Union arrested, tried, and imprisoned thousands of religious believers during its seventy-year reign. Two of the most influential of these believers were Aida Skripnikova and Valeri Barinov. Skripnikova, arrested and tried on three separate occasions beginning in the mid-1960s, was known for her zealous work and tireless efforts to help other religious prisoners. Barinov, arrested numerous times in the early 1980s, utilized his musical talent to evangelize the youth in Leningrad. Spanning nearly two decades, Skripnikova and Barinov witnessed four changes in Soviet leadership from Leonid Brezhnev to Mikhail Gorbachev. By examining Skripnikova's and Barinov's lives and trials, an understanding, and perhaps even a pattern of liberalization, can be seen in the religion policy of the Soviet Union from Brezhnev to Gorbachev.

Soviet Religion Policy through Religious Dissidents from Leonid Brezhnev to Mikhail Gorbachev: A Comparative Study of Aida Skripnikova and Valeri Barinov

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DEDICATION

To Mom, Dad, and Holly for all their love, support, and encouragement

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Soviet Union was the first modern Western country that attempted to systematically eliminate religion and belief in God in the everyday lives of its citizens. Elaborate propaganda campaigns, strict governmental censorship, and harsh prison sentences were carried out in order to effectively erect atheism as the official belief system in the Soviet Union. Hundreds of churches were seized and destroyed while others were turned into storehouses, public toilets, or museums of atheism. Whole congregations and “religious sects” were forced to undergo absurdly complicated registration procedures in order to secure the legality of regular worship services and even then suffered persecution. Many congregations, for various reasons, were unable to gain proper registration and were forced to carry out their worship services clandestinely in private homes or forests. Believers willing to defy Soviet law in obedience to God eventually came to be referred to as dissidents.

Two religious dissidents who suffered tremendous persecution in the Soviet Union were Baptists Aida Skripnikova and Valeri Barinov. Aida was part of the Reform Baptist movement that broke away from the mainstream Baptist group, and her community was never granted registration. Valeri was part of the mainstream registered Baptists, who were willing to cooperate with the regulations put in force by the Soviet state. Both Aida and Valeri received prison time for their religious and evangelism activities—Aida for her religious zeal and desire to distribute Bibles in the Soviet Union and Valeri for his evangelism method to reach the lost youth of Leningrad through

Christian rock music. This paper will focus on Aida and Valeri, their early lives as Christians, their experience of religious persecution, and the question of whether visible liberalization can be identified in Soviet religion policy. Aida was imprisoned in 1968, whereas Valeri was imprisoned in 1984, and therefore by examining Soviet religion policy during the time of their imprisonment, it can be discerned if liberalization was carried out. To understand religious persecution in the Soviet Union during Aida and Valeri's lives a general background on persecution and dissidents prior to the 1960s is necessary for framework, and because Aida and Valeri were both Baptist, a more detailed look at Baptists will be taken throughout the paper including their entry into Russia in the 1850s.

The term dissident employed for those like Aida and Valeri is ill fitting in many ways, partially because the term ignores the fact that many believers were simply trying to live in compliance with their religious beliefs and not directly criticize or rebel against the Soviet state. However, persecuted believers were lumped in with other persecuted groups including political and literary critics, who openly challenged and protested against the Communist government.

Regardless of the meaning, "religious dissident" gradually became a favorite phrase displayed in newspapers throughout the West, depicting stories of the harsh harassment and prejudicial treatment believers in the Soviet Union faced everyday. Children of believers were often remanded to the custody of the state and placed into orphanages because of their parents' desire to raise them in a religious environment. Other children were isolated or berated for their religious belief by teachers and classmates at school. Believers, themselves, were liable to lose their job if their employer

found out they were religious, at which point the local police or KGB would step in and declare them a parasite due to their inability to hold a job. If someone was deemed a drain on society they could be imprisoned or have their residence permit revoked at which point they were forced to vacate the city. Other believers were arrested, interrogated, and held in a KGB prison for hours at a time, tried in a prejudicial trial, and sentenced to any number of years in a prison or labor camp. The Soviet state employed these and other techniques in an attempt to break believers' spirits and stamp out religious belief throughout its vast empire.

Like many totalitarian regimes, the Soviet Union overlooked and ignored many of the laws that it had written into its Constitution in order to justify the havoc it wreaked on its citizens. Separation of church and state and the prohibition of discrimination against any individual for reasons of faith and religious belief were both guaranteed rights in the Soviet Union's original constitution written in 1918. The Constitution stated that "the right to religious and anti-religious propaganda is recognized for all citizens."[1] When speaking of the injustice carried out by the tsarist government in Russia, Lenin once proclaimed, "Only in Russia and Turkey were shameful laws against religious people still in force. These laws either directly prohibited the open profession of faith or forbade its propagation."[2] Lenin called such laws "unjust, shameful, and oppressive."[3] However, Lenin's hostility to religion is well known and it is likely that he said this only out of

[1] Michael Bourdeaux and Michael Rowe, ed., *May One Believe—In Russia?: Violations of Religious Liberty in the Soviet Union* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1980), 1.

[2] Michael Bourdeaux and Xenia Howard-Johnston, *Aida of Leningrad* (Berkshire, England: Gateway Outreach, 1972), 91.

[3] Ibid.

disgust for the Russian monarchy and tsarist system, which persecuted all religious groups not associated with the Orthodox Church.[4] Lenin often referred to religion as "spiritual booze."[5] At one point he wrote to Maksim Gorkii that "every religious idea, every idea of God, even flirting with the idea of God" was "unutterable vileness of the most degrading kind, a contagion of the most abominable type."[6] This inimical disgust for God and the institution of religion ran deep through the Communist Party as it came to power and as the regime became stronger and more stable, persecution against believers escalated.

Initially, many believers in the Soviet Union did not undergo any persecution from authorities but rather experienced a blossoming of religious freedom in the 1920s.[7] The exception to the Soviet Union's promise of religious freedom was the Orthodox Church, which was persecuted by the Soviet government from the outset. Groups that received the most freedom were the Baptists, Adventists, and other Evangelical and Protestant faiths. Although anti-religious propaganda got underway immediately when Stalin came to power in 1922, public worship was accepted, missionary activities were not forbidden, and preachers and other religious leaders were free to travel and organize meetings. The Soviet state did not interfere in church matters, and therefore parents had the freedom to raise their children as Christians. This was guaranteed by the thirteenth article of the Soviet Union's Constitution, part of the religious decree, which stated that,

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[4] Ibid, 90.

[5] Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd, *Russian Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1998), 275.

[6] Lenin quoted in Ibid, 276.

[7] Michael Bourdeaux and Howard-Johnston, *Aida of Leningrad*, 91.

"citizens may give and receive instruction in private."[8] However, in 1929, the prosperity and growth that had been achieved among religious groups in the Soviet Union came to an abrupt halt.

On April 8, 1929, the Soviet government passed the "On Religious Associations" law, which forbade the teaching of religious ideas and prohibited religious associational life.[9] The law also initiated the practice of churches and religious organizations having to go through a process of registration in order to legally worship.[10] The number of churches allowed registration was few and kept deliberately low to accomplish the government's long-term goal of stamping out religion in all forms. The law thrust the government into every facet of religious life, effectively eliminating the Constitution's guarantee of the separation of church and state. Because the law flew unrelentingly in the face of the Constitution's thirteenth article, the Constitution was amended one month later on May 18, 1929, excluding the right to religious propaganda.[11]

Believers suffered the most severe persecution under Stalin, receiving prison sentences anywhere from ten to twenty-five years under article fifty-eight of the Soviet's Criminal Code. Under this article, believers were charged with anti-Soviet agitation and/or belonging to an anti-Soviet organization.[12] During 1929, Stalin also issued a five-year plan, which sought to target seventeen million believers by 1932. Five-year plans

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[8] Ibid, 91.

[9] Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 2.

[10] Kelly and Shepherd, *Russian Cultural Studies*, 277.

[11] Michael Bourdeaux and Rowe, ed., *May One Believe—In Russia?*, 1.

[12] Ibid, 2.

originated in the Soviet Union and were a series of nation-wide centralized packages issued by the government for the purpose of attaining an economic or political goal within a five-year period. Stalin and Khrushchev were the only two Soviet leaders to apply the five-year plan concept to the Soviet Union's goal of rooting out religion in all its forms. Although the entire target of Stalin's plan was not realized, five million believers were affected, prompting Stalin to issue a second five-year plan intended to successfully eradicate all religion by 1937.[13] A full-scale attack on religion commenced. Icon corners in work places and homes were replaced with atheist corners; exams on atheism were given in both secondary schools and universities. Museums of atheism were erected in every major city and town across the Soviet Union.[14] The Orthodox Church was persecuted unrepentantly in the early years of Stalin's Great Terror. As the dominant and former state religion in Russia and other countries within the Soviet Empire, with membership in the millions, the Orthodox Church posed the greatest threat to Communist atheistic ideology. Hundreds of Orthodox bishops were arrested, tried, and imprisoned and on the eve of World War II, only four bishops remained at large with possibly only as many as one hundred Orthodox churches still open for worship.[15]

However, as the war continued to ravage Europe, Stalin realized that in order to revive patriotism among Soviet citizens, he needed support from Orthodox Church leaders, and therefore assembled a meeting among the remaining bishops. From 1943 until the end of World War II, Stalin called for a reopening of churches everywhere, the

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[13] Kelly and Shepherd, *Russian Cultural Studies*, 275.

[14] Ibid, 277.

[15] Ibid, 278.

convening of a church council, and the renewal of seminary training for future priests.[16] This revival of religious freedom, though the time was relatively short, was so intense that it has been referred to as "the second baptism of Russia."[17] The first baptism in Kievan Rus occurred in 988 when Prince Vladimir, after receiving baptism into the Christian faith, ordered all of those living under his rule to be baptized in the Dnieper River into the Christian faith, thereby ending Russia's practice of paganism.[18] Even after World War II ended, the Soviet Union's economy had suffered so greatly that believers continued to enjoy a significant amount of freedom. However, in 1949, Stalin's campaign against religion was relaunched, and Orthodox believers suffered persecution until his death in 1953.[19] At this time, the government established two organizations for dealing with religious affairs—one for Orthodox churches and one for non-Orthodox churches. Eventually the two bodies would merge to form the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA).[20]

After Stalin's death in 1953, Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev assumed control of the Soviet Union and instigated a thawing period, signaled by his "secret speech" in 1956, in which he denounced Stalin and his policies. Khrushchev desired to be seen as the leader who returned the Soviet Union and its citizens back to a pattern of normalcy and away from the extremism of Stalinism. Growing up in peasant family, Khrushchev

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[16] Ibid, 278-279.

[17] W. Alexeev quoted in Ibid, 279.

[18] Nestor, *Primary Chronicle* (Kiev, 1113).

[19] Lorna Bourdeaux, *Valeri Barinov: The Trumpet Call* (Basingstoke, Hants, UK: Marshalls Morgan & Scott Ltd., 1985), 54.

[20] Ibid, 53.

sought to combat "the idiocy of rural life," and he became a staunch believer in Communist ideology.[21] As leader of the Soviet Union Khrushchev spoke of "constructing communism" as the party's main task and the eradication of religion was part of Communist ideology.[22] By 1956, religion was still prevalent throughout the Soviet Union and for Khrushchev this was unacceptable. Part of the Communist Party's task in building communism was to break with the past—not only from Stalin's extremism but also from old beliefs and ideas, including religion. Khrushchev saw no better way to begin ridding the Soviet Union of old ideas than to commence a full-frontal attack on religion.[23] Khrushchev's assault on religion lasted from 1959 to 1964 until he was ousted. Khrushchev's approach to eliminate religion was quite different from Stalin's, although there was some similarity. As during Stalin's reign, believers were arrested and sent to prison, but Khrushchev's overall method was to slander church leaders and malign all religious ideas as unprogressive and rooted in mysticism. Khrushchev sought to have Soviet citizens view Christians and all believers as enemies of Communism and the Soviet state. While Stalin's war on religion was heavily concentrated on Orthodox Christians and more tyrannical in nature, relying on prison sentences, torture, and other scare tactics, Khrushchev's assault encompassed all religions and focused on presenting religion as an enemy, deserving nothing less than to be annihilated in totality. His approach was much more expansive and ideological. Stalin's tactic for ridding the Soviet Union of religion had been terror and fear, and although

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[21] Quoted in William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 29.

[22] Quoted in Ibid, 508.

[23] Ibid, 512.

Khrushchev relied on fear to some extent, he added a new element to the equation—"aggressive ideology."

Khrushchev's anti-religious propaganda was coupled with what was referred to by believers as "ideological education."[24] Khrushchev's new program sought to educate the masses about the evils of religion through Communist ideology in an aggressive way. A new group of intellectuals was formed who were responsible for spreading "scientific and political knowledge."[25] Several atheist journals and organizations existed prior to Khrushchev's coming to power including the League of Militant Atheists, which was founded in 1925, *Bezbozhnik*, a campaigning journal, and *Anti-religioznik*, which was a review of science and methodology for a scholarly audience, but Khrushchev decided to fight religion head-on.[26] If church leaders and believers could evangelize and spread the Gospel of Christ through sermons and discussions, then Khrushchev could spread the "Gospel of Atheism" in the same manner. The first step to making people see the folly in religion was the launching of the new atheist journal *Nauka i Religiia* released in September 1959. This journal became the leading element in Khrushchev's anti-religion campaign because the journal "[attacked] Judaism, Islam, and religious survivals in general, not just Christianity."[27]

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[24] Lorna Bourdeaux, *Valeri Barinov: The Trumpet Call* (Basingstoke, Hants, UK: Marshalls Morgan & Scott Ltd., 1985), 54.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Kelly and Shepherd, *Russian Cultural Studies*, 275.

[27] Michael Bourdeaux, ed., *The Politics of Religion in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 5.

The next step was to utilize the newly formed group of intellectuals whose task was spreading "Khrushchev's Gospel." The newly formed group came together and established the *Znanie* (Knowledge) Society. They were responsible for organizing lectures and discussions on atheism, and they also held debates with religious leaders in an attempt to prove that God did not exist. Many political leaders and Party members participated in these debates.[28] Other tactics employed were tax increases on religious activity and a greater number of churches and monasteries closed.[29] By 1965 only three of the eight Orthodox theological schools and seminaries for priesthood training remained open with the number allowed for enrollment significantly decreased.[30] In addition, the number of believers sent to prison camps for their religious beliefs and activities skyrocketed.[31] The press published countless articles attacking zealous believers, accusing them of the most despicable of crimes, including murder, rape, and embezzlement, claiming that these crimes were committed in the name of religion. Khrushchev's anti-religion campaign and persecution of believers continued until his ousting by the Communist Party in 1964.

As mentioned before, Khrushchev's campaign against religion was much more expansive of other religious groups than Stalin's had been. Whereas Stalin focused mainly on Orthodox believers because of their high membership and former status and

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[28] Lorna Bourdeaux, *Valeri Barinov*, 54-55.

[29] William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 512.

[30] Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, "Religion and Soviet Society" (July, 1966), 64. Archive file <USSR/Religion/General>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[31] Michael Bourdeaux, ed., *Politics of Religion in Russia*, 5.

influence as the state church, Khrushchev's campaign included all religious believers and aimed to be the "final and complete uprooting of religious prejudices."[32] As the Soviet government came to realize after Stalin's death, as an institution and a way of life for thousands of believers in the Soviet Union, religion was not going to simply disappear just because the government put a little pressure on church leaders and closed down churches. Khrushchev also realized that the Orthodox Church was no longer the only religious group he needed to worry about. Among the religious groups that Khrushchev and the Soviet government began to heavily persecute were the Baptists, who by 1957, had become one of the fastest growing non-Orthodox Christian movements in the Soviet Union, with over 150,000 members.[33]

When the Baptists sprung up in Russia in the 1850s their presence and activities were considered somewhat of an anomaly. The Baptists were instantly both insiders and outsiders. They were Russians who had chosen a non-Russian course and to many they were representative of the West's constant invasion into non-Western cultures.[34] The Baptists' evangelistic nature was a change from the ritualistic and traditional Russian Orthodox Church and many in Russia and neighboring areas gradually came to welcome this change.

The Baptists or the Stundists, as they were called in the early years, first appeared in German-speaking communities in the western and southern provinces of the Russian

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[32] Quoted in Bociurkiw, "Religion and Soviet Society," 64. Archive file <USSR/Rel/General>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[33] Statistical data presented in *Nauka i Religiia* in 1957. Archive file <Soviet Union/ Baptists/ 20 Statistics>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[34] Coleman, *Russian Baptists*, 3.

empire and only began to flourish in the 1860s with large numbers of Russians and Ukrainians being baptized into the new faith. Reasons for this increase in membership can be attributed to word of mouth, circuit evangelists and preachers, migrant laborers traveling from the city to the countryside, and the sponsorship of a few wealthier believers. The new converts to the Baptist faith in the 1860s were mostly of the lower classes such as peasants, workers, artisans, and simple trades people. [35]

During the early years, because the Russian Orthodox Church was the state church, Baptists were the subjects of much persecution by the government as well as by the Russian Orthodox Church, itself. Both the Orthodox Church and the secular press portrayed Baptists in the worst way and no falsehood was spared to discredit their beliefs and activities.[36] When slander did not work, the government and the Church reverted to physical force. An example took place on November 22, 1891 in the province of Yekaterinoslav (now Dnepropetrovsk).[37] According to an eyewitness police stormed into the village on horseback and on foot and began arresting the Stundists. When some in the village inquired as to what was happening, someone told them, "They're going to take away the Stundists' children."[38] Those who were arrested were brought to the local administration office and told by a priest of the Orthodox Church:

> Now, you Stundists up to now, as your pastors, we've been using words to persuade you to return to Orthodoxy, but from here on we'll do it by the force of

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[35] Ibid, 2-3.

[36] Michael Bourdeaux and Howard-Johnston, *Aida of Leningrad*, 90-91.

[37] Michael Bourdeaux, *Faith on Trial*, 30-31.

[38] Quoted in Ibid, 31.

> authority. We've received a circular from the governor, which states: 'Reconvert the Stundists, using every means to do so.'[39]

Of the Stundists arrested on that day, none converted to Orthodoxy. Upon their refusal to convert, the priest sent the police back into the village where children of several Stundist families were taken away and placed with other families willing to take them in.[40]

Other means of persecution included imprisonment and exile as in the case of Vasili Pavlov. Exiled to Orenburg with his family, Vasili was forced to endure temperatures at 40 degrees below zero. In the spring his two youngest children succumbed to a famine that had overtaken the village and died of starvation. A few weeks later his daughter drowned and his wife and eldest child died of cholera.[41] The persecution Vasili suffered existed throughout Tsarist Russia for the Stundists until the 1905 Russian Revolution.

As the twentieth century approached, the Baptist movement gained in membership, although persecution continued. However, on Easter Day, April 17, 1905, in response to the assassination of the his uncle, the Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich, Tsar Nicholas II agreed to give new concessions and issued a decree establishing religious toleration in Russia.[42] With this decree, formerly registered Orthodox believers who actually practiced the Baptist faith were allowed to legalize their faith. Membership among the Baptists increased significantly. The years following 1905 were also years of prosperous organizational growth for the Baptists. The new decree allowed for churches

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[39] Quoted in Ibid.

[40] Ibid, 31-32.

[41] Ibid, 33-35.

[42] Coleman, *Russian Baptists*, 25.

and prayer houses to be built and believers were even allowed to hold services in their own private homes.[43] Hundreds of those in exile returned to their families and hometowns. Missionary work was permitted under the new decree and the Baptists wasted no time in organizing.[44]

In 1907 the first Baptist missionary society was established in Rostov-on-Don and fifty evangelists, apart from the preachers already there, moved into the area to spread the Gospel. With more preachers and evangelists, the Baptists were able to allocate more time to working with young people and several Sunday schools and youth discussion groups were created. In 1909, the Baptists held their first official congress and established the All-Russian Union of Baptist Youth Circles. This congress set the precedent for the Baptists continued interest in spreading religious education and the Gospel among young people and was an effort that became emphasized throughout Russia among Baptist preachers. In addition to evangelizing to the youth and other missionary endeavors, the years after 1905 were a time of tremendous publishing for Baptist believers. Hymnals, Bibles, and concordances began to be published and Baptist journals such as *The Christian*, *The Baptist*, *The Good News*, *Friend of Youth*, and *Rainbow* were all founded during this time period.[45] In the short time between April 1905 and January 1912, Baptists in Russia had added 21,140 people to their numbers giving them a total of 66,788.[46] Other notable progress made by the Baptists from 1905

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Michael Bourdeaux, *Faith on Trial*, 37.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Coleman, *Russian Baptists*, 27.

to 1912 was the creation of the Union of Russian Evangelical Christians-Baptists in 1909, which held an annual congress meeting. The union also had a large missionary network and the founding of the union contributed to the increasing organizational ability boasted by the Baptists.[47]

Beginning in 1914 there was some renewed persecution of the Baptists by the tsarist government, namely the closing of Baptist places of worship in St. Petersburg. This was, in large part, due to the Baptists' close ties to German-speaking peoples and the government's fierce desire to protect Russian Orthodoxy during World War I. Germans in Russia often had their property physically assaulted and they incurred legal difficulties with authorities.[48] Neo-Slavophile thinkers accused Baptists and other Protestant believers of being "reasoners, devoid of all feeling of holiness," working to strip religion of its sanctity.[49] World War I brought out Russia's "instinctive rejection of occidental Roman-German culture" and as one Orthodox bishop stated, "was a touchstone for all rationalistic sects with their fascination with German Protestantism and poorly concealed antistate and antimilitaristic views."[50] Along with the Baptists, other groups accused of possessing a spirituality that thrived on secularism, a weakened faith, and treacherous anti-national behavior such as pacifism were Adventists and Pashkovites. Baptists were vilified and slandered in the press by the government and the Orthodox Church and in 1916, the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Minister of Justice considered shutting

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[47] Ibid, 27-28.

[48] Ibid, 117-118.

[49] Quoted in Ibid, 117.

[50] Quoted in Ibid, 117 and 118.

down the Union of Evangelical Christians and declaring the sect dangerous to state interests. However it was decided that shutting down the Union would have been too risky from a political perspective, and in the end the worst that Baptists suffered was exile, slander, church-closings, and slanderous accusations from the government and Orthodox Church leaders.[51]

When the Bolsheviks overthrew the tsarist regime in 1917 Russia was hurled into a massive disarray of turmoil and anarchy, but the Baptists overturned what would have appeared to other groups as hopelessness into opportunity and progress. Uninhibited by government regulations and edicts, the Baptists were free to travel the country preaching the Gospel where and when they decided. One evangelist spoke fondly of the period remarking, "The country became one big auditorium with innumerable meetings everywhere….On the streets of the cities, in the parks, in public halls, in theatres, at railway stations, on trains, on board ships, in factories."[52] On January 23, 1918, Lenin called for the separation of Church and State and proclaimed freedom of conscience, securing the right of both religious and anti-religious propaganda. For the Russian Orthodox Church, Lenin's decree meant heavy religious persecution. The Church's association with the tsarist regime put them in an awkward position and a severe disadvantage that nearly proved lethal. While an unprecedented campaign got underway in an attempt to depose the Orthodox Church from any prominent position in Russian

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[51] Ibid, 117-123.

[52] Quoted in Michael Bourdeaux, *Faith on Trial*, 41.

society, the Baptists enjoyed over a decade of special privilege, virtually free of molestation and harassment by authorities.[53]

The role of religious dissidents that had been played so long by the Baptists in Russia and the role of the favored state religion played by the Orthodox Church was turned on its head and utterly reversed under the new Bolshevik regime. The first decade under the Soviet government has often been called the Golden Age for Russian Baptists and other Evangelical Christians. The Baptists were able to expand immensely in mission work, publishing, preacher training, and overall Christian instruction and the creation of programs. Under the new decree guaranteeing religious freedom, Baptists were often able to gain permission to be released from military duty because of religious convictions coupled with a motivation to create agricultural communes.[54] The Baptists found a unique way to utilize the building of socialism to their advantage.

In addition the Bolsheviks were eager for programs and social groups that promoted unity in a time of uncertainty and calamity. The Baptists were able to partially fill that desire by volunteering to create local youth and women's groups that focused on unifying its members by a love and devotion to Christ. The Baptists were also able to organize a number of Bible courses in Leningrad for the purposes of educating preachers. During this time previous Baptist journals that had been forced to halt printing because of World War I and the Revolution could be printed again. Such journals included *The Christian*, *The Baptist*, and *Baptist of the Ukraine*, a new journal founded in 1926. The

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[53] Ibid, 41-43.

[54] Coleman, *Russian Baptists*, 156.

Baptists were also helpful in the printing of the New Testament in Leningrad and Kiev, along with concordances, and hymnals.[55]

Of particular note at this time was the evangelistic zeal of the Baptists in Russia. The concept of reaching out to pagans, Muslims, and other ethnic groups was something new that had not been practiced by the Orthodox Church, but the Baptists made great strides in the field of mission work. Work in remote locations such as Siberia, Central Asia, the Far East, the Western Ukraine, and Belorussia was conducted and a slogan was adopted that read, "Christ for the heathen and the Muslims in the U.S.S.R."[56] The Baptists changed the previously held notion that to be Russian one had to be Orthodox and that others who lived in Central Asia were Muslim.

Although the ten years following the Bolsheviks' ascension to power can indeed be called a Golden Age because of the numerous accomplishments made by the Baptists, the Communist Party was by no means friendly or encouraging of the Baptists' religious behavior. Instead it would be accurate to conclude that the Communist Party's allowance of the Baptists' behavior was in part due to its preoccupation with stamping out Orthodox influence and in part because there were far too many believers to try and crush at one time. The Soviet government had to first concentrate on consolidating its power and establishing stability.

When Stalin came to power after Lenin's death in 1924, persecution of believers came as soon as Stalin settled in to his new position. As mentioned above, persecution was still more heavily concentrated on the Orthodox Church, but many of the freedoms

[55] Michael Bourdeaux, *Faith on Trial*, 41-43.

[56] Quoted in Ibid, 43.

that Baptists had enjoyed were taken away. In 1929 Stalin decreed the "Law on Religious Associations," which listed sixty-eight provisions of what religious bodies were prohibited from doing. Among these provisions was that publishing came to an immediate halt and children were no longer able to receive religious education but were required to receive a purely atheistic education. Under Khrushchev, a decree was given that placed an even greater emphasis on atheistic teaching. A complicated process of registration was also put into place, forcing each religious group to register its religious community, preacher or pastor, and place of worship.[57] As the Soviet state thrust itself further and further into church activities, many Baptists began to protest, agreeing that something had to be done.

As Khrushchev's reign of terror on religion was unleashed in 1959, the Baptist church came under increasing pressure to cooperate with authorities and reduce its evangelistic tendencies. Out of fear of prison, the KGB, and a desire to continue to operate a legally registered religious community, Baptist leaders had little choice but to give in to the Soviet authorities. Under these circumstances a schism ripped through the Baptist community in 1961. Baptist members opposed to the new restrictions of reduced church activities felt that their leaders had been corrupted by fear and intimidation from the authorities. They felt that God's work was no longer the purpose of their Baptist leaders. The new restrictions to be imposed on Baptist communities came in the form of the *Letter of Instructions* adopted by the All Union Council in 1960.[58] The biggest objection to the *Letter* was the state's requirement that all children had to be excluded

[57] Ibid, 43-47.

[58] Ibid, 63-64.

from all worship services and that the baptism of people from eighteen to thirty had to be kept to a minimum. Evangelism was to be kept low and was discouraged completely. Ultimately in 1961, the Baptists opposed to the new statute banded together to form a separatist movement and became popularly known as the Initsiativniki or Action Group. They also formed their own council called the Evangelical Christians and Baptists Council of Churches.[59]

An aspect of Soviet religion policy that should be noted was the fact that even though registered Baptist churches were supposed to be safe from persecution, state interference and arrests still prevailed among the registered Baptist groups, though not to the extent that unregistered Baptists received. Under Khrushchev registration was required in order to maintain control and knowledge of where religious communities were located. Once Brezhnev came to power in 1964, registered Baptists were still persecuted to some degree but the regime was more concerned with the Reform Baptists. Brezhnev's religion policy was marked by the acknowledgment that religion as an institution could not be successfully eliminated and therefore, religious activity was encouraged to remain limited. Brezhnev's religion policy will be discussed thoroughly in Chapter Three.

The *Initsiativniki* or Reform Baptists were never allowed registration by the Soviet government. In March 1966, the government attached a stiffer clause on the Penal Code making the organization of Sunday school more explicitly illegal after the Reform Baptists repeatedly tried to obtain permission to teach religion to children in private.[60]

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[59] Keston College, *Religious Prisoners in the USSR* (Keston, Kent, UK: Keston College, 1987), 80.

Because the Baptists had become one of the larger Evangelical Protestant religious groups, with the clear ability to exact a measure of influence over society, the Soviet government began to heavily persecute them during the Khrushchev years.

Baptist prisoners, both registered and unregistered, often received harsher sentences than other religious prisoners and many were tortured even to the point of death, as in the case of Nikolai Khmara who had his tongue and fingernails ripped off, after attempting to tell other Soviet citizens about God.[61] Baptists were also the victims of kidnappings in the street, commitment to mental and psychiatric hospitals, had their homes and places of worship confiscated, and had their children seized. In many cases children of Baptist believers were ridiculed at school by their teachers and peers. In labor camps and prisons, Baptist prisoners underwent harsher living conditions than other prisoners, including the confiscation of letters containing the word "God" and refusal by authorities to communicate with their family and friends. Medical treatment was often refused to Baptists in prison even for the most severe of injuries or illnesses.[62]

The Reform Baptists were a particularly attractive group to young people, often prompting the Soviet government to allow registered Baptists the freedom to conduct youth functions.[63] One such youth who became attracted to the Reform Baptists was Aida Skripnikova, who, as mentioned above, became well known in the West in the late 1960s for being twice imprisoned by Soviet authorities for her religious zeal and

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[60] Michael Bourdeaux and Rowe, ed., *May One Believe—In Russia*, 51-52.

[61] Archive file photograph collection <SU/Ini (2)>, Keston Center, Baylor University. And Michael Bourdeaux and Rowe, ed., *May One Believe—In Russia?,* 52.

[62] Michael Bourdeaux, *Faith on Trial*, 135-142.

[63] Michael Bourdeaux and Rowe, ed., *May One Believe—In Russia?*, 55.

willingness to risk her freedom to smuggle in Bibles from Switzerland. Aida was accused of anti-Soviet activities and sentenced to three years in prison after already serving one year. In addition, she suffered religious persecution before and after her imprisonments, including losing her job as a lab assistant and losing her residence permit, forcing her to leave her hometown of Leningrad. Aida is an example of the everyday persecution suffered by Reform Baptists during the Khrushchev and early Brezhnev eras.

However, the persecution of Baptists was not only for the Initsiativniki. Registered Baptists were also often arrested and harassed by Soviet authorities, such as the case of Valeri Barinov. Valeri Barinov was a member of a registered Baptist community but was imprisoned for seeking to reach out to the lost youth of Leningrad through his talents in music. Valeri was arrested for the first time in 1983 and held in a psychiatric hospital. In March 1984, he was arrested again and held for over six months until his trial in November 1984.

The similarities and differences between Aida and Valeri in their devotion to God are remarkable and are alone worthy of attention. However, their lives can tell of much more than only their willingness to bear unspeakable horror for their God. Between these two dissidents, the reign of five Soviet rulers can be mapped out and analyzed in the way of Soviet religion policy. Through Valeri and Aida's lives, zeal for the Lord, and experience in prison, it can be established whether or not a significant change in Soviet religion policy occurred from Khrushchev to Gorbachev. By examining the persecution of Valeria and Aida, a first-hand account can be taken to measure if a distinct change in the repression of religious dissidents occurred from the mid-1960s up to 1988. In order to establish this, a close look at the lives of Aida and Valeri is necessary. Their lives

before they came to Christ is required to establish background as well as their thought process upon finding God. Other elements to be considered are the types of religious activities they were involved in, and particularly what their methods of evangelism were in reaching out to others. Also the specific charges brought against them for each arrest is crucial in establishing the type justice system that the Soviet Union employed on religious dissidents.

This paper will examine Aida and Valeri's religious life in considerable detail and outline how each brought their own inherent talents into the task of evangelism. Their preoccupation with spreading the Gospel continued during their imprisonment as well as afterwards. Valeri Barinov was a musician who used his musical charisma as a way to touch the hearts of the youth in the Soviet Union. Aida Skripnikova was a young girl who gave up her job and home in order to proclaim the Gospel to fellow Soviet citizens as well as foreigners. Her zeal and passion for Christ furnished her with a relentless spirit and drive for evangelism. Their differences and similarities in evangelism methods will also be examined and explored.

Also important to both Barinov and Skripnikova was their interest in telling the West of the true conditions in the Soviet Union. Both believed that the West had been blessed with religious tolerance and freedom. They both hoped that the West would come to understand the trials that believers were suffering in the Soviet Union and that it would inspire those in the West to take their vows to live a Christian life more seriously.

Finally, aside from exploring the differences and similarities between Aida Skripnikova and Valeri Barinov, this paper will examine the reaction that both believers received as prisoners. By understanding the persecution and lives of Aida and Valeri, the

liberalization or lack of liberalization made in the Soviet Union concerning religion policy can be established. The period from the imprisonment of Aida to Valeri saw four separate rulers in the Soviet Union: Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, Konstantin Chernenko, and Mikhail Gorbachev. The religious policies of each of these leaders will also be established so that differences and similarities in the Soviet Union can be recognized.

CHAPTER TWO

Aida Skripnikova

From early in her life, Aida Mikhailovna Skripnikova possessed a fire and passion for her convictions that ordinary Soviet citizens did not. Born in a small town in Western Siberia in 1941, Aida came from a broken home, having her father stolen away from her when she was only an infant. Refusing to fight for the Russian army in the Russian Civil War that broke out in 1917 because of his faith, Aida's father was arrested and subsequently shot for his pacifism.[1] Of her father, Aida once wrote, "[My father] refused to kill people and for this he was killed. He died in order not to kill. If everyone were prepared to die rather than kill then there would be no wars."[2] Although Aida never knew her father she admired his courage and his convictions, and there is no doubt that he was a source of inspiration for her bravery throughout her life.

Aida came from a devoutly religious family and both of her parents were devoted Baptist believers. As a young child, Aida could remember other believers arriving at her parents' apartment to pray and discuss the Bible.[3] Aida stated in an interview with Dan Wooding, the founder of the Prayer Foundation, that her mother "brought up all of us in a

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[1] Michael Bourdeaux and Xenia Howard-Johnston, *Aida of Leningrad* (Berkshire, England: Gateway Outreach, 1972), 41.

[2] "Soviet Union," E-W Digest (January, 1964): 19. Archive file <USSR/Initsiavtivniki/7/Aida>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[3] "Aida Skripnikova, Martyr of Leningrad," *Open Doors* (February, 1971): 4 taken from Leonard E. Le Sourd, "The Modern Martyr of Leningrad," *Guideposts Magazine* (1971). Archive file <USSR/Initsiavtivniki/7/Aida>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

Christian spirit, and since our childhood, we knew about God."[4] Aida's uncle was a preacher and when she was young she remembered him being arrested along with two other men from the secret church that Aida's family attended when she was a child. Aida later reported that meeting for worship was dangerous and that one or more believers had to always keep watch for police.[5]

Although Aida attended church as a child, she said that religion and God was not something she thought about very much, but, whether she knew it or not, her upbringing in a religious home in a country where believing in God was illegal provided the foundation for Aida's independent thinking.[6] Aida's lack of concern for religion was in no way unusual because she was so young, but what might have developed into a fervent, deep-seated love for God early on was cut short when Aida's mother died when Aida was only eleven years old. Along with her brothers and sisters, Aida was moved to another town where she attended school, receiving a typical Soviet atheist education.[7] Aida did not so much lose her faith as she was bombarded with atheist propaganda and brainwashed at the tender age of eleven. Having lost both of her parents before she reached her teens, Aida was no doubt confused and naïve, willing to believe the teachings of the new authority figures in her life.

Although Aida may have forgotten her religious beliefs for a short time, the individualist thinking and courage she inherited from her parents was still present and

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[4] Dan Wooding, "Aida of Leningrad," The Prayer Foundation, http://prayerfoundation.org/aida_of_leningrad.htm (accessed November 11, 2008).

[5] Ibid.

[6] Bourdeaux and Howard-Johnston, *Aida of Leningrad*, 21.

[7] Wooding, "Aida of Leningrad."

first demonstrated in 1958 during the Pasternak affair.[8] When Boris Pasternak's novel *Dr. Zhivago* was published in 1957, the book was violently criticized and immediately banned from the Soviet Union, although Samizdat copies were published. The novel sparked such controversy that Pasternak was expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers and was forced to decline the Nobel Prize in Literature that he won in 1958.[9] As protest against the novel continued throughout the Soviet Union, Aida wrote a letter to *Pravda* in which she rebuked Pasternak's accusers for judging a novel they had not read. The authorities deemed the letter "anti-Soviet."[10]

Writing such a letter at only eighteen conveyed a number of factors about the sort of individual that Aida was. She was a young woman living in a dangerous totalitarian regime that thrived off of ignorance, subjugation, fear, and censorship. Fully aware of this, Aida knew that writing such a letter could have irrevocable consequences and yet she stood for her beliefs and spoke up against censorship, demonstrating tremendous courage. Aida's letter also conveyed again her independent mind and unwillingness to behave like one of the sheep. Finally the letter exhibited the impression that even at a young age Aida followed current affairs including literary issues and that she was somewhat educated beyond that of the normal Soviet citizen. It would seem that she was part of the underground dissident movement before she even knew it. Although it is not known how far into her teens Aida reached in her education, she was obviously well versed in affairs and felt particularly strong on matters concerning censorship and the

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[8] Bourdeaux and Howard-Johnston, *Aida of Leningrad*, 21.

[9] Petri Liukkonen, "Boris Leonidovich Pasternak (1890-1960)," Author's Calendar, http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/pasterna.htm (accessed January 31, 2009).

[10] Bourdeaux and Howard-Johnston, *Aida of Leningrad*, 21.

suppression of literature and other means of expression. Injustices of every kind took place daily in the Soviet Union and many of these issues were well known by citizens, who chose to say nothing, but Aida's attention to the Pasternak affair spoke to her affinity for crimes against freedoms of expression.

In 1960 Aida was uprooted again and unbeknownst to her, brought closer to her destiny as a Christian believer and a living example of modern day religious persecution. She decided to move to Leningrad to find work and took up residence in the city at a worker's hostel. Aida said that at the time she still was not "interested in religious questions" but her spiritual search would soon begin.[11] Walking down Nevsky Prospekt one day with Viktor, her eldest brother who had previously moved to Leningrad, Aida came across a House of Prayer, and the two decided to go into the service. Unlike Aida, Viktor was concerned with religion and God, and he profoundly influenced Aida's spiritual search and future conversion into the Baptist faith. Shortly after Aida and Viktor attended the worship service at the House of Prayer, Aida visited a bookstore in hopes of acquiring a Bible, but the bookkeeper had none in stock. Another customer in the store, however, told Aida that he had a copy of the Bible and would sell it to her for fifteen rubles.

Not long after Aida obtained this copy of the Bible, she and her family were faced with Viktor's diagnosis of terminal cancer. Viktor requested that Aida seek out a man he had met from the House of Prayer that he had visited with Aida. The unknown man visited Viktor in the hospital, writing out Bible verses, and reciting others to him. Telling the story in an interview later, Aida said, "We took [Viktor] home and all of a sudden he

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[11] Wooding, "Aida of Leningrad."

started feeling better and so he began going to the services held in an apartment. I went with him for four months, but by autumn my brother felt much worse."[12] Viktor told Aida that he prayed to God asking for some "time to prepare [himself] for death." One night he had a dream about his mother in which she told him the story in I Corinthians 15 of the resurrection of Jesus. Viktor asked his mother if he would die, and she smiled and disappeared. According to Aida, he died a few days later at the age of twenty-five.[13]

Viktor's prayers and devotion to Christianity combined with his sudden diagnosis and premature death deeply influenced Aida, and she began to regularly attend worship services at a Baptist church in Leningrad.[14] Inquisitive by nature and always feeling that if something was to be done, it should be done right, Aida sought to learn more about the Christian faith and began asking elders and others in the Baptist church many religious questions. Once converted, Aida yearned to share her newly found faith with others around her, proving fearless in her attempts to spread Christianity's teachings. She was not afraid to approach anyone and speak to them about God, including foreigners.[15]

One of Aida's crucial techniques and methods of evangelism was her constant appeal to Western Christians for help. Evangelizing other Soviet citizens was wonderful and necessary, but Aida also understood that the problem had to be halted at its root: the Soviet government. The Soviet government's actions toward Christians were an unjust violation of privacy, human rights, and freedom, and Aida toiled tirelessly to make the

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Bourdeaux and Howard-Johnston, *Aida of Leningrad*, 2-3.

world aware of what life was like for Christians behind the Iron Curtain. In addition, Aida hungered for the West to know how fortunate they were to have the freedom to worship how they wanted, when they wanted, and where they wanted. S.L. Robertson, a man that Aida befriended during his frequent visits to Leningrad, wrote of Aida that she "could not comprehend how others were not caught up as she was. The restraining voice of other Christians was not for her."[16] Aida challenged the Soviet norm and even to a Westerner would have appeared outspoken. Robertson continues to write that Aida "found it difficult to accept that we, enjoying freedom to worship, did so little for those who depend so much on our prayers and help of other kinds."[17] Aida was devastated to discover that Western newspapers did not devote entire editions and sections to telling the story of Christians being persecuted around the world.

The elders and pastors at the Baptist church in Leningrad did little to encourage Aida's faith. Instead of nurturing her probing nature and passion for God, they endeavored to squelch it by attempting to keep her from talking to foreigners, often to the point of trying to physically restrain her from approaching. They would try to remove papers and pamphlets from her handbag that would, for example, have a list of recent believers sent to prison.[18]

Aida's decision to convert and devote her life to Christianity also was not supported by the pastor or the elders, partially because Aida was so young. As stated previously, church leaders were encouraged to keep the number of young adult converts

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[16] Ibid, 5.

[17] Ibid, 6.

[18] Ibid, 4.

to a bare minimum. Therefore, Aida had to seek answers to her religious questions from other sources, and this is another reason why she was often so anxious to speak to foreigners, despite the language barrier. S.L. Robertson was surprised to hear Aida say in 1961 as she was on the brink of conversion that the pastor at the Leningrad Baptist Church "had no time" for answering her doubts and questions.[19] Despite the church leaders' unwillingness to assist Aida in making, what was to her, the biggest decision of her life, by the time Robertson returned in 1963, she had become a Christian, and was heavily involved in church activities.

In addition to her own contact with Western Christians and evangelizing Soviet citizens, Aida was named secretary of a group known as the Organizing Committee or *Orgkomitet*. The committee's purpose was to prepare a church congress in an effort to rid the church of the evil and corrupt influences that had slowly seeped in. These influences were the Soviet government and its constant intrusion into church affairs.[20] The *Letter of Instructions* that had circulated through the Baptist churches in 1960 establishing the new statutes and laws the church was to abide by was an atrocious affront to believers' call to spread Christianity. Baptist believers knew that the new laws had been handed down from the government, but it was nonetheless disappointing and disconcerting to know that their leaders had given in to government pressure. The congress that the *Orgkomitet* created was never held, and the group, now known as the

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[19] Ibid, 2.

[20] Ibid, 3.

Initsiativniki, or reform group, split from the registered Baptist churches and took a substantial number of believers with them.[21]

In regard to the split in the Baptist churches, Aida described the events as "a miracle." She went on to say that, "In the twentieth century, when atheists are shouting about the extinguishing of faith, a fire like this suddenly flares up. And I wanted everybody to know about this miracle of awakening."[22] Aida was an active supporter and worker in the Reform Baptist movement, and as her faith and understanding in Christianity strengthened so did her activities in trying to reach out to other lost souls. It was Aida's special method of evangelism that first landed her in trouble with authorities.

On December 31, 1961, Aida was arrested for the first time by Soviet police as she stood in the center of Nevsky Prospekt near a museum of atheism distributing handmade cards with a greeting for the New Year and a plea for the lost to come to Christ.[23] On the front of the cards was a picture by Claude Lorain of a harbor at sunrise, possibly symbolizing the awaiting of a new day for the newly converted believer. The poem on the back was entitled "Happy New Year! 1962," and read:

> Our years fly past
> One after another, unnoticed.
> Grief and sadness disappear,
> They are carried away by life.
> This world, the earth, is so transient
> Everything in it comes to an end.
> Life is important.
> Don't be happy-go-lucky!
> What answer will you give your creator?

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[21] Michael Bourdeaux, "Aida," (July 5, 1974), 2. Archive file <SU/Ini 2 Skripnikova>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid, 1.

What awaits you, my friend, beyond the grave?
Answer this question while light remains.
Perhaps tomorrow, before God,
You will appear to give an answer for everything.
Think deeply about this,
For you are not on this earth forever.
Perhaps tomorrow, you will break
Forever your links with this world!
SEEK GOD WHILE HE IS TO BE FOUND.[24]

Analyzing and taking to heart what she read in Acts 5:20 where the apostles are told to "Go, stand in the temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life," Aida could not contain her excitement and felt compelled to proclaim her newly found faith to her fellow citizens.[25] For her actions, she was brought to trial by a Comrade's Court in April 1962, where she was informed that she could no longer live in Leningrad, meaning that her residence permit would be revoked, and that she was to lose her job as a lab assistant. However, because of the Soviet Union's size, the large number of dissidents being brought to trial, and the overall tendency of government officials' failures to act on executive orders due to bureaucracy, it took the government three years to act on Aida's sentence.[26]

In the meantime, Aida was released back into the community without a prison sentence, but she could not escape the Soviet government's popular tactic of media slander and propaganda. During Khrushchev's rule the press portrayed believers from all faiths as fanatics and troublemakers vying for attention. Often malicious lies and deliberately false accusations were spread in an attempt to discredit believers and their

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[24] Wooding, "Aida of Leningrad."

[25] Acts 5:20 (New International Version).

[26] Bourdeaux and Howard-Johnston, *Aida of Leningrad*, 23.

religious notions. Aida was attacked continuously beginning in about 1962 until about 1967. Newspapers such as the *Izvestia* and *Evening Leningrad* endeavored to damage Aida and her church group's reputations by naming them as "pirates" and "religious fanatics."[27] Aida was also accused by atheist writer V. R. Bukin of having been brainwashed by "experienced Baptists," exploiting her "desire to be popular" and convincing her to act on their behalf.[28]

Another atheist journalist Valen Ivanovich Kuzin wrote an article in *Smena* on June 4, 1962, in which he called Aida's Baptist friends "cowards" and "enemies" to Aida.[29] He accused Aida and other Baptist believers of being forced to invent new methods of chicanery in order to replace the numbers they were losing in membership. Kuzin continued by writing that Aida and other believers' lives were dictated by "fear and ignorance" and that they were "living corpses."[30] Kuzin's final insult was to state that atheists "do not mock God or Christ because one can only mock that which exists" and that "Communists have always been against religion because its teaching harms people and it has destroyed you, Aida."[31]

Aida wrote a response to Kuzin in September 1962, but the authorities would not publish her letter. In her reply, Aida wrote that believers in the Soviet Union did not fear the government's anti-religious propaganda, because their lies would not "attract a man

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Quoted in Ibid.

[29] Ibid, 29-30.

[30] Ibid, 30-31.

[31] Ibid, 33.

who has recognized the truth, who has accepted Christ into his heart."[32] Furthermore, Aida trapped Kuzin with his own atheistic beliefs by pointing out that "the very fact that you talk about immortality shows that despite your atheism, you find it hard to conceive that you will disappear forever."[33] She went on to detail the preoccupation that atheists engaged in to try and immortalize themselves on earth through writing, art, and other intellectual ventures, but Aida called attention to the fact that the names of past atheists and persecutors of Christianity have either been forgotten or were remembered with contempt. Aida wrote that even persecutors of Christianity today did not speak fondly of such men as Nero, Herod, and Caiaphas.[34]

Aida's response to Kuzin was also one of the best examples of the clear distinction that Aida made between Christianity and religion, which was a fundamental element of her faith and method of evangelism. Aida wrote that she was not concerned with "religions" because while there are many religions, "some with difficult and complex rituals, some thought up by men," the Christian religion was dependent on Christ.[35] Without Christ religion was useless and "does not save; it [was] dead and [could not] enable man to be born again." She told Kuzin that Baptists were "not religious people—we are Christians."[36] Earlier in the same letter Aida responded to Kuzin's claim that religion promised only the sitting of its faithful in "some sort of

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[32] Ibid, 39.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid, 40.

[35] Ibid, 41.

[36] Ibid.

Elysian field, munching sticky buns" by testifying that religion's promises are worthless. Rather it was the Bible that said, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."[37] As with many other believers in the Soviet Union and around the world, Aida regarded religion as a worldly invention. To Aida, Christianity was a lifestyle established by God with an emphasis on Christ and his ability to redeem, forgive, and grant salvation to the world.

Aida's letter was another testament to her intellectual ability and the strength with which she professed her convictions, and although Aida's letter was refused publication in the newspaper, it was widely circulated amongst other Baptist believers and friends. Aida was living in the forefront of the *samizdat* movement, the clandestine copying and distribution of government suppressed literature in Soviet countries, and many of Aida and other believers' unpublished writings enjoyed broad circulation in the underground. Many were so inspired by Aida's words that they gave copies to their friends and soon widespread curiosity about this young woman who dared to defy Soviet authorities swept through the Soviet Union and eventually to the West. Curiosity about Aida became so intense that the authorities were forced to step up their attack and early in 1964, Aida had no choice but to leave Leningrad for a while.[38] She was aware of the government's growing attempt to establish a campaign against her that would result in her arrest.

Aida had always regarded many of the believers in Leningrad as too timid, especially the leaders and members of the registered Baptist communities, and with the investigation and accusations mounting against her, she opted to travel to the Ukraine and

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[37] Ibid, 39.

[38] Ibid, 23.

stay with her sister for a time. Aida had worked as a laboratory assistant for three years, and although it is not clear what the nature of position was, she said that she enjoyed the job. At work the threat of dismissal for her religious activity always hung over her head, but now that the Soviet police were closing in on her, Aida decided to quit.[39] In addition, Aida yearned to make contact with believers outside of Leningrad and to perhaps gather religious material that could be useful in the future for establishing contact with the West. While staying with her sister in the Ukraine, Aida met many believers and came to admire their "boldness."[40]

Eventually Aida learned that the police had planned to arrest her at the same time she left Leningrad to travel to the Ukraine. When she began her journey back to Leningrad in the spring of 1964, Aida noticed police staked out at city bus terminals and railway stations, so she rode on a country bus in the opposite direction and reached Leningrad via an alternate route. Leaving her job had caused her to automatically lose her residence permit, and upon reaching Leningrad, Aida was forced to live with friends outside the city limits. Those in the Soviet Union who could not find work or those who quit their jobs were considered "parasites" by the State, and for this reason, it was very difficult for Aida to secure a job once she returned from the Ukraine. The only work she could find was bottling milk at a factory twelve hours a day for thirty rubles a month.[41] According to her friends and others, Aida accepted her task "without grumbling."[42] For

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[39] Ibid, 85.

[40] Ibid, 3.

[41] Ibid, 4-5.

[42] Ibid, 5.

Aida secular employment was not an important part of who she was, but rather only a way to buy necessities. She worked any job necessary to just get by, spending most of her time laboring for God. Marfa Akimovna Skurlova, a fellow unregistered Baptist and a close friend to Aida who testified on her behalf at Aida's trial in 1968, stated that "Aida worked all the time. If she didn't have money, she went out and worked."[43] Aida continued working at the factory and participating in church activities and evangelism until the summer of 1965.

During most of the summer of 1965, Aida and her fellow believers of the unregistered Baptist church in Leningrad were able to hold meetings uninterrupted in the forest because no one knew about them. However, towards the end of the summer, the police discovered the meetings and commenced breaking up the meetings as often as they occurred.[44] According to Aida's friend Marfa, at one of the worship services in the forest in 1965 the police chased the believers off, shoving them and grabbing their hair. Several believers were arrested and Aida was among them. Of those arrested, some were merely fined whereas others were imprisoned for a fortnight. Aida was brought to trial, however, on the grounds of her failure to obtain a residence permit.[45] Regardless of the official charge, there was no doubt that the reason Aida was put on trial was for her Christian beliefs and work in the Baptist church.

Little is known about Aida's trial in 1965, except what is described by Marfa Skurlova during testimony in Aida's second trial. Marfa described Aida's struggle in

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[43] Ibid, 67-68.

[44] Ibid, 94.

[45] Ibid, 68.

trying to find work the year she returned from the Ukraine and her difficultly in obtaining a residence permit. Marfa and Aida met at church and when Aida was no longer able to live in Leningrad, she stayed with Marfa for a short while. According to Marfa, Aida looked for work everywhere and finally secured a position at Sestroretsk. Aida's employers promised to provide her with a residence permit, but after three months, they suddenly refused, and Aida was forced to look for work somewhere else. Shortly after Aida met an elderly woman who offered to let Aida live with her and provide her with a residence permit there. The woman was ill and promised to help Aida find a job if Aida would live with her, but the police intervened again and refused to grant Aida a permit.[46]

According to Marfa, for Aida's first trial she "was brought to some factory; they shouted and made noise; Aida wasn't even given a chance to speak."[47] It is not known if Aida was allowed to have any witnesses testify on her behalf, and the length of the trial is not known. At the conclusion in November 1965, Aida was sentenced to one year in a labor camp. The camp she worked at was located in Perm. She was released from the labor camp on November 13, 1966.[48]

Meanwhile, during the year that Aida was in prison, considerable changes were made by the Soviet government concerning believers. It is usually believed that while these legal changes applied to all religious groups, the decree specifically targeted believers of unregistered Baptist communities. The decree was handed down on March

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 "In Prison Today: Aida Mikhailovna Skripnikova" (Slaviska Missionen: 1968), 1. Archive file <USSR/Initsiavniki/7/Aida>, Keston Center Baylor University.

18, 1966 and aimed to better enforce Article 142 of the Criminal Code. According to Aida at her trial in 1968, at the end of 1964 and into 1965, the police had slowed their normal activity of breaking up meetings held by unregistered Baptists. By 1965, when Aida was arrested for the second time, the police had resumed this practice by the end of the summer, but it was still not as prevalent as it had been in the past.[49] However, when the March 18, 1966 decree was handed down arrests and trials of many believers began anew.[50]

The decree outlawed the "organization and staging of religious meetings, processions, and other religious ceremonies which are prejudicial to social order" and the "performance of deceitful acts with the aim of arousing religious superstitions among the public."[51] What this amounted to was to make the open profession of faith illegal in all forms. Believers could be arrested, fined, tried, and "punished by up to three years deprivation of liberty" for conducting religious meetings in the open or organizing meetings with the intention of giving religious instruction to children or young people.[52] The clause that forbade the open profession of faith included not only religious meetings in public but also praying and speaking to citizens about God or their beliefs.

The law previously outlawing these nearly same measures had been spearheaded by Khrushchev in 1959 in articles 142 and 227 of the Criminal Code but had been

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[49] Bourdeaux and Howard-Johnston, *Aida of Leningrad*, 96.

[50] Ibid, 93.

[51] Michael Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia: Protestant Opposition to Soviet Religion policy* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 160.

[52] Ibid, 159-160.

deliberately vague.[53] The March 18, 1966 decree sought to clarify previous laws given in 1959, but was also handed down to justify and legalize illegalities committed by the Soviet state.

After her release from prison in late 1966, Aida was still not granted permission to live in Leningrad, but was allowed to register in Volkhovstrye and found work at a printing works shop. Only a week after she started her job, Aida had another run-in with police when she was caught at a prayer meeting. The police took down her name and the location of her residence permit. Aida stated to the court during her trial in 1968 that she "knew they would report me to my place of work."[54] The following day at work Aida was honest with the foreman on duty and told him that the police would call because she had attended an illegal prayer meeting. Not to Aida's surprise the foreman informed her that the police had already notified them and would arrive soon.

Although Aida said she saw no police, the other employees became nervous about the situation and it was made obvious from the beginning that Aida would be fired if she did not change her religious views. The secretary of the party organization advised Aida to abandon her beliefs at which point the authorities would cheerfully take up the task of rehabilitating her through a "proof-reading course." She told Aida that "our society is a humanitarian one."[55] Of course Aida did not change her views, and furthermore, she made no effort to make her employer think she had quieted her faith, as some Christians

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[53] Michael Bourdeaux and Michael Rowe, eds., *May One Believe—in Russia?: Violations of Religious Liberty in the Soviet Union* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd Ltd, 1980), 2.

[54] Bourdeaux and Howard-Johnston, *Aida of Leningrad*, 86.

[55] Quoted by Aida Skripnikova in Ibid, 86.

were forced to do in the Soviet Union to hold a job. During her trial Aida testified, "[T]he fact that I can call God my Father is very precious to me." She prefaced this by saying that being able to call God her Father meant that she could "turn to Him with [her] needs, tell Him everything, ask Him about everything, and entrust [her] life to Him."[56] Faith such as Aida's demanded her all and she refused to silence the joy she felt in Christianity in order to maintain secular employment.

For three weeks, Aida's fate at the printing works hung in the balance. She was told that the printing works was "a political institution" and "not everybody [could] work there."[57] Eventually a management commission arrived at the printing works and it was decided on April 21, 1967, that Aida should be dismissed. With no prior opportunity to find a job, Aida was forced to leave her position at the printing works the same day the decision was handed down. Her faith was not cited as the reason for her dismissal, however, but rather was said to be because of a staff reduction. Aida stated later that after her dismissal from the foreman, she told a worker on the shop floor that she had been let go because of a staff reduction and the "workers' eyes nearly popped out of their heads" as "one of the machines had been standing idle because there was no one to work on it."[58]

Straight away, Aida began looking for another job and was given a position at another factory inside the city. As Aida filled out the necessary forms, she came across a form requiring her to pledge not to disclose any production secrets of the factory.

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[56] Ibid, 101.

[57] Ibid, 86.

[58] Ibid, 86-87.

Desiring to be honest about her situation and not wanting to be dismissed from another job that would result in her having to immediately look for work again, Aida informed the secretary that she was a believer and had recently been fired from a position at the printing works. Aida asked the woman to speak to the manager because she wanted a decision on whether or not they could hire her. After fifteen minutes, the woman came back and notified Aida that they could not hire her because her permit was only valid outside the city.[59]

After searching for work again Aida secured a position at a home for the disabled in the middle of June, but after working there only one day, chose to leave. A month before she was hired at the home, Aida became aware, on May 4, that the police were looking for her, because they had begun questioning believers and neighbors. At first, Aida took this as a sign that the police wanted to warn her and make sure she did not make contact with foreigners at worship. However, events escalated when the police began to carry out searches of believers' houses, and the Procurator's office began asking others questions about Aida. Soon the Procurator's office summoned a number of believers associated with Aida to the office for questions. Aida stated at her trial in 1968 that she "knew that a case was being compiled on a group of believers" and "from the questions asked at the Procurator's office we could surmise whom they wanted to try."[60] Because so many people that Aida knew were questioned and searched, it was not difficult for her to discern that she was among the believers who would be tried.

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[59] Ibid, 87.

[60] Ibid.

Therefore, Aida did not attempt to register at the home for the disabled because she would have been arrested immediately.

When the police began looking for Aida on May 4, it was under the pretext that Aida was not working and was in danger of becoming listed as a parasite. However, Aida had only been dismissed from her job at the printing works on April 21, and, therefore, not enough time had elapsed for the State to become concerned about a person not working. The police told Aida's neighbors that her residence permit had been revoked because she was not working, but Aida maintained that the authorities did not actually cancel her residence permit until July or August.[61] The landlady where Aida resided informed her at the beginning of September that her residence permit had just been revoked.[62] Aida and her friend Marfa even sought counsel from the legal advice bureau in the summer of 1967, to establish when the authorities could legally cross someone off as a residence for not working. According to the bureau, if a person was not currently residing in the place of the permit, they could not be crossed off until after six months.[63] However, the authorities cancelled Aida's permit and she was forced to move out of the building where she was staying. Because she no longer had a permit, and because the police were looking for the smallest excuse to arrest her, Aida found a place to stay outside the city.

On November 7, 1967, for the first time, Aida met Miss Jursmar, a Swedish believer who had traveled to Russia as a tourist. She was a typist at the Slavic Mission in

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61 Ibid, 79.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid, 75-76.

Sweden, which was a religious organization. Bengt Persson, a close Christian friend to Aida from Sweden, gave Miss Jursmar Aida's address when she came to the Soviet Union so that she could visit Aida. She and Aida forged a close friendship in the short time she stayed in Russia and Miss Jursmar was able to donate fifty New Testaments to Aida for circulation among believers that did not own one.[64]

In return Aida gave Miss Jursmar copies of the *Herald of Salvation* and *Fraternal Leaflet* along with the trial transcripts of believers and other information about persecution in the Soviet Union. One of Aida's many Christian activities unique to her was her frequent attendance at the trials of other believers. It is not known how many trials Aida attended, but at her own trial in 1968 she told the court that she had given Miss Jursmar copies of transcripts from trials in Moscow and Ryazan. Aida felt that giving the transcripts to foreigners and Western contacts would help in petitioning on behalf of believers who had been unlawfully convicted.[65]

Aida continued her contact with foreigners, particularly her friends from Sweden, until April 1968, when she was arrested for the third time. On April 11, 1968, Aida attended an Easter worship service at another believer's house. Police were watching the house where the worship service was held, and when Aida was coming back from the service, while standing at the tram stop, she said that "some people seemed to me to be suspicious, but I didn't pay much attention to them."[66] The next morning Aida went

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64 Ibid, 47-52.

65 Ibid, 100-101.

66 Dan Wooding, "Aida of Leningrad," Assist News Service, http://www.assistnews.net/strategic/s0107010.htm (accessed November 13, 2008).

shopping for milk and was approached by an investigator accompanied by police who informed Aida that she was under arrest. In a recent interview in 2000, Aida told Dan Wooding that when she was told this, she "acted very calmly, at least on the surface."[67]

At the police station, the investigator showed Aida her case file indicating that they had more than enough evidence for a trial. She was also told that her home would be searched.[68] In Aida's presence they searched her apartment and found documents published by the reform Baptists, "Bulletins of Rescue," and letters written to Aida.[69] Among the items confiscated by authorities were "25 copies of the journal *Fraternal Leaflet*…13 copies of the journal *Herald of Salvation*" along with transcripts from the trials of Georgi F. Kryuchkov, Georgi Vins, and Lidiya Bondar and others in Alma-Ata.[70]

Aida was placed in a prison cell to await trial. As she recalled in her interview in 2000, "I was confused and I wondered if God didn't want me to continue my work. I tried to pray, but I couldn't. All of a sudden, I looked at the wall and saw written…'The ways of the Lord are not understood.'"[71] The message inspired her to forge ahead and she said that "it was like an answer from God."[72] Aida's trial began on July 11 and concluded on July 15, 1968. Aida repeatedly stated that she knew the only reason she was allowed to speak at her trial this time was because of her contact with the West and

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67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 "Protocol Search," 1-2. Archive file <USSR/Initsiavniki/7/Aida>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

70 Bourdeaux and Howard-Johnston, *Aida of Leningrad*, 49-50.

71 Wooding, "Aida of Leningrad."

72 Ibid.

their involvement in the case. By this time, bits and pieces of information about Aida had filtered into the West, and because of the West's help and the Soviet Union's fear that the trial was being monitored by foreigners, Aida said that they allowed her "to speak as long as she wanted in her defense."[73] Aida told Dan Wooding, "I was able to tell the court that it was true that there was persecution in the USSR and they didn't interrupt me."[74]

When Aida's trial began the procurator read the charges being brought against her under article 190/1 of the Criminal Code. They were as follows:

> Skripnikova, being a member of an unregistered so-called Evangelical Christian and Baptist Community in Leningrad, belonging to the illegally operating Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (CCECB), during 1967-1968, living in Leningrad without a residence permit, and being without regular work, systematically distributed among Soviet citizens and also among foreign subjects literature illegally published by the CCECB, such as journals *Fraternal Leaflet* and *Herald of Salvation*, various reports and appeals, containing deliberately false statements slandering the Soviet state and social order.[75]

During the course of her trial, Aida was interrogated about her contact and relationships with different foreigners including Miss Jursmar and her friend David to whom she had sent a copy of *Herald of Salvation* No. 20 in January 1968. Although Aida was allowed to represent herself without an attorney present and to give history and numerous examples of believers persecuted for their beliefs, in his final speech the procurator stated firmly that the Soviet Union did "not interfere in the activities of religious bodies, if these communities do not break the legislation on cults."[76] He went on to declare that Aida's "guilt of systematically distributing false statements which [slandered] the Soviet state

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73 Ibid.

74 Cited in Ibid.

75 Bourdeaux and Howard-Johnston, *Aida of Leningrad*, 47.

76 Ibid, 84.

and social order [was] fully proved."[77] The procurator recommended that Aida receive two and a half years prison sentence for her actions.

In her defense speech, Aida discussed the history and persecution that believers had endured, particularly the severity under Khrushchev.[78] Aida maintained firmly that she was not alone in her actions and that "those who really believe will break" the law that forbade the teaching of children, praying in places other than churches, gathering for worship in homes and forests, and missionary activity.[79] Aida was honest about her past telling the court that she was at one time "attracted by impressive external greatness" but then "came to know the greatness of humility and patience."[80] Before the court on July 15, 1968, Aida declared that "believers can't keep a law which forces them to deny the Gospel," that an atheist can be either militant or non-militant, but that "a Christian can't be anything but militant."[81] Aida finished by professing that she was "not in any way an important figure." She stated, "I love freedom and would very much like to be free now with my family and friends. But I can't buy freedom at any price…what good is freedom to me if I can't call God my Father?"[82] Aida's sincerity and faith in Christianity was evident throughout her trial, and she accepted her sentence without hesitation. The bravery and magnitude of spirit she carried through the ordeal was a testament to her

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77 Ibid.

78 Ibid, 90-93.

79 Ibid, 95-96.

80 Ibid, 100.

81 Ibid, 96-103.

82 Ibid, 103-104.

belief that God would provide for her regardless of where she was in the world. Whether on the streets of Leningrad, at a worship service in the woods, or in a labor camp miles from home, Aida believed that God was always with her. On the other hand, she also knew that if she recanted her beliefs and sought rehabilitation through the State her faith was meaningless.

Aida was sentenced to a prison for six months and afterwards was moved to a labor camp in the district of Potma, fifty miles east of Moscow where her job was sewing.[83] Consisting only of a few houses surrounded by barbed wire and constantly guarded day and night, the camp had an estimated 50,000 inmates imprisoned when Aida was taken there on December 30, 1968, in the middle of winter. Like so many other inmates, Aida was not supplied with adequate clothing and she was not permitted to use her own clothes, only prison clothes. In her interview with Dan Wooding in 2000 Aida said that "the conditions there were very hard, the food was very bad," but that she "was not depressed or afraid" but was uplifted spiritually.[84] The authorities would not permit Aida to possess a copy of the Bible in prison and although she begged repeatedly for the privilege to have at least a New Testament, she was denied this request.[85] Eventually Christians who visited were able to smuggle a copy of the New Testament to her, which she shared with the other inmates. However, shortly after Aida received this New

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[83] James A. Stewart, ed., "A Letter from Aida," (Lansdale, Pennsylvania: Gospel Projects, Inc., 1970), 22. Archive file <SU/Initsiavtivniki/2/Aida>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[84] Wooding, "Aida of Leningrad."

[85] James A. Stewart, ed., "A Letter from Aida," (Lansdale, Pennsylvania: Gospel Projects, Inc., 1970), 22. Archive file <SU/Initsiavtivniki/2/Aida>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

Testament copy, authorities discovered it and confiscated it from her. For her defiance, Aida was sentenced to ten days of solitary confinement where she suffered through a bitter cold spell again without proper clothing.[86] In one letter from a prisoner who knew Aida, she wrote, "I feel very sorry that Sister Aida does not have her New Testament any longer. She promised to let me read it. How sad I am that I do not have one now."[87] Several of the prisoners intervened on Aida's behalf telling the guards that Aida was a model prisoner "in work and as a comrade," but the guards refused to listen.[88]

Upon her return from solitary confinement, the inmates pleaded with Aida to give up her beliefs if just for a short time so that the guards would not be so tough on her, but Aida would not listen. One inmate wrote, "[Aida] speaks to everyone about Jesus."[89] In her interview in 2000, Aida said that the prisoners listened to her speak about Jesus and that they all knew she was a Christian.[90] The prisoners treated her well and knew that she "wouldn't inform on them," saying, "They trusted me."[91] Through analyzing letters from Aida's fellow prisoners and knowing the extent of Aida's caring and evangelistic nature, there is little doubt that she was truly a source of inspiration and a welcome change from the harshness of camp life. One can easily tell by the way that inmates repeatedly put themselves at risk in intervening for Aida when the guards abused her that

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86 "Aida Skripnikova, Martyr of Leningrad," 4.

87 Cited in Stewart, ed., "A Letter from Aida, 23.

88 "Aida Skripnikova, Martyr of Leningrad," 4.

89 Ibid, 5.

90 Wooding, "Aida of Leningrad."

91 Ibid.

those in the labor camp loved her. Regardless of the abuse she received, Aida continued to evangelize. Solitary confinement, biting cold, and terrible food could not measure up to Aida's spirit and her love for God.

One of the only letters that the West was able to receive from Aida was written on January 21, 1970.[92] Having been in the labor camp for over a year at the time, Aida exuded a level of happiness and thankfulness that Christians in their ordinary lives often do not possess. Addressed to a "Brother in Christ," Aida wrote that "in complete sincerity I thank God with all my heart for this."[93] Aida said that she had no regrets and was happy because her happiness was long lasting and "[did] not depend on outward circumstances."[94] She also wrote that it had never occurred to her that she should not have done what the government imprisoned her for because "life without God loses all sense."[95] Aida had experienced life without God and now that she knew the joy of living in Christ she could not go back no matter what the cost.

Because Aida was a believer, she was rarely allowed visits from friends and family, and when visits were permitted, they were always cut too short by the guards. After one such visit from a Christian friend, Aida wrote a letter telling her friend not to be disappointed that their time together had been only for a few minutes, because "you will never know what a great joy your visit was for me....I can't explain it, but somehow

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92 Aida Skripnikova to Brother in Christ, January 21, 1970. Archive file <USSR/Initsiavtivniki/7/Aida>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid.

there came with you the warmth from back home."[96] It would be over a year still before Aida would be able to return to her beloved Leningrad, yet she remained hopeful.

Aida was finally released from the labor camp on April 12, 1971. She was now thirty years old and the three hard years in the labor camp left her looking "much older and haggard."[97] According to an interview with Aida in 1971 conducted by an anonymous Western friend, Aida did "not talk about the difficulties and tribulation she experienced, but about God's wonderful protection, peace, and joy."[98] After leaving the camp, Aida first had to live in a large town east of Moscow for six months before she could return to Leningrad. Restrictions usually reserved for hard criminals and murderers were applied to Aida and she was not allowed to travel outside the city or stay out past nine o'clock and she had to report to the police twice a week.[99] Eventually Aida was allowed to return to Leningrad where she continued her work for the Lord. Aida never married, and when Dan Wooding asked her in 2000 if she thought that all the suffering she endured had been worthwhile, Aida replied firmly, "Of course it was."[100]

Little is known about Aida after her release from prison in 1971. Of the bits of information that exist, it appears that the police and KGB continued to monitor Aida into the late 1970s, and she continued to have difficulty obtaining a residence permit. On October 6, 1972 news came that Aida had been dismissed from her job at the Leningrad

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96 Cited in Stewart, ed., "A Letter from Aida," 23..

97 Wooding, "Aida of Leningrad."

98 Bourdeaux and Howard-Johnston, *Aida of Leningrad*, 105.

99 Ibid, 105-106.

100 Wooding, "Aida of Leningrad."

railway station and that she was no longer in the city.[101] In 1976, a report from the Center for Progressive Reform (CPR) informed Aida's Western contacts that the militia in Leningrad had arrested both her and her Christian friend Boiko. Boiko was told that she could no longer live in the city.[102] In her interview with Dan Wooding in 2000, Aida told him about a conversation she had with Les Samuel, a Christian friend from the West, in which she sadly reported to him that visitors from the West did not come see her anymore because they were afraid.[103] It is not known exactly what Aida meant by this. However, it is known that as of 2000 she was still living in St. Petersburg attending church and serving the Lord.

Aida's struggles against the Soviet government are not only proof that persecution existed in the Soviet Union, although vehemently denied by authorities, but also that one person can make a difference and overcome insurmountable odds if they have faith. Aida's faith in God took her down a path she could never have possibly foreseen or imagined and yet she did not shy away from it. From early in her life, Aida lived by the principle of standing up for her beliefs even at a time when she was not religious. It, therefore, makes sense that she would have given all of herself to the cause of Christianity once she converted. The ordeals Aida faced inspired not just family and friends but thousands around the world at a time when more and more knowledge of religious persecution in the Soviet Union was coming to light. Many people in Western

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[101] "News from Russia," October 6, 1972. Archive file <USSR/Initsiativniki/7/Aida>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[102] CPR Bulletin 45, (June 24, 1977): 24-30. Archive file <SU/Ini Documents/1977>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[103] Wooding, "Aida of Leningrad."

Europe and America knew little about religious persecution in the Soviet Union and perhaps thought that it had all but died out with the death of Stalin. Aida wanted to make sure that the world knew what Christians in the Soviet Union were enduring and that they needed help and support.

Religious persecution did not end in the Soviet Union with Stalin or even with Khrushchev, as is evidenced by Aida's struggles, but great differences in religion policy were made during Brezhnev's leadership, who next to Stalin, was the longest reigning leader of the Soviet Union. While part of Aida's persecution took place at the end of Khrushchev's leadership before he was forced out in 1964, the majority of Aida's struggles against the Soviet government took place under the watch of Leonid Brezhnev. Not everything about Brezhnev's religion policy can be garnered from looking at Aida's experience because persecution against her largely ceased after 1972, but factors about his early policy towards religion can be established on many levels. The next chapter will briefly chart Leonid Brezhnev's rise to power and discuss his religion policy in detail.

CHAPTER THREE

Leonid Brezhnev and Religion policy

Leonid Brezhnev came to power in the Soviet Union on October 12, 1964, to the surprise of many not only in the Soviet Union but in the West as well. His record of heart trouble combined with his background and personality made him an unlikely successor to Khrushchev, who by most people's account accomplished nothing but giving the Soviet Union a more blemished image in the West. Brezhnev's character could not have been more different from Khrushchev's. Whereas Khrushchev was remembered for his rants, anger, mood swings, and boorish qualities, Brezhnev was described as "easy-going, heavy-drinking, and totally relaxed" with "a stock of good anecdotes and jokes, quite a few of which [were] at the expense of Communism."[1]

In stark contrast to Khrushchev he was rarely seen enraged or out of control in public and was known as a pragmatist in politics, a conservative, and at times, overly cautious. Privately he was known to have appreciated the finer elements of life including "expensive clothes, gadgets, ostentatious and fast cars, thorough-bred horses, stiff drinks, spicy foods,…beautiful girls,…and yachting."[2] Brezhnev was also renowned for his vanity, evidenced by his habit of preening himself in every mirror he passed and making sure that any unwanted particle was removed from his suits. Additionally it was said that

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[1] John Dornberg, *Brezhnev: The Masks of Power* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1974), 17.

[2] Ibid, 18.

he had the facial wrinkles removed from official portraits, and he refused to be photographed in his rimless eyeglasses.[3]

More than anything, Brezhnev could be called a manipulator and an opportunist. He knew exactly when and how to take advantage of a situation and should be thought of as a man who knew how to impress diplomats, the media, world leaders, and others with gracious attention and warmth. He made political decisions with confidence but also knew how to market himself, his country, and its resources. In the eyes of the Western world, Brezhnev sought to be the first Soviet leader deserving of trust, and was called "an effective politician" by several American statesmen.[4]

On the flip side, Brezhnev was not popular with the Soviet people and jokes often circulated through the Soviet Union regarding Brezhnev's health, age, and political policies. Many called him an international bully responsible for invading Czechoslovakia, crushing the "Prague Spring," and establishing the Brezhnev Doctrine. More often than not he hesitated to declare a solution to a problem and did not like taking wild risks.[5] It is in this context that Brezhnev's religion policy can be examined from the beginning in 1964 to his death in 1982.

To believe that religious persecution would come to a halt under any leader after the severe, ideological war waged on religion by Khrushchev would be naïve and grossly inaccurate, but what should be considered in the Brezhnev years was the small, but noteworthy liberalization made. After Khrushchev's horrific campaign against religion,

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid, 28.

[5] Ibid, 29-33.

any minimal difference was an improvement, and Brezhnev allowed for that difference. As a leader of the Soviet Union, Brezhnev was under the hold of Communist ideas and therefore, great strides in religion policy could not be expected, but a policy distinct from Khrushchev's can be identified.

From the beginning, Brezhnev seemed much less concerned with eliminating religion than Khrushchev or Stalin, and believers never again saw a mass concerted effort by the government to eliminate religion from the USSR. Brezhnev was not to be thought of as an advocate of religion or religious practices or of necessarily being soft on religion, because he firmly espoused the traditional ideals of the Soviet Union including atheism. However, Brezhnev's method for dealing with religion was one of pragmatism, based in scientific research and explanation without the militancy of Khrushchev's campaign. Articles written in atheist journals such as the *Voiovnychyi ateist* (Militant Atheist) continued but the writings, after 1964, became much less offensive to believers, and generally focused on explaining why religious activities and beliefs continued to exist in the USSR.[6]

As a general rule, Brezhnev's approach to religion was a much less ideologically atheist viewpoint in exchange for the promotion of the alternative "scientific materialist world view."[7] By the time Brezhnev became general secretary, the Soviet government had accepted that religion was not going to disappear because of state pressure, and therefore, the government's objection became more concerned with limiting religion's hold on the youth. Arrests continued to take place and believers were still slandered in

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[6] John W. Strong, ed., *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev and Kosygin* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1971), 137.

[7] Quoted in Ibid, 138.

the press, as is evidenced by Aida's situation, but atheists began to focus on explaining religious survival as a social phenomenon existing in an atheist society rather than relying on blind ideological Marxist concepts and militant intimidation practiced by Khrushchev and Stalin. An article in the journal *Voprosy nauchnogo ateizma* wrote that to attribute religion to "the deception of simpletons by charlatans" or "alien ideological influence," or "the shortcomings of atheist propaganda" ignores "the objective social factors underlying the tenacity of religious superstitions."[8] Therefore, Soviet citizens had to understand that the "correct" way to approach the anti-religious struggle was to "assume that there [were] still objective social factors operating in a socialist society" and that religion could not be overcome simply by atheist education.[9] Rather social-economic changes were required to abolish the objective roots of religion.[10]

Newspapers and especially journals enacted a greater emphasis on the scientific and rational approach to the fight against religion rather than relying on the former tactic of degrading believers' reputations and presenting them as enemies deserving of obliteration. For example, in March 1965, the editors of the infamous atheist journal *Nauka i religiia* (Science and Religion) published a biting criticism of the atheist writer Trubnikova for her malicious assault on church leaders and believers.[11] Furthermore, a number of Soviet newspapers and journals opened their pages to criticism of the *antireligiozniki* for their combative aggression towards religion, their preoccupation with

[8] Quoted in Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

insulting church leaders and believers and accusing them of being immoral fanatics vying for attention, their use of intimidating measures and coercion in closing churches and arresting believers, as well as their abusive actions in attempting to "voluntarily" convince believers to convert to atheism.[12] Soviet atheists agreed that the best way to combat the presence of religion was "the steady reduction of the reproduction of religiousness among the new generations of Soviet society."[13] Therefore, atheist education had to be improved and strong, emotional, atheist propaganda had to displayed among children, teenagers, and young people.[14] These changes in viewing religion as a social phenomenon that had not yet run its course, and not as an enemy, was a deep fundamental difference evident in Brezhnev's religion policy that was completely absent in Khrushchev's.

With these more tolerant ideas about religion emerging at the start of Brezhnev's leadership and the condemnation of such practices as had occurred during Khrushchev's era, Brezhnev wanted to separate his rule from his predecessor's, in hopes of garnering popular support among Soviet citizens. Therefore, Brezhnev called for the closing of churches and the suppression of parishes to come to a virtual standstill.[15] In addition, a number of prisoners convicted previously for their religious activities were allowed to return home. According to a study done by historian Peter Reddaway, over the course of 1966, more than half of the nearly two hundred Baptists arrested in the Khrushchev era

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid,139.

[15] Ibid.

were released early.[16] In addition Brezhnev "took the interesting step of immediately halting arrests in all categories" and from October 1964 to June 1965, no "mainstream" dissenter was arrested.[17] Mainstream dissidents were citizens who had been in trouble with the local police or KGB at a prior time and continued their illegal behavior. This is congruent with the time of Aida's second arrest when she was arrested at a prayer meeting in the woods at the end of the summer in 1965. By this time it is very likely that the Soviet Union considered Aida a "mainstream" dissident. However, with the exception of Aida and other "mainstream" dissidents, no Baptist dissenter was arrested until February 1966.[18]

Despite these liberalizing measures in religion policy, on the negative side, many churches seized in the Khrushchev era were not returned to believers and the authorities did not, for the most part, restore the religious rights believers had enjoyed before 1959.[19] Brezhnev also failed to change the conditions of prisons and labor camps in the Soviet Union, although this was not directly in correlation with his religion policy. It should be noted though that Aida reported a worsening of camp life in many areas after her release in 1971.[20] She reported that "conditions got worse concerning the feeding and the camps

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[16] Peter Reddaway, "Soviet Policy Towards Dissent since Khrushchev" (article part of a symposium titled *Authority, Power, and Policy in the USSR: Essays Dedicated to Leonard Schapiro*, Britain: Macmillan, September, 1980), 4. Archive file <Soviet Union 15/2 Brezhnev>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Strong, ed., *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev*, 139.

[20] Dan Wooding, "Aida of Leningrad," Assist News Service, http://www.assistnews.net/strategic/s0107010.htm (accessed November 13, 2008).

became more crowded," although many of these prisoners were most likely not there because of religious persecution.[21] The key to understanding Brezhnev's liberalization in religion policy is to recognize slow change and differentiate from the past.

One other change Aida witnessed made in the treatment of religious affairs during Brezhnev's leadership was seen when she was released from prison in 1971. Upon her return to St. Petersburg, she told Dan Wooding in 2000, the borders to the West of the Soviet Union "seemed to be open wide and the spiritual literature was coming to Russia."[22] This trend of religious literature being allowed across Soviet borders and to be sold to the public was an element of great success early in Brezhnev's years as leader of the Soviet Union and can be viewed as a kind of hallmark event.

This first known example of religious literature to be openly sold during Brezhnev's term was on August 11, 1966.[23] In Moscow long lines formed outside a bookstore when a new book of Old Testament "stories" went on sale. All 100,000 copies were sold, and for the first time since 1917 ordinary Russians were able to read a Bible in the vernacular. The stories were arranged by a Polish writer name Zenon Kosibovsky in simple prose and were published by a State publishing house in the USSR. Many people in the Soviet Union had lived their entire lives having never seen a Bible or only seeing limited editions in the Orthodox Church. Of course the government issued a statement in the preface saying that they did not regard the stories to have been divinely inspired, but the tales were "a monument of world literature, reflecting the life of many generations of

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] "Bible tales a sell-out in Moscow," *The Guardian*, August 12, 1966. Archive file <USSR/Religion/General>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

ancient people."[24] Regardless of the government's personal beliefs and ideologies, the fact that 100,000 copies of Old Testament stories were published by the Soviet state during Brezhnev's leadership was a milestone, an event that would have never occurred under the watch of Stalin or Khrushchev, and it should not be ignored when discerning changes in religion policy.

Another testament to the changes taking place in the Soviet Union with regard to religion was the amount of religious themes that began showing up at the end of Brezhnev's term in the late 1970s.[25] Religious themes came to dominate literary journals such as *Molodaia gvardiia*, *Nash sovremennik*, *Volga*, and *Sever*. Part of Brezhnev's permitting of these motifs was an effort to boost Russian nationalism that had begun its wane in the Stalin era and continued through Khrushchevism in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In a story by writer Petr Proskurin, his protagonist, an *obkom* secretary, comes to see Russian "Orthodoxy as the spiritual foundation of Russia."[26] An *obkom* secretary was a higher ranking Party Committee member in charge of a certain area in the Soviet Union, and therefore, would not have considered Orthodoxy as Russia's spiritual foundation. In addition other writers and poets, such as Valentin Sorokin began stressing the important role that the Orthodox Church had played in Russia's defeat against the Mongols in 1380.[27] Brezhnev also allowed the formation of the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments (VOOPIK), which spent most of its

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[24] Quoted in Ibid.

[25] Peter J. Potichnyj, *The Soviet Union Party and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 231.

[26] Ibid, 231.

[27] Ibid.

time restoring churches. Attempts to boost Russian nationalism seem to have been the motivating factor in Brezhnev's decision here, as well, but nevertheless proved that religion policy in the Soviet Union was headed in a liberalizing direction with a willingness to compromise for the greater good.

Brezhnev appears to have wanted the anti-religious struggle to take on not only a more pragmatic style but also a more responsible and less militant element. As discussed before, atheist education became more centralized and objective and came to rely on research and scientific findings that tried to understand why religion continued to permeate aspects of Soviet society. Brezhnev moved anti-religious work, which was under the overall control of the Agitation and Propaganda department of the Central Committee, from the Academy of Sciences to the Academy of Social Sciences so that anti-religious material would once again become "the preserve of specialist journals."[28] As a general rule, anti-religious articles and other writings no longer saturated the secular press to the same extent as during Khrushchevism. Also the slander and personal assaults on believers virtually ended and tended to concentrate on a single individual preceding or following their arrest, which although still persecution, showed more selectivity and responsibility in the press.[29]

Atheist journals took on a less radical and combative form as well. In the first issue of 1965, *Nauka i religiia* (Science and Religion) appeared with a new format and its Ukrainian equivalent, the journal *Voiovnychyi ateist* (Militant Atheist) changed its name

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[28] Sabrina Petra Ramet, ed., *Religion policy in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 24.

[29] Ibid, 24.

to *Lyudina i svit* (Man and the World).[30] All of these measures were part of Brezhnev's attempt to create a less militant style of religion policy in hopes of lessening religion's hold on future generations through improved atheist schooling, scientific explanation, and an increase in atheist propaganda shown to young people.

Other acts measuring liberalization in Brezhnev's religion policy and in Soviet politics, in general, were the massive expansion of the dissident movement on all fronts beginning in 1965. On December 5, 1965, an unprecedented event that took the entire world by surprise was the first Constitution Day demonstration in Moscow, making the growing civil rights movement in the Soviet Union official.[31] The event sparked concern on Brezhnev's part, and he was forced to reply in kind so that the Soviet Union did not appear weak. The Constitution Day demonstration combined with the growing bravery of the reform Baptists and their refusal to register their communities sparked Brezhnev to announce the March 18, 1966, decree discussed above, which specifically targeted Baptists and sought to halt the profession of faith in any place other than a registered house of worship. The new laws passed in 1966 sparked the arrest of nearly 170 Baptists within the year. However, it is not known how many of these arrests were taken to the next step of a trial and imprisonment, and the decree was in large part, although not entirely and certainly not justified, an attempt by Brezhnev to consolidate his power. In some ways the 1966 decree can be seen as liberalization in the Soviet Union's overall religion policy because the decree attempted a clarification of the 1959 laws set down by Khrushchev, which had been intentionally vague.

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Peter Reddaway, "Soviet Policy Towards Dissent since Khrushchev," 5.

However, another setback in the liberalization of Brezhnev's religion policy occurred at the end of 1971 and into 1972 when the KGB was instructed to close the *Chronicle*, a kind of dissident journal that covered human rights issues. The dissident movement had, since 1965, gained popularity and developed important contacts, and Brezhnev was losing the appearance of a stronghold not only among Soviet citizens but also among the international community.[32] The KGB succeeded in shutting the *Chronicle* down for eighteen months but as letters and appeals from prisoners reached the circles of various activists and the West began to protest the Soviet government's repressive tactics, the Politburo was forced to reverse its decision.[33]

From 1974, Brezhnev's regime in regards to human rights activists and religious affairs was mainly on the defensive, in part because the United States, President Richard Nixon, and Henry Kissinger, United States Secretary of State, watched as Brezhnev sealed the deal on one of his aims in foreign policy—a European security conference. Before, during, and after the conference Brezhnev could not afford to have the West see his regime as a hotbed for human rights violations. This requirement remained in force into 1975 when the Soviet Union signed the Helsinki Final Act in August, which guaranteed respect for human rights and basic freedoms, such as freedom of religion and beliefs.[34]

Brezhnev's respect for believers and religious belief during this time, regardless of how forced, allowed for the final thrust of liberalization notable during his rule: the

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[32] Ibid, 12.

[33] Ibid, 13.

[34] Ibid, 15.

massive growth of churches, particularly Baptist churches. Records indicate that the number of churches that opened in the Soviet Union during Brezhnev's rule grew every year from at least 1974 on. *The Baptist Times* reported in August 1973 that in one Ukraine village alone fifty new churches had been allowed to open.[35] In 1975, *The Mennonite Reporter* received word from the Russian Baptist Union that nearly thirty churches had opened in the Novosibirsk and Kiev regions, which had added to the growing Mennonite population.[36] That same year a source from Russia informed the West that in the Moscow area forty-four new churches were opened for the Evangelical Christian Baptists, and 14, 589 members of the unregistered Baptist communities returned to the union.[37] In 1977 *Ostkirchliche Information* reported another breakthrough when they received news that in 1976, 6500 new members had been baptized in the Baptist faith, forty-three new churches were opened, and ninety-seven new students from Bible courses were preparing to become preachers.[38] From that point until the near the end of Brezhnev's reign between the years 1977 to 1980, over 170 Baptist churches were reopened while even more new churches were opened.[39]

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[35] A. H. van den Heuval, "Visit was full of surprises," *The Baptist Times*, August 23, 1973. Archive file <USSR/Baptist Churches/20>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[36] Walter Sawatsky, "Churches growing in Soviet Union," *The Mennonite Reporter*, December 22, 1975. Archive file <USSR/Baptist Churches/20>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[37] Report from *Ecumenical Press Service*, November 13, 1975. Archive file <USSR/Baptist Churches/20>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[38] Report from *Ostkirchliche Information*, 1976. Archive file, <USSR/Baptist Churches/20>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[39] Ramet, ed., *Religion policy in the Soviet Union*, 26.

Ultimately, Brezhnev's reign in the Soviet Union saw the very slow beginning of the liberalization of religion policy. Persecution still existed along with numerous arrests and prison sentences, but by the time he died in 1982 there was a visible change in the way that religion was dealt with among the public and among Communist Party members. Brezhnev realized that religion was not going to disappear, and his religion policy sought pragmatic measures as a means of dealing with it. While unregistered communities, particularly the reform Baptists, were persecuted more heavily than registered Baptists, who enjoyed a considerable amount of growth during Brezhnev's rule, Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign represented the last attempt by the Soviet Union to systematically eliminate religion. Unlike Khrushchev and Stalin, Brezhnev never promised the eradication of religion in a certain number of years and his religion policy was much less militant throughout when compared to Khrushchev and Stalin.

Although many of his decisions were decided under the need to keep the West happy along with the growing international preoccupation with human rights violations, Brezhnev's actions of allowing more religious literature to cross the borders and be published, the opening of new Baptist churches, the decline in the number of arrests in the 1970s, and the overall change in tone of atheist journals points to unprecedented liberalization previously unknown since the time of the Bolshevik Revolution. However, Brezhnev's religion policy did suffer setbacks, and many of these were caused by the Politburo's decision to appoint Yuri Andropov as director of the KGB in 1967. The effect that Andropov had on Brezhnev's religion policy will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter Four. Andropov's intense hatred for all aspects of the dissident movement is well charted, and he made many of the decisions to attack believers during Brezhnev's

rule. However, when one looks at Brezhnev alone, a distinct change in religion policy is evident, albeit a slow change. A number of reasons can be attributed as the motivating factors in Brezhnev's decisions, but in the end the small accomplishments foreshadowed the bigger achievements that would come later.

CHAPTER FOUR

Intermission: Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko

Together Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov and Konstantin Ustinovich Chernenko only ruled the Soviet Union for roughly two and a half years and their two terms are generally seen as an intermission period between Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhail Gorbachev. In terms of background, personality, and political ideology, Andropov and Chernenko had little in common with each other. Andropov was a far more complex man compared to Chernenko and although his leadership has not been as widely discussed as other Soviet leaders, he was nevertheless an important part of Soviet politics, and particularly significant in the examination of the Soviet Union's religion policy.

Yuri Andropov was unlike his predecessors in a number of important ways that separated him and left him in a category all to himself. Andropov was made General Secretary of the Soviet Union on November 12, 1982, two days after Brezhnev's death. Apart from the knowledge that he had been promoted to director of the KGB in 1967, Andropov was virtually unknown to the world and the Soviet public. Although he was sometimes part of the welcoming committee when foreign guests arrived at the airport, because of his position as the USSR's top man in charge of secret intelligence, he was never part of international negotiations. In addition when Andropov came to power in 1982 virtually nothing was known about his private life, including whether or not his

wife was even alive, and nothing was known about his views on key political issues, save for his dislike of dissidents.[1]

When Andropov gave his first public appearance as leader of the Soviet Union on November 15, 1982 in front of four princes, fourteen foreign ministers, fifteen prime ministers, and thirty-two heads of state, he surprised everyone. As the oldest man to assume the position of general secretary, Andropov did not at first make an imposing impression. Pale and stooped in stature, Andropov, at sixty-eight years old, wore heavy glasses with a shirt collar one size too large and the top button of his shirt was fastened an inch from his neck. However, as each of his guests discovered, first impressions, especially in the Soviet Union, were almost always misleading. Within the next few months the world came to know Andropov, the Soviet leader, who was "animated and alert" with quick reactions spoken energetically and eagerly.[2] Often in a hurry to move on to the next order of business, Andropov would interrupt the interpreter before he had a chance to finish.[3]

Despite his age, Andropov had a remarkable memory and a tendency of changing the status quo for how matters would be been carried out. In April 1983 in an unprecedented event, Andropov allowed for unknown and unrehearsed oral questions to be asked while the tape recorder played in an interview he gave with a western journalist

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[1] Jonathan Steele and Eric Abraham, *Andropov in Power: From Komsomol to Kremlin* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984), 1.

[2] Ibid, 2-3.

[3] Ibid, 3.

writing for *Der Spiegel*. Andropov conducted the interview in fluent, grammatically correct English and discussed his musical tastes and the rumor that he played tennis.[4]

Andropov's initial vibrancy and energy was a welcome change from what had been witnessed toward the end of Brezhnev's rule when his health was declining so rapidly. But Andropov's energy did not last long. As early as 1957 it was hinted that Andropov had heart problems and in 1983 it was reported that he had once given reason to suspect that he had a pacemaker for his heart.[5]

In addition, the jovial and light-hearted manner seen in Brezhnev was completely absent in Andropov. While Andropov was clearly an intelligent man demonstrating control and self-discipline, he was also very cold and unemotional. He was described by France's Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson as an "unromantic man" who functioned "like a computer."[6] Cheysson went on to say that Andropov was "dispassionate, lacking in human warmth, sober…and precise, who [showed] no emotion, sticking to the facts and to a mathematical reasoning."[7]

In his later years, Brezhnev was described by a Soviet political commentator as a man who "tolerated incompetence and corruption around him."[8] After working closely with Andropov the same commentator said, "For Brezhnev politics was a hobby. For

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid, 12-14.

[6] E.J. Dionne, Jr., "Cheysson Sees Andropov as Cold," International Herald Tribune, February 24, 1983.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Steele and Abraham, *Andropov in Power*, 4.

Andropov it is a profession."[9] In strong contrast to Brezhnev was Andropov's unsociable personality. Many described Andropov as a loner. Also very different from Brezhnev was Andropov's desire to avoid a personality cult, keeping pictures of himself to a minimum in the press.[10]

With regard to addressing the Soviet public, Andropov's speeches were usually brief and concise, containing "frequent touches of realism and warnings against dogma."[11] In an address to the Central Committee on November 24, 1982, Andropov insisted that solutions to the Soviet Union's economic problems could not be solved "by slogans alone," and he often attacked the conservative manner of the Soviet economic system.[12] Differences in leadership as exhibited by Andropov coupled with his disdain for religious dissidents promised nothing short of an interesting religion policy.

As director of the KGB from 1967 until 1982, Andropov did much to shape the foundation and basic elements of his future religion policy before he ever took on the position of general secretary. In fact most of the evidence available in examining Andropov's beliefs on religious dissidents and policy must be viewed during his time as KGB director, because he ruled the Soviet Union for such a short period of time. Acting much of the time on his own volition, Andropov contributed to many of the negative events that took place in religious affairs under Brezhnev. While Andropov sought to change the image of the KGB somewhat, fear continued to be the primary tactic

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[9] Quoted in Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid, 5.

[12] Ibid.

employed and it was even encouraged by the KGB among ordinary Soviet citizens.[13] Even Andropov felt a sense of nervousness by the KGB before his appointment as its director. He once said of the KGB headquarters, "All my life I have been walking past this building with a feeling of unease and awkwardness. Imagine, I'm going to be its boss."[14] The KGB's foreboding appearance and mystique was facilitated by the fact that secret policemen were purposefully isolated from the rest of the population and agents were expected to keep relationships and ties to outsiders to a minimum. All of this was necessary in order for a sense of mystery and apprehension to be maintained.[15]

Although the KGB was technically under the control of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and decisions were supposed to come from the Politburo, the KGB had a long history, dating back to Stalin's KGB man Beria, of getting out of control.[16] After Stalin's death the KGB suffered from a bad reputation that prevailed as Andropov assumed position as director. The Kremlin wondered whether it was worth trying to restore a police force that had become such a threat to the Soviet state and its citizens. The KGB was responsible for espionage and intelligence abroad, but it was also in charge of domestic security. The KGB had its own separate force of uniformed border guards

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[13] Martin Ebon, *The Andropov File: The Life and Ideas of Yuri V. Andropov, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1983), 77-78.

[14] "Soviet in Transition: Andropov's Drive to Revive a Stagnant Society Left a Legacy," *International Herald Tribune*, July 30, 1985. Archive file <Soviet Union 15/2 Andropov>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[15] Ebon, *The Andropov File*, 78.

[16] Ibid, 75.

and an underground network of contract agents and part-time informers in order to keep tabs on both Party members and ordinary citizens.[17]

In terms of direct orders from Brezhnev, Andropov was expected to avoid arresting dissidents, if possible, until at least 1979.[18] This was in part because throughout the 1970s, Brezhnev was seeking the approval of the international community who had become increasingly concerned with human rights violations. If large numbers of arrests took place, the risk of creating martyrs and generating negative publicity increased dramatically. However, another part of the reason was that Brezhnev was still seeking favor among Soviet citizens, and if religious dissidents continued to be persecuted as they had during Khrushchevism, the risk of the public siding with them grew, leaving Brezhnev looking like a tyrant.

As a whole through the 1970s, Andropov succeeded in carrying out Brezhnev's orders, and the KGB became "more human" in its dealing with believers and others that they considered to be a threat to the Soviet state.[19] According to Soviet historian John Anderson, the arrest rate in the Soviet Union during most of the 1970s radically dropped, peaking at only about 100 religious arrests in 1973.[20] The average for the rest of the 1970s was at around thirty or forty religious arrests per year falling to just twenty arrests for the entire year 1975. Again, although these measures of religion policy under Brezhnev were made from external motivating factors, as many decisions are by

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[17] Steele and Abraham, *Andropov in Power*, 88.

[18] Ibid, 91.

[19] Quoted in Ebon, *The Andropov File*, 81.

[20] John Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 134-135.

politicians, they marked a period of change with early signs indicating that liberalization was in the making. As the West began trying to work with the Soviet Union on global issues and as the violations of human rights internationally and the civil rights movement in America got under way, Brezhnev and other Soviet leaders were forced to revise their policy on dissidents, and slow liberalization toward tolerance began.

One of the few exceptions that the KGB made to Brezhnev's orders was Andropov's decision to employ psychiatry in order to "convince and educate" those who continually posed a threat to the interests of the Soviet state.[21] Although changes in techniques for dealing with religious dissidents had developed in the Brezhnev era such as no longer resorting to starvation, shooting, exhaustion, and overworking in labor camps, the practice of using psychiatric drugs on religious dissidents, which had begun only slightly under Khrushchev, flourished with Andropov as KGB director.[22]

At the time Andropov became director of the KGB in 1967, there were three known psychiatric hospitals in the USSR. By the time Andropov became General Secretary of the Soviet Union in 1982, at least eight more had been built.[23] By 1983, Amnesty International reported that 313 people in the USSR had been forcibly admitted to psychiatric hospitals since 1969.[24] Once committed to a psychiatric ward, drugs causing damage to health and excruciating pain were usually administered. The drugs

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[21] Steele and Abraham, *Andropov in Power*, 88.

[22] Arnold Beichman and Mikhail S. Bernstam, *Andropov: New Challenge to the West* (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1983), 184.

[23] Ibid, 183.

[24] Steele and Abraham, *Andropov in Power*, 94.

used usually debilitated the mind and altered one's perception.[25] Examples of drugs administered were sulfazine, a combination of sulfuric acid and peach oil used in the West in the 1930s, insulin that led to shock in non-diabetic patients, aminazin, which caused severe depression, and reserpine, a psychotic drug sometimes used for symptoms of Huntington's disease.[26]

Andropov had always despised insolence of any kind, including laziness, lateness, and dissident behavior, and as leader of the Soviet Union, he sought to combat all forms of bad behavior.[27] In 1967 he was quoted in *Pravda* as saying that the reasons for dissidents remaining in the Soviet Union were "various: political or ideological delusions, religious fanaticism, nationalistic obsessions, resentment caused by personal offense or lack of success…and even in some cases mental imbalance."[28] Andropov went on to say that in the Soviet Union, "deluded individuals are helped through persuasion to correct their mistakes."[29] Andropov's desire to weed out dissidence and other undesirable behavior continued when he became leader of the Soviet Union and was basically to be his official religion policy.

While it is probable that Brezhnev knew about the KGB's misuse of psychiatry, the KGB's massive secret police force, their reputation, and the fear they utilized even on Party members, combined with Andropov's authority, allowed for this method to

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[25] Ebon, *The Andropov File*, 81.

[26] Beichman and Bernstam, *Andropov: New Challenge*, 183.

[27] Steele and Abraham, *Andropov in Power*, 5.

[28] Ibid, 90.

[29] Ibid.

continue. Marshall Tito once said that the KGB had "become a power above Soviet society" that had turned out to "really [rule] the country."[30] The KGB had always been a state within a state, and after 1967, Andropov was its dictator. Andropov enjoyed authority previously unknown to any other KGB director.[31] He was chosen as an alternate Politburo member one month after his appointment as the director of the KGB, meaning that he had the power to vote on major executive decisions. Within six years, he was promoted to full Politburo member and solidified enough power and supporters to appoint himself the secretariat of the Central Committee in 1982.

By the time Andropov became the leader of the Soviet Union late in 1982, he had all but consolidated his power and unofficially taken over the position. As Brezhnev's health began to rapidly decline beginning in about 1979, Andropov, as the head of the KGB and an important and powerful member of the Politburo, began to put his own policies into effect.[32] Along with an increase in psychiatric terror in 1979, Andropov stepped up the persecution of religious dissidents.[33] Arrests of prominent church leaders resumed in 1979 with the initial number in prison standing at 180. By 1985 the number of religious prisoners thought to be in prison or labor camps was 411.[34]

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[30] Quoted in Beichman and Bernstam, *Andropov: New Challenge*, 184.

[31] Ebon, *The Andropov File*, 77.

[32] Elizabeth Teague, "Andropov's First Hundred Days: Domestic Policy," *Radio Liberty Research*, February 21, 1983, 1. Archive file <Soviet Union 15/2 Andropov>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[33] Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Religion policy in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 27.

[34] Ibid.

As Andropov officially became leader of the Soviet Union in November 1982, a number of reforms were initiated as he attempted to rid Soviet society of the stagnation that had crept in during the Brezhnev years. The majority of Andropov's reforms involved reviving the economy and stamping out corruption, which included eliminating dissidents, alcoholism, laziness, and decreased productivity. Andropov waged a war on slackers in attempts to promote labor discipline and sought to make changes in "planning, management, and the economic mechanism" of the entire Soviet system.[35] In terms of economic reforms, Andropov favored Gorbachev's plan of encouraging decentralization and local initiative.[36] He also advocated the idea of allowing peasants to lease farm animals that they would in turn raise on their own private land and then sell back for a profit. On the other hand, Andropov remained in support of Brezhnev's Food Program, which allowed for a third of the investment sums set aside for agriculture to be spent on rural roads, improved housing, schools, and communal facilities. However, Andropov's reforms on all fronts were too cautious and the old Soviet system was too conservative and unwilling to accept change.

Andropov's religion policy as Soviet leader was similar to the measures taken by Andropov as leader of the KGB. *The Herald* reported one month after Andropov's death that "Soviet life under Yuri Andropov had become a lot tougher for many religious believers."[37] As Andropov settled into his position as leader of the Soviet Union, the KGB was still in the process of carrying out Andropov's bidding, and in 1982 alone there

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[35] "Soviet in Transition: Andropov's Drive to Revive a Stagnant Society Left a Legacy."

[36] Steele and Abraham, *Andropov in Power*, 165.

[37] "Tougher on Believers," *The Herald*, March 15, 1984.

were over 110 religious arrests.[38] While arrests picked up, the number of those undergoing forced psychiatric measures continued as well. In an article that appeared in *Kommunist*, Andropov wrote that the re-education of those hostile to the Soviet system was not a violation of human rights but rather true humanism and democracy seeking to express the will of the majority.[39] Andropov did not seek to continue the liberalization made in religion policy under Brezhnev. Rather, as director of the KGB and then Soviet leader, he caused a set back to what could have been greater liberalization during Brezhnev's rule.

Ultimately Andropov's rule failed to make any significant mark on Soviet political and economic policy. In addition, his religion policy was reactionary and narrow-minded. His reforms to halt corruption and increase productivity were calls to orderliness and obedience and not a commitment to change. He took advantage of Brezhnev's frailty to propel himself to the top and initiate his own policies before he was even named general secretary, and yet his policies were unsuccessful. He was absent from government for more than six months at the end of his rule because of his own failing health, and was therefore not able to closely monitor the country's affairs. However, after acting as director of the KGB for fifteen years, his religion policy was well established in the way that religious dissidents were dealt with. Ultimately, although Andropov did not undo the whole of small but significant liberalization that Brezhnev had made in Soviet religion policy, he certainly did hinder it. Andropov's successor did little to change the repressive religion policy he had maintained.

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[38] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union*, 134.

[39] Yuri Andropov, "Uchenie Karla Marxa," *Kommunist*, April 1983. Archive file <Soviet Union 15/2 Andropov>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

Andropov's successor Konstantin Ustinovich Chernenko ruled the Soviet Union for an even shorter period—only thirteen months—and was, by any measure, an unsuccessful leader. His entire political career lacked in achievement and he was the living embodiment of the word "patsy." Behind his back at Politburo meetings Andropov and others called Chernenko a "country-bumpkin" and at one time Georgi Arbatov, director of the Institute of USA and Canada, said it was "unthinkable" and indecent to consider Chernenko as a potential leader for the Soviet Union.[40] Above all, Chernenko was a people pleaser, and he sought to be in good favor with whomever was in the position of General Secretary. After Andropov became General Secretary, he told Chernenko at a Politburo session that if he would not stop smoking for the health of those around him, then he should at least think of himself. A smoker since the age of nine, it was said that not only did Chernenko stop smoking in Andropov's presence, he stopped smoking altogether that very day.[41]

Before he came on the scene as Brezhnev's yes-man, he had held a number of lackluster positions, all within the context of the Communist Party. A party member since 1931, he had been the secretary of the Krasnoyarsk kraykom, the secretary of the Penza obkom, and chief of the Propaganda Department of the Moldavian Communist Party Central Committee. In 1956 he was elected to full membership of the Moldavian Central Committee and from 1956 to 1960 he was the chief of the Mass Agitation Work Section of the CPSU Central Committee Propaganda and Agitation Department. From 1960 to 1964 he was chief of the Secretariat of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium and

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[40] Quoted in Vladimir Solovyov and Elena Klepikova, *Behind the High Kremlin Walls* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1986), 41.

[41] Ibid, 44.

in 1965 Brezhnev appointed Chernenko chief of the CPSU Central Committee General Department. He did not become a full member of the Central Committee until 1971 and in 1976 he was elected CPSU Central Committee secretary and was in charge of administration measures including security, order, information, and documentation. He became a full Politburo member in 1978.[42]

All of these positions meant that prior to 1982, unlike most of his counterparts, Chernenko had never led a nationwide party organization or even a "party organ at the union republic level."[43] Therefore, Chernenko had never been given the opportunity to establish a power base, either locally or professionally, but having been a loyal Party member for so long, he had developed important personal contacts. All in all the whole of Chernenko's political career had been spent in Brezhnev's shadow and many of his posts mentioned above were attained through Brezhnev.[44] Chernenko and Brezhnev first met in the 1950s while both were working in Moldavia.[45] When Brezhnev left Moldavia for Moscow, Chernenko followed, and in 1965 Brezhnev chose him to head the CPSU Central Committee General Department, a position that Chernenko remained in for more than twelve years.

Chernenko and Brezhnev's relationship was the source of much criticism and jokes among Party members and others in the Soviet Union. One such joke ran,

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[42] Baruch A. Hazan, *From Brezhnev to Gorbachev: Infighting in the Kremlin* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 24.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid, 104-105.

[45] Steele and Abraham, *Andropov in Power*, 137.

"Brezhnev has been dead for quite some time, but Chernenko hasn't told him."[46] Chernenko served as Brezhnev's "flunky, orderly, valet, and secretary" throughout their relationship and at times performed all of these tasks at once.[47] Chernenko's personality was one of approval seeking and no task was too lowly for him to perform in obedience to Brezhnev, including opening bottles of water, setting out napkins, and filing protocols. Sincerely devoted to Brezhnev, he made sure Brezhnev did not exceed his quota of cigarettes, helped him from his chair, took him to the bathroom, and repeated words lost on Brezhnev due to his increasing deafness.[48]

At meetings with foreigners Chernenko typically never spoke, and after one such meeting Malcolm Toon, the former United States ambassador to the Soviet Union, said that the only impression of Chernenko he garnered was that the man was a "dullard."[49] Brezhnev got to the point where he could not do without Chernenko and relied on him at the office and at home. The two were neighbors in the same apartment building and their wives were close friends.[50] By the end of the 1970s it was clear that Chernenko, as Brezhnev's right hand man, was Brezhnev's choice for a successor and observers assumed that Chernenko would become the next general secretary.

Chernenko's hope had been that Brezhnev would retire and recommend him as successor because if Brezhnev died in office much of Chernenko's political influence

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[46] Quoted in Solovyov and Klepikova, *Behind the High Kremlin Walls*, 43.

[47] Ibid, 41.

[48] Ibid, 42.

[49] Quoted in Ibid, 42.

[50] Ibid, 42-43.

would disappear with Brezhnev. In terms of individual merit, Andropov was much more suited and qualified for the position of General Secretary. He was more intelligent and more experienced than Chernenko. Whereas Chernenko was nothing but a "classic apparatchik" who had lived his entire political life in the Party bureaucracy, Andropov had served as a diplomat and adviser on foreign issues and had spent fifteen years as director of the KGB.[51] On the other hand, in appearance Chernenko inspired more confidence than Andropov and he was certainly more personable of the two. However, Andropov's past political positions and work as head of the KGB left him with the ability to project himself as independent and separate from Brezhnev. He was not the typical Soviet crony and was perhaps the only Soviet leader to ever win the position of General Secretary without assistance from a patron or previous Soviet leader. According to *The Economist*, Andropov "had more solid political experience to offer and over the years he had been able carefully to build up the kind of independent constituency within the party that Mr. Chernenko lacked."[52] These aspects combined with the stagnation of the economy and other failures in the last years of Brezhnev's term sealed Chernenko's fate and he was passed up, leaving him to wait an additional nearly two years before his turn as leader of the USSR.

When Andropov died in February 1984, Chernenko was a natural choice for the Politburo. Although the West had concluded that he was much too "sick, unconfident, unqualified, and incompetent" at the age of seventy-two, ten years exceeding the life expectancy of the average Soviet man, these flaws in Chernenko were not considered a

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[51] Ibid, 138-139.

[52] Quoted in Beichman and Bernstam, *Andropov: New Challenge*, 192.

hindrance in 1984.[53] Andropov, although his legacy was by no means extraordinary, had left the Soviet establishment shaken with talk of reforming the old system. In large part the reason that Gorbachev was not chosen as Andropov's successor was fear of similar reform tactics being instituted, as Andropov had been Gorbachev's mentor. However, Gorbachev was recognized to be the heir apparent to Chernenko and thus, Chernenko's election as General Secretary was both an extension of the quiet and secure life enjoyed by the Party before Andropov and "a contract between two generations, a promise for the future, and an excellent compromise for the present."[54] With Chernenko's appointment to the position of General Secretary, Gorbachev established himself as number two in the Soviet leadership.

As leader of the Soviet Union, Chernenko accomplished little and basically used the position as a means of thrusting himself into the limelight that he had been forced to stay out of for so many years. He never missed a chance to speak at public events and he made at least one major speech every week. In April 1984 alone the Soviet press reported on ten speeches given by Chernenko at various occasions, all of which exhibited a confidence in tone but a lack in content.[55] Chernenko was fond of using the theme of "moving forward" and advocating for a "new approach" without ever clarifying what he meant.[56] He urged economic leaders in the Soviet Union to "take risks" and on March 2,

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[53] Quoted in Hazan, *From Brezhnev to Gorbachev*, 104.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid, 113.

[56] Quoted in Ibid.

1984, he proclaimed that "we can and want to move forward faster."[57] In terms of actual political content, Chernenko made a series of promises to the Soviet people such as raising the standard of living, strengthening the country's defenses without an increase in work hours, and social and economic development, which could never have been accomplished.[58] The stagnation of the economy combined with the failure of Andropov's reforms had left the Soviet Union in a terrible state. Ultimately Chernenko espoused such cliché messages with the motive of projecting himself and the Soviet government with a fresh image of vigor and youth. It is also likely that Chernenko's political promises were made out of Chernenko's fear that his time to make a mark on history was quickly drawing to a close because of his age and poor health.

Hoping to plant the idea that he was healthy, active, and vigorous, Chernenko was often photographed by the press in his leisure moments spent with family outdoors. In reality Chernenko's health had been on the decline for quite some time. During Andropov's funeral he was unable to keep his hand in salute for longer than a few seconds without succumbing to tremors, and his voice was weak, making a public display of his respiratory problems.[59] While giving a speech in early July he was short of breath and obviously very ill, and about one week later it was reported in the press that he had left Moscow to take a holiday, but his absence continued for seven weeks.[60] This

[57] Quoted in Ibid.

[58] Ibid, 114.

[59] Ibid, 104.

[60] Ibid, 121-122.

absence was subsequently followed by many of varying lengths until Chernenko's death in March 1985.

In terms of religion policy, Chernenko did not live long enough to establish a policy that was distinct from Andropov's and thus, religious arrests continued in 1984 and into 1985, although there was some decline. In 1983 there were nearly 120 known religious arrests under Andropov while in 1984 there were about eighty.[61] Considerably more than the number in Brezhnev's years but certainly less than during Andropov's stint as leader. Chernenko's own personal beliefs involving religious dissenters seemed to stem in part from Brezhnev's religion policy, and Brezhnev most likely influenced Chernenko's ideas in this area. While Andropov unleashed a psychiatric nightmare upon believers deeming they deserved nothing short of annihilation for their subversive activities, Chernenko took a more practical view of religious dissenters, like Brezhnev.

Chernenko's religious views have been identified in three separate sources at different times. The first was from a 1978 pamphlet titled "Communists in the USSR," the second from his 1982 book titled *Human Rights in the Soviet Union*, and the third from a June 1983 speech at the ideological Plenum.[62] Chernenko's basic thoughts do not vary from the party line in terms of believing that religion was the foundation for bourgeois enslavement of the proletariat, and that the best way to combat religion was aggressive atheist propaganda. Distinct from Andropov, Chernenko held the Brezhnevite

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[61] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union*, 134.

[62] J.P.A., "Chernenko and Religion," February 15, 1984. Archive file <Soviet Union 15/2 Chernenko>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

belief that education and "socialist transformation" played a great role in helping believers and others to see religion's flaws.[63]

While Chernenko did not sympathize with believers and believed that religion was a ploy invented by imperialists, he, like Brezhnev, favored an emphasis on affirming atheism's assets and creating more effective propaganda techniques rather than on defaming religion and believers. Chernenko wrote that the best way to help believers was not through laws and prohibitions but by "drawing believers into an active social life" and that "any violation of believers' feelings will only lead to the strengthening of religious fanaticism."[64] Another important similarity between Chernenko's thoughts on religion and Brezhnev's was his belief that religion was a survival of the past with "deep social and epistemological roots."[65] Religion continued through propaganda and activities from religious organizations, belief from abroad, and failings of atheist propaganda. The best way to repair the problem among young people was more aggressive propaganda and education.[66]

However, regardless of Chernenko's beliefs and their similarities in philosophy to his patron's, because he only ruled for thirteen months, much of the time being absent, his religion policy was virtually non-existent and a continuation from Andropov prevailed. Therefore, the intermission period of Andropov and Chernenko was an interruption in the beginning liberalization witnessed in religion policy under Brezhnev.

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Quoted in Ibid.

[65] Quoted in Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

Andropov's religion policy was carried over from his days as the director of the KGB and characterized by an increase in religious arrests and the confinement of dissidents in psychiatric hospitals. Chernenko's religion policy would have most likely been a variation of Brezhnev's because their ideas were so in sync, and it is safe to say that Chernenko would not have deviated a great deal from his patron's policies. In addition, Chernenko's lack of intelligence and originality of thought combined with his need to feel accepted by Party members would likely not have allowed him to create a more liberalizing religion policy. It would not be until Gorbachev came to power and instigated a number of sweeping reforms that religion policy in the Soviet Union would take on a more aggressive state of liberalization. Gorbachev combined Brezhnev's beginning liberalization in religion policy with Andropov's desire for reform, along with his own understanding of the Soviet system. Before examining Gorbachev's religion policy as general secretary, though, it is necessary to turn first to religious dissident Valeri Barinov and analyze his conversion to Christianity, early life, and experiences of religion policy in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

CHAPTER FIVE

Valeri Barinov and The Trumpet Call

Even as a small child Valeri Alexandrovich Barinov stood on the outside of the world around him, never quite fitting in. In fact he seemed born to be a failure. Those who knew him before he became a Christian saw a class clown, a prankster, a troublemaker, and an alcoholic living on the verge of total destruction. Born on December 6, 1944, in Leningrad during the closing days of World War II, his family heritage was one that reached back to the Revolution where his grandfather was a hero and served in the Chekha, a forerunner to the KGB.[1] Valeri's mother fell for a dashing young soldier in the Red Army during the war, and after a short courtship they married. However, Alexander Sardonikov, Valeri's father, was not ready to settle into family life, and Valeri and his mother were soon faced with the realization that he wanted nothing to do with either of them. According to Valeri his mother never got over the shock of returning home one day to find her husband gone for good. Valeri, himself, did not remember his father at all from childhood, but of his mother, he had only happy memories.[2]

Valeri showed a love for music early on and as a child he would sneak out of bed and crouch outside on his neighbor's steps listening to their gramophone. Valeri described himself as a shy child, instinctively clinging to his mother's skirt upon entering

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[1] Valeri Barinov and Danny Smith, *Jailhouse Rock* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), 18.

[2] Ibid.

a room, but if music was heard, Valeri transcended everything around him and would begin dancing. His real passion was singing, and he easily picked up any tune he heard. In school he often sang solo parts in school plays. Valeri wrote, “Music seemed to unlock something within myself.”[3] In times of despair, even as a small boy, Valeri would turn to music for comfort, and he frequently fell asleep at night with the radio on in his room.

Valeri’s mother noticed his musical talent and worked hard to give him a proper education. She was trained as a professional bookkeeper and worked long hours so that she was able to send Valeri to kindergarten when he was three and school when he was seven. According to Lorna Bourdeaux, historian and friend to Barinov, Valeri was very bright and excelled at all of his examinations.[4] One afternoon, Valeri’s mother surprised him with a secret: she had been saving money so that she could afford to pay for him to take singing lessons at the Rimsky-Korsakov Conservatoire in Leningrad. She showed Valeri a Russian doll full of ruble notes and for several weeks, he would lie out on the bed carefully unfolding and caressing each note.[5]

Valeri’s mother was also very religious, and she sought for her son to have an understanding of God and Christianity, even though it was discouraged by the state. On Sundays, she would dress herself and Valeri in their best clothes, and they would walk together to the Orthodox Church. Valeri’s favorite part was the church bells, the chants, and the music, which he found engrossing. The desire to eliminate religion from society

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[3] Ibid, 19.

[4] Lorna Bourdeaux, *Valeri Barinov: The Trumpet Call* (Basingstoke, Hants, UK: Marshalls Morgan & Scott Ltd., 1985), 18.

[5] Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 19-20.

and children's minds was so strong in the Soviet Union that even as a very young boy, Valeri said that he understood that his mother's ideas about God were different from his teachers' views at school. He wrote that at school he was taught that "the concept of God was a fairy tale, an invention of wicked people who used religious ideas to exploit the poor.[6] Nevertheless, his mother arranged for him to be baptized in the Orthodox faith by Brother Piotr Tiyetich, an engineer, devout believer, and family friend.[7]

Eventually to better provide for the young Valeri, his mother secured a job in the accounts department of a Pioneer Youth Camp outside Leningrad. Valeri knew that his mother had never gotten over his father, and she never stopped trying to locate him. At the suggestion of a friend at the camp, she attempted to contact Sardonikov through the army network and for the first time in years had luck in tracking him down. She learned from a letter sent by the Russian army that he was living in Vyborg, a town near the Finnish border, not far from Leningrad. Although he had remarried, his second wife had since died. The letter came with an address, and Valeri's mother made arrangements to leave right away. Excited about the upcoming Sports Day at the camp, Valeri said goodbye to his mother not knowing that it would be the last time he saw her well.[8] While in Vyborg, Valeri's mother suffered from a blood vessel bursting in her head brought on by intense psychological pressure, which resulted in paralysis. Struggling in the street, she finally collapsed a few yards from Sardonikov's door, unable to knock. No one

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[6] Ibid, 20.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid, 22-23.

noticed her in the snow, and she spent two days laying in the street unconscious. She died shortly after being brought back to Leningrad. [9]

Valeri was only eleven years old when his mother died. She was all Valeri had and he later wrote that her death felt like a shock ripping through his body. After he was told of her death, he went outside and the camp band began playing a melancholy song. Valeri wrote later that the song made him feel "as though my soul itself was weeping."[10] Returning to his mother's room the night of her death, Valeri found the Russian doll that had once held the hope of a promising musical career. Valeri took the doll, which was now empty, with him as "an eternal expression of [their] love."[11] Later in life Valeri said, in regards to having the prospect of a musical career taken from him, "That had to be denied me because otherwise I would have been devoted not to God's will, but to following my own career."[12] Although Valeri's inability to go to music school was not his choice, he believed later once he had become a Christian that God had always had a plan for his life, even if he had not been able to see it. Valeri's last goodbye to his mother was at her funeral, which was held in Leningrad and attended by over three hundred people.[13]

Valeri's Uncle Ura came to the camp and took him back to Leningrad to live with him and his wife Vera and their daughter Valentina in their small apartment in Nevsky

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[9] Ibid, 22-29.

[10] Ibid, 31.

[11] Ibid, 31.

[12] Bourdeaux, *Valeri Barinov,* 19.

[13] Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 31.

Prospekt. It did not take Valeri long to realize the difficulties he was going to face in his new home. While his uncle was kind in heart, Ura had a serious drinking problem, which resulted in him losing job after job, leaving the family to live off of Vera's meager salary, which could only buy potatoes and bread. Ura also had a habit of taking his frustrations out on Vera, and Valeri was forced to intervene from time to time on her behalf, leaving Ura angry with him.[14]

On Saturday nights, Ura would stumble in drunk yelling and cursing at the top of his voice and on a number of occasions he and Valeri had violent encounters. Once angry at Valeri, Ura chased him out of the apartment with a meat axe, forcing Valeri to spend the cold night on the streets of Leningrad. On another occasion, Vera suffered such a severe beating from Ura that she decided to leave, and she took Valentina with her, leaving Valeri behind with his alcoholic uncle. The next few weeks were a nightmare for Valeri as Ura's drinking raged on uncontrolled. Soon Ura began bringing home prostitutes and would not allow Valeri to leave the room. Eventually Ura informed Valeri that he planned on placing him in one of the local orphanages.[15]

Valeri was taken to Internat No. 10 and wrote that at the time, "the sense of isolation and abandonment that I had experienced after my mother's death in June was beginning to give way to a feeling of independence."[16] He was alone but no longer lonely and enjoyed his newfound freedom. Quickly learning the ropes of what it meant to be a teenage boy in an orphanage, Valeri passed the test of courage and after only a

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[14] Ibid, 32-33.

[15] Ibid, 37-38.

[16] Ibid, 39.

few weeks there, he had become one of the gang leaders hanging around with the older boys. They spent their time "whistling at girls and making up jokes that could only be told behind the toilets."[17] At the orphanage, Valeri was always in trouble, resulting in numerous expulsions, which only fueled his rebelliousness. However, the orphanage was inevitably forced to take Valeri back because he had nowhere else to go.[18]

One day after the orphanage staff discovered a failed escape plan masterminded by Valeri and five other boys, Valeri was warned to shape up or he would be expelled and prohibited from returning. Convinced that no one cared for him, he fashioned his belt into a noose, throwing it over a beam in the hallway. He climbed up on a stool and strapped the noose around his neck, and as he jumped off the stool, Valeri described seeing "a million light bulbs [flash]" and hearing "a glass [smash] against the wall."[19] Valeri said he saw his mother's face float across the sky before the belt broke, causing him to sustain a nasty bruise and an injured leg. Afterwards, Valeri tried to behave himself better, but to no avail, and within a few short weeks of his suicide attempt, he was expelled, forcing him to return to Ura.[20]

Little had changed in Ura's world when Valeri came back to stay with him. Ura had sunk further into alcoholism and his practice of bringing prostitutes back to the apartment became more frequent. Valeri was often reduced to roaming the streets for hours on end into the night with nowhere to go. Learning to bypass the ticket barrier,

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid, 40-41.

[19] Ibid, 43.

[20] Ibid.

Valeri would ride the tram to the end of the line. One night on one his many walks, his feet carried him down to the Neva River, where he was taken with the flags and canons on the military ships. Valeri found himself climbing up the wall of the harbor to get a better look at the sailors.[21] At that point in his life, Valeri was looking for a purpose and a way to escape the miserable and desolate turn his life had taken. Still an idealistic youth at the age of fourteen, despite his misfortunes, Valeri was vigorously patriotic and seeing the sailors in their elegant uniforms excited him.[22]

Again and again, Valeri would walk to the waterfront and watch the ships. One night Valeri came upon a gathering of young people joking and singing with some of the sailors, and he began to participate. Valeri regaled them with his voice and knowledge of funny songs he had learned in the orphanage. After making quite an impression on the sailors, he was taken aboard where he spent the night. The following morning the captain gave Valeri a tour and consented to Valeri's request to spend his school holidays on the ship. A group of sailors serving on the smaller boats became especially close friends to Valeri, but eventually Ura became aware of Valeri's absence and alerted the police. Ura was angry and insisted that Valeri go back to the orphanage, but within no time after arriving, he was expelled again. The next few months Valeri spent being shuffled back between the orphanage and Ura's, making him feel. Finally Valeri took matters into his own hands, said goodbye to Uncle Ura, and ran to the docks in hopes of attaining a position as a ship's boy.[23]

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[21] Ibid, 43-44.

[22] Bourdeaux, *Valeri Barinov*, 20.

[23] Ibid.

Successful in his endeavor, Valeri worked on a battleship from May to September 1958, was given a naval uniform, and an identity card with his photograph and the official seal of the ship. When September came, Valeri was forced to return to his normal life and spent next nine months shuttling between Ura's apartment and the orphanage once again. When May 1959 came around Valeri was able to secure another stint as a ship's boy and spent five months sailing the Russian coast. However, by September 1959 Valeri was no longer a child at sixteen and was resolved to give up his dreams of becoming a naval officer. Admission to the Russian navy required formal training and special qualifications that Valeri did not have and could not hope to receive.[24] His short-lived career as a sailor from 1958 to 1959 was one of the most pleasant experiences of his early life and one that he always looked back on as saving his life in many ways. However, it was Valeri's next job that inadvertently pushed him closer to his destiny with Christ.

Back in Leningrad, Valeri secured a job operating the film projector at the Sputnik Cinema on Nevsky Street and became entranced by such American films as *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* and *Oklahoma*, which were dubbed into Russian. Other favorites were movies starring Humphrey Bogart and John Wayne and Valeri took it all in. He began memorizing the lyrics to songs in Glenn Miller films such as *Sun Valley Serenade* and he learned to sing "Chattanooga Choo-Choo" even though he did not understand the words. Wanting to know what the songs meant, Valeri sought out

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[24] Ibid, 48.

foreigners and was able to borrow illegally made copies of movie soundtracks and tapes recorded from BBC and the Voice of America.[25]

For the first time, Valeri heard the musical styling of Elvis and Bill Haley and the Comets and was blown away by the sound. Nothing similar had ever been heard in the Soviet Union before and Valeri fell in love with all of it. He quickly learned the lyrics to every song he could get his hands on. In time Valeri bought an accordion and formed a band with an old friend George from the orphanage. The two teens added a trumpet along with drums and a bass, playing songs learned from various foreign radio stations. However, while music and playing was important to Valeri and his band, they were teenagers looking for a good time and their sessions often turned into drinking bouts. Valeri confessed that, now at eighteen with no guidance or stability, he sought to do nothing but challenge the establishment. Then out of nowhere, Valeri received a letter from the Russian Army ordering him to report for duty. [26]

In 1963, although Valeri had experienced some of the worst elements that life had to offer, his patriotism toward the motherland remained, and he reported to the army without grumbling. Wanting to enjoy his freedom while he could, Valeri slipped further into debauchery and got "blind drunk" every night until the day he left.[27] As a farewell on his last day in Leningrad, Valeri's Aunt Tamara arranged a dinner for him with his closest friends. As his friends left, Tamara began speaking to Valeri about her religious faith and personal relationship with Christ. Valeri dismissed the ideas at first and later

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[25] Ibid, 48-49.

[26] Ibid, 49-50.

[27] Ibid, 51.

wrote, referring to his aunt, “There you are, such a young person and already in the ranks of the elderly.”[28] Valeri went on to write that for his entire childhood, he had never given God any thought, saying, “I wasn’t remotely interested in such questions.”[29] Atheist schooling and Soviet propaganda had taught Valeri that God was something that only old women believed in.[30] However, the seed had been planted and without realizing it, Tamara’s words stuck with Valeri as he left his beloved Leningrad for the army.

When Valeri arrived at his army barracks in Riga under Colonel Sergei Sekunov, a renowned disciplinarian, he realized how much he would have preferred to be in the navy. Valeri was a wonderful soldier, received praise for his marching ability, and was chosen to participate in parades welcoming visiting dignitaries. His behavior was still unruly, however, and his drinking continued. Valeri trained as an assistant radio operator and was able to continue listening to broadcasts from foreign radio stations. It was at this time that he first heard the Beatles, whose music heavily impacted Valeri’s future musical style.[31]

During his stint in the army, Valeri continued down a destructive path and his drinking increased. He was often depressed, and his mind would give way to thoughts of suicide, although Valeri never again attempted to kill himself. On one occasion he talked with another soldier Maxim and asked him if there was any real love in the world and whether God existed. Maxim replied that God was a fairy tale told by old women and

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[28] Quoted in Bourdeaux, *Valeri Barinov*, 21.

[29] Quoted in Ibid.

[30] Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 51.

[31] Ibid, 52.

declared firmly, “There is no God, Valeri. NO GOD!”[32] But Valeri was not convinced that Maxim was correct and on several subsequent occasions he surprised himself by asking other soldiers whether or not they believed that God existed.[33]

The question remained with Valeri, and he became consumed with finding the answer. He could not help but see that everyone around him was lost and in despair. Valeri could not forget the promise that his life had held before his mother’s death and he could still remember attending worship services with her at the Orthodox Church where they both took communion regularly. Valeri could not understand where his life was going, but he soon found his answer while sitting in an army jail cell.

During his army days Valeri met and fell in love with Viktoria, a factory girl that Valeri met at a dance, and he was often able to sneak off base to see her. However, he began forsaking his patrol duties to spend time with her, and in 1966 the army’s patience with Valeri’s erratic behavior had worn thin. He was brought before a court martial that threatened to land him in a military prison. While sitting in jail waiting for his future to be decided, Valeri contemplated his life and eventually again settled on the idea that suicide was the best option. Then Valeri heard Aunt Tamara’s words: Valeri, if you forget everything else I’ve said, just remember one thing. God exists!”[34] Valeri repeated the words over and over in his head and the idea came to life. Looking out his prison window Valeri saw the sun hit a tall gray building with a cross on the top, and immediately fell down on his knees. Unable to recall how he had seen people pray in

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[32] Quoted in Ibid, 54.

[33] Ibid, 53-54.

[34] Quoted in Ibid, 55.

church when he was a child, Valeri tried the familiar ritual of crossing himself, but became frustrated at not knowing the correct procedure. Finally, he simply said:

> Oh God,
> If you really exist, then you will help me
> because I'm pleading to you with all my heart.
> But if you're not there and if you only exist
> in people's minds, then you can't help me,
> and you will remain silent.[35]

The following day Valeri was surprised to hear that he was cleared of the charges. Valeri believed that his prayer had been answered by God. On December 17, 1966, he was officially discharged from the army and returned to Leningrad.[36]

Once in Leningrad, Valeri bombarded Tamara with countless questions about the faith. He could not wait to be born again and was amazed to learn that once he had accepted Jesus, he could experience God anywhere. Valeri wanted to know about the Bible and whether or not the stories were true. He asked Tamara if it was true that Christians sacrificed their children on altars in obedience to God. Finally Valeri beseeched Tamara and said, "Auntie, tell me what I should do?"[37] She told Valeri to give himself over "completely to Jesus."[38]

Valeri was overwhelmed with emotion and vowed to God to turn his life over in service to the Christian faith. For two months, Valeri was able to stop smoking and drinking, but he soon fell back into his normal pattern. Eventually Valeri felt that the only way to make his life better was to leave Leningrad and get away from the bad

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[35] Ibid, 56.

[36] Ibid, 55-56.

[37] Quoted in Ibid, 58.

[38] Ibid, 57-58.

influences.[39] Valeri obtained a job as an assistant to an expedition leaving for Siberia on a topographical survey for a new airfield, and he made the decision to go.[40]

Valeri was not excited about living in Urai, a small town in Siberia, but he quickly found activities to occupy his restless mind. He joined a local band, giving concerts and singing Beatles songs. Western music had engulfed Moscow and Leningrad and teenagers everywhere longed to hear more. Valeri, being from Leningrad with his long hair and Beatle-like appearance, was an instant hit with the youth in Urai. His drinking continued to rage out of control, and although he tried to pray to God Valeri was not able to change. Then one day after telling the band that he was a Christian and would stop drinking, Pavel, a member of the band and a close friend, told Valeri, "I can't imagine what you'd be like without a drink."[41] Pavel's comment deeply impacted Valeri and he was awakened to the reality of how out of control his life had become. Valeri felt that he had forsaken and abandoned his newly found faith.

That night Valeri had a vivid dream in which he stood before his Uncle Ura, ashamed and guilty, and Ura told him to clean his feet, which were all muddy. Valeri woke immediately understanding the dream and fell upon his knees praying to Jesus for help.[42] The dream was a profound moment for Valeri, and the next week he worked very hard to change his life and not drink so much.

[39] Bourdeaux, *Valeri Barinov*, 33.

[40] Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 61.

[41] Quoted in Ibid, 65.

[42] Ibid, 65-66.

Valeri also prayed to meet a girl that he could share his life with, and soon he found who he was looking for in a redhead named Tanya, whom he met in April 1968. As Tanya and Valeri got to know one another better, Valeri was surprised that although he adored Tanya, they did not have much in common. Tanya was not a Christian and instead was involved in occult practices and believed she had the ability, like her mother, to foretell the future. She could not understand how Valeri was a Christian, but he continually worked to explain God and the grace discussed in the Bible. Tanya did not change her religious views, but Valeri was certain that he and Tanya were meant to be together, and after seeking counsel from Tamara he asked Tanya to marry him, and the two were married on December 27, 1968.[43]

At their wedding, Tamara gave Valeri and Tanya a Bible as a gift, the first one Valeri had ever seen. The newlyweds spent their honeymoon in a rented dacha for thirty days. Valeri wrote that although he had been with numerous girls before Tanya, he waited to consummate their relationship until after they married, because it was natural and right. In October 1969, Valeri and Tanya's first child was born and they named her Zhanna. In the meantime, Valeri found work as a driver and began taking an advanced course in professional driving. However, he missed Leningrad and wanted to return to his hometown.

In March 1970, Valeri found a job and an apartment and moved back to Leningrad. Three months later Tanya and Zhanna joined him. A year later in 1971 their second daughter Marina was born, and Valeri was forced to work longer hours as a driver to cover their expenses. Initially, Valeri and Tanya experienced the troubles that all

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[43] Ibid, 67-69.

newlyweds do, but tensions increased when Valeri began attending worship services at the registered Baptist Church on Poklonnaya Street. Valeri tried to attend every service and his knowledge of the Bible increased. He found acceptance by the members and they did not judge him for his past. In September 1971, Valeri was baptized and became a member of the church. Valeri cut his hair, wore a suit and tie, stopped drinking, and sold all his Beatles records. In fact he hardly listened to rock music for two years. No one was more shocked by these changes than Valeri himself.[44]

In the beginning Valeri admitted that he was naïve and childish about his faith. At work he proudly proclaimed to everyone that he was a Christian and asked if they had any questions about the Christian faith. Most people just laughed in amusement at Valeri's youthful zeal and played along, pretending to ask him serious questions. However, eventually Valeri talked to so many people about Jesus that he managed to pile up a number of complaints about his preaching where he worked as a chauffeur.[45]

One day during the New Year, Valeri was summoned to the transport union office where he was questioned about his Christian behavior. Valeri was accused of forcing his Christian beliefs on other citizens and spreading slanderous propaganda. He was told that he could believe in God as long as he kept it to himself, but what he was engaged in was dangerous activity. The union chief asked Valeri, "What if other people were influenced by your ideas?"[46] Although Valeri defended himself well during the interrogation stating

[44] Ibid, 77-78.

[45] Ibid, 87-93.

[46] Quoted in Ibid, 96.

that he had only answered questions about Christianity when they were asked of him, he was dismissed from the depot.[47]

Valeri was forced to take a string of menial jobs, including work as a laborer and a cleaner, before he was able to secure another job as a driver. He continued to evangelize and speak to everyone he encountered about Jesus, which continued to get him into trouble. Soon he was accused of spreading anti-Soviet propaganda and was called in to see the manager when another driver became annoyed with Valeri's beliefs. Shortly after, difficulties increased and Valeri was forced to quit, but he quickly heard about Ambulance No. 7 needing drivers and he was hired immediately. Valeri's shift was usually at night lasting until about nine or ten in the morning, and he would maneuver the ambulance in and out of the backstreets for medical emergencies and house calls.[48]

It was during many of these emergencies and house calls that Valeri claimed he was able to improve the condition of several of the patients by simply praying for them. Many were lifted and encouraged, and Valeri gained a reputation among the other drivers and doctors who saw him as an enigma. Preachers and religious believers were supposed to wear suits and ties and shun the enjoyment of life, but Valeri was the exact opposite. When he told them he loved rock music, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and even played their songs in a band, Valeri became a paradox.

Indeed Valeri had begun playing music again with some local musicians he had come into contact with. Valeri wanted to help those who were lost in the same way he

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[47] Ibid, 96-98.

[48] Ibid, 98-100.

had been. He sympathized with others who had chosen alcohol as a way to ease their pain and he knew the personal struggle and depth of despair that could drive one to take his or her own life. Valeri reasoned that the youth of Leningrad were the ones who suffered the most from such issues. They believed in nothing, not even Communism; they were not patriotic, and they escaped their troubles with sex, drugs, and alcohol. In order for them to understand the promise of a new life in Christ, Valeri knew he was going to need a catalyst, and he began to see music as the means to getting through to them. Valeri had become troubled when he realized that he had abandoned his musical gifts, and after hearing a rock band singing about Jesus on a Ukrainian radio broadcast, Valeri began to see his musical talent as a spiritual gift that he could use to convert others to Christianity.

Evangelizing the youth in the Soviet Union was a concept previously non-existent when Valeri began to put together a band in 1974 at the Komsomol, a local youth club, and this became his cause in serving Christ.[49] Valeri was not afraid to discuss Jesus and his religious beliefs with anyone, but the youth of Leningrad had a special place in Valeri's heart. The Soviet youth were bombarded on a daily basis with atheist propaganda and atheist teaching in school and they were often slighted by church leaders because of the March 1966 decree that forbade Sunday school worship for youths and the baptism of anyone under the age of eighteen.

By 1977, Valeri had formed his band and they gained a substantial fan base and played at various clubs and discos. At this time, Valeri had already written the lyrics to what was to become his masterpiece, the rock opera titled *The Trumpet Call* and

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[49] Bourdeaux, *Valeri Barinov*, 73-74.

composed the music in his head. Lorna Bourdeaux, a student studying in Leningrad at the time who met Valeri at the Baptist Church in 1977, and her friend Diana, translated the words into English.[50]

Ultimately Valeri's method of evangelism was a clever practice of building up a human relationship with someone first, allowing himself to just be a friend and someone they trusted and respected. When the time was right Valeri would spring his joy in Christ upon them and share his moving story of conversion with them. Valeri deeply believed in Christ's healing power and forgiveness and he repeated his story countless times to those who felt they were unworthy of God's love.[51]

Even early on in 1977, Valeri had a good deal of success in his evangelism. While driving the ambulance for the hospital, he was quizzed for two days by another young driver named Ivan, who wanted to know everything about Valeri's conversion to the faith. Valeri recommended that Ivan "try it out. Test Jesus."[52] A week later Ivan came running and proudly proclaimed to Valeri, "I tested God and the experiment worked. God exists!"[53] Valeri wrote that Ivan seemed surprised by his findings, and that he grew in the faith, becoming a witness to others about the changes Christianity had made in his life. According to Valeri, Ivan remained a close friend and even started to attend the Baptist Church in Leningrad.[54]

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[50] Ibid, 74.

[51] Ibid, 76.

[52] Quoted in Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 105.

[53] Quoted in Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

A powerful example of Valeri's evangelism method and skill for working with the youth came one night while he and his band were playing at The Moonwalk Club, which was notorious for murders, rapes, and other criminal activity. The band played for over an hour, singing renditions of Beatles songs and Chuck Barry, and at the end of the night Valeri linked the meaning behind "Let it Be" to the saving power of Jesus. Valeri appealed to his audience's troubles and loss of purpose. One girl in the audience yelled out, "You don't understand. I've got nothing to live for."[55] Questions were thrown one after another from the crowd and at 1:30 in the morning over thirty teens were still talking and discussing Valeri's words. After the first night at The Moonwalk Club, the club became their territory and "the kids looked up to [them] as heroes."[56] According to Valeri, while many were just drawn to the music, others were distressed and in desperate need of help.[57]

One of the teens that Valeri met at Moonwalk was named Lita who had been "passed like a bag of sweets from hand to hand, living with anyone that would keep her." A drug dealer to whom she owed money had scarred her in the face, and in order to support her drug addiction, she had turned to prostitution. One night after a show she vowed to Valeri that she was going to change. She found a job cleaning dishes in a hotel and fought to kick her drug habit. With no place to turn at one point she showed up on Valeri's front door step having been beaten badly by a drug dealer. After staying with Valeri for a few days and receiving care from both him and Tanya, she left and a month

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[55] Quoted in Ibid, 108.

[56] Ibid, 109.

[57] Ibid, 107-109.

later came to Valeri asking if he would accompany her to meet her family. Her parents gladly welcomed her back and after that she became a living testament to what belief in God could accomplish for even the most broken individual.[58]

From the end of 1977 until 1982, Valeri experienced a number of setbacks that hindered his ability to record his rock opera. Toward the end of 1977, many of the church leaders began to reject him because of his tendency to associate with the dregs of society and play rock music. One member asked, "Can you be a Christian and play at discos?"[59] Valeri wrote that for the first time he "realized that there was a great deal of hypocrisy in [his] church and that for many people what mattered most was outward appearance, form, and ritual, but not the essence of Christianity."[60] Despite the criticism from his church, Valeri pressed on to his task, feeling that God had called him to save the youth of Leningrad through his musical talents.

In 1981, Valeri met Sergei Timokhin and the two became fast friends. With the majority of his band members being called up to army duty in 1980, Valeri was looking for new members with which he could record *The Trumpet Call*, and Sergei volunteered to play bass.[61] Sergei was a recent convert to the Christian faith and with a passion for rock music similar to Valeri's, he was anxious to spread his wings and serve his newly discovered faith.

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[58] Ibid, 109-110.

[59] Quoted in Bourdeaux, *Valeri Barinov*, 82.

[60] Quoted in Ibid.

[61] Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 115-122.

At the beginning of 1982, it became obvious to Valeri that the KGB was surveilling their apartment and after taking an unpermitted absence from work to finish *The Trumpet Call*, Valeri was dismissed from his job. The KGB labeled him a parasite and Valeri's employment options became very limited. Eventually he found work at a large vegetable store working nights as a stoker operating the furnace. One day after returning from work in the morning, Valeri received a visit from an English foreigner who had brought instruments and other musical equipment across the border so that Valeri could record his opera. The foreigner had been in contact with four visitors Valeri had previously met from South London who had informed him that Valeri needed instruments.[62]

Valeri attributed the event to a miracle from God and set to recording immediately and over the next nine months, the band worked to complete *The Trumpet Call* as quickly as possible. During the nine months that it took for Valeri to record his opera, both of his daughters were growing spiritually and by the end of 1982 they expressed the desire to be baptized. Valeri's church prohibited the baptism of young people, and therefore with the help of friends he was able to arrange for Zhanna and Marina to be baptized in the Orthodox Church in January 1983. Valeri wrote, "It didn't matter to me which denomination administered the gift of baptism.[63] The real issue was that Zhanna and Marina were sincere in their search for God."[64]

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[62] Ibid, 126-136.

[63] Ibid, 137.

[64] Ibid.

Not long after his daughters' baptism, Valeri and Sergei wrote a letter of appeal to General Secretary Andropov asking for permission to perform their music in public arenas, because it had no political implications. Valeri and Sergei planned to travel to Moscow to deliver it personally but were arrested by the KGB in the Leningrad Railway Station. The two men were forced to strip, were searched, interrogated, and yelled at. The KGB arranged for two witnesses from the station to come in and sign prepared documents. Valeri wrote that they just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time but they "knew you didn't refuse a request from the KGB."[65]

After being interrogated for two hours, Sergei and Valeri were allowed to leave but not before one KGB official warned Valeri that he was a marked man and should not leave Leningrad. All of their belongings were returned to them except for the cassettes and envelopes containing the appeal to Andropov. The following day Sergei and Valeri were summoned to the Council of Religious Affairs where Mr. Kirov, a high ranking member of the CRA, greeted them. He made Valeri a simple offer: stop singing about Jesus and the Soviet Union would propel his band right to the top. Valeri refused the offer and was allowed to leave but was visited by a militiaman the following day.[66]

The militiaman informed Valeri that he was to report to the military commission in order to receive a medical and psychiatric examination before being drafted back into the army. Valeri saw this as a tactic by the KGB to have him declared insane and remanded to the custody of a psychiatric hospital. During the examination Valeri received confirmation that he was under surveillance by the KGB, and the psychiatrist

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[65] Ibid, 139.

[66] Ibid, 139-141.

told Valeri that if he spoke about Jesus in the army he would be put in a psychiatric ward. The doctor concluded that Valeri needed another examination and on his second visit, he was prodded and asked outrageous questions.[67]

On April 13, 1983, Valeri received a visit from a nurse who informed him that he was a psychiatric patient, which Valeri had previously not been made aware of. Shortly after this Valeri was again summoned to the Council for Religious Affairs where Mr. Kirov threatened to put him in prison. Valeri's troubles worsened when in May he was told by his employer that he could no longer work at the store. When pressed he told Valeri that it was bad for business for one of his employees to be a registered psychiatric patient.[68] The KGB was employing any method it could think of to break Valeri's spirit, and employment might have been enough for some Christians, but not for Valeri. Valeri had vowed before to devote his life to following Christ, and a little persecution by the KGB was not going to hinder his mission work. However, the next tactic that the KGB used against Valeri cut him to the core.

On June 29, 1983, the elders of the Leningrad Baptist Church made the decision to expel Valeri as a member. Although he was still able to attend worship services there, he could never be considered a member, and Valeri was devastated. He was well aware that the KGB had put pressure on them to keep him under control but the decision hurt nonetheless, and Valeri was surprised that supposed men of the Christian faith could shirk their responsibilities discussed in the Bible. There were four reasons given for Valeri's expulsion. The first was his appearance. Clad in jeans, tee shirts, and a cross

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[67] Ibid, 143-145.

[68] Ibid, 149-150.

around his neck, he looked like a hippie, they said. The second reason was that Zhanna and Marina had been baptized in an Orthodox Church. The fact that Valeri had not always clearly identified himself with the Baptist denomination was the third reason, and the last reason was that he played rock music.[69] Although the elders' decision came as a painful shock to Valeri, his ordeal with the KGB was just beginning.

On October 11, 1983, Valeri was again arrested by the KGB and taken to a Psychiatric Hospital No. 3 where he was admitted and then ridiculed by the KGB officers and doctors. The hospital was beyond reprehensible as Valeri stared at the stained vomit and food on the walls, where the toilets overflowed, and the staff wreaked havoc on the patients. He was able to see Tanya after he was admitted but not for very long. Valeri felt despair at times but was able to keep going with the knowledge that pressure from the West would influence the KGB, and they would eventually dismiss him.[70] The psychiatric doctors told Tanya that her husband suffered from "abnormal beliefs."[71] Valeri was injected with aminazin, which is usually used in patients with schizophrenia.[72] He was told by doctors and inmates alike that he would be there for a long time because his "views on religion differ so much from those of ordinary citizens."[73] However Valeri was not aware that Tanya had already made an appeal for him to Valeri's English friends, and a BBC program had already reported the news of his arrest and forced entry into the

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[69] Ibid, 150-151.

[70] Ibid, 158.

[71] Walters, Philip and Jane Balengarth. *Light through the Curtain* (Herts, England: Lion Publishing plc, 1985), 30.

[72] Quoted in Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 159.

hospital. The amount of publicity for Valeri in the West was significant and there is no doubt that the KGB felt the pressure mounting. After six days, the injections of aminazin were halted and on October 20, 1983, Valeri was released from the hospital.[74]

About a month after his release Valeri was summoned to a special psychiatric commission that questioned him about his religious beliefs and why he had attracted so much attention to himself. Valeri was told that the Soviet Union allowed for religious liberty and that there were a great number of believers in the Soviet Union, but Valeri had chosen to go against his country and engage in relationships with foreigners who sought to do the country harm. Valeri was questioned extensively on his connections to English foreigners, and in particular about his relationship with Keston College, an institution based in Oxford that focused on reporting and stopping religious persecution in Communist and post-Communist countries.[75] Keston College has since been transferred to Baylor University in Waco, Texas and has been renamed the Keston Center. The conclusion by the psychiatric doctors was that Valeri was considered not to be "fully well."[76]

The next few months were crucial for Valeri as he was constantly hounded and slandered in the press by the KGB. By December a rumor that he was a drug trafficker was in full circulation, and Valeri knew that this was the work of KGB as it would have been easy for others to believe that he was involved in drug activity. Many of the young

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[74] Ibid, 160-161.

[75] Bourdeaux, *Valeri Barinov*, 149.

[76] Ibid.

people he ministered to and shared his Christian faith with were drug addicts and users.[77] Valeri went about his business and did not worry about the rumor because he knew that if the KGB wanted to arrest him they did not need a reason. During his time in the psychiatric hospital, Valeri talked with a woman who did not understand why she had been arrested because she was "a loyal Party member."[78] Valeri replied to her, "But this isn't the real Communist Party. These people are more like the Mafia!"[79] Valeri knew that no one inside the Soviet Union could resist the KGB.

On January 30, 1984, Valeri knew that his life as a free man was growing shorter when he received a summons from the Leningrad Procuracy instructing him to stop "spreading slanderous fabrications defaming the Soviet social and state system."[80] The KGB had been embarrassed by the psychiatric fiasco, in which they had been forced to release Valeri after garnering so much negative publicity and condemnation abroad. Now the KGB was out for blood and Valeri could practically hear them at his door. In January he made the heart-wrenching decision to leave his family and home for a while and go underground to record more music.

The plan was, in fact, to leave in early March and cross the border into Finland. Valeri was fully aware of the risk he was putting himself and Sergei in, and thus decided not to tell his family that he was crossing the border.[81] With their decision made on

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[77] Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 164.

[78] Quoted in Ibid, 156.

[79] Quoted in Ibid, 156.

[80] Quoted in Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 165.

[81] Bourdeaux, *Valeri Barinov*, 228.

leaving the Soviet Union, Valeri and Sergei spent January and February preparing by packing food, warm clothes, homemade skis, compasses, a map of the Finnish border, and Finnish/English/Russian phrase books.[82] The two left on March 2, traveling by train first to Murmansk, and then arriving at Loukhi, which was about sixty miles east of the frontier zone. However as they continued their journey, they realized they were being followed and decided that attempting to cross was too risky. They abandoned their plan and turned back to Leningrad. They took a train back to Knyazhava and as they were waiting to buy tickets to Leningrad, three militiamen arrested Valeri and Sergei.[83]

Valeri and Sergei were taken to a detention center in Kandalaksha and an investigator named Shelimov interrogated them into the early morning hours. Valeri explained everything to him, and eventually Shelimov asked Valeri to write his actions down in order that they might have a record of the events. Valeri asked if he should write down that he had decided to abandon the plan and go back to Leningrad, but Shemilov told him that there was no proof of that, and thus no point in recording it. Exhausted as he was, Valeri was not thinking and did as he was told.[84]

Eventually, after remaining in a prison in Murmansk for over a month, Valeri and Sergei were remanded to the KGB prison in Leningrad over the course of the investigation, which lasted eight months. On April 3, the KGB searched their homes and the homes of three other families with a connection to Valeri and Sergei. It was not until

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[82] Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 165.

[83] Bourdeaux, *Valeri Barinov*, 229-230.

[84] Ibid, 231.

that point that Tanya was even made aware that Valeri had been arrested. In all, more than sixty young people were questioned about Valeri and *The Trumpet Call*.[85]

The fact that it took the KGB eight months to set a date for Valeri's trial was a strong indication that not enough evidence was available for a trial, but Valeri knew from the beginning that he would be convicted. On September 16, 1984, an article titled "Swashbucklers of Rock and Roll" appeared in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* vilifying rock music and damning its subversive influence on Soviet youth. The article also slandered Valeri's band writing that the band was unpopular and untalented.[86] The article meant that his trial was about to begin as the KGB usually printed articles with the purpose of insulting religious dissidents in the public eye before court appearances.

Valeri's trial was finally set for November 23, 1984. The day the trial began Valeri learned that Sergei had signed a confession admitting that he had engaged in unfortunate behavior by choosing to play Christian songs in a rock band and preach the Bible to others. Sergei also gave a television interview in which he denounced to Soviet journalists Valeri's international contacts. For his cooperation and confession, Sergei was given two years whereas Valeri was given two and a half.[87]

During the trial, false witnesses were called to testify against Valeri, but the KGB was unable to convict Valeri on anything concrete. Valeri's psychiatric record came into play quite a bit and on several occasions the judge suggested that he was suffering from

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[85] Ibid, 232-233.

[86] Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 190.

[87] Bourdeaux, *Valeri Barinov*, 237-241.

mental instability.[88] The witnesses had been clearly coached by the KGB, and this became even clearer when one witness, who had signed a KGB statement without reading it, stated, "I was told to sign it and I did. It's just the KGB way."[89] Valeri's trial was a mere three days, and he was not given the chance to defend himself. A report from Keston College read that Valeri and Sergei were found guilty on the charge of having "entered into criminal collusion in February 1984, and with a view to crossing the border, arrived at one of the border stations in March."[90] The report went on to say that the Soviet government found that Valeri and Sergei had "for several years…maintained contacts with foreigners—representatives of anti-Soviet organizations abroad" and with help from "emissaries of those organizations…had tried to smuggle slanderous information abroad on the position of believers in the USSR."[91] The court decided that Valeri was to be transferred to a labor camp.

A few days before his trial Valeri had begun a hunger strike, which he ended on December 6, the day of his fortieth birthday. He had been in prison for forty weeks and his hunger strike lasted forty days.[92] Eight days after the start of the hunger strike, Valeri

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[88] Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 195-197.

[89] Quoted in Ibid, 195.

[90] Quoted in "Christian Rock Musicians Sentenced," KNS No. 214, December 6, 1984, 2.

[91] Quoted in Ibid.

[92] Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 197.

suffered a heart attack from being force-fed.[93] Although his body was left weakened, his battle had not yet begun as he arrived at the labor camp on April 4, 1985.[94]

The labor camp that Valeri was sent to was colorfully nicknamed "Bloody Special" and Valeri was assigned to Group Twelve, which was made up of the most brutal criminals. He was also given one of the cruelest and toughest disciplinarian administrators in the Soviet state, whose name was Zhora.[95] Camp life was every bit as horrifying as Valeri imagined that it would be. The guards were abusive, and prisoners were often refused medical treatment.[96] Valeri described the camp by saying, "It was filthy and infested with rats. Three times each day we would remove our clothes to pick the bugs off our bodies and clothing."[97] By September 1985, Valeri was very ill after being sent to solitary confinement for going on a hunger strike. In the confinement areas "beatings, killings, and suicides" were not unusual and Valeri naturally feared for his life.[98] Valeri became ill on June 17 but was refused a doctor until July 3 when camp authorities became alarmed about his condition.[99] The doctor found that Valeri had acute abdominal pains and was covered with eczema and immediate hospitalization was

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[93] For an account of the technique used by the KGB in force-feeding prisoners see, Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 9-14.

[94] "Valeri Barinov Arrives at Labor Camp," KNS No. 222, April 4, 1985, 2.

[95] Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 204-205.

[96] Ibid, 230-237.

[97] "Barinov snatched by Soviet Police," *Christian Herald*, November 6, 1986, 1.

[98] Quoted in "Six more months of solitary." Archive file <Soviet Union/ Baptist/ 29/3 Barinov>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[99] "Barinov in punishment cell ordeal," *Church Times*, August 16, 1985, 3.

recommended. However, once the doctor departed, Valeri was returned to his cell and given a couple of tablets for the skin condition.[100]

Once Valeri was released from solitary confinement he continued his evangelism, and at the end of September he was thrown back into isolation again, but this time he spent nearly six months there. Despite the treatment that Valeri received from the guards, the other prisoners loved him, and he made many friends.[101] Valeri was even successful a few times in his evangelism work and was able to convert and baptize some of the inmates using camp water.[102]

In June 1986, Valeri was once again sentenced to solitary confinement after he was caught writing a letter to Christians in the West. The sentence was to be for one month but within three weeks, the guards were forced to have him transferred to a hospital where he was found to be suffering from pneumonia, heart trouble, and pleurisy. It took Valeri over two months to recover, but with daily running and weight training he was able to go back to the labor camp, where he was finally released on September 4.[103] Finally, after a harrowing two years inside the "Bloody Special" labor camp, Valeri was allowed to go free, and on September 6, 1986, he arrived home with his family in his beloved Leningrad.[104] But the harassment of the KGB did not stop just because Valeri had served his sentence.

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[100] "Barinov ill," *Evangelical Times*, September 1985, 19.

[101] "Barinov put in isolation," *Baptist Times*, November 21, 1985, 3.

[102] "Barinov snatched by Soviet Police," 1.

[103] "Barinov hoping to quit Russia," *Church Times*, September 19, 1986, 1.

[104] Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 290-194.

A month after returning to Leningrad, Valeri was arrested on October 22 and held in a jail cell overnight with no charge given. Having been threatened by the camp authorities that he would be arrested again and sentenced to another three years, Valeri was frightened and prayed for Jesus's protection. Valeri was released the next day when Tanya contacted the police station.[105] It was at this point that he knew that he had to get out of the Soviet Union or the KGB would kill him.

Valeri had for some time been thinking of a way for him and his family to leave the Soviet Union for good, and the continued harassment of the KGB had convinced him the time had come to leave. The only problem was that the Soviet Union would not let anyone leave that did not have relatives outside the country. However, the Jubilee Campaign, a non-profit organization that fought for the release of religious prisoners around the world, had in March 1987 successfully sent an appeal to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, telling her Valeri's story, and pleading for help. They received assurance that she would raise Valeri's case to Gorbachev and others in the Kremlin on her visit to Moscow later that month.

When Prime Minister Thatcher arrived in Moscow, Valeri wrote that the "visit was phenomenal" because "the openness surrounding her visit was unprecedented in the history of the Soviet Union" and it was evident that Gorbachev's changes in religion policy were taking effect.[106] Ten days after Thatcher left Moscow, Valeri was called to the emigration office where he was told that he could leave the USSR the following

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[105] "Barinov snatched by Soviet Police," 1.

[106] Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, 301.

day.[107] Valeri and his family left Russia in late November and arrived in Britain on November 30, 1987. [108] Little has been revealed about Valeri's life since his emigration to Britain, but it is known that he carried on his evangelism work and spoke at a number of conferences and other gatherings to tell his tale of religious persecution in the Soviet Union. It is known that in 1989 he and his family moved to Bognor Regis in West Sussex, England, and became members of a local parish. Valeri's oldest daughter Zhanna married her long-time boyfriend Maxim in 1990, and Valeri continued to work on spreading Christianity through his music.[109]

Valeri's story was one that touched the lives of many throughout the world. His method of evangelism, of infusing rock and roll with the Christian faith, was not a new idea in the West, but it was unheard of in the Soviet Union, where rock music was shunned and even outlawed at various times by the government. Like the Soviet atheists, Valeri knew that the future of the Christian faith was in the youth, and he sought to change their lives by sharing Christ's saving power and grace. When those around him cracked under Soviet pressure and advised Valeri to do the same for the sake of his own life, he refused because he could not turn his back on his religious beliefs. Were it not for Valeri's discovery of the Christian faith, there is no doubt that he would have led a life of debauchery, battling alcohol addiction and depression for the remainder of his life. Fighting through the most unimaginable horrors against a government out to kill him for his religious beliefs, Valeri prevailed and triumphed over the atheist Soviet state.

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[107] Ibid.

[108] Brenda Forward, "Free to sing of his Lord," *Baptist Times*, February 4, 1988. Archive file <Soviet Union/Baptist/ 29/3 Barinov>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[109] Barinov and Smith, *Jailhouse Rock*, Postscript.

Ultimately Valeri’s experience with the KGB in the late 1970s and his subsequent imprisonment in a labor camp that lived and breathed agony shows the downward spiral that religion policy took with the rules of Andropov and Chernenko. Valeri had the misfortune of being investigated and harassed by the KGB when Andropov acted as director, and he was imprisoned during Andropov’s rise to General Secretary. The KGB’s repeated persecution of Valeri along with testimony and evidence from others that Valeri came in contact with showed that the KGB was a force of its own that did not require explicit orders from the General Secretary. Valeri experienced the increase in psychiatric treatments that came about with Andropov in power, as well the KGB’s desire to stamp out dissidence in all its forms. However, change would soon come, and although Valeri would be in England for most of it, reform in religion policy had already begun to occur under Gorbachev by the time he left the Soviet Union in 1987.

CHAPTER SIX

Mikhail Gorbachev and Reform

As earlier shown in chapter three, General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev was responsible for a number of changes in Soviet religion policy beginning in 1964. Religious arrests declined throughout the 1970s, and Brezhnev generally did not treat religion as an enemy of the Soviet state, but rather introduced the concept of eliminating religion through improved atheist education and propaganda. Though many of his reasons were politically motivated, Brezhnev represented the first Soviet ruler who did not seek to systematically destroy religion. Rather, during his years as leader, public slander and the defaming of believers lessened dramatically, and many denominations, particularly the Baptists, saw an increase in the number of churches they were allowed to open.

Conversely, towards the end of Brezhnev's years as Soviet ruler, he was too ill to make executive decisions, and Andropov, the director of the KGB, stepped up arrests and increased the number of people forcibly interred in psychiatric wards. Little changed when Andropov became General Secretary, and Chernenko's religion policy did not change from Andropov's because of his health, although his ideas about believers were in line with Brezhnev's. From 1979 to 1984, religious arrests went up, as did the number of believers who were given prison sentences. The fact that Andropov did much to reverse Brezhnev's religion policy coupled with Brezhnev's conservativism, and therefore unwillingness to allow religious freedom, is the reason for why religion policy in the Soviet Union is normally recognized as continually hostile to believers. However, the

small changes made during the Brezhnev years combined with the reform seen in Andropov's rule allowed for unprecedented changes to be made when Gorbachev came to power in 1985. Even Valeri Barinov commented on Gorbachev's reforms saying in 1987, "Gorbachev's doctrine of *glasnost* was creating widespread speculation throughout the world. Inside the country we learnt of the changes through personal experience."[1] As a religious believer Valeri must have noticed many of the changes that began to occur during Gorbachev's years in power.

Gorbachev's sweeping reforms are some of the most important pieces of Soviet policy, and although economic and political policy are emphasized the most, Gorbachev's religion policy was by far the most liberalizing in Soviet history. If Gorbachev would have been named General Secretary immediately after Brezhnev, it can be assumed that religion policy in the Soviet Union would have continued to liberalize in the early 1980s. With the small number of arrests taking place in the 1970s under Brezhnev, the trend would have continued under Gorbachev, and changes in religion policy and the treatment of believers could have liberalized faster and more easily had Gorbachev not been forced to undo the nearly four years of harsh measures exacted toward dissidents imposed by Andropov.

Gorbachev was an unprecedented Soviet leader in more ways than just his reform tactics. Religion and dissidence were large parts of his heritage that could have easily made a political career in the Communist Party in the Soviet Union unattainable. Gorbachev was born in 1931 to a peasant family, which was not unusual for a Party member, but there were two elements of his childhood that stood out from all of his

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[1] Valeri Barinov and Danny Smith, *Jailhouse Rock* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), 301.

predecessors of the position of General Secretary. The first oddity that could have prevented his political career was the fact that both of his grandfathers had been arrested as enemies of the state during the Stalinist years.[2] Although both of the charges against them were false they both suffered greatly for their "crimes." Andrey Gorbachev, Mikhail's paternal grandfather, was banished to the Irkutsk region of Siberia where he was forced to fell trees. His crime was that he had failed to "fulfill the plan for sowing in 1933," despite the fact that three of his six children had previously died of starvation. Gorbachev's maternal grandfather Panteli Gopalko was arrested in 1937, imprisoned, and intensely interrogated for fourteen months, during which he finally confessed to crimes that he had not committed. The main charge brought against him was that he had been an active participant in a Trotskyite organization. The accusations made against both of Gorbachev's grandfathers have been determined as false. [3]

The other issue for Gorbachev as a youth that could have been a definitive dent in his desire for a successful political career was the fact that he had been born in the Stavropol region, which was under German occupation from 1942 to 1943. It was decided in the Stalinist years that it was a disadvantage to have lived, even as a child, in this area. The reason for this originated in the years when spies from the West, especially Germany, were thought to be lurking about.[4]

Apart from these two important pieces of Gorbachev's childhood, he was also the only Soviet ruler to not have been born before the Bolshevik Revolution, meaning that he

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[2] Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 25.

[3] Ibid, 25-26.

[4] Ibid, 26.

was a child purely of the Soviet system. He was affected early on by the harshness of Stalin's regime, and this no doubt fed his future dislike of conservativism and resistance to change. The collectivization of agriculture, famines, and the Great Purges were all major events of Gorbachev's childhood, and as a peasant's son, he witnessed the worst. Many in the Stavropol region starved or were purged, including members of Gorbachev's family.[5]

Associated with political dissidents from his childhood, Gorbachev could also be loosely linked to religious dissidents and believers. Gorbachev's mother and both of his grandmothers were devout members of the Russian Orthodox Church at a time when Orthodox believers were more likely to be arrested and imprisoned than other religious denominations. The three arranged for Gorbachev to be secretly baptized, and years later Gorbachev told a journalist that he had received the name Mikhail by the priest that baptized him.[6]

When the German army invaded the Soviet Union during World War II, Gorbachev was ten, and his memories of the war "were of a time of great suffering for the civilian population."[7] In the five years after the war when Gorbachev attended school, he spent his summers performing agricultural work, and at fifteen he became an assistant at a machine-tractor station where he worked with his father.[8]

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[5] Ibid, 26.

[6] Ibid, 27.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

In Gorbachev's years leading up to college, he had to wrestle with the Soviet state's unequal system that prohibited anyone from a peasant background from attending university. Although the authorities desired some students from peasant and worker families to attend universities, as this seemed to be the entire idea behind Communism, the chance of a child from that social strata entering into a notable university was limited. However, Gorbachev was determined, intelligent, and a hard worker, and it was entirely on his merit that he attended university. At school, Gorbachev received the highest grade of five in all of his subjects but German where he received a four, therefore finishing with a silver medal. Gorbachev attended school longer than most children who left at seventh grade. The nearest ten-year school was in Molotovskoe, and his parents, who were very concerned for his education, arranged for Gorbachev to live with two other boys from the village so that he could complete a ten year education before attending university. Ultimately, his high marks at school combined with his exemplary skill as a worker solidified his acceptance to Moscow University, the oldest and most prestigious university in Russia.[9]

In the summer of 1948, Gorbachev established his reputation as an outstanding manual worker when he was bestowed with the honor of the Order of the Red Banner of Labor for producing a record harvest, nearly six times greater than the average. In a team of four, they worked from twenty to twenty-two hours a day, making sure the conditions were perfect. The Order of the Red Banner of Labor was a prestigious award, and it was

[9] Ibid, 27-28.

very unusual that it would be bestowed upon a teenager. Of all the Soviet honors Gorbachev received, this one was his most cherished.[10]

Gorbachev's years at Moscow University were crucial to his intellectual development and his ability later as General Secretary to mastermind the reforms that would radically alter Soviet policy. At Moscow University, Gorbachev received a better education than any of the Politburo members he would later share the political arena with, as none of them "had spent five years studying at a major Russian university."[11] Although Gorbachev was behind the other students when he arrived in Moscow, within a year he had caught up and graduated with honors in 1955.[12]

After graduation Gorbachev became the First Secretary of the Stavropol regional party in 1966 and he was ready to "[improve] the economy and social facilities of his native territory."[13] In the 1960s, in an effort to acquaint himself better with agriculture, he attended the Stavropol Agricultural Institute, which enabled to achieve firm results in agriculture during his position as First Secretary of the Stavropol regional party.[14] In 1978, he was transferred from Stavropol where he had become the Secretary for Agriculture to Moscow and made Central Committee Secretary for agriculture in Moscow. Gorbachev's achievements in agriculture and promotion to the "big leagues" in Moscow helped him gain the attention of other important politicians, and in 1980 his

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[10] Ibid, 28.

[11] Ibid, 29.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid, 39-42.

[14] Ibid, 43-47.

political career gained momentum when he was promoted to full membership in the Politburo.[15] His promotion to a full member of the Politburo was yet another substantial landmark in Gorbachev's career. At forty-nine, Gorbachev was the youngest member of the Politburo by five years with only two members being under sixty-five, meaning that he had significantly impressed the members of the old system.[16]

Yuri Andropov did much to further Gorbachev's career, and although Gorbachev was not a lackey in the typical sense of Khrushchev or Chernenko, he would have most likely been Andropov's choice for a successor.[17] The two met while Andropov was on one of his many visits to the Stavropol region, where he often vacationed in order to improve his health.[18] The following year when Gorbachev became the First Secretary of the Stavropol region, meetings with Andropov became a regular fixture when Andropov visited Stavropol.[19] Gorbachev and Andropov's relationship seems to have been built on a solid respect for each other, and they both valued the other's intellect, especially in a party where many did not possess even close to equal mental capacity.

Andropov and Gorbachev were kindred spirits in the sense that neither had a true patron vying for them to become the next General Secretary. Both seemed to be in the Politburo but not of the Politburo, and they were the only two Soviet leaders to try and make reforms a large part of Soviet policy, although Andropov did not succeed at this.

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[15] Martin Couch, *Revolution and Evolution: Gorbachev and Soviet Politics* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1990), 62.

[16] Ibid, 62-63.

[17] Ibid, 60.

[18] Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 50.

[19] Ibid.

They were both more liberal than their comrades in the Politburo, and both had a better understanding of economic and political problems than those ingrained with the ideas of the old system. Andropov did not treat Gorbachev as Brezhnev had treated Chernenko. In Andropov's eyes, Gorbachev was an equal colleague of whom he could bounce ideas, and he truly valued Gorbachev's mind. In 1977 he told a Politburo member that Gorbachev was one of "the completely new people with whom it is really possible to link our hopes for the future."[20] Once Gorbachev became General Secretary he did not want to be seen as Andropov's minion, and in 1991 said that he did not worship Andropov "and [Andropov's] ideological conceptions and participation in the struggle against dissidents."[21] He went on to say, "I would not say that [Andropov and I] had a very close relationship, but I knew him well and we met regularly."[22] While Andropov and Gorbachev were close as political colleagues, it is likely that because of Andropov's stern nature, he and Andropov rarely discussed anything outside of politics. In addition, Gorbachev wanted to be held accountable for his own actions as general secretary and not judged by Andropov's past actions. He wanted to separate himself from Andropov and be looked at as a leader in his own right.

By 1985, when it came to a vote in the Politburo on who would be the next General Secretary, Gorbachev had already established an impressive power base, both on his own competence and by Andropov's influence, and had gained a reputation for his

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[20] Quoted in Ibid.

[21] Quoted in Ibid, 51.

[22] Quoted in Ibid.

reform tendencies.[23] Gorbachev had come to understand the problems that the Soviet Union was facing and in 1984 in a number of speeches conveyed the message that the Soviet Union needed to stop trying to compete with the United States and instead try to keep itself from falling further behind the West. In the speeches, Gorbachev said that at stake was "nothing less than the ability of the Soviet Union to enter the new millennium in a manner worthy of a great and prosperous power."[24] He even went so far as the hint that the Soviet Union might not be able to salvage "what has been achieved" and that political and social instability could hinder liberalization.[25]

But liberalization is what Gorbachev was aiming for, and when he became leader of the Soviet Union in March of 1985, he set out to reform the entire Soviet system, including the religious dissident issue. Overall Gorbachev's religion policy can be seen as a shift from a model of conflict to one of cooperation, and he argued that religion had the potential of acting as an ally in the battle for reforming the Soviet Union, rather than an enemy.[26] In terms of religion policy, Gorbachev's reforms took four distinct phases, as outlined by historian Sabrina Petra Ramet.[27] The first phase, from March 1985 to December 1986, was characterized by a lack of action and the traditional espousal of

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[23] Couch, *Revolution and Evolution*, 63-64.

[24] Quoted in Ibid, 64.

[25] Quoted in Ibid.

[26] John Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 137.

[27] Sabrina Petra Ramet, ed., *Religion policy in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 33.

atheist thought.[28] This explains why Valeri's sentence was not overturned by the authorities. In November 1986, Gorbachev stated in a speech in Tashkent that he supported "a determined and pitiless combat against religious manifestations" in Central Asia.[29] However, the summer of 1986 was a prelude to the significant change about to take shape in the USSR when Gorbachev announced that "new religious legislation was in preparation."[30] Also in the summer of 1986, in July a number of believers incarcerated for their beliefs in the Ukraine were released, including the well-known Ukrainian Catholic activist Iosyf Terelia.[31]

The second phase of Gorbachev's religion policy was initiated with the publication of Soviet poet Yevgeni Yevtushenko's article in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* in December 1986. In the article Yevtushenko argued that "if church and state are separate, atheism cannot be an official ideology."[32] The article praised religion as the greatest example of morality and culture, and Yevtushenko advocated in favor of publishing Bibles in state publishing houses. This second phase was also marked by an increasing number of academicians and other intellectuals beginning to expound on religion's admirable qualities. One example was an interview of Dimitry Likhachev, an academician, in September 1987, in which he chastised the Soviet government for interfering in normal church affairs. Shortly thereafter the journal *Literaturnaia gazeta*

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Quoted in Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

published a series of articles discussing the Ten Commandments and "holding them up as essential as a moral basis for civilized society."[33]

While all of these were testaments to the coming change in the Soviet Union's religion policy, the true highpoint of the second phase was identified by three events. The first of these important events was in 1987 when the infamous atheist journal *Nauka i religiia* published a table of statistics for religious denominations and institutions from 1961-1986. This information had been previously unavailable because of the government's desire to have citizens believe that religious belief was on the decline. Ultimately the journal's publishing of such information was evidence of Gorbachev's *glasnost* extending into the realm of religion policy.[34]

The publishing of anti-atheist and other praises of religion that occurred at this time highly parallels stages in Brezhnev's religion policy, especially at the beginning, when journals published criticisms of atheist journalists and lessened the number of slanderous writing that had occurred in Khrushchev's rule. Brezhnev's purpose in doing this was to allow Soviet citizens to see religion not as an enemy but as a social phenomenon with deep societal roots that could not be extinguished easily. Gorbachev took this idea one step further with journalists not explaining religion as a phenomenon but as something with high moral implications that citizens could learn from and aspire to. Gorbachev's religion policy can, therefore, be considered as a continuation of Brezhnev's religion policy on a higher and more accepting plane than Brezhnev could have allowed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Brezhnev's own conservativism and fear

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

coupled with his ideological inability to stray from Marxist principles did not allow for the kind of reforms that Gorbachev was able to institute, and only small liberalization was made.

The second crucial occurrence in this phase of Gorbachev's religion policy was his formal meeting on April 19, 1988, with Patriarch Pimen and other Russian Orthodox leaders.[35] This meeting was highly symbolic of change as the last time a Soviet leader sat down with a religious leader was on September 4, 1953, when Stalin appealed for the Church's help in boosting patriotism during World War II. Gorbachev's meeting with the Orthodox leaders was a Soviet commitment to improve the conditions of believers and their religious institutions.[36]

The third crucial event in the second phase was in line with the desire to improve church and state relations. Gorbachev allowed for the celebration of the millennium of the Christianization of the Kievan Rus to be televised and heavily discussed in the Soviet press. Official celebrations were held in Moscow and Kiev from June 5-16, 1988 with supplement celebrations in Leningrad and Riga. The fact that such a momentous occasion in religious life was given such positive attention by the government and the media, with no police or KGB interruptions, showed a shift from religion being an individual affair to the church as a social institution and a "celebration of national culture" and the church's contributions to Soviet culture.[37] Gorbachev's religion policy

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid, 33-34.

changed religion from being viewed as a phenomenon requiring stronger atheist propaganda and education to being viewed as part of the USSR's cultural identity.

The third phase of Gorbachev's religion policy was initiated by the number of churches and freedoms that registered Baptists and other groups began to enjoy throughout the Soviet Union. On October 16, 1986, *The Baptist Times* reported that Baptists in the Soviet Union were "experiencing a period of unprecedented growth," and Alexander Bychkov, the general secretary of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, said that "church-state relations were 'proper and good' and that Baptists in several socialist countries [reported] increased freedoms.[38] The growth of churches blossoming in 1986 was a trend that continued rapidly under Gorbachev's watch. By 1991 in the Ukraine, registered communities rose from 5,689 in 1988 to 9,994 in 1991 and in the USSR registered religious associations grew from 12,427 in 1986 to 21,284 in 1991.[39] In a truly remarkable and unprecedented measure, even religious groups previously not allowed to register were accepted as registered communities such as the "Uniates, Jehovah's Witness, and Hare Krishnas."[40] Beginning in 1988 even the unofficial Baptists and Greek-Rite Catholics were allowed virtually unrestricted registration.[41] Religious institutions such as "new training centers, monasteries and

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[38] "Soviet church growing," *The Baptist Times*, October 16, 1986, 7. Archive file <Soviet Union/15/2 Gorbachev>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[39] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union*, 173.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ramet, ed., *Religion policy in the Soviet Union*, 35.

convents, and charitable and other institutions" were allowed to expand and grow under the control of other religious bodies, rather than the state.[42]

Gorbachev's reforms in religion policy also allowed for the increased participation in religious rites, such as baptism. In the Town of Yaroslavl alone baptisms in the Orthodox Church rose by nearly a third in the first six months of 1987. The increased number of church leaders allowed on television elucidated this development. In addition the state requirement that parents desiring for their children to be baptized had to produce passports and register the baptism with authorities was outlawed. The Council on Religious Affairs also stepped up its activity in Gorbachev's reform program by reversing eighty-three decisions made by local authorities that had refused registration to religious communities. [43]

Also included in the third phase of Gorbachev's religion policy was the gradual ease of the importation, production, and censorship of religious books by the authorities. By 1989 over two million copies of the Bible or New Testament had been allowed importation and over fifteen million copies had been granted permission to be brought in by 1995. By the time Gorbachev was forced from his General Secretary position in 1991, permission for importation was no longer required.[44]

As already mentioned, churches also began to be regularly active in charity organizations thrusting them into the public eye for them to be recognized as a positive influence on society. By 1988 members of the Moscow Orthodox Church carried out

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[42] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union*, 173.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid, 174.

charity work in hospitals, priests visited the sick, and Baptists were volunteering at the Kashchenko Psychiatric Hospital. Charity work done by churches in the Soviet Union contributed greatly not only in physical work but also monetarily. In 1989 money from believers throughout the USSR as well as volunteers from church organizations helped clean up the destruction caused by the Armenian earthquake in December 1988.[45] In 1989 Gorbachev, himself, proclaimed gratitude to two of the largest religious organizations in the world for the assistance they provided in helping those affected by the earthquake.[46] He personally thanked the general secretary of the World Council of Churches and the general secretary of the Conference of the European Churches for their appeal to churches to provide relief for those suffering from the tragedy. Gorbachev stated, "May I take this opportunity to express my personal feeling of solidarity with your own activities and those of the churches represented for the happiness of the people and the world."[47] Gorbachev was the first Soviet leader to thank a world-renowned religious institution based in the West for helping the USSR through a crisis. Gorbachev's message to world churches exhibited his willingness to cooperate with believers and religious organizations not only in the USSR but internationally.

Ultimately Gorbachev's message to the ecumenical organizations of the world indicated a preparedness to initiate the final push in his religion policy that can be thought of as the fourth phase. In 1990 the Soviet government announced the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, which was to characterize the new

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[45] Ibid, 175.

[46] "Gorbachev Message to Ecumenical Organizations," *EPS*, April 20, 1989. Archive file <Soviet Union/ 15/2 Gorbachev>, Keston Center, Baylor University.

[47] Ibid.

legal standing of religious organizations within Soviet society.[48] The new law sought to not only legalize religious institutions and believers' right to believe, but also to set a standard of procedure that could be predicted and to put a final end on arbitrarily made decisions by local officials.[49] Gorbachev's new law was evidence of the Soviet government's realization that religious persecution of the church and its believers was counterproductive economically and politically. The first peek at what the new law would accomplish was a decision made by the Council for Religious Affairs in 1989, a few months before the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations was actually officially decreed. The CRA decided in March that believers could work as schoolteachers, officially signaling the end of believers being treated as second-class citizens.[50]

Aside from Gorbachev's ecumenical message in 1988, three major advances in 1989 led the way for even greater change in Soviet religion policy under Gorbachev. The first of these was the reversal of the banishment of religious education. In Latvia, several new Lutheran churches reintroduced the concept of Sunday schools, and even though the law had not been changed quite yet allowing for Sunday schools, the idea was fully endorsed by the Latvian newspaper *Padomju Jaunatne* (Soviet Youth), which called for the complete legislation of Sunday schools in the Soviet Union. A greater development

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[48] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union*, 176.

[49] Ramet, ed., *Religion policy in the Soviet Union*, 36-37.

[50] Ibid.

in religious education was the creation of a theology course by Baptists offered at the Soviet Academy of Sciences in the fall of 1990.[51]

The second development that took place as a pretext to the 1990 decree was the broadcast of the first ever religious program in the USSR in Lithuania. Afterwards it was announced that the program would be broadcast every Sunday. In November 1989, Latvian church leaders persuaded authorities to allow them to operate a similar broadcast on Sundays, and the request was granted.[52]

The third and final prelude to Gorbachev's 1990 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations was the measures by the Soviet authorities to end disciplinary taxation of the clergy in 1989. Since 1981, clergy had been made to pay tax rates of up to sixty nine percent while ordinary Soviet citizens paid a maximum of thirteen percent. In 1989, Estonia decided to lift the heavy taxation burdens placed on church leaders and elected for them to pay the normal rate of an ordinary citizen. Gorbachev's religion policy was undeniably more liberalizing than any of his predecessors, although some of his actions mirrored Brezhnev's on a larger scale, such as the lessening of atheist literature and propaganda in the media along with an unprecedented growth in churches and membership, and a gradual opening of the border for more religious literature to come into the Soviet Union.

It has been suggested by those who knew Gorbachev as leader of the Soviet Union that he, himself, was a "closet Christian" and there has been much debate on this

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[51] Ibid, 37.

[52] Ibid.

issue.[53] Although Gorbachev left his religious beliefs largely to speculation in the press, preferring not to comment on whether he believed in a higher power, President Ronald Reagan in 1985 remarked that the fact that Gorbachev was read the Bible as a child "had a influence."[54] In 1987 it was revealed that unlike other Soviet leaders who had in the past been heard to curse the name of God or Christ, Gorbachev would often invoke the phrase, "May God help us."[55] The same article revealed that every year when Gorbachev visited his mother on his birthday, she would prepare for him the traditional Easter cake with the initials "XB," which in Russian stands for "Christ is Risen."[56] In the same summit meeting where Gorbachev was heard to remark, "May God help us" he was also heard to say, "We have never been at war with each other. Let us pray God that this never happens."[57] Furthermore in a fireside chat at Geneva between Gorbachev and Reagan, Gorbachev was said to have made another casual reference to God and even quoted a bible verse.[58]

Despite these revelations, however, it has never been proven that Gorbachev was a believer at the time of his rule in the Soviet Union. Many Soviet leaders made references to God whether negative or good. On one occasion, Brezhnev was reported as

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[53] Quoted in Paul Kengor, "Red Herring: Mikhail Gorbachev's Not-Quite Conversion," *Christianity Today*, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/aprilweb-only/114-52.0.html?start=2 (accessed February 01, 2009).

[54] Quoted in Ibid.

[55] Martin Walker, "Soviet appeal to God," *The Guardian*, December 12, 1987. Located in file titled Soviet Union 15/2 Gorbachev.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Quoted in Kengor, "Red Herring."

[58] Ibid.

saying, “Gospodi,” meaning “Lord above” when he lost his place while giving a speech.[59] Gorbachev has defended his atheism at numerous times especially after various articles announced his Christian tendencies. Gorbachev came out to the press saying, “To sum up and avoid any misunderstandings, let me say that I have been and remain an atheist.”[60] In March 2008 Gorbachev visited the tomb of St. Francis of Assisi in Italy, which sparked the rumors of his Christian faith and provoked his comment about his long-time atheist beliefs, but the spokesman for the Russian Orthodox Church stated that, “In Italy [Gorbachev] spoke in emotional terms, rather than in terms of faith. He is still on his way to Christianity.”[61]

Regardless of whether Gorbachev was a Christian at the time of his rule as General Secretary of the Soviet Union, his religious childhood and flare for reform definitively altered Soviet religion policy beginning in 1986. In an interview with Michael Reagan, the son of Ronald Reagan, Gorbachev told him, in response to the question of who did he turn to for guidance as General Secretary, “I don’t know who I turned to, but I had a grandmother [who] was a Christian and my grandmother used to go to church everyday and would come to the Kremlin and visit me and say, ‘Mikhail, I prayed for the atheists today. I prayed for you.’”[62]

This would suggest that Gorbachev at least believed in the power of prayer to a being above, but his religion policy should not be thought of as a motivation for believers

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[59] Quoted in Walker, “Soviet appeal to God.”

[60] Quoted in Kengor, “Red Herring.”

[61] Quoted in Ibid.

[62] Quoted in Ibid.

to achieve freedom for the sake of themselves or God. Rather Gorbachev saw religious freedom as the means to an end. Believers could be useful in helping to reform Communism by acting as teachers, performing charity, and functioning as productive individuals in society, instead of rotting away in a cell for believing in God. He sought to find a commonality with the church so that cooperation and a working relationship could be achieved. Had Gorbachev become leader of the Soviet Union after Brezhnev, a liberalization in religion policy would have taken place. Gorbachev would have been able to directly build on the developments made in Brezhnev's leadership, scrapped the idea of explaining religion as a social phenomenon, and used believers as allies in improving the Soviet economic and political situations. Brezhnev was halted in forcing great religious reforms because of his own conservativism and cautiousness—he was not a reformer. However, the brief intermission of Andropov and Chernenko did much in the way of undoing Brezhnev's small liberalization, and further damaged the Soviet Union's infrastructure and status as a world power. The horrors suffered by believers like Barinov in psychiatric wards and labor camps would not have happened had Gorbachev's religious reforms been instigated before Andropov's reign.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

In concluding this study of examining Soviet religion policy through the thoughts, ideas, and actions of five Soviet leaders coupled with the personal experiences of Aida Skripnikova and Valeri Barinov, two religious dissidents, prisoners, and believers, a number of elements can be observed concerning the similarities and differences between Aida and Valeri as well as a general liberalization in Soviet religion policy. Although Valeri and Aida were two of the better known Soviet believers to the West, little was discovered about their conversion in an atheist country or to their characters. From the details fleshed out in the previous chapters, a great many in-depth similarities and differences can be seen concerning their conversions, methods of evangelism, personal lives, as well as thoughts on the Christian faith.

The most obvious difference between Aida and Valeri about their Baptist faith was that Aida belonged to an unregistered Baptist community, whereas Valeri attended a registered Baptist church. Aida's church was not allowed registration and, therefore, all of their activities were illegal, causing them to band together into a tight-knit family that looked out for their fellow Christians. Valeri's church on the other hand received registration along with constant pressure from the KGB, which forced them to expel one of their most active brethren.

In terms of activities and contact with the West, Aida's contact with the West was twofold. First, she wanted to alert the West to the travesty taking place against believers in the Soviet Union in hopes that help and relief could be provided. She knew the West

was influential and enjoyed religious freedom, and she therefore hoped that westerners could pressure the Soviet government into acting less maliciously toward believers. To achieve this goal of letting the West know the USSR's plight, she attended countless trials of believers and sent the transcripts abroad. She also sent pamphlets and histories of the Reform Baptists so that the West would realize their situation in contrast with other churches, which in general received less persecution. Her second reason for contact with the West stemmed from the fact that there was not enough religious literature in the Soviet Union, and many citizens had never even so much as laid their eyes on a Bible. Aida risked her freedom and her life to smuggle in copies of the New Testament for believers that did not have one.

In contrast Valeri's contact with the West was almost purely self-motivated. There is no record of him ever trying to smuggle literature into the Soviet Union in order to give Bibles to the youths he evangelized. Rather, he asked English contacts if they could smuggle in instruments and other musical necessities in order for him to record *The Trumpet Call*. Later during his prison sentence he sought help for his family financially and in order that the four of them be allowed to leave the Soviet Union.[1]

In terms of evangelism, Valeri and Aida are more similar as to whom they evangelized but vastly different in the method employed. Aida's method was to use the West to stamp out the corruption and persecution that stemmed from the Soviet government. She understood the need to tell ordinary Soviet citizens about Christ and she did, especially in prison when she lent her Bible to several of the inmates, but Aida knew that the open profession of faith was a fundamental right of believers and many

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[1] Valeri Barinov and Danny Smith, *Jailhouse Rock* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), 197-198.

Soviet citizens would not take the leap of faith if they thought they would be thrown in prison. On the flip side, Aida exhibited fearlessness in those she approached about Jesus. Her first arrest resulted from her standing next to a museum of atheism in the middle Nevsky Prospekt handing out religious pamphlets on New Year's Eve.

Valeri's method of evangelism was an altogether different technique from Aida's. Whereas Aida appealed in particular to westerners and everyday Soviet citizens, Valeri specialized in trying to reach the youth of Leningrad through Christian rock music, which had never been done before in the Soviet Union. Valeri's love for music was deeply rooted in his childhood, and he believed it was a gift from God that he should use. Although it is not known how many teenagers truly converted as a result of Valeri's music, he received countless letters by young people explaining to him what his music meant in their lives.[2] Still Valeri's method of evangelism spoke to an inner sense of value and attention that he received from being on stage, meaning that unlike Aida's evangelism methods, his evangelism was not selfless, but was again motivated at least to some extent by self interest.

This is not to say that Valeri was insincere in his methods and actions or that he did not truly believe in God. Some might have called Valeri vain and almost asking for trouble because of his mode of dress and behavior. He looked every bit like a Russian rock star with long hair and American-style jeans listening to the Beatles and playing their music. However, Russian thinking about religion was very different from the West, and many Christians in the Soviet Union, who would risk prison for the faith, wore their heart on their sleeve, not seeing the need to conceal it and not talk about it as has become

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[2] Lorna Bourdeaux, *Valeri Barinov: The Trumpet Call* (Basingstoke, Hants, UK: Marshalls Morgan & Scott Ltd., 1985), 156-194.

the mode of behavior in Western Europe and the United States. This can be seen quite greatly in Aida's case in the fact that she wanted westerners to know how fortunate they were for religious freedom. She could not understand why more was not being done in countries where citizens had the ability to worship in any fashion they deemed appropriate. To Aida this must have seemed like a paradise on Earth. Valeri, on the other hand, did not speak about the fortunes of religious freedom in the West as far as records indicate, although it is certain that he knew and understood the difference between the Soviet Union and the West in this regard.

During his trial, Valeri was accused of using Christianity as a guise to obtain attention from authorities and others around him. Although Valeri enjoyed the attention he got from singing on stage, being sent to a labor camp where one's clothes and body became infested with lice, there was never adequate warm clothes or food, and guards could exact sadistic force against any inmate for any reason, was no way to win attention. The trials that Valeri suffered were real, and there is no record of him renouncing his faith in order to garner better treatment in the labor camp. He endured a heart attack, pleurisy, pneumonia, near starvation, beatings, and other imaginable terror for his Christian beliefs. Valeri's brand of faith was rare, especially in the Soviet Union, because of the open way he professed his faith to anyone including KGB members, co-workers, and anyone he met on the street.

Throughout his autobiography Valeri claimed to have experienced dreams in which the Lord spoke to him in order to convey to him what action he should take. Valeri also claimed to have been able to heal a number of individuals through God's power. Regardless of whether these events actually took place the way Valeri

remembered them, his faith was strong enough for him to believe that God could intervene in remarkable ways.

As far as records indicate, Aida never spoke of her own visions or dreams from God and she never claimed to have the ability to heal through her Christian faith. However, she also believed in divine intervention, such as the dream her brother had just days before his death and the message she found scrawled across the jail wall when she experienced doubt about her actions. Divine intervention was another strong part of the Christian faith in the Soviet Union in groups such as the Baptists as is evidenced by both Valeri and Aida in different aspects.

Apart from their specific brand of faith and belief, Aida and Valeri are similar in the way that both of them converted as a result of a family member. Aida was profoundly influenced by her brother's death, and although she had attended church before his death, her faith became much stronger after his death. Valeri, on the other hand, was converted as a result of his Aunt Tamara's belief in the Christian faith. Up to the point that Valeri was in the army he, like Aida, had never given religion very much thought although both he and Aida attended worship services as children. However, Valeri's case is different in the way that he was an atheist before he came to the faith. He doubted that God existed and from his autobiography it could be said that had he not been spared a stint in military prison, he might not have come to believe that God existed at all. It was after he prayed for God's help in his trial with the tribunal that he came to believe in God's presence.

Aida, however, never seemed to have any doubt about God's existence, although this is not known for certain. She simply said that she did not give the concept of God

much thought, having received an atheist education, but her conversion was not as conditional as Valeri's had been. She did not beseech God for help and ask whether or not He existed, but rather she found her faith with the help of her brother and others around her.

Apart from their religious beliefs Aida and Valeri were vastly different in terms of their families, childhood environment, and ideologies. Whereas Aida came from a family of religious outlaws who risked their lives to have Baptist meetings in private homes, Valeri did not grow up with that sense of rebellion. His rebellion was manifested as a result of his mother's death and his placement in an orphanage. Valeri spoke in his autobiography of his extreme sense of patriotism, and he had a strong desire to serve Russia in the navy. Valeri's patriotism in his youth most likely originated from the knowledge that his father had been a soldier in the Russian army and his mother adored him. In great contrast, Aida's father had been stolen from her during her infancy having been shot for being a pacifist and refusing to fight in the Russian army. Aida seemed to have been anti-Soviet from the time she was born. In her teenage years, despite her atheist education she wrote an anti-Soviet letter rebuking those who had condemned Boris Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago*.

Aida's knowledge of Russian literature coupled with her later knowledge about the Baptist faith in Russia since 1850 is evidence that she was somewhat more educated than Valeri. Growing up in an orphanage, Valeri did not appear to receive very much schooling, especially as he was being shipped back and forth from the orphanage to Uncle Ura's home. However as he became older and became a Christian there is no evidence to suggest that he knew anything about the past struggles believers had

undergone during tsarist times or during the formative years of the Soviet Union under Stalin. Of course he was aware that believers had been persecuted in the past, but this was common knowledge among Soviet citizens. Valeri was not interested in history or learning, although he read his Bible daily.

Other differences between Aida and Valeri stem from general preferences and chance. Aida, for example, never sought to leave the Soviet Union, feeling that her place was in her hometown of Leningrad. She never married or had children, and although it is not known whether she preferred it this way, it did not seem to bother her. Valeri fought to leave the Soviet Union for a long time and was finally granted permission in 1987. Early on he prayed to God for a girl that he could share his life with and soon after met Tanya in Siberia. Valeri's yearning for a family may have been a result of having no family structure as a child, which left him rebellious and suicidal. In the beginning his faith was more restless than Aida's and he wrestled with God's existence and his inability to stop drinking. Aida had none of these issues to deal with, although she lost both of her parents at a young age.

Ultimately Aida and Valeri, despite their idiosyncrasies, proved that people still longed for religious meaning even in the face of atheistic hostility to religion. Aida used her strong will, honesty, bravery, compassion for people, and passion for justice to spread the Bible and make the West more aware of the plight of believers in the Soviet Union. Conversely, Valeri showed how belief in God had the ability to take a broken individual without hope on the verge of self-destruction and make use of a talent normally thought of as purely secular. Valeri and Aida professed their faith openly among those in the Soviet Union and they both paid dearly for it but their tribulations were evidence of a

work being done in the Soviet Union that could not be halted by a government that was hostile to religion, regardless of what tactics he chose to employ.

Aida and Valeri were both witnesses to the volatile state of religion policy in the Soviet Union. Up to the time that Brezhnev became General Secretary, religion policy in the Soviet Union had been straightforward and brutal against believers. Religion as a social institution and practice was to be eliminated at all costs including the mass closing of churches, imprisonment of believers, and the prohibition of religious activities despite the fact that the Soviet constitution explicitly allowed for religious freedom and propaganda. During Stalin's repressive regime, believers were often given sentences of up to twenty-five years, and many did not survive the harsh conditions. Execution, starvation, and backbreaking labor were all tactics employed in prisons and labor camps to root all religion at its core. On several occasions, Stalin announced to citizens that the government was close to its goal of ridding the empire of religion and all of its counterparts. He announced specific dates and years for the expected finality of religion's purge from society.

Stalin's attack on religion was characterized by terror and fear exacted through a tyrannical regime, and he focused his efforts mainly on the Russian Orthodox Church and its leaders, rather than on religious groups as a whole. At the time, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Hare Krishnas were not large and therefore did not pose a significant risk to the state. Stalin did not rely on shifty slander methods and evidence collection in order to charge believers with a crime. Once arrested believers received a brief, biased trial and were then sent to the Gulag. Stalin employed atheist propaganda as a tactic in hopes of substantiating atheism among the youth.

When Khrushchev became leader of the Soviet Union in 1953 after Stalin's death, he instigated a full frontal assault on religion in 1959. Although, prison sentences were considerably less than those imposed on believers during Stalin's reign, usually ranging from three to five years, Khrushchev's attack proved more dangerous on an ideological level. Under Khrushchev, Baptists were heavily persecuted, most of their churches were closed, and the technique of registration became more confusing and more firmly applied. In 1961, the Baptist split caused resounding repercussions throughout the religious world. The reform Baptists were continually refused registration of their communities despite repeated attempts to register with the state. Khrushchev was also responsible for a massive propaganda campaign against religion and the use of ideology associated with Marxism in an attempt to recruit young people for the future of Communism. Khrushchev hoped to win support and a potential group of followers by uniting patriotic Communists against a common enemy. Khrushchev's attack on religion may also have been prompted by his desire to secure a cult following such as what Stalin obtained and in order to consolidate his power.

When Khrushchev was ousted in 1964, making him the only General Secretary not to die in office, apart form Gorbachev whose rule was interrupted by the collapse of the Soviet Union, Brezhnev was chosen by the Politburo as his replacement and slow steady liberalization in religion policy was initiated. Aida bore the extent of her trials with authorities during Khrushchev's war on religion, identifying her as a "mainstream dissident" when Brezhnev came to power and therefore excluding her from Brezhnev's order to halt all arrests in the late 1960s. However, religious arrests during Brezhnev's rule dropped significantly, especially in the 1970s as tactic for gaining Western approval

during the signing of the Helsinki Accords in 1975. When Aida was released from prison in 1971, she witnessed the increased religious literature that was being permitted across the border. Brezhnev's liberalization of religion policy was also evident in 1966 when a state publishing house published a collection of Bible stories for the first time in the Soviet Union and the Soviet public was allowed to purchase them at ordinary bookstores.

Brezhnev's overall tactic for dealing with religion focused on treating religion as a social extension of the past that had not yet found its true way in the world of Communism. Brezhnev had the foresight to realize that religion was not going to disappear regardless of the measures taken by authorities, and therefore Brezhnev and scientists sought to explain religion as a social phenomenon that had not yet caught up to the present. Atheist propaganda to the extent that it was employed under Khrushchev lessened, although measures were taken to improve atheist education and propaganda among the youth. The slander of church leaders and other church members decreased dramatically, although slander of individual believers before a trial continued, as experienced by Valeri Barinov. But generally, believers as a group were no longer depicted as criminals.

However, under Brezhnev, especially beginning in the late 1970s, there was a substantial increase in the number of believers forcibly committed to psychiatric hospitals. This was in large part due to Yuri Andropov's leadership of the KGB and his obsession with rooting out all forms of dissent in the Soviet Union. Soviet citizens witnessed and testified to the effect that the KGB was a force within itself that even Party members did not tangle with and Andropov used that fear to decide the fate of many

believers. The trend of forced psychiatric internment and treatment continued when Andropov took Brezhnev's place in 1982.

In the last years of Brezhnev's rule, Andropov took necessary steps to enact his own policies, and therefore Andropov's religion policy can best be seen as an extension of his actions toward dissent when he was director of the KGB. In his efforts to root out religious dissent, arrests of believers climbed greatly in the early 1980s and many of those arrested were placed in psychiatric facilities. However, Andropov's attempts to destroy the dissident movement were cut short by his increasingly poor health and death in 1984. His replacement Konstantin Chernenko suffered the same setback of poor health and failed to exact a religion policy distinct from Andropov's. Therefore liberalization of religion policy ceased under Andropov and Chernenko, although Chernenko's personal papers and speeches indicate that his beliefs on religion were similar to his patron Brezhnev.

Gorbachev's ascent to power was characterized by reform and this was a policy he continued when he became General Secretary in 1985. While it is doubtful that Gorbachev reformed religion policy for the sake of believers' faith and right to freedom, believers enjoyed almost complete freedom under Gorbachev in the later years from 1988 to 1991. Gorbachev's thoughts on religion originated with his mother and grandmother who were staunch Orthodox believers, and although it is not known whether Gorbachev was a believer when he ruled the Soviet Union, he sought to create a medium of cooperation and practicality with believers. Gorbachev viewed believers as potential productive members of society who could build the Soviet state back to its greatness and

his liberalizing religion policy signaled an end to the idea that believers should be imprisoned for their faith.

Under Gorbachev believers were not treated as second-class citizens, but were allowed to teach in educational fields, hold worship services and Sunday schools, open churches and baptize children and young people without a permit, own copies of the Bible and have religious literature spread across the Soviet Union, broadcast religious programs on the radio, and appear on television. Up to Gorbachev's rule, local authorities could refuse registration and hand out arbitrary decisions without firm grounding in the law. Gorbachev ended this practice and sought to establish one law for religious believers that would be carried out by all local authorities. These were obviously massive departures from earlier Soviet measures against believers.

Therefore, the state of religion policy in the Soviet Union was one of extreme volatility and shifts form Stalin's rule to Gorbachev's rule. A peek of liberalization of religion policy was carried out under Brezhnev, whether Brezhnev intended this or not, but the liberalization was interrupted by the rules of Andropov and Chernenko. When Gorbachev became General Secretary, damage to the Soviet Union's economy and political structure was atrocious. If the Soviet Union had not been forced to succumb to destruction by its own inabilities, there is little doubt that believers would have enjoyed complete freedom with Gorbachev in power.

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