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Special Issue: Opening Up the KGB Archives in Ukraine

Editor's note: In the spirit of democratization proclaimed by the 2013-14 Maidan protesters, the government of Ukraine has since moved to make the historical archives of the KGB secret police and its Soviet-era predecessors fully accessible to the public. They include a wealth of material detailing the repression of Christians and other religious believers under Communism.

In this issue, the East-West Church Report *offers a taste of these previously top-secret records and hears from some of the researchers who have delved deepest into them about how they—as well as records in other Soviet-era archives—are re-shaping our understanding of the Communist impact upon Christian life in Ukraine.*

"It is important to open these archives up to everyone":

An Interview with Archivist Andriy Kohut

Andriy Kohut has a background in historical research, digital archiving, and social activism. In 2015 he was appointed director of the historical archive of the SBU [Security Service of Ukraine], which comprises millions of documents produced by the KGB secret police and its predecessor bodies in Soviet Ukraine.

After perusing some of the collection at the SBU's Kyiv headquarters in late 2018, the editor of the East-West Church Report *spoke with Andriy Kohut about his mission to publicize and preserve its invaluable holdings. The original conversation took place in Russian.*

When did the archives open to researchers?

In practice, the level of access to the KGB archives available in Ukraine today became possible due to the legislative package on de-Communization. On 9 April 2015 four laws were adopted—the most talked about in the media was probably the one that banned propaganda and symbolism of totalitarian regimes. There was a lively discussion about whether the Communist regime could in fact be compared to the Nazi regime. A second, more or less declarative, law concerned the recognition of people who fought for Ukrainian independence—there was also much discussion surrounding it.

Another of these laws was the law *On Access to the Archives of Repressive Organs of the Communist Totalitarian Regime of 1917-91*, that is, what is well known in the West under the generic title of the KGB archives. Unfortunately,

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A Ukrainian KGB document with a checkered history: created and classified secret [Russian: *sekretno*] in 1983, first declassified [Ukrainian: *rozsekrecheno*] in 2009, then affirmed as not secret [Ukrainian: *netaemno*] in 2013. (Source: SBU ARCHIVE)

Andriy Kohut (G. FAGAN)

Kohut Interview *(continued from page 1)*

the archival legislation is not as well known, but in fact it is a foundational law because it deals with reassessment of the past—what is called *reconciliation* in English. In Russian or Ukrainian it is difficult to find such terms; you need to use entire phrases. But if we think about the term *reconciliation*, then of course a law about access to the archives is crucial, because it offers the chance to figure out what actually took place, what testimony exists, and what the role of the totalitarian state and its secret services was in various spheres of life. When we speak about religion, faith groups, and churches, this is of course a very important resource allowing us to understand what the nature of the Communist regime really was, and how—or even if—it may be compared with others.

Similar efforts have been made, notably by the Baltic States. But open access to KGB archives of this scale seems unprecedented.

The 2015 law stipulates that, "everything is open to everyone." The law protecting personal data does not extend to documents in the KGB archives. A discussion took place in Ukraine about which human right should take precedence—the right to privacy or the right to information. Strange as it may seem, the war with Russia and Russian aggression against Ukraine played a very important role here, because we see that a hybrid war is being waged—not only with weaponry at the battlefront, but also in the informational sphere. Unfortunately, we have found ourselves in a situation in which the difficult questions of history are being used by the Kremlin in order to manipulate and create various provocations, which then feed into military aggression—direct, harmful aggression against Ukraine. And so we came to the conclusion that the right to access information—and when we speak about the KGB archives, this is the right to access information about human rights violations—turns out in practice to be an important factor in the provision of the right to life.

This may appear to be a somewhat convoluted philosophical discussion, of course, but it lies at the foundation of why we believe it is important to open these archives up to everyone, and to exempt the information that is in them from the scope of the law on the protection of personal data.

Were the KGB archives accessible prior to 2015?

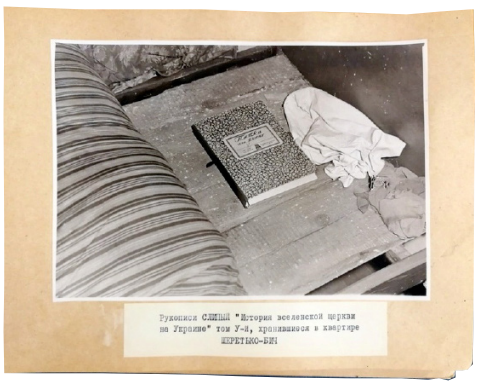
There were problems with access to the collection from 2010-14 [i.e. during the Kremlin-backed presidency of Viktor Yanukovych]. During this period, a portion of the documents that had been de-classified began to be classified once again. This was a policy dictated from the Kremlin; it was a political choice.

There are two approaches here. From the perspective of independent Ukraine—and this is now law—the archives pertain to a regime that was to some measure an occupation. In the 1920s the Ukrainian People's Republic lost its struggle against the Bolsheviks, who then seized Ukraine. This is certainly not experience upon which anything should be built; rather, it is experience of how *not* to build a state—of how security services should not operate. According to Russia's view of the situation, however, the opposite is the case: the Soviet Union was a great country, and it was a shame that it fell apart; it is something that should be preserved, restored.

Following this logic, we arrive at two diametrically opposing points of view. According to the view of the Russian FSB [a successor security service to the KGB], this archive contains their experience, and so it should go on being secret. Today's Ukrainian authorities, meanwhile—including the secret services—wish this experience to be as well known as possible, not as *best practice* but as *bad practice*.

From 2010-14, Russian influence over Yanukovych determined practically everything, especially in the sphere of state security, and so there was obviously a different approach to these documents. They tried to limit opportunities to work with them. The archive had a number of academic publishing projects with partners in Ukraine and abroad, which—while not closed down—were frozen.

We are now trying to renew all of that. We have already finalized some projects, and among those we hope to realize in the near future is the publication of a book about the repression



Pages from a KGB internal publication in the form of a photo album, published in Siberia in 1958. It features photographs of arrested Ukrainian Greek Catholic clerics then-Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj, Fr. Vasyl Kavatsiv, and Fr. Ilia Blavatsky. Another photograph shows Metropolitan Slipyj's manuscript of the fifth volume of The History of the Church in Ukraine, which was used as incriminating evidence against him. (Source: SBU ARCHIVE/HIDDEN GALLERIES DIGITAL ARCHIVE)

of the Greek Catholic Church in Transcarpathia. Another project in conjunction with the Institute of Church History [at the Ukrainian Catholic University in the western city of Lviv] is publication of manuscripts written by Cardinal Josyf Slipyj, a church history preserved as evidence in his criminal file.

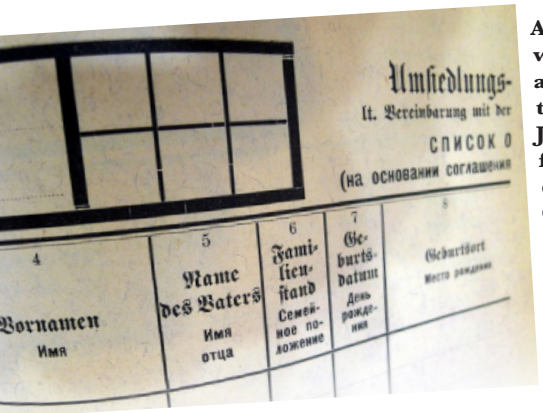
How are the conditions here for researchers?

We are seeing constant growth in the number of researchers, both Ukrainian and foreign, who come to familiarize themselves with these archival documents. We are working to digitize our collection, and the increasing number of visitors is one of the factors stimulating this process. You worked in the readers' room—it is not large, unfortunately; we have only nine desks there. Yet every day we receive between 12 and 20 applications to work in the archive. Digitization is a solution for us, because those who are interested in the documents can copy items and then work with them somewhere more convenient, thus giving someone else the chance to work in the reading room.

We also have case files that are in high demand, and if 10 people examine such a file, it requires repair work. This particularly occurs with documents from before 1960, when there was a paper shortage and people wrote on whatever was at hand. Digitization is therefore also among the best solutions to ensure preservation into the future. To date, we have digitized around five percent of our collections. This is not much, but we are not doing badly in comparison with other Ukrainian archives.

Do you plan to digitize everything, and make the collection accessible online?

The law says that these materials must be digitized, and we are continuing this process. By law, our task is to create an archive under the auspices of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance [a state-funded national historical research institution formed in 2006]. This would gather together materials from all repressive organs, that is, documents preserved in our archive here at the SBU [Security Service of Ukraine], at the Interior Ministry, the Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine, and in the collections of the Prosecutor's Office and various courts. Once this archive is created, we hope it will be a more civilized arrangement than under the auspices of the SBU. Here, we have to abide by security requirements that are significantly greater than for civilian institutions. Therefore for us the priority is to get these archives in order, to create the necessary indexes and continue digitization.



Andriy Kohut: "People wrote on whatever was at hand." The back of a top-secret report from July 1940 is an unused form for recording details of ethnic Germans relocated to Nazi Germany from territory newly controlled by the Soviet Union. (Source: SBU ARCHIVE/G. FAGAN)

Two-volume study of the Soviet liquidation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (G. FAGAN)

Unfortunately, this all means that the question of making the material public online must remain a later stage of our work, or it will happen with the future archive at the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance. However, we do work with some local organizations with websites where digitized copies of our documents have been published. One is the Center for Research of the Liberation Movement in Lviv. Perhaps half of the documents on the Center's website are from our archives. [See http://avr.org.ua. Two sections are devoted to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic and Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Churches.]

What interest is there in researching the Soviet regime's treatment of Christianity and other faiths in Ukraine?

Thanks to the fact that the Greek Catholic Church supports a university and other institutions engaged in church history, the Greek Catholics have the most advanced historical research. The Institute of Church History at the Ukrainian Catholic University [re-established in Lviv in the early 1990s] has done an immense amount of work. Unfortunately, that is probably an ideal beyond the reach of representatives of other denominations. That does not mean that we do not have information about the repression of other faith groups—we do, of course. But if we were to draw a graph of who researches church repression most actively, then the Greek Catholics would lead far ahead of all the others.

The Orthodox would probably be next, but significantly behind. As a rule, they are more interested in local histories: particular bishops or monks who were repressed, or individuals identified as KGB agents. There is no *meta-narrative*, while Greek Catholics are engaged both in history at the grassroots level and also in speaking about the history of the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine in the Soviet period more generally, about it being banned and its experience underground. The Church has supported this research, and also considers it important from the point of view of confessional identity: "We suffered for our faith as Greek Catholics, we endured repression, and we continue to follow Christ." They had this sense of mission, and this helped them to develop their historical research.

Work by Protestants is generally very weakly developed, unfortunately, although we do not have any less material about them: perhaps more in some cases. Even the celebration of the

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Kohut Interview *(continued from page 3)*

500th anniversary of the Reformation somehow did not prove an impetus for Protestant historians to come and work with these documents. Much work is needed in this field. Research is also done on Jews and Muslims, but very rarely. We hope this will change.

Do many researchers come from outside Ukraine?

From abroad, we do have a researcher from Austria studying Protestantism in southern Ukraine. Orthodoxy is more interesting to people in Russia. We have a situation in which researchers come here from Russia who do not have the opportunity to work with this type of document there. Their number is growing steadily. If we speak of all researchers visiting from abroad, then in 2017 we had 94. The year before that we had around 80, and 41 the year before that. So the number is constantly increasing. [Editor's note: In 2019, it was 118.]

It is difficult for me to say precisely how many of those researchers focus just on the topic of religion, probably about two or three percent of the total—a handful of people. But the scale of the material is huge. The main challenge facing researchers who come to our archive is the quantity of material. Sometimes historians find that everything is interesting, and they want it all! ♦

Christians as Targets of the KGB: A Peek into the SBU's Historical Archives

GERALDINE FAGAN

Encompassing millions of documents, the historical archives of the SBU [Security Service of Ukraine] in Kyiv is an extraordinarily rich resource on how the secret police dealt with Christian and other religious communities in Soviet Ukraine. The editor of the East-West Church Report *here offers brief summaries of several documents she examined at the archive in late 2018.*

"To Comrade Fedotov… 'Concerning the Work and Behavior of Agents among the Episcopate of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine'"

This January 1946 document sheds important light upon the fraught issue of leading Russian Orthodox clerics' collaboration with the Soviet secret police. In late 1943 Stalin granted the Russian Orthodox Church limited legal status after almost persecuting it out of existence in the 1930s. Here, the then head of state security in Soviet Ukraine, Sergei Savchenko, is reporting to a superior in Moscow, Petr Fedotov, about the Church in his republic.[1]

Savchenko notes that 12 of the 15 diocesan bishops in Ukraine at the time of writing were consecrated in the years 1944-45; this was soon after the Red Army had recaptured the territory from the Nazis. After listing the agent code names of four bishops discussed in a previous communication, Savchenko gives performance assessments for seven.

These seven are likewise referred to only by their agent code names. Due to biographical details in the assessments, however, the *East-West Church Report* is able to identify all with complete or near certainty. (The Russian-language website of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* discussed the same document in early 2018, but appears to have wrongly identified two of the seven bishops.[2])

The bishops appear to be cognizant of their obligations to the KGB, as the specific tasks of several are outlined. Agent *Petrov*, for example—Bishop Nikon (Petin) of Donetsk and Voroshilovgrad [Lugansk]—informed on "anti-Soviet" dissident Orthodox Christians both within and outside the Moscow Patriarchate, providing material that resulted in multiple arrests and the closure of an underground monastery. Agent *Pavlovsky*—Bishop Antoni (Krotevich) of Zhitomir and Ovruch—is similarly said to have supplied the KGB with "valuable, vetted agent material" resulting in arrests, including that of village Orthodox priest Fr. Platon Bereziuk. Fr. Platon was handed down a 10-year prison term for "anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation" within weeks of Savchenko's report.[3]

However, Bishop Antoni is the only one of the seven bishops assessed to win unequivocal praise from the KGB. Otherwise lauded, Bishop Nikon (*Petrov*) is criticized for aiding a wandering monk (in 1946, most monasteries in Soviet Ukraine were not permitted to function). The records of two more—*Glebov*, a.k.a. Bishop Makari (Oksiiuk) of Lvov and Ternopol, and *Usov*, a.k.a. Bishop Sergi (Larin) of Odessa and Kirovograd—also appear mixed. While both are said to have been active in alerting the KGB to "hostile elements" in church circles, they are described as working fervently to strengthen Orthodoxy—certainly not an item on the Soviet agenda.

Quite remarkably given Stalin's continued grip on power and their previous personal experience of arrest, imprisonment, and/or internal exile under the Bolsheviks, the remaining three bishop-agents are found to be outspokenly disloyal.

As well as poorly fulfilling his KGB tasks, Agent *Spokoiyni* [Russian: "Calm"], a.k.a. Archbishop Andrei (Komarov) of Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhe, is reported to have "a disloyal attitude towards Soviet power" and to be protecting clergy who are similarly hostile: "He tries to surround himself with such people while characterizing them positively and—in some cases—giving them attention and material assistance."

Agent *Koltsov*, or Bishop Feodosi (Koverinsky) of Chernovtsy and Bukovina, is reported to have voiced "anti-Soviet expressions among the clergy" and to have appointed priests to the best parishes in his diocese who are suspected of underground ties to the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN).

Agent *Tverdyi* [Russian: "Firm"], or Bishop Varlaam (Boriseevich) of Vinnitsa and Bratslav, has dared to ignore KGB instructions to cease summoning clergy from West Ukraine to his diocese. He also reportedly commented to one priest that the Communists "came from the dirt, they are the scum of society and do not know how to string two words together."

These three bishop-agents are themselves under further KGB investigation, Savchenko assures Moscow.

"To Comrade Melnikov… 'Concerning the Arrest of Participants in an Anti-Soviet Entity of Sectarian Pentecostals…'"

Two December 1951 communications from then Deputy Minister for State Security in Ukraine Mikhail Popereka highlight how even low-level unsanctioned religious activity was of serious concern to the very top echelons of Soviet government.

In the first, Popereka informs then Ukrainian Communist Party leader Leonid Melnikov about the arrest of seven Pentecostal Christians in the far western city of Lvov.[4] At this time, Pentecostals were not permitted to organize separately from the Soviet-recognized All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, and are therefore defined by Popereka as illegal "sectarians." One—shoe-factory worker Gennady Morozovsky from Poland—joined the community three years before. Aged just 24, he is accused of giving "sermons of a hostile nature in which he slandered Soviet reality, called upon sectarians to reject Soviet laws, military service in the Soviet Army, and defense of the Motherland by bearing arms."

Originally from Russia, another Pentecostal—39-year-old Olga Alinova—is described by the document as a "prophetess" who "gave anti-Soviet sermons and disseminated provocative rumors about the inevitability of the fall of Soviet power."

Orthodox bishops in Soviet Ukraine regarded as among the most and least reliable by the secret police in early 1946: Nikon (Petin), a.k.a. Agent *Petrov*, and Varlaam (Boriseevich), a.k.a. Agent *Tverdyi*.
(Source: https://ru.wikipedia.org)

Writing the same month to Aleksandr Volkov, a top secret police colonel in Moscow, Popereka reports on a case code-named *Mechtateli* [Russian: Dreamers] opened against a similar Pentecostal group in Kiev Region.[5] Here too, the concern is that the four leaders under surveillance are giving sermons "in which they slander the Communist Party and the Soviet government, express provocative ideas about the imminent downfall of Soviet power, and call upon participants in the group to refuse to serve in the Soviet Army." The communication quotes verbatim from the 12 July 1951 sermon given by one leader, Fedor Korshunov, a 40-year-old glazier originally from Russia:

> "Brothers and sisters, if you are called up to join the army, do not go, do not take up arms. You will be persecuted and sent to prison, but do not be afraid, we will help you."

"To Comrade Shcherbitsky… More than 100 Baptist schismatics performed religious songs accompanied by a string orchestra…"

In 1961 Soviet imposition of new rules limiting evangelism and religious instruction to young people led to a split among the state-approved Evangelical Christian-Baptists. Those who broke away in protest were pursued by the KGB as illegal "schismatics"—and also became a top-level government concern. This is clear from a special September 1974 report submitted by the KGB to Vladimir Shcherbitsky, then First Secretary of the Communist Party in Ukraine.[6]

The report describes an unsanctioned harvest festival attended by more than 100 people in the yard of the private home of factory worker Nikolai Kramarenko in the eastern city of Slavyansk, Donetsk Region. The assembled "performed religious songs accompanied by a string orchestra. Four religious banners were hung on a specially equipped stand." Alleging that the event caused consternation among surrounding residents, it also states that the "sectarians" did not obey local officials' orders to stop the meeting, but instead blocked and pushed police trying to enter the yard, "let out screams… and continued to perform religious songs." After "measures were taken to curtail the gathering," the participants were taken to the city police department in two buses. Nine—including Kramarenko—were detained, and 65 items of "religious propaganda" were confiscated.

Long in the public realm, an account of the same event produced soon afterwards by the Council of Relatives of Evangelical Christian-Baptist Prisoners can now be seen as concurring precisely on the time, location, and other crucial details.[7] However, it adds that the Baptists did promise to fulfil the police order to disperse once they had concluded their worship, and that the congregation was then threatened in ways conspicuously omitted by the KGB:

> "Seeing that threats did not produce the desired results, additional police were summoned. KGB personnel arrived. . . . Then the public prosecutor sanctioned the use of force to disperse the believers. . . . It is hard to imagine

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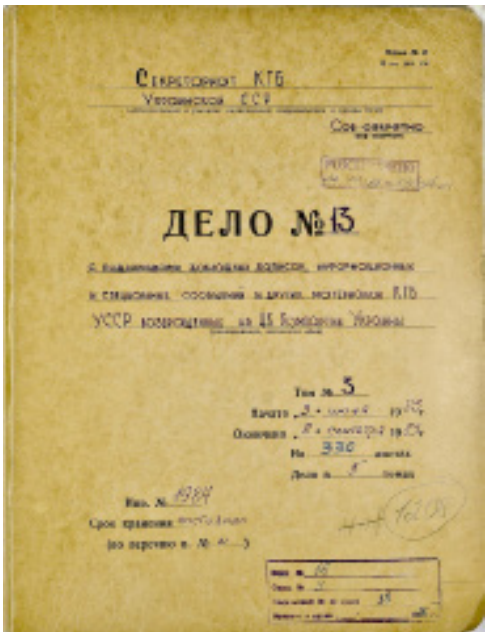
Christians as KGB Targets *(continued from page 5)*

> what our municipal state representatives were guided by as they twisted arms, dragged people along the ground and by their hair, beat men and women…. Searing screams went up from women and children in the yard, who could not remain passive at the sight of the inhumane actions committed against their husbands and relatives."

"Concerning the Reaction Among Believers in the Republic to the Visit of the pope of rome [*sic*] to the People's Republic of Poland"

In the early 1980s, almost daily reports to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine by KGB head Stepan Mukha recorded a hodgepodge of data on foreign citizens, criminal incidents, and religious affairs.

One such bulletin from 10 May 1983, for example, gives precise figures for the number of foreign citizens from capitalist and developing countries present on the territory of Soviet Ukraine (21,942), the latest on a search for whoever damaged the brakes of a freight train in Kharkov Region, and the number of Orthodox, Old Believers, and "registered sectarians"—such as sanctioned Baptists—who attended Easter worship that year: approximately 1.2 million.[8] (The items on religion are generally among those alongside which someone has handwritten the Russian abbreviation *Unich.* in red—apparently an unfulfilled order to *Unichtozhit'*, or "Destroy.")



KGB file containing report on Pope John Paul II's 1983 visit to Poland (Source: SBU ARCHIVE)

Amid these routine developments, however, the upcoming June 1983 visit of Pope John Paul II to his native Poland was clearly of special concern to the KGB in neighboring Ukraine. While the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church had of course been illegal for nearly 40 years by this time, a two-page report to First Secretary Shcherbitsky on 20 May 1983 notes the presence of 98 registered and four unregistered Roman Catholic parishes in Ukraine, served by 43 priests and uniting around 170,000 faithful.[9]

"Due to outside influence, a certain revitalization of an extremist portion of adherents of the catholic church [*sic*] is observed," warns Stepan Mukha, then chair of the KGB in Ukraine. "Unlike previous years, individual instances of the creation of youth groups on politically harmful grounds have been noted." He also states that, while "no activization is observed" in connection with the papal visit in eight of the 11 Ukrainian regions where most Catholics live, some in Khmelnitsky, Zhitomir, and Vinnitsa Regions "are ever more insistent in their demands to register Catholic parishes and have church premises returned to them." The KGB has therefore devised and is implementing measures "to identify subversive schemes and intentions by the leaders of the Vatican" prior to and during Pope John Paul II's time in Poland, as well as "to prevent negative manifestations" by Roman and Greek Catholics (the latter are referred to disparagingly as "Uniates" in the original document.)

A similar 27 June report—four days after the papal visit to Poland concluded—describes how the KGB worked with border and customs personnel to enhance checks on foreigners entering the USSR during the visit, including 16,000 arriving from Poland.[10] Together with the Interior Ministry, the KGB also took "measures to prevent adherents of the catholic and uniate churches [*sic*] from leaving the country"—an apparent ban on Soviet Catholics joining the crowds of papal well-wishers in Communist Poland.

The follow-up report also examines local public reaction to the papal visit, noting that TV and radio broadcasts from Poland could be accessed in several far western areas of Ukraine, where they were "favorably received." It further offers sample impressions gleaned from Catholic circles inside Ukraine. Polish specialists working on the construction of the Urengoi-Uzhgorod gas pipeline are said to have feared that the papal visit would "boost the activity of antisocialist elements" in Poland, "destabilizing the situation in the country still further." (Martial law would remain in force in Poland another month, until late July 1983.) In Lvov Region, leading clandestine Greek Catholic clerics are described as having a "restrained" attitude towards the visit, considering it to be principally aimed at strengthening the [Roman] Catholic Church in Poland. The report does not make clear how this information was obtained.

In addition, the KGB warns, there are "individual religious fanatics" who believe that the papal visit to Poland "will promote greater opportunities for the church in the USSR and 'put an end to the oppression of believers.'" Revolutionary changes would indeed sweep the region just a few years later. ♦

Notes:

[1] SBU Archive, f.16, op. 1, spr. 562, 141-51. Names and locations in this article follow the Russified forms used in the original documents.
[2] [In Russian] Mark Krutov, "Episkopy na sluzhbe Liubianke," *Radio Svoboda*, 23 January 2018, https://www.svoboda.org/a/28989881.html.
[3] [In Ukrainian] Natsional'nyi bank represovanykh, no. 277119, http://www.reabit.org.ua/nbr/?ID=277119.
[4] SBU Archive, f.16, op. 1, spr. 833, 115-18.
[5] Ibid., 247-50.
[6] SBU Archive, f.16, op. 1, spr. 1096, 338-39.
[7] [In Russian] *Biulleten' Soveta Rodstvennikov Uznikov Evangel'skikh Khristian-Baptistov v SSSR*, 19 (1975) 12-14.
[8] SBU Archive, f.16, op. 1, spr. 1208, 14-18.
[9] Ibid., 55-56.
[10] Ibid., 189-90.

"We have all the criminal files of those who were repressed, including for religious reasons":

An Interview with Dr. Roman Skakun of the Ukrainian Catholic University

From Lviv, Roman Skakun is Deputy Director of the Institute of Church History, which belongs to the Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) in that city. He currently also runs the Institute's publishing projects, which to date have included 30 books on church and general Ukrainian history, both new and in translation, as well as eight issues of the journal Kovcheh ['Ark'].

Dr. Skakun is among researchers best acquainted with material concerning religion within the SBU [Security Service of Ukraine] historical archives. In late 2018 the editor of the East-West Church Report *spoke with him in Lviv about his findings. The conversation took place in English.*

How long have you been working in the SBU historical archives?

Since 2011. The gradual process of declassifying these documents began around 2009. At first I could get almost nothing. I began working with the criminal files of those people who were repressed by the Soviet regime. For a long time that was the only type of document available to researchers. I would list the names of people who were repressed, and the archivists would confirm whether they had the criminal files of those people. To get access to something more—that is, to the extant operational documents of the former KGB and its predecessors—was a very difficult process. Even once they were gradually declassified, I could not get access to the archival catalogues initially. I would find citations of some documents in publications by "privileged" SBU historians and produce those, and the archivists would confirm that they indeed had those documents. Later on they made some catalogues accessible, but then access was restricted once again under the pro-Russian president Yanukovych, and I could get almost nothing—not even documents that I had been working on previously. Finally, our parliament passed the new law regulating these matters in 2015.

Dr. Roman Skakun (G. FAGAN)

What is the scope of the SBU material pertaining to religion?

From 1927-29 we have weekly reports from the secret services of Soviet Ukraine to the Communist leadership, which include sections about religious matters. We have some directives from the OGPU [a predecessor to the KGB] regarding religious matters dating from the 1920s and 30s. We have all the criminal files of those who were repressed, including for religious reasons. They are all in place and accessible right now. But if we turn to the various operational materials, the situation is different. There is a clear line—we have very little after about 1961 or 1962. The later materials have been purged very thoroughly. For example, the collection of documents of the notorious Fifth Directorate, created in 1967 and tasked with countering "ideological diversions" (including religious ones) was destroyed almost completely in 1990-91, so that only eight files remain. However, from the 1940s and 50s there are detailed monthly reports about religious matters: about different operations performed using secret agents, including agent penetration of different faith groups. These agents would gather information that was later used to prosecute people, in what was termed *agenturnaia razrabotka*—the development of agent intelligence.

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was the target of a huge *agenturnaia razrabotka* operation code-named *Rifi* ["Reefs"]. This consists of some 32 volumes spanning the period from 1939 to the early 1960s. We also have the so-called *nabliudatel'nye dela*—or files concerning the Ukrainian KGB's control and co-ordination of operations led by its local departments—on Greek Catholics from various regions in Ukraine. I am currently working on an article about the KGB's agent intelligence operations in the Greek Catholic community here in Galicia during the first Soviet occupation of 1939-41. This is mostly based on the *Rifi* files. [Editor's note: Entitled "Their Brothers' Keepers: Soviet Intelligence Activities against the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in Galicia in 1939–1941," this article appeared in Ukrainian in volume 8 (2018) of UCU's *Kovcheh. A Journal of Church History.* See https://www.academia.edu/38386759/_Сторож_братові_своєму_агентура_органів_безпеки_СРСР_у_середовищі_греко-католицького_духовенства_в_1939_1941_роках.]

The 1940s and 50s was the period when a new type of Soviet religious policy began to take shape. From one perspective there was resurgence in religious life, but at the same time, this resurgent religious life was being brought under control. The MGB [Ministry for State Security]—from 1953 on, the KGB—exercised very tight control over all legally sanctioned religious groups, including by introducing its agents into key positions within those groups. We have documents about how the MGB organized the 1943 Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Church Council of 1945, as well as documents for 1947 from which we may infer that, out of 17 or 18 Orthodox bishops in Ukraine at that time, at least 15 were MGB agents. There is a directive from Moscow requesting close

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monitoring of the behavior of these bishop agents, as well as reports prepared in response that contain observations about how each of those bishop agents behaved: how he did or did not collaborate with the MGB to de-mask different anti-Soviet trends among the clergy, or help to identify Nazi collaborators. Nazi collaboration had a very broad meaning in the opinion of the Soviet security services. In fact, most people who remained in the Nazi-occupied territories and were active in religious or public life were later viewed by the MGB as collaborators.

We also have some files concerning foreign Orthodox delegations visiting Soviet Ukraine and the ways in which they were monitored by the KGB, including through agents among local clergy, surveillance on the streets, and bugs in their hotels. There are transcripts of what those delegates were talking about.

How about the later Soviet period?

Very little is preserved from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s: mostly various reports from the KGB to Communist Party leaders here in Ukraine. All the operational materials from the later period have been destroyed, although some traces may be found here and there in different collections within the archives.

The missing documents were destroyed back in the late 1980s and early 90s. Around 1990 there was a KGB decree along these lines: "In view of the processes of democratization and *glasnost'*, given that these materials are starting to attract interest from academics and the general public, and that there is a possibility they could be transferred to public archives, we must review our procedures for storing documents, and such and such types of documents should no longer be stored in the operational archives of the KGB." Several categories of archival materials were destroyed around that time. These included most of the personal and working files of KGB agents, apart from some that were spared due to their historical significance.

What material have researchers focused upon so far?

Typically, the results of the KGB's activities: what operations were conducted and what their aims were. For example, the 1946 Council that was organized here in Lviv to achieve the unification of the Greek Catholic Church with the Orthodox Church; the unification of the Pentecostals with the Baptists; the dismantling of different underground groups from within. But such publications have tended to avoid naming agents, apart from some people whose collaboration was quite obvious. The documents that we have actually give plenty of information about these agent operations, so this part of the picture awaits further research.

Does the SBU archive corroborate any material known previously from other sources?

You probably heard about the commission to investigate the KGB's activities created by the Russian parliament in the early 1990s. That commission got access to the KGB archives in Moscow and made some excerpts from operational reports, including those of the late 1980s. Various


Совершенно секретно

К ЛИЧНОМУ ДЕЛУ №

Т А

СВЕДОМИТЕЛЯ)

Псевдоним «Сокол»

1. Фамилия Леляхин
2. Имя Виталий
3. Отчество Михайлович
4. Год рождения 1903 5. Место рождения

Registration form of Agent *Sokol* [Russian: "Falcon"], a.k.a. Ioasaph (Leliukhin), Moscow Patriarchate Metropolitan of Kyiv 1964-66 (Source: SBU ARCHIVE/R. SKAKUN)

sensational fragments were published from which you could make deductions. [Editor's note: Dissident Orthodox priest Fr. Gleb Iakunin was a member of the commission. Together with journalist Aleksandr Nezhnyi, he matched KGB agent code names with senior Orthodox clergy by comparing details described in the archives with past news items in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*.] From what I have seen here in Ukraine, what they published is indeed what those reports look like, and those inferences they made are mostly true, as far as I can tell. Some code names from those excerpts—like *Antonov*, the Kyiv Metropolitan Filaret Denysenko—can be found in the Ukrainian KGB materials from the early 1960s.

Then we have the so-called Mitrokhin Archive [compiled by Vasilii Mitrokhin, a retired KGB archivist who defected to the UK in the early 1990s with notes he had copied from the archives he supervised in the 1970s]. I have found some documents that correspond to what you can find in the documents published by Mitrokhin. For example, there is a fragment in the Mitrokhin Archive about a KGB agent among the Greek Catholic clergy in the Vatican, code-named *Vernyi* ["Devoted"], whose name was Ortynskii. [See "The Vernii (Devoted) Case. Folder 92. The Chekist Anthology," June, 2007, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110783.] Here, we have a document that indicates that this priest was indeed the subject of KGB interest and was intended for recruitment as an agent. So this is indirect proof that what Mitrokhin published was not his invention, and that his archive may be relied upon.

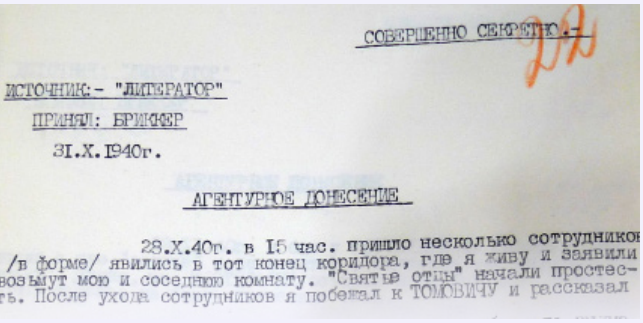
However, I think I have almost a complete picture of what is in the SBU archive, and there is almost nothing there about the foreign activities of the KGB. It's not that the Ukrainian KGB was not engaged in those activities—in tandem with Moscow, it had its own foreign agents who worked along operational lines, especially concerning the Greek Catholic Church and the Vatican, because here in Ukraine we had the largest concentration of Roman Catholic communities in the Soviet Union outside the Baltic republics. But most of those foreign intelligence materials that were not destroyed in 1990-

91 were transferred to the archives of the Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine, which remain closed to researchers.

We do have several mentions of foreign agents working in the Vatican. Cardinal Josyf Slipyj, who was released from Soviet imprisonment in the early 1960s and lived in Rome for a long time, was active there in organizing the Greek Catholic Church abroad. The KGB had an agent in his milieu who was the husband of his niece and used to transmit his correspondence. This agent was code-named *Rey*, and we have his six-volume file in a collection of personal and working files of agents. These are mostly from the World War II period, because in the directive in accordance with which materials were destroyed circa 1990, documents were spared pertaining to wartime agents who worked beyond the frontline in Nazi-occupied territory. Besides these wartime agents, only several dozen files remain, pertaining to agents who worked among Ukrainian and Russian émigrés or the intelligentsia, in the Ukrainian nationalist underground, or in various religious groups. Most of these files are still classified.

One was Agent *Literator*, who worked here in Lviv in the milieu of Greek Catholic Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky. This was a young student who was introduced to him and pretended to be interested in wanting to become a priest. He was introduced to a form of underground seminary that existed here in 1940-41.

Top-secret October 1940 report from Agent *Literator* (Source: SBU ARCHIVE/G. FAGAN)



СОВЕРШЕННО СЕКРЕТНО.-

ИСТОЧНИК:- "ЛИТЕРАТОР"

ПРИНЯЛ: БРИФЕР

31.X.1940г.

АГЕНТУРНОЕ ДОНЕСЕНИЕ

28.X.40г. в 15 час. пришло несколько сотрудников /в форме/ явились в тот конец коридора, где я живу и заявили возьмут мою и соседнюю комнату. "Святые отцы" начали простес- ть. После ухода сотрудников я побежал к ТОМОВИЧУ и рассказал

Another was Agent *Popov*, a very strange person. He moved in both Orthodox and Catholic circles in Kyiv and later Lviv. He was born in present-day Finland; his father was French and his mother Polish, so he spoke both French and Polish. He was also a homosexual. In the 1930s, he sold different religious items like icons and crucifixes near churches in Kyiv, and he also provided homosexual partners to various clerics. He was providing the NKVD secret police [a predecessor to the KGB] with information from the Orthodox milieu from the late 1920s. After that, in the 1940s, he played the role of a Greek Catholic priest consecrated by Metropolitan Sheptytsky during his stay in St. Petersburg [then Petrograd] in 1917. The Metropolitan attempted to create a Greek Catholic Church in Russia and consecrated several people there. So this *Popov* played the role of a Russian-French Greek Catholic priest consecrated by Sheptytsky—the MGB provided him with a fake consecration document with Metropolitan Sheptytsky's signature and also the necessary liturgical items. He was later sent on an intelligence mission to the Catholic church at the French embassy in Moscow. Maybe I will write about this one day.

2014 Ukrainian publication of Dr. Skakun's doctoral thesis on the Murashkovtsy

It almost sounds like a novel! How did you first become interested in this sphere?

As a doctoral student I was interested mostly in various religious sectarians. My doctoral thesis was about the so-called Murashkovtsy, or Evangelical Christians of the Holy Zion—a very strange sect of Pentecostal origin, the result of a kind of indigenization of religious trends coming from the West. [Editor's note: Led by one Ivan Murashko, this was a 1930s millennialist movement that arose in then-Poland. It was notable for acts of sacrificial bloodletting performed by Murashko's wife, styled the "Mother of Zion". See https://www.academia.edu/6643930/БУДІВНИЧІ_НОВОГО_ЄРУСАЛИМУ_ІВАН_МУРАШКО_І_МУРАШКІВЦІ.] That was quite a curious first topic for a student!

When I started out in 2003, I wanted to write a history of the Jehovah's Witnesses, because they had a really complicated history in different regions that have since come together in present-day Ukraine. The Jehovah's Witnesses were under different regimes in the interwar period: Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union. Once they were all inside the Soviet Union, they were one of the most persecuted religious groups—the reason was quite obviously that their headquarters were in America, in Brooklyn, New York. In the early 1950s the KGB tried to create a parallel governing center for the Jehovah's Witnesses in Ukraine composed of its agents; it later succeeded in intercepting the line of control over the community by infiltrating the Witnesses' National Committee, and even influenced the Brooklyn center to change some aspects of its rhetoric and doctrine.

When I first started talking with members of the community, they spoke about KGB agents among their leaders in Ukraine and fake *Watchtower* magazines. This sounded like nonsense to me. I knew that the Jehovah's Witnesses had had a change of doctrine in the 1960s—previously they had interpreted calls to obey authority in the book of Romans as referring to Jehovah and Jesus Christ rather than to civil government. That interpretation underlay their opposition to the Soviet regime. This was a very important doctrine for them, and I assumed they had not been able to accept it changing. I thought this was why they believed they had received fake *Watchtowers*—one group later claimed the Brooklyn center had fallen into apostasy, while another group thought that genuine *Watchtowers* did still exist, but were simply

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not reaching Soviet Ukraine, as the KGB was intercepting them.

So I wrote this off as the—perhaps understandable—product of paranoia. But in the archives I discovered that the KGB had indeed been printing fake *Watchtowers*, to boost the credibility of its false Jehovah's Witness leadership. It had to print them, because in the underground, the leaders would be recognized if they had contact with Brooklyn, which meant they would have religious literature. And so the KGB had those *Watchtowers* prepared by its agents, printed at its printing press, and distributed through its channels. The operation was discontinued after Stalin's death. It was somewhat wild—even for the KGB—to print *Watchtowers*, as you might guess!

Then later, once the Witnesses' Ukraine-based National Committee in the USSR was under KGB control, the KGB filtered the literature that Brooklyn tried to smuggle into the USSR. Simultaneously, its agents persuaded the Witnesses' governing body that some aspects of that literature, perceived as anti-Soviet, should be toned down so that believers would suffer less persecution. Among other things, the agents insisted upon a more traditional interpretation of the book of Romans—which was soon changed.

So you came upon the SBU archives because these forms of religious life were in the sphere of competence of the KGB and its predecessors?

Yes. First of all I was thinking about criminal files, because you have a lot of material there—correspondence, doctrinal texts, witness statements—all kept in those files as material evidence. Step by step I began to get more material, a fuller picture.

Photographs from a KGB surveillance file on Jehovah's Witnesses, 1955-56. Taken with a hidden camera, these images capture a meeting between a KGB agent—a Witness minister recruited by the KGB—and a group of believers in the town of Morshyn (Lviv Region). There were about 200 agents and informers working in the Witness underground in western Ukraine in the mid-1950s.
(Source: SBU ARCHIVE/HIDDEN GALLERIES DIGITAL ARCHIVE)

The building which is home to the Institute of Church History also houses UCU's original Greek Catholic chapel (G. FAGAN)

It takes time, but gives interesting results. You can identify agents. You can identify the instruments used—not only the final results. Not only what they arrived at, but also *how* they arrived at it. Intelligence agents were one of the most important instruments that the KGB relied upon. The arrests that were made are very often described in a random way; how they came and arrested someone because some other person wrote a denunciation against him. There was actually a system of operational accounting, or *operativnyi uchet*. They kept accounts of all the categories of people deemed anti-Soviet, including clergy, collecting "compromising materials" of all sorts in people's personal files, or *uchetnye dela*.

Once they had enough material, they opened an *agenturnoe delo*—or agent case—that was if their target was a group of people. If it was an individual, the dossier was called a *delo-formuliar*. They continued to gather material, now purposefully, via agent surveillance. Then, once these cases were ready to be "realized"—it was called *realizatsiia* or *likvidatsiia*, liquidation, of the case—only then were people arrested, when it was the right time from various perspectives. So if you want to understand the logic of the arrests—including those of different religious people—you have to look into those agent cases. Also, agent reports contain plenty of first-hand information about religious life as it was, information that you could probably find if you interviewed people using oral history methods, but many of the people concerned are long dead. I managed to find two or three people who were in Soviet prison camps, who had been arrested under Stalin or later. But few were alive, and now almost none.

This is very dense material—you have to invest a lot of time in order to work on it properly. If you collate documents—especially those files that are preserved in full—for some topics or periods, you can get more or less the full picture, as for our Greek Catholic Church. You can find how materials were gathered, how they tried to influence the internal politics of religious communities, how they tried to move aside some people and to move the ones they needed up into particular positions—including KGB agents, how they tried to control different kinds of activities. You can obtain interesting insights into Soviet religious policy. ♦

How the KGB Turned Believers into the Enemy

TATIANA VAGRAMENKO

My interest in secret police surveillance of religion was first aroused in the Russian Arctic. In 2006—then a social anthropology student at the European University at St. Petersburg—I traveled to northern Siberia, to the lands of nomadic indigenous people who lived in the tundra as reindeer herders and hunters. The focus of my fieldwork in the Far North was the growth of international Protestant missionary movements throughout Russia.

Dr. Tatiana Vagramenko (Source: KENNAN INSTITUTE)

"Every foreign missionary coming here is under the surveillance of the FSB [ex-KGB]," a government official in the snowbound Yamal-Nenets District told me. Threats and anti-religious media campaigns were the reality for those vernacularly known as "sectarians." One Baptist believer was dismissed from his job: "I don't need problems here," his boss explained. Police detained and interrogated a Pentecostal minister in the middle of the night; he was forced to walk home through bitter cold of minus 20 Celsius [minus 4 Fahrenheit] in his slippers.

A few years later I came across a document from the recently opened KGB archives in Ukraine (access to the FSB historical archives in Russia is very limited and increasingly complicated). It came from a file about a secret operation in the 1950s against those known in Soviet Ukraine as the "religious underground": illegal communities of various Protestant denominations, Greek Catholics, and dissident Orthodox. I realized that similar strategies of intrusion, intimidation, and control that had determined the lives of religious minorities during the Soviet era were still being used by the FSB today. The KGB archives in Ukraine became a natural extension of my field of research.

In 2018 I spent several months in Kyiv and other regions—including Odessa, Lviv, Chernihiv, and Transcarpathia—sifting through thousands of pages of what used to be top-secret material for stories of KGB operations against religious dissent. I wanted to find out what was concealed behind official anti-religious propaganda, and how the image of "destructive foreign sects"—still prominent in public discourse in Russia today—was constructed. A paragraph, phrases, or just a few notes in the margin of a document; a person looking straight at the camera in a surveillance photograph (an agent?); the quotation of an informer's voice: all these traces of a bigger story are dispersed through separate files and even archival collections in Ukraine.

Regardless of its provenance, the materials that found their way into the KGB archives—including diaries, art, manuscripts, and personal photographs—were subordinated to a single dominant interpretation. They were all transformed into incriminating evidence of crimes against the Soviet state. Photographic and other visual material illustrates particularly well how this took place.

The Soviet security services photographed targeted persons and alleged evidence of criminality. Largely following standard judicial procedure, in-house photography laboratories produced mugshots of people in custody, and police officers photographed crime scenes during investigations. Photography was also commonly used in so-called "agent-operational measures": KGB officers used concealed cameras to take pictures of targets during surveillance operations, as well as of intercepted or confiscated materials. In-house manuals instructed officers on how to photograph surveillance targets, arrestees, and crime scenes.

KGB photography went far beyond the standard functions of crime detection and personal identification, however. Unlike classic judicial photography, it did not pursue accuracy or objectivity as its main principle. To this end, photographs were subject to material intervention, including cropping or retouching. The aim was to mold the image of the enemy, such as by pasting together a collage of numerous

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Photograph of religious manuscripts, books, and photographs confiscated during the arrest of 14 followers of the Reformed Adventist movement in the town of Bila Tserkva (Kyiv Region) dating from 1952. All were found guilty of anti-Soviet activity and refusal to perform military service and were sent to the Gulag. This image was used as evidence of criminal activity; the original books and photographs were later destroyed. Religious art in the image contains, in Russian, the biblical verses, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" [Joshua 24:15] and, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" [Matthew 11:28].
(Source: SBU ARCHIVE/HIDDEN GALLERIES DIGITAL ARCHIVE)

Believers Turned into the Enemy *(continued from page 11)*

individual mugshots in order to reinforce the notion of a subversive organization.

Such collages were also published in KGB internal instruction manuals, or featured as exemplary case materials in internal KGB periodicals. Eventually, photographs were "recycled" in the exhibitions, films, and media publications that were vehicles for antireligious propaganda campaigns throughout the Soviet period. Here, religion was considered a weapon of the class enemy: believers were alleged to be counter-revolutionaries who hid their political subversion behind the mask of religious belief. They were therefore punished not as believers, but as members of organized political or even terrorist groups.

One example comes from the late 1920s and early 30s. Over two thousand priests, monks, and ordinary peasant believers were tried as members of a terrorist "ecclesiastical-monarchist" organization called the True Orthodox Church (also known as the Catacomb Church). The True Orthodox movement in fact did not form any theologically or organizationally unified phenomenon. Instead, it was constituted of dispersed communities and individual priests, monastics, and wanderers, united by a shared apocalyptic vision of the world. Yet a powerful image of them as a centralized and networked political organization took shape on the pages of KGB documents. The KGB's photographic and graphic experimentation played a crucial role in the construction of this image.

Such visual material is the focus of *Hidden Galleries*, a new research project led by Dr. James Kapaló of University College Cork, Ireland. In addition to my research from Ukraine, this includes material from secret police archives in Hungary, Romania, and Moldova: http://hiddengalleries.eu.

Alongside visual materials, I am interested in the narratives of believers, informers, and KGB officers found in the Ukrainian archives, as these shed light on the complex ambiguities of secret police activity. As a social anthropologist, I wish to go beyond the simple dichotomy of "victim" and "traitor," and to understand why people collaborated. When you assemble disparate pieces

Photo collage produced in 1931 to illustrate a case prosecuted against dissident Orthodox believers headed by Aleksii Bui, who was acting bishop of Voronezh until early 1928. The document was sent to the Ukrainian OGPU secret police because numerous religious communities belonging to the same movement were located in Ukraine. Eleven of the group were shot in 1930; Bishop Aleksii [top row, fourth from left] was similarly executed in Soviet Karelia in November 1937. (Source: SBU ARCHIVE/HIDDEN GALLERIES DIGITAL ARCHIVE)

of information from the KGB archives, more nuanced stories of negotiation and non-institutionalized encounter emerge. For example, religious communities might delegate someone to become an agent or collaborator in order to learn something about secret operations, as well as to misinform the KGB. The relationships between the watchers and those who were watched were remarkably complex. ♦

Tatiana Vagramenko *is a post-doctoral researcher, most recently at the Kennan Institute (Washington, DC) and University College, Cork (Ireland).*

Photographs taken during and after a Soviet secret police raid in 1945 on an underground Orthodox monastery in the town of Chuhuiv (Kharkiv Region). The monastery had been dug out under a private house. At the time of the raid, 20 people were gathered for a religious service; nine were arrested and brought to trial. Among them was Hieromonk Seraphim (Shevtsov). Here, Fr. Seraphim is shown at the "crime scene" with religious artefacts confiscated from the community; most were later destroyed. Fr. Seraphim was sentenced to seven years in the Gulag. He died in 1955. (Source: SBU ARCHIVE/HIDDEN GALLERIES DIGITAL ARCHIVE)

Exploring the Not-So-Distant Religious Past in Kyiv's Archives

ANDRIY FERT

As a researcher of religion in the late Soviet period, it is hard not to notice two phenomena that oversimplify our understanding of it, particularly the Orthodox Church. The first was observed by Nikolai Mitrokhin, a prominent scholar of the Russian Orthodox Church, who termed it "plenipotentiary collection sickness."[1] Back in 1943, a government organ devoted exclusively to the sphere of religion was set up in the USSR. This was the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, which later became the Council for Religious Affairs. It had a representative—or "plenipotentiary"—in each administrative region, or *oblast'*. This Council was dissolved soon after the collapse of the USSR, and the materials produced by its plenipotentiaries ended up in public archives. They were discovered by historians and, as Mitrokhin notes, "We consequently have a veritable mountain of books and academic articles laying out what our colleagues found in these collections."

Andriy Fert
(G. FAGAN)

"So where is the problem?" you might well ask. "This was the organ responsible for religion, so where else should we look, if not in its archives?" There is naturally a great deal of interest in the "plenipotentiary collection." But the problem lies elsewhere: in the fact that, for many researchers, everything starts and finishes with this "plenipotentiary collection." They do not take into account numerous other sources: materials from local executive committees, Soviet organizations such as the Knowledge Society or the Society for the Protection of Monuments, the press, or memoirs. Mitrokhin drew attention to this back in 2012, but I still encounter many publications suffering from the same sickness in 2020.

The second problem is a tendency by many people to focus solely upon persecution of the Church in the Soviet Union. I am not at all suggesting that there was no persecution or restrictions. However, by focusing solely upon persecution, we overlook a great deal else, such as how "the severity of the law was compensated by the laxity of its enforcement," as the Russian saying goes. Or even how religious organizations "manipulated the state for their own ends," as state officials lamented for the umpteenth year about their failure to get the abbess of Sts. Florus and Laurus Women's Monastery in Kyiv to remove an electric stove from her room or to deposit donations in a bank account—it being illegal to hoard cash.

Now imagine what occurs when both these issues combine in one piece of research. First, you end up with narrow and one-sided material—the viewpoint of an official in a single government organ. Second, you are unable to compare this material with anything else. If a plenipotentiary reports that the number of baptisms in Kyiv churches has gone down in a particular year, or that fewer people are attending church on Sundays, how can we verify these statements? Assuming that measures were carried out as described in a plenipotentiary's reports is even worse. This results in a simple and convenient picture of an all-powerful persecutor and defenseless victims.

In the spirit of the *Annales* school of historiography, I am trying to take a broader view by asking questions about who wrote the reports on religion, who read them, what the reader expected to see, and how this influenced what the author included in or omitted from his narrative. In other words, I am interested not so much in how the Church fared in late Soviet Kyiv in the first instance, but in how it had to be described as "inevitably dying out," and in who produced this description.

The main impetus for my efforts was the late Sonja Luehrmann's 2015 book, *Religion in Secular Archives: Soviet Atheism and Historical Knowledge*.[2] She posed the question of how to extract historical knowledge from the documents produced by Soviet officials who were responsible for religion. This becomes possible not just by reading, but by reading between the lines; by paying attention to the classification of a document, revisions to it, the topic addressed, the manner in which believers are cited, how an archival file is assembled, and so on.

Kyiv Case Study

The city of Kyiv offers a particularly interesting case study. It was the capital of Soviet Ukraine, as well as the administrative center for the Ukrainian Exarchate—the largest component of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Soviet period. Between 1966 and 1988 there were eight Orthodox churches and two women's monasteries open in Kyiv. Compared with other cities in the USSR, this was a huge number; at that time, the Russian Orthodox Church had only 16 functioning monasteries in total. Moreover, Kyiv was one of the cities regularly visited by foreign religious delegations. Most notable, however, was that not a single church or monastery was closed for the duration of Brezhnev's Period of Stagnation. This is strange, because churches were being slowly but surely closed everywhere else.

In 1968 the position of Plenipotentiary for Religious Affairs was created for the city of Kyiv. (As throughout the USSR, there was previously only a plenipotentiary responsible for Kyiv Region.) From 1970 on, so-called Support Commissions were created in every one of the city's 12 districts. Attached to the executive committee administering each district, these were supposed to monitor the religious situation locally. From 1979 on, so-called Support Groups were also set up in all factories, housing authorities, research bodies, and universities. The unwritten aim of all these institutions was to "reduce the religious network in the city." In total—if we are to believe the reports—more than a thousand people were engaged in the process of monitoring the life of religious communities, clerics, and members of the

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Kyiv's Archives *(continued from page 13)*

dvadtsatki—those groups of 20 people featuring in the legal registration documents of every religious community. This is an impressive number.

But what if most of them did not receive any pay, and "checking religion" was extra work at the weekends, assigned as part of "labor and Party discipline"? Of these thousand people, only three were paid—the plenipotentiary and his two assistants. Moreover, theirs was a standard salary—typically 80-90 rubles a month. The work of the others was thus decidedly substandard.

For example, out of 19 members of the Support Commission for the Podil District of Kyiv—the most "religious" in the city—only eight regularly attended meetings, and only four actively participated in discussions. The Commission regularly called upon representatives of the Support Groups to give reports, and discovered on every occasion that "the comrades are not doing any work."

The Support Group for Kyiv's Labor Social Club was twice summoned to meetings of its local Commission. On the first occasion in 1976, the result was pitiful:

> They are not conducting any work, as is shown by the case of Comrade Sidorchenko having his child baptized in church. He is a Shock Worker of Communist Labor… there is no plan of atheist education. No individual work is being conducted with believers.

On the second occasion, in 1978, "the comrades…reported quite calmly that they are doing nothing and even have scant idea about what they are supposed to be doing. This is despite the fact that the Commission… is being addressed for the second time." Such cases of "no work is being conducted" were the norm.

"How do you know all this?" Protopriest Vladislav, head of a Kyiv parish permitted to function during the Soviet period, once asked me in a genuinely surprised voice. He had just acquainted me with the previous parish priest, whom I would go on to interview a few days later.

"From the archives," I responded. "It is possible to find out all of this in several archives offering completely open access." I conduct my research in three of them.

Ascension Cathedral and (below) potato harvest at Sts. Florus and Laurus Women's Monastery, Kyiv (G. FAGAN)

Three Key Archives

The first is the Central State Archives of Supreme Authorities and Governments of Ukraine (CSASAGU).[3] Central state institutions of the Soviet period transferred their documentation to this archive. Materials of the Council for Religious Affairs attached to the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic are also found here, forming Collection 4648.

What does it contain? Apart from the obvious items requested most frequently by researchers—such as correspondence between regional plenipotentiaries and the leaders of religious associations—there are other interesting items, such as individual employee files. These are all accessible, with photographs, profiles, resumes, old telephone numbers, and occasionally explanatory notes such as this:

> "Despite warnings from you and the Party office, I became blind drunk at the hotel during a field trip to Dnepropetrovsk Region and ended up in hospital. My behavior was also highly immoral and incompatible with the office of a departmental head."

This was written in December 1976 by Comrade Gladarevsky, a long-serving chief inspector and later departmental head of the Council. He was fired, but then re-hired so he could scrape through to the end of the year and thus receive a pension. He was not sent on any more field trips, however.

This is my favorite archive: you may freely copy whatever you wish and request as many files as you like. You can then sit the whole day without a break taking notes and photos before filling out your next request for files, which will be brought to you the following day (unless the water or heating are cut off.) The only downside is that this archive is difficult to get to—an eloquent example of poor urban planning.

The second archive—unfortunately, the most important for my research—is the State Archive of the City of Kyiv (SAK).[4] If CSASAGU offers a general impression of what interested the bosses and what directives they issued, then SAK allows you to see how work was conducted on the ground. I say "unfortunately" because, despite its many merits, SAK is the least friendly archive I have ever visited. It is located near a metro station on the first floor of a Soviet-era residential building with thick walls and poor heating. You are not allowed to take photos of documents unless you write a detailed request to the archive director, who may or may not appear at his desk the following week. The archive is open three days a week, so your requested files might appear only the week after that, and a maximum of only 10 at a time!

This archive also has a lunch break between 1 and 2 p.m., when the woman in charge of the reading room simply shoos you out of the building. There is nothing to do except wander around the neighborhood for a whole hour. SAK is located across a noisy highway from Babi Yar, where over 100,000 were massacred under Nazi occupation. There are almost no cafés nearby where one could pass the time. I sometimes get a coffee from a street stall and go to the Babi Yar site. There, I sit on the slope of the ravine, watching locals walking

their dogs, and ponder what I have just read in the archive.

Judging by his *How to Write a Thesis*, however, Umberto Eco would have approved of making copying documents difficult.[5] You work more closely with the text, take notes on it, read it several times—and so notice things which you would probably not have noticed later from copies on your laptop screen. For example, how masterfully an official in Podil District softens the annual report by a rank-and-file colleague "in the field" about the level of religiosity there in order to make it palatable to his boss.

The main thing about this archive, however, is that it is an antidote to "plenipotentiary collection sickness." Its offerings include materials from the aforementioned district Support Commissions; archives from the "Knowledge" Society with theses from their seminars on atheist propaganda held at Kyiv factories; itineraries and scripts for guided tours of churches, both those functioning and turned into museums. All this affords the opportunity to view work in the religious sphere in the 1970s and 80s from different vantage points.

This is especially true of the minutes from meetings of the Support Commissions. Often handwritten during the meetings themselves and containing numerous semantic and grammatical errors, they provide insight into the thinking of religious affairs officials and the routine of their everyday work. These minutes demonstrate better than anything else that no one understood how to make religion die out; how to "reduce the level of religious ritualism" and "clerical income." They reveal the complete apathy of those who the plenipotentiary described in chipper accounts as "local activists," apathy stemming from the fact that they kept encountering the same problems on the ground: Communists baptizing their children, Communists attending church on Sundays. These "activists" would ask their bosses to "give us recommendations for what is to be done," "invite scholars to help us sort this out," but in response they would receive the same set of recommendations: to "promote socialist rituals" and "have prophylactic conversations with parents of baptized children." This was never successful. Such apathy is also evident from the almost carbon-copy annual workplans of the Support Commissions, as if nothing changed from year to year.

Fr. Fyodor Lenok, Tolstyi Les village priest (Source: chernobylpeople.ucoz.ua)

The third archive I use is the State Archive of Kyiv Oblast [DAKO in Ukrainian.][6] Here I quite unexpectedly found the "Case File of the Religious Community of the ROC in the Village of Tolstyi Les in Chernobyl District, De-registered in 1987." Within the exclusion zone caused by the accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, there were several functioning Orthodox churches, which all had to be legally dissolved after the inhabitants of the district were obliged to evacuate. The file of the community in Tolstyi Les consists of more than 100 pages relating the history of the church and its parishioners from 1944 to 1986. It is an extraordinary find for the researcher: everything in a single file, not only materials from the plenipotentiary, but also the local Support Commission, police, and even internal documents from the parish itself.

The reading room in which documents from this collection may be studied is located in a basement, in a tiny room with no windows or ventilation. In Soviet tradition, the lower part of the white walls is painted over in a toxic shade of green. Completing the experience, I examined the Tolstyi Les materials there during the run of the popular recent HBO series, *Chernobyl*.

"As the village is located close to the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant and the wind was blowing in our direction, evacuation took place earlier than in the town of Chernobyl, so the Easter service did not take place. The church was closed up, and I have the keys. I was evacuated together with the people… There were no religiously motivated manifestations or statements of an undesirable nature. Now… the people are at work, receiving assistance from the authorities and eagerly awaiting orders. They are prepared to return to their village right away," Fr. Fyodor Lenok, then village priest in Tolstyi Les, tells the regional plenipotentiary in a confidential conversation on 8 May 1986, almost two weeks after the Chernobyl catastrophe.

Eyewitnesses

"Everything you say is so interesting, but I am thinking that eyewitnesses of the 1970s and 80s are still alive, have you not thought about interviewing them?" the historian Boris Kolonnitsky asked me at "Constructing the 'Soviet'?"—a conference held at St. Petersburg's European University in 2018.

Naturally, I have considered this, but sometimes it is easier said than done. Of the three employees of the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Religious Affairs whom I have managed to track down, only one has agreed to speak with me. Viktor Yelensky is a well-known religious studies expert, a recent member of the Ukrainian parliament, and among the most prominent supporters of the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Back in the 1980s, he was a senior inspector for the Council for Religious Affairs, whose task was to supervise the work of regional plenipotentiaries and to check up on religious communities, including ensuring that no children were present at worship services. The other two former employees declined to meet me for different reasons, even though I tried to explain to them that my aim was in no way to accuse them of "persecuting religion in the Soviet period."

Interviewing priests and nuns is even more difficult. Almost all those Kyiv churches and monasteries that were open during the Soviet period have been retained by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), which I have found to be an incredibly insular organization. When I have tried to approach priests or abbesses directly, I have always received the same response:

(continued on page 16)

"We will not speak with you without the bishop's blessing."

In 2019 I wrote to Metropolitan Onufry, head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), asking him to grant me his blessing to conduct interviews. A month later, I was contacted by the Church's chancellery and asked to submit printed copies of all the articles I had ever written on church topics. I complied, and—quite unexpectedly—was granted a blessing two weeks later. Unfortunately, this was sufficient only for two interviews. But what interviews they were! Each transcript consisted of around 25 pages of small, tightly spaced script.

Some highlights: "You probably want to know if we collaborated with the KGB?", "Of course, the state security organs demanded that we report any anti-Soviet expression, break the confidentiality of the sacrament of confession," "I refused to break the confidentiality of confession, and the Lord came to my defense, so that I never had any problems as a result," "Please understand that His Holiness [the Patriarch] had to collaborate, in this way he was defending the Church," "We were constantly being monitored."

But the longer you talk, the more episodes arise in conversation illustrating that the monitoring was not all that close. How it was possible to come to an arrangement with all officials except those who were totally "ideological"—of whom there were hardly any. How they took bribes and turned a blind eye to "the activization of church people." How they would suggest writing, "Please allow us to move the old barn 15 meters closer to the road," rather than "Please allow us to build a new barn."

Mother Alipiia

"Now I can say for sure that she was a witch!" one priest who served in a Kyiv church during the 1980s told me. I had asked him about Mother Alipiia—a homeless woman living in the Goloseevo Forest to the south of Kyiv during the 1980s. Today, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) is considering the possibility of canonizing her. Her grave at Goloseevo Monastery has become a pilgrimage site; even on a workday, there are dense crowds there. In addition to invoking Divine retribution against homosexuals, she is reputed to have healed people from radiation sickness after the Chernobyl catastrophe, and prophesied schism in Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

Whoever Mother Alipiia may have been, for some strange reason she never fell within the sights of Soviet officials. She often walked barefoot from her hut in the forest to the nearest church. According to its priest, she would shout or thrash about for no apparent reason during services. She also regularly received believers in her hut in the forest, where she healed their illnesses with mysterious potions. How could officials possibly have overlooked such a colorful character? They regularly apprehended people in the forest, filled in "sacred springs," and isolated *klikushi* [Russian: "shriekers" or female demoniacs], but they never once—not in a single report—breathed a word about Mother Alipiia, who was well known to every priest in Kyiv.

Mother Alipiia is an example of how officials "sacrificed truth to efficiency." Although they reported that they regularly checked up on churches, in actual fact they did not visit so regularly. If they did see Mother Alipiia there, they did not relay this to their superiors, as this would have messed up their reports. And even if they had thought to act, they had no idea what to do with Alipiia, or with the people's faith in her and her miracles. ♦

Notes:

[1] Nikolai Mitrokhin, "Bolezn' pod nazvaniem 'fond upolnomochennogo' ili neskol'ko stranits ob aktual'nykh problemakh izucheniia religioznosti v SSSR," *Gosudarstvo, Religiia, Tserkov'*, 3-4 (30), 2012, 505-11, http://www.intelros.ru/pdf/GosRelTserkov/2012_03-04/22.pdf.

[2] Sonja Luehrmann, *Religion in Secular Archives: Soviet Atheism and Historical Knowledge*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

[3] http://tsdavo.gov.ua/en/welcome/.

[4] http://www.kiev-arhiv.gov.ua/en/.

[5] Hua Hsu, "A guide to thesis writing that is a guide to life," *New Yorker*, 6 April 2015, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-guide-to-thesis-writing-that-is-a-guide-to-life.

[6] http://dako.gov.ua/.

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