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Protestants, Peace and the Apocalypse: The USSR's Religious Cold War, 1947–62

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Abstract

In recent years historians have paid growing attention to the religious dimensions of the Cold War. These studies have largely focused, however, on the capitalist world, particularly the rise of evangelicalism and fundamentalism in the USA. This article turns the spotlight on the communist adversary, asking whether the USSR also participated in a 'religious Cold War'. Given the atheist convictions on which the Soviet state was founded, this might appear counter-intuitive, but religious dynamics were of growing importance in the USSR too. Soviet officials sought to create what was called an 'ecumenical movement', inviting religious actors to become advocates for the Soviet peace message. Protestants, in particular, were important figures on the international stage because of the large communities of co-believers in the West. At the same time, however, the authorities were alarmed about various grass-roots phenomena at home which seemed to be on the rise as the Cold War escalated, such as pacifism and apocalyptic prediction. Faced with such threats, state tactics included the arrest of believers and hostile press campaigns. Even though the inconsistencies were readily visible to all, this dualistic approach was not abandoned and the ultimately self-defeating engagement with the 'religious Cold War' continued.

Keywords

apocalypse, Cold War, peace, Protestants, religion, Soviet

In 1958, a Ukrainian Baptist in his forties named Fedor Krylov found himself in court for writing and disseminating what were deemed anti-Soviet sermons and texts. In addition to preaching slanderous messages to congregations in several different cities, he was found to have sent his works to Peter Deyneka,

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the missionary leader of the Slavic Gospel Association in Chicago, asking for them to be read aloud on radio programs broadcast on Soviet airwaves. His trial proceedings centred on the content of the texts such as the 'Appeal to Atheists' in which Krylov argued that the 'recklessness' of both political systems risked universal destruction. In it, he addressed the world's politicians directly:

Leaders of nations! Decide your own fate today. If you now turn away from the world God offers you, you must lie in the bed you've made. You who kindle the flames of war, armed with arrows of fire, go walk into your own fire and among the sparks you have set ablaze. This is your fate at my hands: you shall lie down in torment... Showing no restraint in front of the people you threaten one another with atomic and hydrogen bombs, but on whose heads do you want to drop them, on yours or ours? It is not enough that you have sentenced hundreds of millions of people to eternal agony by turning them against God, but you, ignoring article 124 of the USSR Constitution, are also hurting the true people of God.¹

Here Krylov articulated political messages he wanted his imagined audience, both in the USA and at home in the USSR, to hear. He criticized the Soviet government for failing to adhere to its own promises, as laid out in article 124 of the 1936 Constitution which promised 'freedom of religious worship'.² But his text is not a straight-forward critique of the Soviet leaders and their unconstitutional mode of governance.³ In fact his first, and perhaps most powerful, point concerns world leaders, particularly those responsible for the escalating Cold War. The author draws explicitly on the Bible, interweaving an unattributed verse from Isaiah (From 'You who kindle' to 'lie down in torment') into his own text to give a clear lesson: those who deny God, who continue to incite war, and who hurt the righteous will be punished, their own violence turned against them.⁴ The Isaiah verse was used not only to prophesy retribution against the atheist state, but also to

1 Fedor Krylov, born in 1912 in a village in Poltava region (Ukraine), received only three years of schooling, and by the age of 20 his Baptist faith had landed him in prison for the first time, sentenced in 1932 by a GPU *troika* to three years, and in 1937 to a further 10 years by a NKVD *troika*. Between his release in 1947 and his third arrest in 1958, he lived with his wife in the Krasnodar region and supported eight children by working as a cobbler. In August 1958, he was sentenced under article 58 to 10 years in corrective-labour camps. In 1966 his sentence was reduced to eight years and he was released but not rehabilitated (although the 1937 conviction had been overturned). Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskii federatsii (GARF) f. 8131, op. 31, d. 89745 (especially l. 20). This case, and others based on individual court files, has been anonymized by assigning the protagonist a pseudonym.

2 1936 Constitution of the USSR. Available at: <http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Text/cnst1936.htm> (accessed 8 November 2017).

3 In this respect, it was quite different from the texts composed by members of the dissident movement that was to emerge over the coming years. As Benjamin Nathans has shown, one key tactic deployed by dissidents was to call upon the state to obey its own laws. See B. Nathans, 'The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol'pin and the Idea of Rights under "Developed Socialism"', *Slavic Review*, 66, 4 (Winter 2007), 630–63.

4 Isaiah, 50, 11: 'But you who kindle a fire and set fire-brands alight, go, walk into your own fire and among the fire-brands you have set ablaze. This is your fate at my hands: you shall lie down in torment'. For commentary on this verse, see C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA 1969), 235.

evoke scenes of blazing fire. The Soviet officials dealing with his case took this to mean Krylov believed atomic weapons threatened all peoples with a terrible extermination.⁵ During the investigation, he apparently claimed that if believers served in the army they would ‘burn for all eternity in a lake of fire’, further evidence for his interrogators of his subversive, scripture-based pacifism.⁶

Krylov’s case raises important questions about Cold War mentalities in the Soviet Union. How far were Soviet people aware of the new threat posed by nuclear weapons in the late 1940s and 1950s? Did the advent of atomic weaponry shape their outlook on the contemporary world and on the future? Did the Cold War encourage pacifist sentiment (as with Krylov), or did it inspire robust patriotism, as the state hoped? And what role, if any, did religion play in all of this? Religion has often been considered a potential source of resistance to the communist regime, particularly for the early and late Soviet eras.⁷ Without adopting the notion of resistance per se, this article contributes to the existing literature by showing how the threat of a new kind of global conflict, whose scale and character were unknown, made scripture appealing for those seeking to ease their fears about the future. The article also explores how, in the context of the Cold War, the Soviet state responded in new and quite ambivalent ways.

The issues under consideration here have been explored very fully in the existing scholarship on the USSR’s nemesis: the USA. From August 1945, soon after Enola Gay dropped its load on Hiroshima, the media bombarded readers with images of the terrifying mushroom cloud, alongside poetry, jokes, and cartoons on the atomic theme; science fiction ‘accounts of a nuclear holocaust wiping out the entire population’ proliferated, with scenes of devastation far outstripping the destruction of which nuclear technology was yet capable.⁸ Although this

5 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 89745, l. 17.

6 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 89745, l. 19.

7 On various forms of resistance from within the Russian Orthodox tradition see for example: W.B. Husband, ‘Soviet Atheism and Russian Orthodox Strategies of Resistance, 1917–1932’, *Journal of Modern History*, 70, 1 (March 1998), 74–107; A. Beglov, *V poiskakh ‘bezgrezhykh katakomb’: tserkovnoe podpol’e v SSSR* (Moscow 2008); M.V. Shkarovskii, ‘The Russian Orthodox Church versus the State: The Josephite Movement, 1927–1940’, *Slavic Review*, 54, 2 (Summer 1995), 365–84. In the late Soviet period, contemporary observers often saw in church life opposition to the regime developing. See, for example: M. Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia: Protestant Opposition to Soviet Religious Policy* (London and New York, NY 1968); *Risen Indeed: Lessons in Faith from the USSR* (London 1983); W.C. Fletcher, *Soviet Charismatics: the Pentecostals in the USSR* (New York, NY 1985). Jane Ellis’ 1986 study of the Russian Orthodox Church pays significant attention to its role in the emergence of dissent from the 1970s on: J. Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: A Contemporary History* (London 1986). More recently, Emily Baran argues that in the case of Jehovah’s Witnesses at least, the concept of resistance is useful: ‘Witnesses’ activity illustrates the power of religion to motivate believers to resist, even if believers did not see it in these terms’. E. Baran, *Dissent on the Margins: How Soviet Jehovah’s Witnesses defied Communism and Lived to Preach about it* (New York, NY 2014), 7.

8 T. Garvey, ‘László Moholy-Nagy and Atomic Ambivalence in Post-War Chicago’, *American Art*, 14 (Fall 2000), 22–39 (36–7). Paul Boyer identifies the 20 August 1945 edition of *Life* as the moment when many Americans first encountered images of the mushroom cloud. P.S. Boyer, *By the Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill, NC 1994), 8. On the emerging nuclear culture, see also: S. Weart, *Nuclear Fear: A History of Images* (Cambridge, MA 1988); A.M. Winkler, *Life under a Cloud: American Anxiety about the Atom* (Urbana, IL 1999).

climate of fear and conjecture ebbed and flowed over the coming years, what Paul Boyer has called a 'nuclear consciousness' established itself as a key feature of the late 1940s and 1950s.⁹ Over these years the country also experienced a major religious revival, with evangelicalism and fundamentalism gaining significant ground, phenomena which many historians attribute, at least partially, to the Cold War's impact. Stephen Whitfield suggests that the popularity of evangelist Billy Graham's invocation of Armageddon (as well as his promise of redemption) was possible only in the atmosphere of 'dread and anxiety' generated by the new conflict.¹⁰ For pre-millennialists, nuclear war, or its threat, was evidence that the great tribulation was imminent; this kind of conjecture about the End Times – once the preserve of a minority – now took root in mainstream culture.¹¹ These cultural and spiritual shifts were encouraged by the country's political leaders, even if the latter did not always endorse the more apocalyptic visions.¹² On the international stage, Harry S. Truman sought to build an ecumenical alliance that would unite the democratic world against the godless communists. In 1948, the World Council of Churches – the interwar innovation of European and American Protestants horrified by the violence of the First World War and the rise of fascism – formally came into existence and, according to Dianne Kirby, Truman sought to incorporate it into his 'religious anti-communist front'.¹³ Kirby writes that the Cold War came to be perceived as 'one of history's great religious wars' because of the way western propaganda exploited 'the crusade concept, transforming containment into a morality play in which western civilization and Christianity were defended from the encroaches of a godless communism'.¹⁴

9 Boyer, *By the Bomb's*, xviii. More recent work cautions against overstressing the impact of the Cold War. See P. Kuznick and J. Gilbert (eds), *Rethinking Cold War Culture* (Washington, DC 2001).

10 S.J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD 1996), 77–82 (78). Paul Boyer notes that in 1950 Graham seemed to indicate that the end was coming within two years. See P. Boyer, 'The Growth of Fundamentalist Apocalyptic in the United States', in B. McGinn, J.J. Collins and S.J. Stein (eds), *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism* (New York, NY 2003), 516–44 (534). For an exploration of how Jehovah's Witnesses used the Book of Daniel to explain the Cold War, see Z. Knox, 'The Watch Tower Society and the End of the Cold War: Interpretations of the End-Times, Superpower Conflict, and the Changing Geo-Political Order', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 79, 4 (December 2011), 1018–49.

11 Boyer, 'The Growth of Fundamentalist Apocalyptic'; A.M. Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelism* (Oxford 2007). On Catholics, see T.A. Kselman and S. Avella, 'Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 72, 3 (July 1986), 403–24.

12 William Inboden suggests that at least at times, Harry Truman's perspective was predominantly post-millennial, for example. W. Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945–1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge 2008), 111.

13 D. Kirby, 'Harry Truman's Religious Legacy: The Holy Alliance, Containment and the Cold War' in Kirby (ed.), *Religion and the Cold War* (Basingstoke 2003), 77–102 (94); see also D. Kirby, 'From Bridge to Divide: East–West Relations and Christianity during the Second World War and Early Cold War', *International History Review*, 36, 4 (2014), 721–44; Canon J. Nurser, 'The "Ecumenical Movement" Churches, "Global Order," and Human Rights: 1938–1948', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 25, 4 (November 2003), 841–81; J. Gorry, *Cold War Christians and the Spectre of Nuclear Deterrence, 1945–1959* (Basingstoke 2013); J.P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York, NY and Oxford, 2011).

14 D. Kirby, 'Divinely Sanctioned: The Anglo-American Cold War Alliance and the Defence of Western Civilization and Christianity, 1945–48', *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, 3 (July 2000), 385–412.

Whilst there was certainly opposition to this use of their faith to bolster a militaristic agenda from a small Christian pacifist movement, and many presidential initiatives encountered opposition from church leaders, religion, very broadly defined, had undeniable potential for uniting the nation in opposition to its communist enemy and for giving meaning to fears about the destruction atomic technologies could unleash.¹⁵ In his history of religion and foreign relations in the USA, Andrew Preston suggests we adopt the concept of a 'religious Cold War' to complement the now widely used notion of a 'cultural Cold War'.¹⁶

In comparison with this rich scholarship on the USA, the literature on Soviet Cold War culture is rather less extensive. Indeed, as the musicologist Peter Schmelz has noted, it was once assumed that there was no 'Cold War culture' in the USSR.¹⁷ Over the last decade or so, several key studies have certainly challenged this perception covering topics that include, among others, cinema, music, childhood, domestic life and nuclear plants, some of them making explicit comparisons with the USA.¹⁸ Yet it is also the case that in the cultural and media forms sanctioned by the Soviet authorities, there were key silences and omissions. The iconic images of exploding bombs found in the West were absent from the pages of the Soviet press and the state actively discouraged reflection on the scale of devastation a nuclear conflict might bring.¹⁹ The Soviet media offered its own binary version of the conflict, but it was a sketchy one with little real explanation of what the atomic, and hydrogen, bomb meant in practice.²⁰ Instead, from the late 1940s, the press gave endless coverage to an international, communist-led, peace movement initially known as the Partisans of Peace and then

15 On the Peacemaker movement, see L. Danielson, "'It Is a Day of Judgment": The Peacemakers, Religion, and Radicalism in Cold War America', *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, 18, 2 (Summer 2008), 215–48. On the opposition of some Protestant leaders to certain presidential initiatives, see chapter 2, Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*.

16 A. Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York, NY 2012), 417.

17 Schmelz cites anthropologist, Nancy Ries, who wrote in 1997: 'The kind of consciousness of the nuclear arms race that from 1945 on inspired Western war fantasies and peace movements, and their thousands of cultural productions, had hardly taken place in Russia'. P. Schmelz, 'Alfred Schnittke's Nagasaki: Soviet Nuclear Culture, Radio Moscow, and the Global Cold War', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 62, 2 (Summer, 2009), 413–74 (413–14); N. Ries, *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation during Perestroika* (Ithaca, NY 1997), 7.

18 A. Shcherbenok 'Asymmetric Warfare: The Vision of the Enemy in American and Soviet Cold War Cinemas', *KinoKultura*, 28 (2010); Schmelz, 'Alfred Schnittke's Nagasaki'; M.E. Peacock, *Innocent Weapons: The Soviet and American Politics of Childhood in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC 2014); S. Reid, 'Cold War in the kitchen: Gender and the de-Stalinization of consumer taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev', *Slavic Review*, 61, 2 (Summer 2002), 211–52; S. Reid, "'Who Will Beat Whom?'" Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 9, 4 (2008), 855–904; K. Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (Oxford 2013).

19 On this, see M. Dobson, 'Building Peace, Fearing the Apocalypse? Nuclear Danger in Soviet Cold-War Culture', in M. Grant and B. Ziemann (eds), *Understanding the Imaginary War: Culture, Thought and Nuclear Conflict, 1945–90* (Manchester 2016), 51–74.

20 See, for example, *Krokodil* front covers on 30 April 1952, 30 November 1952, and 20 December 1952.

in 1950 renamed the World Peace Council, 'initiated and lavishly funded by the Kremlin'.²¹ The core message was that 'peace' was pursued by the Soviet Union, responsibility for the arms race lying squarely with the West. The WPC recruited a range of public luminaries from the communist bloc as well as fellow-travellers in the West, holding almost annual international congresses that were awarded endless pages of reportage in *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, peaking in 1950 with the issuing of the Stockholm Peace Appeal demanding 'the unconditional prohibition of the atomic weapon'.²² Soviet citizens were not to be passive bystanders in all of this, but were instead expected to support the campaign by attending meetings or signing petitions.²³ The regime thus wanted its citizens to be alert to, and concerned about, the international crisis, but it denounced fear as an emotion unworthy of Soviet people and gave the public little sense of how nuclear weapons actually changed the nature of warfare.²⁴ Although Stalin's successors proved more willing to acknowledge the danger posed by the advent of atomic weaponry, cultural representations of nuclear war remained largely taboo until almost the very end of the Soviet period. In this context, anxiety did not dissolve but found alternative, illicit modes of expression.

In this article, I begin by offering a vision of Soviet society in the late 1940s and 1950s that has much in common with Timothy Johnston's recent social history. His examination of the USSR in the war and its immediate aftermath suggests a community abuzz with hearsay, a society in which rumours rivalled the state media as people's main source of information. He also suggests that whilst the peace campaigns were highly effective in galvanizing society, individuals often articulated a subtly different conception of peace, expressing views that were essentially pacifist, and failing to adopt the official logic, whereby war might in fact be essential for securing the peace of the future.²⁵ This article also includes examination of anti-war sentiment of certain groups within society, but departs from Johnston's portrayal of Soviet life in one key way. According to Johnston's picture, the vibrant oral culture of the postwar years was essentially a secular one. In relation to the war rumours of 1945–7, he argues that the 'the apocalyptic language of religious protest, identified by [Lynne] Viola in the 1930s, had been supplanted by a more earthly day of reckoning for the Soviet government'.²⁶

21 L.S. Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement* (Stanford, CA 2009), 42.

22 Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb*, 24–8 (26). See also P. Deery, 'The Dove Flies East: Whitehall, Warsaw and the 1950 World Peace Congress', *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 48, 4 (December 2002), 449–68. On Soviet press coverage see Dobson, 'Building Peace'.

23 On the peace campaign's reception in the USSR, see T. Johnston, *Being Soviet: Identity, Rumour, and Everyday Life under Stalin, 1939–1953* (Oxford 2011), 127–67.

24 On the Soviet regime's attitude towards fear, see Dobson, 'Building Peace'. On the way other Cold War governments attempted to both cultivate and curtail fear, see F. Biess, "'Everybody Has a Chance": Civil Defense, Nuclear Angst, and the History of Emotions in Postwar Germany', *German History*, 27, 2 (2009), 215–43; J. Plamper, review of B. Greiner, C.T. Müller and D. Walter (eds), *Angst im Kalten Krieg* (Hamburg 2009), for H-Soz-Kult. Available at: <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2010-1-222> (accessed 7 October 2015).

25 Johnston, *Being Soviet*, 127–67.

26 T. Johnston, 'Subversive Tales? War Rumours in the Soviet Union, 1945–1947', in J. Fürst (ed.) *Late Stalinist Russia: Society Between Reconstruction and Reinvention* (London and New York, NY 2006), 62–78 (70).

In contrast, I use archival materials such as court files and official reports to uncover evidence of apocalyptic moods linked to fears of war. According to anthropologist Mariia Akhmetova, grassroots movements anticipating the End Times have historically appeared in moments of crisis, including the seventeenth century, the revolutionary epoch, and the 1990s.²⁷ Although at this juncture they did not consolidate into a significant religious movement, these apocalyptic moods embodied a vision that clashed with communist eschatology, and caused sufficient alarm to draw their putative authors in the wave of state repression that hit in the late 1940s.

The second half of the article turns to the state's attempt to build a patriotic campaign around the notion of peace, focusing in particular on its curious decision to involve religious organizations in the movement. Witnessing how the USA sought to harness Christian organizations, including the World Council of Churches, a leading figure in the governmental apparatus responsible for religious matters, I.V. Polianskii, suggested the USSR take a similar tack, fashioning its own 'ecumenical movement'. The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) would, of course, play the leading role: the Stalinist leadership had forged an alliance with the ROC from the mid-point of the war;²⁸ and this special relationship was to continue into the postwar period.²⁹ In the late 1940s, the international peace campaigns now offered the prime arena in which the ROC was expected to showcase its support for Soviet values, in addition to the financial contribution it was required to make to WPC funds.³⁰ Polianskii's proposed ecumenical movement required the involvement of religious organizations other than the ROC, however: the participation of leading Muslim, Jewish and Protestant figures, alongside Orthodox counterparts, in international peace events would – Polianskii's logic ran – convey the universal nature of support for the Soviet initiative and the tolerance of the atheist regime in allowing them a public presence. This attempt to orchestrate a religious dimension to the peace message was not unproblematic. Not only was it contested within some government circles, it placed high demands upon religious leaders who now had to comment on the international situation in terms that were both acceptable to the communist authorities and in keeping with the tenets of their own faith. Eschatological

27 M. Akhmetova, *Konets sveta v odnoy otedel'no vziatoi strane: religioznye soobshchestva postsovetskoi Rossii i ikh eskhatologicheskii mif* (Moscow 2010).

28 Some scholars explain the wartime alliance primarily in terms of international factors, particularly the government's desire to woo Western allies with evidence of its tolerance for religion. See D. Pospelovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia* (Crestwood, NY 1998), 286. In a recent article, Dianne Kirby suggests that both US and Soviet leaders were keen to exploit religion, arguing that Franklin Roosevelt and Stalin 'sought to make Christianity a bridge between East and West'. Kirby, 'From Bridge to Divide', 722. Steven Merritt Miner acknowledges these diplomatic motivations, but places greater emphasis on the Soviet government's use of the Russian Orthodox Church as an instrument of control in territories conquered in 1939-41 and then again after occupation, as well as in Eastern Europe. S. Merritt Miner, *Stalin's Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945* (Chapel Hill, NC 2003). On this see also: A. Dickinson, 'Domestic and Foreign Policy Considerations and the Origins of Post-War Soviet Church-State Relations, 1941-6', in Kirby (ed.), *Religion and the Cold War*, 23-36.

29 L.N. Leustean, 'Eastern Christianity and the Cold War: An Overview', in Leustean (ed.), *Eastern Christianity and the Cold War, 1945-91* (London 2010), 1-15.

30 Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, 271-4.

interpretations of the contemporary world that were criminalized when they appeared in the vernacular culture (examined in the first half of the article), now had to find forms that were acceptable to the Soviet state.

Fearing the prospect of renewed and even more devastating conflict, some individuals and groups used scripture to make sense of the contemporary world; in apocalyptic rumours and so-called 'holy letters'; in sermons preached at informal gatherings; and in petitions to the peace congresses penned by religious leaders. Conscious of the west's harnessing of religion, and the USA's definition of the Cold War in terms of religious crusade, the Soviet state took a bifurcated approach to these voices, outlawing some as 'anti-Soviet', but adopting, sculpting and publicizing others to add weight to their own international campaigns. After an initial examination of the religious resurgence of the 1940s and its relationship to the emerging Cold War, this article focuses on the treatment of Protestants during the final bout of Stalinist repression and the fury of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaigns. Protestants (in particular Baptists, Evangelical Christians and Pentecostals) demonstrate the state's dualistic approach particularly well. Along with other so-called 'sectarians', they were demonized as pacifists and prophets of the apocalypse, but – unlike Jehovah's Witnesses who were condemned outright as 'enemies of the state' – they were also employed symbolically as spokesmen for the Soviet version of 'peace'. Their story points to the fundamental difficulty the regime encountered as it fashioned its response to the Cold War, and in particular to the contested place of religious outlooks in both official and unofficial cultures faced with the prospect of a future conflict.

During the Second World War, the USSR witnessed a religious resurgence.³¹ Even before Stalin's meeting with the heads of the ROC in 1943, widespread expectations of a thaw in church-state relations emboldened many believers to gather for worship and prayer, and this grassroots activity only increased in the final two years of war.³² In occupied territories, with the atheist authorities temporarily out of sight, religious life was even more vibrant.³³ The revitalization of

31 For an official report which identified the war as the beginning of an alarming religious resurgence which continued into the postwar years, see GARF f. 6991, op. 3, d. 47, ll. 224–43. Key works of secondary literature which trace the religious growth of the war and postwar periods include Miner, *Stalin's Holy War*; M.V. Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' pri Staline i Khrushcheve: gosudarstvenno-tserkovnye otnosheniia v SSSR v 1939-1964 godakh* (Moscow 1999); T.A. Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodox from World War II to the Khrushchev Years*, ed. and transl. Edward E. Roslof (Armonk, NY and London 2002); D. Peris, "'God is Now on Our Side': The Religious Revival on Unoccupied Soviet Territory during World War II", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 1, 1 (Winter 2000), 97–118.

32 U. Huhn, "'Krasnye tserkvi" i "pechat' antikhrista". Tserkovnoe podpol'e, narodnoe pravoslavie i slukhi v kontekste religioznogo vrozozhdenia posle 1943g.', in I.V. Narskii (ed.) *Slukhi v Rossii XIX-XX vekov. Neofitsial'naia kommunikatsiia i "krutye povoroty" rossiiskoi istorii. Sbornik statei* (Cheliabinsk 2011), 276–88.

33 K.C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA 2004), 232–52.

congregational life during the war affected not only the Russian Orthodox, but also other denominations including Protestants.³⁴ As we shall see in more detail later, however, the state's new approach did not signal a straightforward relaxation, but instead entrenched a division between groups that were registered with the state, and those that escaped its oversight and control. Small followings sprang up around prophetic individuals, both men and women, within the Orthodox and evangelical traditions alike.³⁵ One practice that particularly alarmed the authorities was the exchange of rumours and texts predicting an imminent Judgement Day. Rather than dissipating, these apocalyptic moods seemed to intensify as cold-war tensions peaked in the late 1940s.

Anxiety about the future was perhaps inevitable in the wake of a war that had left such a trail of devastation and a peace that offered little reprieve. In 1946 famine took approximately two million lives and a generation of children developed chronic health problems as a result of malnutrition.³⁶ The Soviet media made no reference to this new trauma, but some kind of explanatory framework was evidently needed, and some people turned to the eschatological narratives offered in scripture. In Tambov region, for example, one local official working for the Council of Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC)³⁷ noted the growth of 'religious moods' following what he euphemistically called the 'crop failure' [*neurozhaï*], before commenting on the dissemination of 'holy letters'. He told his superiors in Moscow:

A large quantity of anonymous letters – which postmen jokingly call 'God's letters' [*pis'ma bozhie*] – have been delivered to the addresses of people living in cities... The content of the letters is the following: The antichrist has come, soon the world will end. People will face terrible misfortunes, disasters, and horrors. Only believers who have repented will be saved.

The recipient could save herself by passing the letter on to no fewer than 20 or 30 people.³⁸ As the decade progressed the impact of the famine declined, but fears of the End Times did not. In 1948, Metropolitan Veniamin of the ROC returned to

34 On the revival among Protestants, see T.K. Nikol'kaia, *Russkii protestantizm i gosudarstvennaia vlast'* (Saint Petersburg 2009), 120–2.

35 On the Orthodox church see Beglov, *V poiskakh*, 203–3. In a 1947 report Polianskii cited the case of an ECB congregation in the Omsk region that had invited so-called 'prophetesses-hysterical women' [*klikushy-prorochitsy*] to their prayer meeting and widely advertised their ability to predict the future in the village. See GARF f. 6991, op. 3, d. 47 l. 232. In the coming years, state officials would pay particular attention to what they considered the dangerous role of the prophetess within Pentecostal communities. See TsDAHOU f. 1, op. 24, d. 1572, l. 22, and l. 89–91; Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI) f. 17, op. 132, d. 497, ll. 72–3.

36 The figure of two million deaths in the years 1946–8 comes from historian V.F. Zima, cited in E. Zubkova, *Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945–1957* (Armonk, NY 1998), 47. On the effect of war on children's health, see J. Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-war Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford 2010), 34–6.

37 CARC was established in 1944; further details are given later in the article.

38 Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Tambovskoi oblasti (GATO), f. 5220, op. 3s, d. 9, l. 12.

the USSR from North America, where he had spent almost three decades. In a report composed for G.G. Karpov, Chairman of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (hereafter CAROC),³⁹ he laid out certain features of the religious situation in Latvia, the very first of which was the widespread nature of fears that the end of the world was nigh. 'This [idea], he wrote, "sometimes leads to pathological fanaticism, and even on occasion to madness".⁴⁰ In the same year, and at almost the other end of the Soviet Union, local officials in Altai region were reporting a similar trend. Amongst believers, it was alleged, anti-Soviet elements had recently spread rumours about the inevitability of war, using citations from the scriptures as evidence. One rumour claimed that if the USA and Turkey went to war against the USSR, Soviet power would dissolve: 'It is written in the scriptures that before the end of the world there will be three wars, after which there will be one king for the whole earth and this is what is happening'.⁴¹ In May 1950, reporting to M.A. Suslov, secretary of the party's Central Committee, Karpov himself observed that in February and May a wave of 'mass mysticism' involving the 'so-called "renewal"' (*obnovlenie*) of icons had swept through western regions of Belorussia. At the same time rumours claimed that a war would begin in 1950, a prediction based on the fact that the sum of the figures (1 + 9 + 5 + 0) came to 15, as had the fateful years of 1914 and 1941.⁴²

Like his colleague in Tambov three years earlier, Karpov reported on the dissemination of 'holy letters'. He included an example for his Central Committee readers:

The holy letter was recounted by a 12 year-old boy. Near the White Sea stood a man in a white robe [*riza*] and in front of him was written 'Do not forget the Lord God'.

Write this letter out nine times. He who does so will have joy within six days. One woman wrote it, but forgot to pass it on, and she received an incurable disease.

Pray to God twice a day. In the name of the father and the son and the holy spirit.⁴³ Amen.

Christ said: 'Half of the people will perish on the 12th June 1950 and on the 15th all the rivers and lakes will fill up [*napolniatsia*] and the sun will grow dim and will stop shining'.⁴⁴

This is a bleak vision of the future, offering believers little real sense that redemption was possible, for while the letter might help protect those who passed it on in this life (bringing happiness, preventing disease), there is no mention of what might

39 CAROC was established in 1943; further details are given later in the article.

40 RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 6, ll. 177–82.

41 RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 593, ll. 121–30.

42 RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 285, ll. 96–8.

43 Capitalization, or lack thereof, is preserved from the original report.

44 RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 285, ll. 96–8.

occur after 15 June. At almost the same time that Karpov submitted his memo, the department of propaganda and agitation also received a letter from a *Pravda* reporter based in Poltava region (Ukraine) who had found a 'holy letter' in her mailbox which she attributed to local 'sectarians'.⁴⁵ The letter was almost identical to the first, except for the ending which contained an explicit reference to a new world war and an allusion to the possibility of salvation, albeit brief: 'Christ himself said that on 12 June 1950 half the world will end. On 15 July there will be a world war and on 16th the sun will stop shining. People will recall the hours and the days, but by then it will be too late. Anyone who preserves this letter will be saved. Amen'.⁴⁶

While there is no explicit reference to the Cold War in either letter, it is suggestive that they make reference to 'half' the world, or 'half' the people, being destroyed, hinting at the bipolar dispositions encouraged by the international conflict; this contrasts to the Book of Revelations where devastation is repeatedly wreaked on a third, rather than a half, of the world.⁴⁷ Both letters offer concrete prophecy: Judgment Day is not some distant date but predicted to happen that very summer. According to official reports, apocalyptic fears seemed to continue rising into the fall of 1950. In a subsequent report, Karpov informed his readers that in Voronezh region some collective and state farms' work had been seriously disrupted as people began to prepare for the end of the world.⁴⁸

Neither the practice of writing and disseminating letters, nor the eschatological frameworks they deployed, were new of course.⁴⁹ Canonical Orthodox teaching may have been, in the words of Leonid Heretz, 'reticent on the time and indications of the Second Coming', but popular religion had long developed its own 'folk eschatology':⁵⁰ the darkening sun which appears in the 1950s holy letters drew on centuries-old Russian folk tradition.⁵¹ Indeed, the writing of holy letters was

45 RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 285, ll. 39–41 (39).

46 RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 285, l. 43.

47 The devastation of the natural world which follows the breaking of the seventh seal, including the sun and the moon turning dark, are to be found in the Book of Revelations, chapter 8. Here it is a third rather than a half of the world that is destroyed. For example, in verse 7: 'A third of the earth was burnt, a third of the trees were burnt, all the green grass was burnt'. In verse 12: 'The fourth angel blew his trumpet; and a third part of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that the third part went dark and a third of the light of the day failed, and of the night'.

48 RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 285, ll. 198–9.

49 On the history of 'texts as amulets' see W.F. Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight: Magic in Russia* (Stroud 1999), 293–308. On 'letters from heaven', particularly in Eastern European history, see A. Zayarnyuk, 'Letters from heaven: an encounter between the "national movement" and "popular culture"', in J.-P. Himka and Zayarnyuk (eds), *Letters from Heaven: Popular Religion in Russia and Ukraine* (Toronto 2006), 165–200.

50 L. Heretz, *Russia on the Eve of Modernity: Popular Religion and Traditional Culture under the Last Tsars* (Cambridge 2008), 103–4. Andrew Louth notes that in Eastern Orthodox eschatology the emphasis is primarily on 'the resurrection of Christ, the ultimate fount of all Christian hope'. A. Louth, 'Eastern Orthodox Eschatology', in J.L. Walls (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (New York, NY 2008), 233–48 (233).

51 Revelations 6:12. In the *Golubinnaia Kniga*, described by W.F. Ryan as 'that curious seventeenth-century compendium of popular cosmological and eschatological beliefs in the form of a "spiritual verse"', we find two poems which describe the darkening sun as omen of the End Times. See L.F. Soloshchenko and I.S. Prokoshina (eds), *Golubinnaia kniga. Russkie narodnye dukhovnye stikhi XI-XIX vekov* (Moscow 1991), 249 and 256; Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight*, 73.

itself a long-established practice, and one that – like fears of the End Times – cut across denominational boundaries.⁵² Yet their reappearance and re-working in the late 1940s is indicative of a new climate of anxiety, particularly given the imminence of the End Times they predicted.⁵³ Stephen Smith has recently explored how various religious practices, including the production of ‘heavenly letters’, survived the Bolshevik revolution not so much as vestiges of the past (the ‘*perezhitki*’ the Bolsheviks so persistently lamented), but as ‘re-energized’ elements of Soviet culture. Smith argues that the greater distribution of such letters at the end of the 1920s, and a groundswell of prophetic tales on the brink of war in 1940, is evidence that they flourish not in moments of ‘massive social dislocation itself – violent collectivization or Nazi invasion – but during the period *just prior* to the onset of disaster – that is, to the period when a threat loomed, yet when it still seemed possible to avert it’.⁵⁴ According to Smith, the purpose of the chain letter was to create a new epistolary community and, in promising ‘divine protection to transcribers’, to allay anxiety; they are not a call for arms but an invitation to ‘prepare for the Last Times’ through increased piety.⁵⁵ Following this interpretation, it is perhaps not so surprising that the start of the Cold War – a war which hovered on the horizon, menacing but unconsummated, generating anxiety but not requiring action – led to a resurgence of the holy letters. In a world where the possibility of universal destruction was hinted at but not expressed, where the danger was everywhere and nowhere, this surely felt like a pre-catastrophe moment. The wave of letter-writing thus points to a fear that some greater disaster was near. Certainly, in the second of the two texts cited above, the author is clear what this disaster was: a new world war.

The regime read into the exchange of rumours and letters that flourished in 1950 – as the proxy war in Korea unfurled and the peace campaigns reached a peak in intensity – a response to contemporary political events, and a response quite different in nature from the patriotic endorsement it had hoped to cultivate. Faced with a renascent religious culture, characterized at least in places by a fear of impending conflict, the authorities took an increasingly punitive approach to those who participated, as it did in many areas of Soviet life by the end of the 1940s. But even though the phenomena described here crossed denominational boundaries, and indeed were most commonly described by officials responsible for monitoring Orthodox life, it was those deemed religious outsiders who bore

52 A.A. Panchenko, *Khristovshchina i skopchestvo: fol'klor i traditsionnaia kul'tura russkikh misticheskikh sekt* (Moscow 2002), 344. See also A.A. Panchenko, “‘Magicheskoe pis'mo’ i izuchenie religioznogo fol'klora”, *Antroplogiia religioznosti* (St Petersburg 1998), 175–216.

53 These letters are much shorter than those analysed by Andriy Zayarnyuk in his examination of ‘letters from heaven’ in late nineteenth-century Galicia. They are also characterized by a much greater sense of urgency. Zayarnyuk, ‘Letters from heaven’.

54 Steven Smit [Steve Smith], ‘Nebesnye pis'ma i rasskazy o lese: “sueveriiia” protiv bol'shevizma’, *Antropologicheskii forum*, 3 (2005), 280–306 (296).

55 In this regard, Smith’s interpretation of holy letters differs from Lynne Viola’s analysis of rumours circulating during the period of collectivization itself. She suggests that the apocalypse provided peasants with a ‘vocabulary of rebellion’. L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York, NY 1996), 55–61 (55). See also N. Werth, ‘Rumeurs défaitistes et apocalyptiques dans l’URSS des années 1920 et 1930’, *Vingtième Siècle*, 71, 1 (2001): 25–35.

the brunt of the blame: the *Pravda* journalist who attributed authorship of the holy letter she received to local ‘sectarians’ was hardly alone. As we shall now see, the wave of repression against ‘religious anti-Soviet elements’ was particularly severe for those adhering to non-Orthodox traditions. This attack on the ‘sectarian’ was an approach which had pre-revolutionary roots but gained new prominence and severity as the Cold War escalated.

In Imperial Russia, the ‘sectarian’ had already received a great deal of attention not only from the state, but also from the Orthodox church and the intelligentsia. Groups that emerged over the course of the eighteenth century – the dancing, whirling *khlysty*, the self-castrated *skoptsy*, the pacifist Molokans and Dukhobors – were perceived as threats to ‘social order’ by the government.⁵⁶ Socialists often took a different stance: from the Populists to the Bolsheviks, there was a tradition of seeing the ‘sectarian’ as a possible ally, his non-conformity a form of social protest against the imperial regime.⁵⁷ Both those attracted to, and those repulsed by, the ‘sectarian’ were fixated with the unusual forms of worship and ritual such groups were alleged to practise, especially concerning their sexual customs.⁵⁸ When communities began to form under the influence of Protestant teaching in the late nineteenth century, ‘Evangelical Christians’ and Baptists (hereafter ECBs) were also grouped under the (pejorative) term ‘sectarian’.⁵⁹ In the following decades the ranks of the ‘sectarian’ were further enlarged and diversified by the arrival of Pentecostalism and, with the annexation of new eastern-European territories during the Second World War, Jehovah’s Witnesses.⁶⁰

Despite some initial overtures to the ‘sectarians’, Soviet anti-religious policy shows the Bolsheviks’ earlier sympathies were not sustained: the 1930s were a bloody decade for both Orthodox and ‘sectarian’ believers alike.⁶¹ From the mid-point of the war the government took a less hostile tack, seeing to create some kind of legitimate space for religious worship, albeit one that it could supervise and regulate. With this aim, two new bodies were created in 1943–4: the

56 L. Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom: A Russian Folktale* (Ithaca, NY 1999), 51. Nicholas Breyfogle speaks of the nineteenth-century exile of Molokans and Dukhobors as a form of ‘communal isolation’ intended to prevent ‘heretical “infection” of Orthodox subjects’. N.B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia’s Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca, NY 2005), 2.

57 A. Etkind, ‘Whirling with the Other: Russian Populism and Religious Sects’, *Russian Review*, 62, 4 (October 2003), 565–88. For a Soviet explanation of the pre-revolutionary Social Democrats’ interest of the sectarian, see A.I. Klibanov, E. Dunn (trans), S.P. Dunn (ed.), *History of Religious Sectarism in Russia (1860s–1917)* (Oxford 1982), 1–14. On the role of the Old Bolshevik Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич, a specialist on the ‘sectarian’, see also Engelstein, *Castration*, and A. Etkind, *Khlyst: sekty, literatura i revoliutsiia* (Moscow 1998).

58 Etkind, *Khlyst*. See also O.I. Panych, ‘Mif pro baptystiv u radians’komu suspil’stvi 1950–1980-kh rr.: marnovirstvo i propaganda’, *Ukrains’kyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, 2011 (May–June), 121–40.

59 H.J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905–1929* (Bloomington, IL 2005), 100–4.

60 Baran, *Dissent on the Margins*, 14–30.

61 A.I. Savin, ‘Repressii v otnoshenii evangel’skikh veruiushchikh v khode ‘kulatskoi operatsii’’, in M. Lunge, B. Bonvech and R. Binner (eds), *Stalinizm v sovetской provintsii: 1937–1938 gg. : massovaiia operatsiia na osnove prikaza 00447* (Moscow, 2009), 303–42.

Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (CAROC) and the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC) for other Christian denominations and other faiths. CAROC and CARC deployed plenipotentiaries across the country with the task of monitoring religious life. At the same time, the creation of Moscow-based religious organizations (such as the 'All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists', hereafter AUCECB) aided ecclesiastical centralization. These measures, along with the attempt to register large numbers of religious groups, gave believers greater freedom in some regards, but it also made them more visible and accountable to the authorities. The new approach adopted in the years 1944–7 did not signal, moreover, a conclusive end to religious persecution. And when a new wave of repression was unleashed, certain 'sectarian' groups were targeted disproportionately.

Internal correspondence between the leadership of CARC and the party's Central Committee shows how and why the wartime reprieve was so quickly reversed. The year 1947 witnessed a significant shift, with two clear positions emerging: on the one hand, CARC defended the new more lenient approach, while on the other members of the Central Committee raised doubts about the loyalty of certain religious groups.⁶² Following an extended exchange of views, in the summer of 1947, Stalin signed a decree meant to strengthen CARC and to provide better conditions for its plenipotentiaries, but which also introduced a bifurcated policy: registration for Old Believers, Muslims, Buddhists and the Armenian Apostolic Church was to continue in areas where they lacked prayer houses, while petitions for registrations coming from Roman Catholic, Jewish, Lutheran, and 'sectarian' congregations were only to be approved in 'highly exceptional circumstances'. The Cold War leaves a clear imprint here: religious communities associated with capitalist countries saw their opportunities for registration dramatically scaled back, while those without such links were protected. (The ROC did come under attack albeit a little later, primarily in late 1948 and early 1949, but in May 1949 Stalin personally intervened to halt an out-and-out campaign.)⁶³ The decree also recommended reducing the number of existing prayer houses, 'especially sectarian ones'.⁶⁴

The vilification of the 'sectarian' is reflected in the increasing numbers of arrests. O.B. Mozokhin's archival research into the workings of the extra-judiciary organs provides a breakdown of arrests according to the 'nature of the charge' [*okraski otcheta*].⁶⁵ According to his figures, the number of those apprehended by

62 RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 506.

63 Chumachenko, *Church and State*, 94–101.

64 RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 506, ll. 183–4.

65 In general, precise figures are hard to come by given that convictions were under general articles (for example, article 58/10 'Anti-Soviet Agitation and Propaganda'), rather than ones specific to religious activity. Mozokhin's work is unusual in trying to disaggregate the different reasons given for arrest. See O.B. Mozokhin, *Pravo na repressii: Vnesudebnye polnomochiia organov gosudastvennoi bezopastnosti (1918–1953)* (Moscow 2006), 363–465. They are also presented, and discussed, in Savin, 'Repressii v otnoshenii evangel'skikh veruiushchikh'.

the Ministry of State Security (MGB) as ‘religious anti-Soviet elements’ jumped significantly in 1949, with over 3000 cases per year in 1949, 1950 and 1951 (compared to under 2000 arrests in 1945). Mozokhin’s figures suggest that the ‘sectarian’ was disproportionately targeted, and increasingly so: the percentage of ‘sectarians’ within the category of ‘religious anti-Soviet elements’ was 50 per cent in 1945, rising to 72 per cent in 1952.⁶⁶ Records from the Soviet Procuracy, the judicial body responsible for reviewing sentencing practices, paint a similar picture: at the end of the Stalin era, Baptists, Evangelical Christians, Pentecostals and (unsurprisingly) Jehovah’s Witnesses were finding themselves charged under article 58/10 – anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda – rather more commonly than their Orthodox counterparts.⁶⁷ According to the indictments made against them, they used scripture to both predict and condemn a looming war. While many aspects of the charges can be read as fantasies about what the sectarian did and said, they required some grounding in actual religious practices and beliefs, however tenuous, to make them convincing texts. In addition to their potential affinities with fellow believers overseas, two aspects of the evangelical tradition helped to give the charges a veneer of veracity: the tradition of pacifism and the tendency towards pre-millennial dispositions (that is, their expectation of a period of conflict and strife prior to Christ’s second coming).

Let us begin with a case from Riazan’ which blends political charges germane to the Cold War (pacifism and pro-Americanism), with long-established notions of the depraved behaviour of the sectarian. According to the charges, a woman born in 1900 stood accused of organizing a Pentecostal group in the immediate postwar years; alongside her in the dock were the two men whom she had recruited as preacher and prophet. All three were charged with praising various un-Soviet phenomena (pre-revolutionary Russia, the life of believers in the USA, and the German occupation during the Second World War), as well as spreading rumours of an impending war, the defeat of Soviet power, and the salvation of all believers. During this war, they allegedly said, believers should fire into the air, as shooting the enemy was a sin.⁶⁸ Although at the time such cases were not reported in the press, this woman later appeared in an anti-religious tract which claimed that, in addition to the ‘wild habits’ of the Pentecostals, she brought her

66 It is not entirely clear what is included in the category ‘sectarian’, though it is worth noting that the Orthodox *dukhovenstvo*, Lutherans, Muslims, Buddhists, Catholics, Uniates and Jewish religious leaders are listed separately from 1948 (*Pravo na repressii*, 392).

67 For cases reviewed in 1953, many of them relating to incidents that allegedly occurred in the late 1940s or early 1950s, those involving members of Pentecostal and ECB congregations exceeded those identified as Orthodox. The most well-represented denomination is the Jehovah’s Witnesses. These findings are drawn from 900-page book compiled by researchers at GARF which offers summaries of cases relating to 4855 men and women charged under article 58/10, or its successor article 190, between 1953 and 1991 approximately 60 per cent of those charged. The materials are drawn from the archives of the USSR Procuracy’s ‘department for oversight of investigations by state security’. V.A. Kozlov and S.V. Mironenko (eds), O.V. Edel’man (compiler), *58/10 Nadzornye proizvodstva prokuratury SSSR po delam ob antisovetskoi agitatsii i propogande: annotirovannyi katalog mart 1953–1991* (Moscow 1999).

68 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 47273.

own innovations, making believers crawl behind her on their knees and blowing into their mouths.⁶⁹ This accretion of disparate allegations was typical of Stalinist criminal justice, as if the very diffuseness of the charges somehow endowed them with an aura of truth. Charges against other Pentecostals contained a similar melding of the religious and the political, with prophesy, wild prayer, and the refusal to bear arms regular offences.⁷⁰ Three ‘evangelist-baptists’ found themselves – like the Riazan’ Pentecostals – facing a whole raft of accusations: praising life in pre-revolutionary Russia, spreading rumours about the disbandment of collective farms, saying ‘Heil Hitler’, listening to Voice of America, predicting a war with the USA and refusing to bear arms. Interestingly, in his petition letter, one of the defendants denied all the charges except for the latter.⁷¹ In the same year, a Baptist who belonged to a registered ECB congregation was sentenced to 25 years because, as he explained in his subsequent petition letter, he had refused to participate in military training in early 1953.⁷² Alongside the charges of foreign allegiance, pacifism was the cornerstone of many indictments.

In other cases, expectation that Christ’s second coming was imminent – and would be preceded by a period of conflict and suffering – was used to cast the believer as an opponent of Soviet progress. One elderly collective farmer from Iaroslav region was accused of leading an illegal sect of Evangelical Christians from 1949 to 1952. According to witness statements, some of them provided by young city girls billeted with him while helping with the harvest, he had also criticized Soviet agricultural policy, used scripture to predict an imminent world war, and announced the coming of the Anti-Christ.⁷³ A group of Ukrainian evangelicals – whether they were Baptist or Pentecostal is unclear – stood trial in Uzbekistan. Local procurators maintained: ‘At their meetings, they preached that the “end of the world” is coming, that inevitably “life will perish”, that the Soviet people “must perish”, and that God will destroy Soviet power with an inextinguishable fire.’⁷⁴ In Kirovabad in Azerbaijan, two Pentecostals were accused of scaring members of their ‘sect’ with references to the ‘end of the world’ and the judgement facing un-believers.⁷⁵ On the most western fringes of Ukraine, eight members of a ‘Sabbath Pentecostal’⁷⁶ group had conducted missionary work in a number of villages, it was alleged, warning people that at Judgement Day non-believers would be destroyed and not only Soviet rule, but all earthly powers, would be annihilated, leaving God to reign for eternity.⁷⁷

69 E. Tsvetogorov, *Sektanty i chto oni propoveduiut* (Novosibirsk 1960), 60.

70 See for example, GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46115, ll 3–6.

71 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 61302, especially l. 34.

72 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 47431.

73 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 38166.

74 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 44594, l. 6.

75 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43671.

76 The ‘subbotsvuiushchie’ were Pentecostals who worshipped on a Saturday. According to T.K. Nikol’skaia, they emerged in the Zakarpats’ka region before the Second World War when it was under Polish rule. T.K. Nikol’skaia, “Avgustovskoe soglashenie.” i pozitsii piatidesiatnikov v 40-50-kh. gg. XX v., *Gosudarstvo, Religii, Tserkov’ v Rossii i za rubezhom*, 2010 (no. 4), 124–33 (127–8).

77 GARF f. 8131, op 31, d. 65445, ll. 5–10.

In the context of a society based on Marxist-Leninist doctrine, prediction of the End Times could all too easily be read as an assault on the Revolution's promise to create a 'shining future'. In a number of cases, investigators claimed that defendants, inspired by the Book of Revelations, not only prophesied the coming of the antichrist but even identified Lenin or Stalin as his embodiment. Let us take the example of an evangelical woman, A.E. Tsvetkova, originally from a Ukrainian village, who lived in the postwar period in the Sakhalin region, working from home as a licensed dressmaker.⁷⁸ According to witness statements, she held gatherings where she read from the Bible and explained passages, saying

there will be drought, hunger, disease and people will beg God to let them die, but they won't die, just carry on suffering. Soon the sun will turn dark, and the moon will turn to blood, the devil will blow smoke which will burn with flames. This will happen because people disrespected God.⁷⁹

Another witness claimed Tsvetkova said: 'The first devil has been, and died, and now the second is carrying out the dragon's affairs'.⁸⁰ Another case from 1953 involved Elena Tarasova, a native of Mogilev. A member of a Pentecostal sect from 1947, she allegedly refused to participate in elections, advised her son and others to refuse military service, and praised capitalist countries. In December 1952, she wrote two letters addressed to the World Peace Council. In one letter, she directed her reader to various verses from the Book of Revelations in which she identified the two beasts as Lenin and Stalin.⁸¹ Her second letter was more prosaic: 'There are rumours', she wrote, 'that the American government has set aside 100 million dollars to save people who are not subject to humane law. I beg you not to refuse me and to include me amongst those resettled [*pereselentsy*]'.⁸²

What is striking about this last case is that the believer addressed her concerns to the World Peace Council. Its political role was apparently oblique to her and she imagined it as an external institution that might, alongside the US government, choose to intervene in Soviet life to save her. The WPC appears in another case; here the harmonious future promised by the peace movement was described as an illusion masking the true desolation the world found itself in. The case concerned four men and two women living in a Novosibirsk village – all but one of them exiles or former convicts – who were sentenced to 25 years' corrective labour under article 58 in 1953.⁸³ Sergei Potapov was accused of having set up an anti-Soviet cell under

78 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 42255, l. 12. Her court records suggest there was an earlier three-year sentence in 1939 under article 143 of the Ukrainian criminal code.

79 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 42255, l. 7.

80 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 42255, l. 8.

81 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 42255, l. 14.

82 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 56263, ll. 21–3.

83 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 54597, l. 9.

the ‘cover of an ‘evangelical-baptist group’, and more specifically, of predicting the imminent end of Soviet power.⁸⁴ One of his co-defendants allegedly testified in court:

I used to say that people greet each other ‘peace to the world’ [*mir miru*] but in fact there will be a great war . . . the lord god will come and there will be a great judgment. I said that in the Soviet Union they talk about freedom of speech and of religion, but in fact it’s not like that, and the whole world is full of evil [*lezhit v zle*].⁸⁵

‘Peace to the world’ was how the writer Il’ia Erenburg had finished his speech to the World Congress of Partisans for Peace in 1949 and the slogan had been used widely during the gathering of signatures for the Stockholm petition in 1950.⁸⁶ Here the believer condemns the false rhetoric of the peace campaigns and predicts instead war and judgement. Despite their different understandings of what the international peace movement stood for, the cases of Potapov and Tarasova suggest the campaigns had penetrated deep into remote corners of the Soviet Union, but with meanings far removed from those anticipated by the authorities: they did not reassure believers but fed into fears of an impending crisis.

In describing the above cases, the words ‘alleged’, ‘accused’ and ‘apparently’ have been interjected into almost every sentence. The cases are products of the late Stalinist era, a time when fabricated witness statements and forced confessions were commonplace. As the work of Hiroaki Kuromiya amply demonstrates, we should treat the files of the Stalinist criminal justice system with great wariness; in the trial of Reformed Adventists that forms the centre-piece of his microhistory, he finds that all of the charges laid were misrepresentation and fabrication.⁸⁷ Reflections on scripture were often twisted beyond recognition, of course, and we should not read them as accurate reports on what the accused said or did. But even if epistemological caution prevails, we can see in the indictments laid against the ‘sectarian’ the authorities’ attempts to isolate and exoticize certain practices and beliefs. Faced with a religious resurgence they wanted to explain, neuter, and suppress, and by the threat of nuclear war they refused to fully acknowledge, the Soviet authorities found in Protestants’ pacifism and pre-millennialism—however marginal and benign within the denomination—handy tools for transforming them into a despised fifth column.

Yet Protestants were never criminalized en masse as was the fate of the Jehovah’s Witnesses.⁸⁸ Despite the undesirable characteristics of their faith, and their potential sympathies with believers in the capitalist world, Protestant church leaders were not prevented from enlisting in the public performance of peace, as we shall now see. It did, however, make their participation in the campaigns controversial at the highest echelons of power. It also saddled church leaders with the

84 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 54597, l. 10.

85 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 54597, l. 13.

86 Il’ia Erenburg, *Za mir!* (Moscow 1950), 106.

87 H. Kuromiya, *Conscience on Trial: The Fate of Fourteen Pacifists in Stalin’s Ukraine, 1952–1953* (Toronto 2012).

88 Baran, *Dissent on the Margins*, 44–69.

difficult task of commenting on cold-war hostilities in terms that were acceptable to both their atheist master and to their Christian, and in some quarters pacifist, followers.

Let us return to the pivotal year of 1947 and the exchange of memos between the leaders of CARC and the party's Central Committee (CC). This correspondence reveals the conflicting perspectives that emerged with the onset of the Cold War as leading government figures sought to weigh up the pros and cons of allowing religious groups a public presence. Writing to the CC on 1 July 1947, I.V. Polianskii, chair of CARC, began by asserting that the defeat of fascism had led to a renewal of reactionary forces, particularly Christianity. This had resulted in an ecumenical movement opposed to communism, he said. Expressing alarm about western attempts to 'politicize religious activity', Polianskii suggested it would be desirable for the Soviet Union to create its own 'ecumenical movement' under the aegis of the Russian Orthodox Church. Other religious organizations would participate and would be encouraged to develop closer ties between themselves, he said.⁸⁹ Of these religious organizations, the Protestant one – the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (which included Pentecostals) – was the largest.⁹⁰ It also presented particular challenges for the Soviet state despite the commitment of its leaders – many of whom had personally experienced Stalinist repression – to proving their loyalty to the state in order to ensure the church's survival.⁹¹

From the outset, a patriotic note was struck in *Bratskii vestnik* [*Fraternal Bulletin*], the official AUCECB journal which reported on key developments in the organization's work as well as offering readers regular theological articles and sermons. In its very first edition, an editorial from Ia.I. Zhidkov, chair of the AUCECB, praised the new unity of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, and warned readers they would find the word 'rodina' (motherland) many times in the coming pages; faith and patriotism are not in conflict, he said, reminding readers of Jesus' own love for his native Israel. Zhidkov spelt out the implications of this patriotic love very clearly: believers must obey the laws and decrees of their government and should carry out military service. He wrote: 'To be a warrior like the centurion from Capernaum (Matthew 8: 5–10) or the centurion Cornelius from Caesarea (Acts of the Apostles 10: 1–2) should be the genuine desire of every Christian warrior'.⁹² Under state pressure, both the Baptist and Evangelical Christian Unions had repudiated the pacifist tradition in the 1920s and now, in

89 RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 506, l. 110 and l. 118.

90 In terms of the number of registered congregations, at the beginning of 1946 the AUCECB – with its 1429 registered prayer houses – was the largest denomination under CARC's auspices, with the exception of the Greek Catholic Church (GARF f. 6991, op. 4, d. 194, l. 1). In the spring of 1946 Greek Catholics were forcibly made to join the Russian Orthodox Church. By the beginning of 1947, there were 2669 AUCECB registered prayer houses (RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 506, l. 33).

91 See the biographies of I.A. Zhidkov (incarcerated 1938–42) and A.V. Karev (incarcerated 1935–40) in S.N. Savinskii, *Istoriia evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov Ukrainy, Rossii, Belorussii, Ch. II: (1917–1967)* (St. Petersburg 2001), 377, 379.

92 'Khristianin i rodina', *Bratskii vestnik*, 1945, no. 1.

their revived and amalgamated incarnation as the AUCECB, leaders again told believers that a refusal to bear arms was alien to their faith.⁹³ The AUCECB leadership also tended to say little on the subject of eschatology, even though a premillennial disposition had been brought to Russian Protestantism from British evangelical writings.⁹⁴

For Polianskii and his colleagues, there was much to be praised in the AUCECB's initial work. CARC's internal memos did not deny that the evangelical communities presented particular problems for the Soviet state (the church's inclination towards 'anarchy', its commitment to proselytism, and of course pacifist traditions), but – at least in the early postwar period – they tended to depict its members as being, by and large, patriotic citizens. They noted that for the most part ECB believers completed their military service and that many had fought in the war.⁹⁵ CARC also stressed the key role their leaders were playing: at home, they provided the kind of hierarchy and centralization hitherto missing; internationally, they advertised Soviet religious freedoms, as the 1946 visit of Louie Newton, President of the South Baptist Convention, seemed to demonstrate.⁹⁶ By June 1947, however, the Central Committee denounced Polianskii's views as simply 'naïve' and criticized CARC for failing to see that the Evangelical Christians-Baptist 'sect' – note the wording – was 'able to adroitly adapt itself to new conditions and hide its true face', language typical of Stalinist rhetoric towards perceived enemies. Central Committee memos noted censoriously that the Evangelical Christians-Baptist communities were the only religious group still growing and that their methods of recruitment were illegal ones; they criticized *Bratskii vestnik* for trying to claim it was the sole guide to morality in the USSR; and they denounced the leaders of the Baptist World Alliance as 'the faithful servants of Anglo-American capital'.⁹⁷ With time, the head of CARC, Polianskii became more cautious too, though he still maintained that the religious organizations (such as

93 W. Sawatsky, 'Patsifisty-protestanty v Sovetskoï Rossii mezhdû dvumia mirovymi voïnami', in P. Brock (ed.) *Dolgiĭ put' rossiiskogo patsifizma: Ideal mezhdunarodnogo i vnutrennego mira v religiozno-filosofskoi i obshchestvenno-politicheskoï mysli Rossii* (Moscow 1997), 262–84; T. Pavlova, 'Hundred Years of Russian Pacifism', *Journal of Human Values*, 5 (October 1999), 147–155. Nikol'kaia, *Russkii protestantizm*, 47, 86; Coleman, *Russian Baptists*, 120–1, 180–97.

94 This point is made by both Walter Sawatsky and Alexander Popov. W. Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener, Ontario and Scottsdale, PA 1981), 340–4; A. Popov, 'The Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the Soviet Union as a hermeneutical community: examining the identity of the All-Union Council of the ECB (AUCECB) through the way the Bible was used in its publications', unpublished thesis, University of Wales and Prague International Baptist Theological Seminary (2010), 158–9.

95 RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 506, l. 19; see another CARC report from 1947: RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 498, l. 119.

96 See the glowing report on the religious freedom he had witnessed during his time in the Soviet Union: L.D. Newton, *An American Churchman in the Soviet Union* (New York, NY 1946). His writings seem to have caused a stir among US readers, with both positive and negative reactions: GARF f. 5283, op. 14, d. 425. On the other visits received by the AUCECB in these early postwar years see GARF f. 6991, op. 4, d. 6, l. 185. For CARC commentary on these international ties, see: RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 506, l. 17–22; RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 506, ll. 26–65.

97 RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 506, ll. 23–5. A further memo critical of CARC was sent by D. Shepilov to M. A. Suslov, Central Committee secretary: RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 506, ll. 134–5.

the AUCECB) were the best form of control over religious life and that an ecumenical movement was viable and beneficial.⁹⁸ Ultimately CARC was successful in defending itself and the religious organizations overseen by CARC survived. For a time, however, the international role these organizations were to play was more ambiguous. The decree of July 1947 recommended that the Armenian Apostolic Church and Muslim organizations should be encouraged to widen their international ties and help 'propagandize' the freedom of religion which existed in the USSR, but the extent to which other groups, including the AUCECB, were to cultivate links overseas would 'depend on the concrete conditions of the moment'.⁹⁹

This rather equivocal instruction inevitably bred uncertainty. Without doubt, the international profile of the AUCECB was temporarily curtailed: between November 1947 and May 1950, for example, no foreign visitors were officially received at the Moscow Central Baptist Church.¹⁰⁰ And as the peace movement developed momentum in 1949 and 1950, Protestant leaders were not involved. In April 1949, Polianskii contacted D.T. Shepilov at the Central Committee's Propaganda and Agitation Department informing him that in the run-up to the World Congress of Partisans for Peace to be held in Paris that month he was receiving requests from various religious organizations, including the AUCECB, asking for their 'Appeals in Defence of Peace' to be published in the press. Polianskii explained that although he did not object to what he called 'patriotic documents', he did not support their publication, with the exception of an appeal he had received from the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church.¹⁰¹ Shepilov advised against publication in all cases.¹⁰² At this early stage of the peace campaigns, therefore, only the Russian Orthodox Church seemed to have an assured role.¹⁰³

Very gradually, nonetheless, the ecumenical movement got underway, and AUCECB leaders made their way onto the international stage alongside other faith leaders. Official visits from foreign visitors re-commenced in May 1950.¹⁰⁴ In October 1950, Zhidkov attended the 'partisans of peace' congress held in Moscow and spoke on the radio, telling listeners that Evangelical Christians-Baptists were not only praying for peace but actively taking part in the struggle to achieve it.¹⁰⁵ In May 1952, he was invited to a conference bringing together all churches and religious organizations in the USSR to pursue the peace cause.

98 RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 506, ll. 110-118 and ll. 144-63.

99 RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 506, l. 184.

100 GARF f. 6991, op. 4, d. 6, ll. 185-6.

101 RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 109, ll. 57-58: letter from Polianskii to the Central Committee on 8 April 1949.

102 RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 109, l. 66.

103 For press coverage of the Russian Orthodox Church presence in Paris, see: 'Predstaviteli Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi na Vsemirniĭ kongress storonnikov mira', *Izvestiia* (12 April 1949), 4; 'Rech' mitropolita Krutitskogo i Kolomenskogo Nikolaia', *Izvestiia* (24 April 1949), 3.

104 GARF f. 6991, op. 4, d. 6, l. 185.

105 'Uchastie evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov SSSR v dele zashchity mira', *Bratskii vestnik*, 1953, no. 1.

A *Pravda* article recounted how participants had discussed Metropolitan Nikolai's lecture, entitled 'The Church together with the People in the Struggle for Peace'; first on the roster of participants was Zhidkov, followed by Jewish, Muslim, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Buddhist representatives.¹⁰⁶

The inclusion of the ECB church into public life did not always run smoothly, however, for participation in the peace movement required more than sitting on the stage at these public events. Zhidkov and his colleagues had to learn to articulate the peace message appropriately. In 1949, his first attempt at a peace 'appeal' had rather missed the mark. He had made appropriate references to 'feverish enemies' – a stalwart in the Stalinist lexicon – but he also depicted a future far more terrible than was permissible within official Soviet culture. Zhidkov wrote:

It is with great sadness that they [Evangelical Christians-Baptists] follow the feverish actions of the enemies of peace who, calling themselves the defenders of Christian civilization, prepare for the destruction of all human culture, the annihilation of the majority of humankind by means of hellish [*adskoi*] atomic technology, and the transformation of significant expanses of the earth into desert.¹⁰⁷

This rendition of the peace message is entirely at odds with the tenor of the Soviet press, and not only because of the reference to atomic technology as 'hellish'. As suggested at the beginning of this article, *Izvestiia* and *Pravda* were highly restrained in their treatment of nuclear war, giving readers little sense that what might lie ahead would be substantively different from the war they had just experienced. No one was speaking of the possibility that a majority of the human race might be destroyed or the world turned to desert.¹⁰⁸

Even five years later, with the climate more relaxed after Stalin's death, Zhidkov and his colleagues were still articulating a message slightly at odds with the mainstream press. A new peace appeal signed by the AUCECB leaders did now make it on to the pages of *Izvestiia*, but its depiction of nuclear holocaust still pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable.¹⁰⁹ Its authors began by noting that although international tensions had recently decreased, peace was still under threat, because 'some governments' wanted to arm West Germany. And 'if West Germany is armed, then the atomic bomb will hang over Europe, threatening to turn it into a scorched desert in a matter of days'. By 1954, Stalin's successors were willing to acknowledge at least some of the dangers posed by the bomb, publishing a few short reports on the radiation risks of US tests, but this vision of ecological disaster was still daring.¹¹⁰ In his 1954 New Year message to the faithful, Zhidkov warned readers that the new weapons would lead to the 'destruction of people'

106 'Okonchanie raboty konferentsii vseh tserkvei i religioznykh ob"edinenii v SSSR, posviashchennoi voprosu zashchity miru', *Pravda* (13 May 1952), 3.

107 RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 109, l. 62.

108 On this see Dobson, 'Building Peace'.

109 'Zaiavlenie Vsesoiuznogo Soveta evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov', *Izvestiia* (22 December 1954), 4.

110 Dobson, 'Building Peace'.

[*istreblenie liudei*]; although he avoided references to the ‘annihilation of the majority of humankind’ included in the (unpublished) 1949 text his prognosis for the future was still rather ominous. And yet elsewhere in the same text, Zhidkov used the Book of Revelations, not to predict an impending conflict in the pre-millennial tradition, but to reject it:

We are people of peace, heralds of peace, defenders of peace, creators of peace, as opposed to the forces of hell and darkness which, according to the book of Revelations are defined thus: “Then I saw . . . three foul spirits like frogs. These spirits were devils . . . They were sent out to muster all the kings of the world for the great day of battle”. (Revelations 16: 13–14) We are not going the same way as these hellish forces. Their evil actions – inciting war – isn’t for us. We are following the call of the celestial, angelical forces, calling out ‘Peace on earth’.¹¹¹

Here his theological disposition is implicitly more post-millennial than pre-millennial for it rests on a belief in humankind’s capacity to build a better world ready for the Second Coming. Christians must work to improve life on earth, rather than bleakly waiting for the End Times. The conclusion of the article also reminded readers what this meant in practice: military service in the Soviet army for all young men. These two 1954 texts suggest that the AUCECB leaders were still prone to rather graphic evocations of nuclear devastation, but they were nonetheless learning to articulate a peace message that was roughly in keeping with the patriotic, even militaristic, register required.

With their potential for ties with co-believers in the USA, Protestants were in a rather unique position, but in the early Cold War years it was unclear whether their potential ties overseas made them very useful, or very suspect. The church’s pacifist traditions, although disavowed by its leaders, certainly added to the mistrust. They also created tensions within the ECB community itself. As early as July 1947, AUCECB leaders were reporting to CARC that they had received a number of letters from believers who disagreed with their leaders on the issue of military service.¹¹² CARC officials elsewhere noted opposition among believers to their leaders’ participation in the peace movement. In 1952 local ECB pastors had been instructed to read out Zhidkov’s contribution to the peace conference held in Moscow; in the Ukrainian city of Nikolaev, an elderly female member of the congregation said to her ‘sisters’, ‘This is the devil come to tempt us. If they try to force you to sign a list, refuse.’ In Khar’kov, a believer submitted an anonymous note which read ‘We stand for God’s peace [*bozhii mir*], but you preach a worldly peace [*chelovecheskii mir*].’¹¹³ In general terms, there developed a more deeply pre-millennial outlook at grass-roots level than was propounded in the sermons and

111 ‘Novyi god i rozhdestvo’, *Bratskii vestnik*, 1954, no. 1.

112 RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 506, l. 49

113 TsDAHOU f. 1, op. 24, d. 1572, l. 224.

articles of AUCECB leaders.¹¹⁴ All this weakened the domestic profile of the AUCECB and contributed to the schisms that were to characterize the church from the 1950s onwards.¹¹⁵

Yet despite the many concerns, doubts, and criticisms, from 1950 the Evangelical Christians-Baptists developed a public role in the Soviet Union. Thus, at the very same time that a minority of Protestant believers found themselves on trial denounced as traitors and pacifists, their church leaders were tentatively carving out a public role for themselves as advocates of the Soviet peace campaigns. These contradictions, which served to undermine both the peace rhetoric and the anti-religious campaigns, were to remain and deepen in the post-Stalin years: the elderly (male) pastor sombrely sitting on the podium at the peace congress was now joined in Soviet performative space by the dangerous, deluded, and invariably female, fanatic.

One of the facets of de-Stalinization was the changing role of the press: ideological controls were certainly not lifted, but there was more room for manoeuvre, and editors were expected to make their publications lively and engaging for the reader.¹¹⁶ Protestants now made it on to the pages of the Soviet press with greater regularity. But they did so under two quite distinct guises. Toward the end of the decade, as a new attack on religion gathered strength, the 'sectarian' became a particular focus of attention, with a raft of sensationalist stories about her dangerous, uncontrolled behaviour. At the same time, more sober pieces reported on international events at which non-Orthodox Christians, particularly ECBs, appeared as trusted ambassadors who embodied the tolerance and allegedly peaceful ambitions of the Soviet state. The ambivalent position of the Protestant, which this article has traced back to the late Stalinist period, now became readily visible to the attentive reader.

Pravda and *Izvestiia* reported on a number of international exchanges involving Protestant leaders: on visits to the USSR by Baptists, Anglicans and Quakers; and

114 In the summer of 1959, a group of researchers took advantage of a new political climate favouring the revival of sociological fieldwork and set off to Tambov region to study the current state of religious sectarianism. In an article reporting on their findings, L.N. Mitrokhin expressed their surprise on discovering that local Baptists spoke regularly of Christ's imminent coming and Judgement Day, elements which he did not consider 'characteristic' of the church's teaching. L.N. Mitrokhin, 'Izuchenie sektantsva v Tambovskoi oblasti', *Voprosy filosofii*, 1 (January 1960), 143–8.

115 Over the course of the 1950s, unregistered groups of Pentecostals began to meet more frequently. A small number of 'Pure Baptists' (*chistye Baptisty*) who practised the re-baptism of Evangelical Christians also began to meet separately. But the most significant split occurred in 1961 with the formation of the 'Initiative Group' under the leadership of G.K. Kriuchkov and A.F. Prokof'ev. In August 1961, in their first 'message' to the evangelical community, Kriuchkov and Prokof'ev claimed the documents approved by the AUCECB were 'Satanic regulations' which would bring about the 'spiritual disintegration of the church'. See T.K. Nikol'skaia *Russkii protestantizm i gosudarstvennaia vlast'* (Saint Petersburg 2009), 201–15.

116 S. Huxtable, 'A Compass in the Sea of Life: Soviet Journalism, the Public, and the Limits of Reform after Stalin, 1953–1968', unpublished thesis, University of London (2013); T.C. Wolfe, *Governing Soviet journalism: the press and the socialist person after Stalin* (Bloomington, IL 2005).

on visits by leaders of the AUCECB to the USA and Sweden.¹¹⁷ A number of press articles followed celebrating their participation in the peace campaigns: in 1956, an article acknowledged the speech given by A.V. Karev when the Stalin Peace Prize was awarded to a Norwegian pastor;¹¹⁸ in 1957 the AUCECB sent an 'appeal' to the Berlin Congress of Peace commending the importance of Christian love;¹¹⁹ in 1959 Karev himself was one of five Soviet public figures awarded a medal by the WPC for their peace work.¹²⁰ Zhidkov and Karev were frequent signatories on petitions calling for nuclear disarmament and articles alerting the world to the threat of atomic bombs.¹²¹ In these pieces, AUCECB leaders were regularly included in lists of advocates for peace, lined up alongside other religious leaders: the ecumenical movement Polianskii had advocated in 1947 seemed to have become a discursive reality. Yet CARC officials were themselves unhappy with what had been achieved.

In 1956, CARC leaders reviewed progress so far in a memo addressed to the Central Committee's Department of Propaganda and Agitation. In this major report, CARC began by noting that since its inception the Council had been able to ensure that religious organizations, not just the ROC, developed a patriotic relationship with the Soviet state. The authors stressed the thriving ecumenical movement in the West, citing the work of the WCC in particular, and presented the participation of various Soviet religious leaders in the peace campaigns as a very important counterweight. But in order for their potential to be exploited, CARC maintained, greater coherence between international and domestic policy was needed, particularly given that foreigners were increasingly interested in the nature of religious freedom 'behind the iron curtain'. The memo's main thrust was thus to call for an end to miscarriages of justice committed towards believers and for the constitution to be respected.¹²² As the rich historiography on the anti-religious campaigns of the Khrushchev era establishes, this was not at all what

117 'Priezd iz Moskvy rukovodiashchikh deiatelei baptistskoi tserkvi', *Izvestiia* (19 June 1954), 4; 'Deiateli Vsemirnogo soiuzu baptistov o svoei poezdke po Sovetskoii strane', *Izvestiia* (2 July 1954), 4; 'Ot'ezd delegatsii baptistov v Shvetsiiu', *Izvestiia* (3 August 1954), 4; 'Vozvrashchenie delegatsii baptistskoi tserkvi iz Shvetsii', *Izvestiia* (16 August 1953), 4; 'Beseda s predsedatelem Vsesoiuznogo soveta evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov Iakovom Zhidkovym', *Izvestiia* (22 August 1954), 4; 'Priezd v SSSR rukovoditelei amerikanskikh baptistov', *Izvestiia* (7 August 1955), 4; 'Priezd v Moskvu delegatsii Soiuzu shvedskikh baptistov', *Izvestiia* (31 March 1956), 4; 'Prebyvanie v SSSR delegatsii Soiuzu shvedskikh baptistov', *Pravda* (31 March 1956), 4; 'Ot'ezd na rodinu delegatsii shvedskikh baptistov', *Izvestiia* (6 April 1956), 4; 'Ot'ezd v SShA delegatsii baptistskoi tserkvi', *Izvestiia* (18 May 1956), 4; 'Pribytie v SShA delegatsii baptistov SSSR', *Izvestiia* (20 May 1956); 'Vozvrashchenie v Moskvu delegatsii baptistskoi tserkvi', *Izvestiia* (28 June 1956), 4.

118 'Vruchenie mezhdunarodnoy Staliniskoi premii norvezhskomu obshchestvennomu deiateliu pastoru Ragnaru Forbekku', *Pravda* (21 March 1956), 1.

119 'Zaiavlenie Vsesoiuznogo Soveta evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov o Berlinskom Vozzvanii Vsemirnogo Soveta Mira', *Izvestiia* (28 June 1957), 4.

120 'Nagrady Vsemirnogo Soveta Mira sovetskim obshchestvennym deiateliam', *Pravda* (10 December 1959), 3.

121 'Tserkovnye deiateli Chexoslovakii i SSSR trebuiut osvobodzheniia chelovechestva ot strakha atomnoy voiny', *Izvestiia* (7 December 1958), 6; 'Reshit' problemu prekrashcheniia iadernykh ispytaniu', *Pravda* (22 January 1959), 6; 'Predotvratit' ugrozu atomnoy voiny. Pis'mo sovetskikh obshchestvennykh deiatelei organizatoram Evropeiskogo Kongressa za iadernoe razoruzhenie', *Pravda* (15 February 1959), 6.

122 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI) f. 5, op. 33, d. 22, ll. 43–8.

happened, of course: by the end of the decade, the number of church closures and arrests had spiralled.¹²³ The use of propaganda to demonize the sectarian in fact meant such abuses were hardly a secret, either for the Soviet or the international public. In the media, stories of child sacrifice conducted by ‘sectarians’ were perhaps the most extreme manifestation of this demonizing tendency.¹²⁴ Other charges were laid against ‘sectarians’ in the press: they endangered proselytes’ physical and mental health, sometimes resulting in suicide;¹²⁵ they committed criminal acts such as fraud;¹²⁶ and, of course, they predicted the end of the world.¹²⁷ This vilification of the sectarian is reflected in the fact that Protestants, given the relatively small size of the community overall, again constituted a disproportionate percentage of arrests: between 1961 and 1964, 640 convictions had been made on religious grounds in Russia, of which 260 concerned Pentecostals or ECBs; in Ukraine in the same period, of 324 religious arrests, 167 were Pentecostal or ECB.¹²⁸

Let us consider a final court-case which shows how the public demonization of believers that became so ubiquitous in the Khrushchev period also drew on, and amplified, ideas re-discovered in the late Stalinist era, in particular the concept of the sectarian as a pacifist and dangerous prophet of the apocalypse. In December 1956 two men, both of German ethnicity, were convicted of anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda by Semipalatinsk regional court (Kazakhstan). Both collective farmers in their thirties, Ia. Betram and A. Gotman were identified as leaders of the Soviet religious group ‘Children of God’, but Gotman had been a member of a Baptist congregation for a number of years. The men were accused of spreading anti-Soviet propaganda. According to the court records, they burnt their army cards, vociferously condemned military service, destroyed their own property, killed their dogs, stopped their children attending school, and called on others to do the same.¹²⁹ A summary of court proceedings suggested that Gotman explained his actions in terms of prophecy (*prorochestvo*) particularly with regard to the imminent end: he was told believers would be led to Israel, and their belongings

123 On the anti-religious initiatives of the Khrushchev era, see for example A.B. Stone, ‘Overcoming Peasant Backwardness: The Khrushchev Antireligious Campaign and the Rural Soviet Union’, *Russian Review*, 67, 2 (April 2008), 296–320; I. Paert, ‘Demystifying the Heavens: Women, Religion and Khrushchev’s Anti-religious Campaign, 1954–1964’, in S.E. Reid, M. Ilić and L. Attwood (eds), *Women in the Khrushchev Era* (Basingstoke 2004), 203–21; Chumachenko, *Church and State*; Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov’*; E. Zhidkova, ‘Antireligioznaia kampaniia vremen “otpepli” v Kuibyshevskoi oblasti’, *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, 59, 3 (2008), 108–19; V. Smolkin-Rothrock, ‘Cosmic Enlightenment: Scientific Atheism and the Soviet Conquest of Space’, in J.T. Andrews and A.A. Siddiqi (eds), *Into the Cosmos: Space Exploration and Soviet Culture* (Pittsburgh, PA 2011), 159–94.

124 M. Dobson, ‘Child Sacrifice in the Soviet Press: Sensationalism and the ‘Sectarian’ in the Post-Stalin Era’, *Russian Review*, 73, 2 (April 2014), 237–59.

125 V. Mishin, ‘“Ottsy i deti” piatidesiatnikov’, *Nauka i religii*, 5 (May 1960), 27–30; S. Morozov, ‘Zhivoe i mertvoe’, *Izvestiia* (18 June 1961), 6; N. Shtan’ko, ‘Za plotno zanaveshennym oknom’, *Izvestiia* (19 June 1962), 6.

126 ‘Neprimirnost’, *Pravda* (16 August 1960), 2.

127 G. Mikhailov, ‘V chem vred baptisma’, *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia* (5 November 1958).

128 GARF f. 6991, op. 4, d. 173, l. 180.

129 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 78492, ll. 2–12.

should not be left behind for their enemies (non-believers).¹³⁰ For the whole of November and December 1956, it was claimed, 26 villagers refused to go to work on the farm because they were preparing for the end of the world.¹³¹ If true, this would suggest that the fears were not unique to the two leaders.

In contrast to the court cases of the late Stalinist era, this trial was reported in the national press. In 1957 an article in *Komsomol'skaia pravda* explained how the 'Children of God' held conversations with the almighty which ended in 'contorted dancing and grimacing', engaged in sexual depravity (such as wife-sharing), and spread rumours that the end of the world was imminent (the charge which was the centre of the court case). But this was not all: the piece also graphically describes how young communists, upon hearing cries and disturbance, hurried to Betram's home, 'flung open the door and saw a wild sight – a young, half-naked woman was standing beside a tall white cross... The monsters planned to nail the young woman to the cross'.¹³² A fleeting reference to this unlikely occurrence was made in a witness statement in the court record but was key to the press version which depicted the believers as debauched fanatics, drawing on pre-revolutionary notions of the sectarian's depravity.¹³³ The article also made clear that such monstrous behaviour resulted from their hysteria about the End Times. Perhaps geography played its part: the collective farm where this incident occurred was close to the town of Borodulikha in eastern Kazakhstan, and in relative proximity to the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site.¹³⁴ No reference was made to this in the court file or newspaper coverage, but it is worth speculating whether there was a connection between locals' belief that the end was coming and the huge fireballs, mushroom clouds, deafening roars, and earthquake-like tremors they must have witnessed.

At least in part a product of the early Cold War, the anxiety surrounding religious subcultures, particularly their potential to spread apocalyptic fear, now coalesced into a terrifying and much-publicized spectre: the 'sectarian' was no longer a problem over which party and state officials shook their heads in the hush of governmental offices, or passed sentence in a closed courtroom, as had been the case in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but a folk devil repeatedly reviled in the press, newsreels and feature films. And yet this image of the fanatic was rivalled by that of 'sectarian' leaders taking to the international stage. In 1960, at the peak of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, one tract noted: 'There is no doubt that the struggle for peace would be even more successful if it was freed from its religious

130 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 78492, l. 6.

131 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 78492, l. 2.

132 'From the Courtroom: Children of God', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* (28 April 1957), 4.

133 GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 78492, l. 17. Sensationalist scenes of Pentecostals attempting to crucify a young girl provided the dramatic finale to a popular anti-religious film of the era, *Tuchi nad Borskom*, dir. Vasilii Ordynskii (Moscow 1960). On this, see A.A. Panchenko, "'Triasuny': Distiplinarnoe obshchestvo, politicheskaia politsiia i sud'by piatidesiatnichestva v Rossii', *Antropologicheskii forum*, 18 (2013), 223–55.

134 D. Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy, 1939–1956* (New Haven, CT and London 1994), 323. For personal accounts of witnessing the explosions see J. Lernager, 'Second Sunset – Victims of Soviet Nuclear Testing', *Sierra* (March–April 1992).

covering [*obolochka*] as religion only prevents people from recognizing and exposing enemies of peace'.¹³⁵ Quite an admission for a piece of Soviet propaganda. Still, this contradictory approach continued into the early 1960s, with Zhidkov among the signatories of an ecumenical peace appeal published in *Izvestiia* during the Cuban Crisis of 1962 – the year with the highest levels of anti-religious propaganda.¹³⁶

In the USA, the late 1940s and 1950s saw religion, broadly conceived, provide a common ground for politicians, business leaders, and ordinary people, many of whom came to believe that their country's position in the Cold War was divinely sanctioned. Some thought that nuclear weapons might be a sign of the Second Coming, conferring on the conflict additional intensity and purpose. Given the atheist foundations of the communist regime, religion could hardly create this kind of convergence of interests in the USSR. And yet the term 'religious cold war' is nonetheless suggestive in the Soviet context, even if it allows us to identify points of tension rather than a story of (prospective) national unity as was the case in the USA.

In the USSR, religious activity had increased during the war. In its aftermath, the threat of a new outbreak of violence (with weapons about which citizens were given ominous but unclear warnings), created intense anxiety, and religious concepts and imagery proved one way to articulate these fears, just as they did in the USA. Instead of encouraging, or at least tolerating, apocalyptic thinking, the Soviet state tried to suppress the religious imagination, dismissing it as the realm only of a sectarian, lunatic fringe. This demonization of the 'sectarian' made itself fully felt with the anti-religious campaigns of the Khrushchev era, but its roots date back to mid-1947 and the start of the Cold War. Yet the Soviet state did not limit itself to this tactic. The party leadership did not straight-forwardly denounce religion and its adherents, even though this would have been in keeping with the atheist doctrines which the regime had fought so hard to instil in its population.¹³⁷ Nor did it simply embrace Russian Orthodoxy as a source of nationalist sentiment, as is often assumed. It felt drawn to participate in the 'religious cold war' launched by the USA under Truman's presidency and sought to create its own ecumenical movement, attempting to prove its tolerance towards different faiths and the universal appeal of its peace message.

135 Tsvetogorov, *Sektanty*, 63.

136 For the 1962 appeal, see 'Obrashchenie glav tserkvei i religioznykh ob'edinenii sovetskogo soiuza k glavam vsekh pravitel'stv mira, k predstoiateliam vsekh khristianskikh tserkvei, k khristianam vsego mira', *Izvestiia* (25 October 1962).

137 On the earlier period, see in particular D. Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca NY 1998); on the late Soviet era, see V. Smolkin, "'Sviato mesto pusto ne byvaet': Ateisticheskoe vospitanie v Sovetskom Soiuzе, 1964–1968", *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, 65, 3 (2009), at magazines.russ.ru/nz/2009/3/sm5.html (last accessed 16 October 2014) and V. Smolkin-Rothrock, 'The Ticket to the Soviet Soul: Science, Religion, and the Spiritual Crisis of Late Soviet Atheism', *Russian Review*, 73, 2 (April 2014), 171–97.

'Peace' was presented as a patriotic cause, a shared commitment to building a state of harmony on earth, and certainly some Christians – including ECB leaders – were willing to endorse such a vision. And yet within the Christian tradition, and cutting across the denominations, there was also a very different conception of both 'peace' and the future: pacifist opposition to warfare; and a belief that paradise must await the second coming (and further strife and devastation). As the Cold War escalated, the authorities were fearful that dangerous and politicized interpretations of scripture were on the rise. As a result, those identified as 'sectarians' were targeted for arrest in both the late Stalinist era and during Khrushchev's anti-religious campaigns. This persecution opened the regime up to easy charges of hypocrisy by providing opponents both at home and abroad with ready ammunition, as was noted in the major CARC report of 1956 and demonstrated by Krylov's 'appeal' two years later.

Although religion was an arena of the Cold War where the USA clearly had a natural advantage, the Soviet government was unwilling to retreat.¹³⁸ Throughout the final decades of its existence the Soviet regime continued to denounce religious faith as both a tool used by imperialists to discipline their subjects and as a dangerous source of irrational and unproductive thinking among its own population, but it nonetheless sought to present itself, both domestically and internationally, as an inclusive and law-bound polity, far more committed to defending freedom of conscience than its capitalist adversaries. Religion thus took on a renewed prominence in the USSR during the Cold War, but its treatment was more conflicted and ambiguous than might be expected. The status of Protestantism embodies this ambivalence particularly clearly: its believers were vilified as subversive and unsettling 'sectarians', but its leaders were enlisted to join the chorus of patriotic approval for the Soviet peace cause. A 'religious cold war' was thus waged on both sides of the iron curtain, but to the east – instead of providing a sense of shared mission as it did in the west – its internal contradictions undermined both the regime's long-standing atheist credentials and its more recent attempts to present itself as humankind's only hope for achieving peace and harmony in this world.

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138 For later press coverage of AUCECB involvement in the peace movement, see: 'Vo imia blagorodnoi tseli', *Izvestiia* (7 July 1977), 5; 'Golos v zashchitu mira', *Izvestiia* (12 August 1977), 3; 'Gnev i vozmushchenie sovetskoi obshchestvennosti', *Pravda* (13 December 1977), 4; 'Net bolee vazhnoi i neotlozhimnoi zadachi' (7 May 1983), 4; 'V zashchitu mira', *Izvestiia* (9 October 1983), 4.

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