

Children and Childhood among Evangelical Christians-Baptists During the Late Soviet Period (1960s-1980s)*

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Childhood is a special period of human life. It is a time of rapid physiological changes (growth, coming-of-age), intensified personal socialization, and the adoption of basic behavioral rules, social norms and values.^[1] Contemporary anthropology and psychology often regard childhood as a particular social phenomenon within a system of multiple functional and cultural links. The “world of childhood”^[2] reflects the world of adults and interacts with it, but also forms its own subculture, understood as “whatever is created by society for children and by children.”^[3] Childhood influences the world of adults in many ways, in particular by causing adults to think more deeply and answer questions concerning the value and temporality of life and its meaning. For all of that, adults most often perceive children as passive recipients of existing beliefs and values, ignoring or denying their subjective right to influence the arrangement of social relations. In view of this, adults mainly regard children and childhood through the prism of educational tasks and purposes.

Upbringing is one of the key mechanisms for the transmission of religious tradition.^[4] It is highly valued in Protestantism,



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[1] V. V. Kornilova, “Osoboe sostojanie razvitiya – detstvo,” *Praktichna psihologija ta social'na robota.*, No. 12 (2009): 71-73.

[2] This expression is widely used in anthropology; see M. Mid., *Kul'tura i mir detstva: Izbrannye proizvedenija.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), p. 429.

[3] V. V. Abramenkova, *Social'naja psihologija detstva: razvitie otnoshenij rebenka v detskoj subkul'ture* (Moscow: Moskovskij psihologo-social'nyj institut; Voronezh: Izd-vo NPO «MODEK», 2000), p. 92.

[4] For more details about the nature of tradition, see: Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

particularly in its Evangelical branches, including the Evangelical Christians-Baptists.^[5] People believe that a Christian upbringing will give a child a better chance to consciously join a church community at a more mature age. However, children never perceive Christian values simply and unambiguously, especially if this perception is purposefully hampered by secular state and society. These were the conditions of the Soviet period, especially its late phase, the 1960s to 1980s.

The Soviet state treated the education and upbringing of children as a politically important issue almost from the very start of its existence. Everything related to childhood gradually became the subject of state regulations.^[6] Respectively, churches and religious organizations striving to influence the formation of the young generation were treated by Soviet authorities as enemies and competitors. Official state documents noted that, “Protection of children and youth from religious influence always was and remains an important task of state organs and public organizations.”^[7] The education of children by believers was significantly restricted, being qualified by the state as “religious propaganda.” The persecution of believers for the collective Christian education of children was an important feature of the atmosphere of the time when the children of believers were growing up.

The late Soviet period was marked by a state-wide propaganda campaign directed towards the atheistic education of the entire society. It is known as the policy of “scientific atheism.” No Soviet child or adult could escape the ideological influence of scientific-atheistic propaganda. However, for the children of believers it presented a special problem as they were often the focus of attention of Soviet institutes of socialization – secondary schools, communistic organizations for children and teenagers, and street groups of children and youth. In fact, the children of believers were brought up for a long time in a condition of permanent conflict of worldviews between their parents and the Soviet state/society. This conflict necessarily had an impact on their internal world and mentality; later on it also affected the character of their future relations with others in post-Soviet society. Today’s community of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, including its leaders, mostly consists of believers with a “Soviet childhood.” It defines the character of this community and the way its local churches and unions actually function. That is why a study of the childhood of believers in the “late” Soviet period, with its peculiarities and contradictions, is so relevant today.

The phenomenon of childhood is so multifaceted that I cannot treat it comprehensively in this paper. For example, I will not consider the question of the interrelations of the children of believers within different age and gender groups, as this topic is worth a separate large-scale investigation. However, I would like

^[5] For more details about the history of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, see S. V. Sannikov, ed., *Istorija baptizma* (Odessa: Bogomyслиe, 1996; S. N. Savinskij, *Istorija evangel'skih hristian-baptistov Ukrainy, Rossii, Belorussii*, v. 2 (St. Petersburg: Biblija dlja vseh), 1999.

^[6] M. V. Romashova, *Sovetskoe detstvo v 1945 –*

seredine 1950-h gg.: gosudarstvennye proekty i provincial'nye praktiki (po materialam Molotovskoj oblasti), (Candidate dissertation, Perm': Permskij gosudarstvennyj universitet, 2006), p. 29.

^[7] G. R. Gol'st *Religija i zakon* (Moscow: Juridicheskaja literatura, 1975), p. 38.

to underline several aspects most relevant to the interaction of the world of adults and the world of childhood in the milieu of believers, in order to show the characteristic traits of this interaction. The main purpose of my paper is to show which normative values were cultivated in children and in what ways by their believing parents and Baptist churches in the late Soviet period, and what was the character of value conflicts that the children of believers had to overcome. I will attempt to describe a child in a family of believers within three systems of interactions: church, family and the “outside world,” i.e. Soviet society.

The sources of my paper are the oral and written memoirs of believers and children’s literature of that period which I managed to find in the process of my research. Also of value are archive documents, legislation, print media, etc. Most of my sources are related to the activities of the “underground” wing of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, i.e. the supporters of the ECB Council of Churches. This is explained primarily by the character of the activities of this Christian movement and the abundance of relevant sources that appeared as a result of its activity and which have not, as yet, been subjected to scholarly analysis. However, the uniformity of their spiritual and theological beliefs justifies the approximate extrapolation of my conclusions regarding this “separate” wing of ECB onto the entire brotherhood of Evangelical Christians-Baptists as a single religious and cultural community.^[8]

Children and the Church of Evangelical Christians-Baptists

Evangelical Christians-Baptists traditionally treat children as a necessary part of their comprehensive worldview. Children are integrated into a kind of “symbolic universe”^[9] which explains and legitimizes their place and role in the community of believers and in the system of its internal and external interrelations. In Soviet times as well as today, this system of views was formed by theologians and authoritative community members and put into effect in the practices of everyday life.

The value of children in the system of worldviews was rooted in their important, peculiarly “childish” features of character: trustfulness, unselfishness, sincerity. A child neither doubts nor seeks contradictions and disagreements; he or she would rather believe in God, Christ, and His redemption. Also, a child is more inclined to admit his/her weakness and is ready to trust his/her life to God. Preachers repeatedly call believers “children of God,” in order to stress that the community asks its members to preserve the elements of the “childish” attitude to life and God. The Baptist magazine *Bratskiy vestnik* [Brotherly messenger] refers to children as follows:

^[8] Here I employ the concept of Clifford Geertz, *who treated religion as a cultural system. For more details, see C. Geertz, Interpretacija kul'tur. Vibirani ese* (Kyiv: Duh i Litera, 2001), pp. 104-150.

^[9] P. Berger and T. Lukman, *Social'noe konstruirovanie real'nosti. Traktat po sociologii znaniia*

(Moscow: Medium, 1995), pp. 61-70. On the worldview of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, see also V. N. Pavlenko and C. Wanner, “Osobennosti psikhologii evangel'skikh hristian-baptistov,” *Voprosy psikhologii* No. 5 (2004): 72-86.

For an explanation of the law of people's stature in the Kingdom of God, Jesus Christ "took a child, and set him in the midst of them" and said: "Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me" (Mark 9:37). "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:4). In the Kingdom of God, the features of a childish character are highly appreciated. Just as a child does not consider his position, a man who is actually better than others simply does not think about it. Jesus Christ teaches His disciples to show their readiness to serve their neighbors by taking care of the children, the weak, and the feeble. All this should be done "in the name of Jesus." The one who receives the weak receives Jesus Christ.^[10]

However, children may also be inconstant, capricious, and egocentric. In another place we find the following reasoning: "Sometimes we also, like capricious children, insistently seek after privileges for ourselves that we could easily manage without."^[11]

The sinfulness of children was regarded as self-evident: Aren't children the same as adults?" asked the magazine *Vestnik spasenija* [Herald of salvation]:

Or rather, haven't all adults grown up from children? Weren't all executioners, sadists, Herods, Neros, Hitlers once innocent children, light-heartedly amusing themselves on their mother's knee? No one knew what would become of them in the future, but God knew. Were they innocent in the eyes of God? There are no innocent children, because the germs of evil are in every child.^[12]

However, in everyday life there was the widespread belief that in case of death a child would go to Heaven rather than Hell.^[13] Thus, a child is not as sinful as an adult. A child is rather a bearer of the "seal" of original sin, and is inclined to grow up as a sinner. That is why it was so important to educate him/her properly. Special attention was given to children whose parents, relatives, or tutors were church members. The community made every effort to educate such children and integrate them into the church and community life. We have scanty information about the total number of such children in the 1960s-1980s, due to the absence of official statistics; however, based on later sources, we can estimate it as roughly 45 to 55,000 of such children under the age of 15 for Ukraine and 130 to 150,000 for the USSR.^[14]

From a strategic perspective, education in the milieu of Evangelical Christians-Baptists should prepare a child to convert to God at a more mature age by an act of public repentance in a local church. In Baptism, as well as in other confessions that put special emphasis on conversion and repentance, human life is strictly divided into the part before repentance ("the life of an unsaved sinner")

^[10] *Bratskij vestnik*. No. 5 (1978): 11.

^[11] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

^[12] *Vestnik spasenija* No. 3 (43) (1973):21.

^[13] This was especially applicable to the children of believing parents. The parents were sure that they will meet their children again "in heaven."

^[14] Post-Soviet and contemporary statistics in-

dicating that the number of children nurtured by the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood amounts to about 55-56% of the total number of believers. See the official website of VSCEHB, [<http://ecbua.info/>]; *Vestnik Istiny* No. 2 (2011): 14. The estimate is based on the reasonable assumption that this ratio obtained also in late Soviet times.

and after repentance (“the life of a saved and righteous person”).^[15] Only after repentance can one be baptized “on profession of faith” and become a full member of the local church community. A child cannot be considered a full member and therefore has no right to participate in the two main religious rites, baptism and the breaking of bread (Lord’s Supper).^[16]

The moment of conversion to God had to be perceived as the main and central event that connects all the slender threads of the everyday life of a child from a believing family. Twelve years was the minimal legitimate age for public repentance; most common for children from the families of believers was between the ages of 14 to 18 years. However, there is evidence that some children went through public repentance at 10, or 8 years of age, and even earlier.

Conversion and repentance mark a turning point in a person’s life when one more or less consciously adopts not only a confession, but also a new way of living. A. Popov remarks that life after repentance, in the interpretation of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, should be characterized by Christian spirituality expressed in four dimensions: “friendship with Christ” (renunciation of “worldly” values), “practices of initiates” (active prayer life), participation in the local church, and suffering.^[17] The children of Evangelical Christians-Baptists were familiarized with the peculiarities of adult life from the very beginning. Such a child was expected to live a “spiritual life” even in his/her childhood years, although this was as yet a life before repentance. However, at the moment of repentance the child should consider him/herself a sinner and be able to contrast his/her life before and after repentance. This seemingly illogical but theologically grounded requirement caused a very broad interpretation of “sin” in everyday practice: one always had something to “confess” (meaning both particular actions and signs of human imperfection) and witness being a subject of God’s correction.

Here are the memories of presbyter Sergey Mikhailovich Shaptala:

I addressed to God a prayer of repentance for the first time when I was eight. By this time I already had things to confess: my older friends from believing families had already taught me to play cards and dominos, and I already had taken to cigarettes. On the day of my repentance, Brother Pavel Timofeevich Rytikov visited our church. He was just released from imprisonment for his faith in God. This was an evening service. He preached about the purity of the church and being ready to meet God. The portion of Scripture he took for his homily was from the Revelation of John, the message to the seven churches. He listed a few

[15] This understanding of repentance is typical for a number of religious confessions rooted in Protestantism; see R. F. Paloutzian, J. T. Richardson, and L. R. Rambo, “Religious Conversion and Personality Change,” *Journal of Personality*, 67,6 (1999): 1047–1079; L. R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); J. Lofland and N. Skonovd, “Conversion Motifs,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20 (1981): 373–85.

[16] *Osnovnye principy very evangel'skih hristian-*

baptistov. Sbornik publikacij. (Elkhart: Russian Gospel Ministries, 1992), pp. 7-10.

[17] Alexander 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* (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Wales, International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, 2010), pp. 253-263.

things Jesus denounced the churches for, calling them to repentance. I was scared to be in eternity without God, as I also had no first love; I also hesitate, am “neither cold nor hot,” like to do worldly things with my friends, although I also liked to be in church. When I stepped up for repentance Pavel Timofeevich was surprised and said: “Do you indeed have something to confess?” And I said, crying, that I do: I deceived my parents, stole, and played the hooligan. After a prayer he gave me a full Gospel, New Testament and Psalter in a pocket format. At that time not even every adult had a personal Gospel. I liked to read it and valued it highly. However, after age 13 I got in with bad friends again and returned to sinful deeds. However, for all that, I always believed that God exists and understood that I am in a dangerous condition. I planned that after a while I would certainly come to God.

I always attended church. Also I attended Bible study. I learned by heart verses from the Bible and psalms. However, I chiefly came to the meetings to see my friends who were like me. My second conversion came when I was 17. I was brought to it by several automobile accidents in which I was involved with a motorcycle, and also by an illness from overwhelmingly loving act of God’s grace...^[18]

The question of children’s education by the church became one of the controversial questions in the community of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the USSR of the 1960s due to the toughening of the state policy towards religion and the church. The law forbade religious associations “to teach religion to under-age children, involve them in choruses, orchestras, study groups, organize ...special prayer meetings for children and teenagers.”^[19] The presence of children in a church during regular services was also regarded a violation of the law, because this could be considered the teaching of religion. The situation worsened when the leaders of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists adopted instructive documents that, among other things, forbade the evangelization of children. Some believers and church ministers, especially from the older generation, started treating children’s presence at church much more carefully. Others sharply protested against such treatment, interpreting such policy as a “departure” from the basics of Evangelical faith and “treachery” of the leaders in order to please the authorities. In the ideological context the main focus of the debates was which solution of the “children’s question” would better serve the preservation of church.^[20] On the one hand, the limitation of children’s presence during church services helped the local church to avoid having its registration canceled, which would entail its closure; on the other hand, the loss of influence on the younger generation would eventually cause the demographic decline and actual extinction of the churches. The first option could be, in fact, only temporary and situational. The leaders of the Union were inclined to adopt it. However, the opposi-

^[18] S. M. Shaptala. *Sovetskoe detstvo verujuschego. Soobschenie na konferencii v Doneckom hristianskom universitete, 23-24 aprelya 2010 g.* [The Soviet childhood of a believer. Presentation at a conference at Donetsk Christian University, 23-24 April 2010].

^[19] G. R. Gol’st, *Religija i zakon* (Moscow: Juridicheskaja literatura, 1975), pp. 36-37.

^[20] W. Sawatsky, *Evangelicheskoe dvizhenie v SSSR posle Vtoroj mirovoj vojny* (Moscow: IC-Garant, 1995), pp. 189-300; see also *Po puti vozrozhdenija* (Moscow: Izd-vo “Khristianin” SC EHB, 1989), p. 82.

tion party of the Evangelical-Baptist community launched an active controversy and ultimately won partial revision of this solution, including at the state level. The legislation was not changed, but its interpretation became more liberal.

The authorities stopped total pressure on churches and believers when they saw that the formal closure of churches did not entail their actual disappearance. However, they kept on persecuting so-called “malicious” violators of the law on cults, who were often the organizers of children’s Christian camps and Bible schools, and distributors of Christian literature for children. The violation of the article of the law that, among other things, established criminal responsibility for the collective teaching of religion to children was the most widespread among believers. Alexander Lakhno estimates that this article was brought into play in more than 50% of all criminal cases of those who were convicted in Ukraine during the 1960s-1980s for the violation of Soviet legislation on cults.^[21] This is much more than for any other article of the law.

Over time the discussions among Evangelical Christians-Baptists around this question became less sharp, but they had to protect their right to the Christian education of children all the time, particularly in discussions with “scientific atheists.” These discussions revealed significant divergence in views on Christian education. The believers interpreted its goals in its ethical and practical dimension, whereas “scientific atheism” regarded these goals as purely ideological and dogmatic. One of the arguments used by believers against the requirement of Soviet powers to protect children from religious influence went like this: “To teach children faith and obedience to God is like teaching them not to play with fire. Nobody would consider talking about fire and its dangers only to persons over 18.”^[22]

There were typical practices of children’s education in a church, such as Sunday schools, Bible study groups, and preparation for participation in church services. Churches strove to create special places convenient for work with children, and an interesting, attractive atmosphere that would successfully compete with “worldly” institutions of organized recreation: playgrounds, hobby groups, Pioneer meetings, etc. In the process of teaching, churches also used various forms of games, e.g. Biblical quizzes or theatrical performances. The teachers were mostly women. S. M. Shaptala recalls this as follows:

Children’s activities were organized in the church. They were conducted by two sisters who devoted themselves to this ministry. We called them “Aunt Tonya Lobanova” and “Aunt Galya Kolesnichenko.” They encouraged us to learn by heart verses from the Holy Scripture, learn Christian songs, and prepared declamations and Christian stage performances with us for Christian holidays. Sometimes we

[21] Out of 270 convicted representatives of the “underground wing” of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists, 137 were convicted under Article 138 of the Criminal Code of Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (equivalent of article 142 of the Criminal Code of Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic). This is slightly more than 50%. The terms of conviction were 2 to 5

years in camps of general regime; sometimes they were supplemented also by years of internal exile. See O. P. Lahno, *Cerkovna opozicija Evangel's'kih hristijan-baptistiv v Ukraïni (1940-1980-ti roky)*, (Poltava: Drukars'ka majsternja, 2009), pp. 154-162.

[22] *Vestnik spasenija* No. 3 (47) (1974): 37.

took hikes. In the church there was also a string orchestra. Children were also taught to play string instruments, because Christians did not send their kids to music schools, since people there mostly learned songs glorifying the Communist Party and the leader of the proletariat, V. I. Lenin. Later on our church also organized a brass band, and other musical and vocal groups. Youth and teenagers attended Biblical study sessions, wrote concluding papers, passed exams on previously learned material. There were also hobby groups on carpentry for boys, cooking and dressmaking for girls.^[23]

Reading and learning the Bible was an especially respected occupation. This is explained by the specifics of the doctrine of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, and also by the fact that at this time their churches had no developed schools of interpretation of the Holy Scripture. That is why people tried to reproduce and interpret Biblical verses as close to the text as possible, learn them by heart and understand them as literally as possible. Also, the Bible served as a guideline for practical life; “biblicism” was considered a synonym for holiness and spirituality. “The Biblical view of things,” “life according to Scripture,” became verbal markers of a collective identity. Authority in this community directly depended on one’s knowledge of the Bible and the ability to give examples from one’s own life that would aptly illustrate Scriptural texts. Children were also taught this skill.

The value of Bible readings was heightened by the fact that it was difficult to obtain a Bible. Not even every adult had a full edition of the Holy Scripture, not to mention children. Today believers recall their childish experience of managing to obtain a full or partial text of the Bible with manifest awe, as something extremely important. For example, Yelena Anatolyevna Goncharova, a daughter of presbyter A. I. Goncharov, received her first personal Gospel from the senior presbyter for the Donetsk region, I.Y. Tatarchenko, as a gift for her birthday. At that time she was 12 years old.^[24] This was a thin, palm-size book of John. The children of church ministers (presbyters, deacons) had more opportunities to obtain a personal copy of the Holy Scripture than the children of “ordinary” church members. This gave the former more options to win authority among their peers and thus prepared them for future leadership in a local church.

A widespread children’s occupation was learning Christian poems and songs, and participation in theatrical performances on Biblical themes. The aesthetics of poetry and music was primarily called on to influence the emotional sphere of the audience. The most common motif of Evangelical-Baptist poetry for children (as well as adults) was that of confrontation between the Christian world and the “world of unbelief and sin.” Folk poetry declared that one’s most important task from childhood onward is to obtain the Christian faith, preserve it, and protect it from the encroachments of the external “godless” society. This may be illustrated by the following verse:

^[23] S. M. Shaptala, *Sovetskoe detstvo verujushchego*.

^[24] Author’s interview with E. A. Goncharova, Donetsk, July 2010.

I am a little soldier of Jesus,
I have not got much strength!
But I long for immortal truth,
For the source of eternal day.^[25]

This children's poetry is full of images and metaphors that express binary oppositions of good vs. evil, "light" vs. "darkness," "truth" vs. "falsehood," selflessness vs. egotism – all symbolizing two different worlds, that of believers and that of atheists.

The second in terms of importance is the motif of suffering. The artistic world of Evangelical children's poetry portrays the world as full of Christian suffering. Suffering was directly or indirectly caused by the influence or activities of a hostile atheistic society that persecutes Christians and fights against the Christian faith.

Another equally important motif of children's poetry is that of constant accent on the necessity of spreading one's faith, preaching the gospel, and "witnessing" about Christ to nonbelievers. Here is a typical verse:

My friend, if you meet an evil atheist,
Those who reject the Nativity of Christ,
Tell them meekly, to save them from delusion:
Why is the nursery for newborns called a 'manger'?..^[26]

The main goal of a "little" Christian was to show to "atheists" their delusions, the falsity of their worldview and the sinfulness of their "God-rejecting" activity.

There was also special, clandestine Christian prose for children. A three-volume edition called *Detskij drug* [Children's friend] is an interesting example of such literature. It is collection of stories for children, copied manually and then printed on a primitive hectograph (believers called it a "blueprint"). According to some data, its compiler and possibly the author of some of its texts was N. L. Shimanskaya, a resident of Zhitomir.^[27] It was created sometime at the end of 1960s.

Let us endeavor to analyze the third volume of this collection.^[28] This is a Christmas edition, where a number of works are devoted to Christmas. In total there are 68 works, including poems, short stories, and one longer narrative. No authors are indicated. The main heroes of the stories are children aged 2 to 15 years. The collection is full of tragic narratives. The motif of death is present in 22 texts out of 68: the dying persons are children, their parents, or other characters. Ten narratives mention the illness of the main character; the same number

^[25] "Sbornik stihov dlja detej. Zapis" 1966-1972 godov," no author. Personal archives of E. A. Goncharova, p. 44.

^[26] The verse refers to the two meanings of the word "manger" (Rus. *yasli*) in the Christian world (the place of Christ's birth) and everyday usage (an institution that cares for infants). It is noteworthy that the word "evil" in the text is slightly crossed out and instead the word "such"

is written in (*meet such an atheist...*); *Sbornik stihov dlja detej*, p. 29.

^[27] She was convicted for the distribution of children's religious literature and imprisoned during 1971-1974; see G. Vedel "Predislovie," *Detskij drug*, v.3 (Kremenchug: Izdatel'stvo «Hristianskaja zarja», 2004), p.3.

^[28] *Detskij drug*, vol. 3, n. p., n.d., p. 443. Personal archive of S. M. Shaptala.

of narratives tells about little orphans adopted or found by their parents or receiving some help from adults, mostly on the occasion of Christmas. Another clear motif is that of poverty and misery and its opposition to wealth (this motif is basic in 14 stories). Three stories are devoted to children whose parents are imprisoned. In addition, there are a few stories with “positive” or neutral content, including one humor-and-adventure story, several spiritually edifying stories, and one anecdote.^[29] One might remark that this children’s prose reflects Soviet stereotypes of social inequality, which were widespread in non-religious children’s literature, e.g. in numerous translated works of Charles Dickens. The tragic motifs of the stories are counterbalanced by the constant motif of communication with God, expectation of His help, and hope for eternal life and joy after death. Also, this literature seemingly conveys a specifically Evangelical-Baptist understanding of spirituality.

Especially remarkable in this volume is a story called “Godsend.”^[30] It is much longer than any other text in this volume. The plot of the story is as follows. A boy, Zhenya, from a family of believers finds a briefcase containing money and valuables. He shows it to his parents and they jointly decide to return the briefcase to its owner, known by certain available information. Zhenya brings the briefcase to its owner, Mr. New-Man, and meets his family. This family is very rich, but also unhappy due to the recent death of its two children because of an illness. The New-Mans seek to help Zhenya’s family. They invite the boy to their house for Christmas. He elicits liking and sympathy, partly because he resembles their own son. He behaves in their family like a child with a Christian upbringing: he prays before eating, tells about his belief in God, and sings psalms. This deeply impresses Mrs. New-Man. She is especially fond of his singing psalms that deeply touch her soul. Zhenya and his family are rather poor, but they live a well-ordered, measured life, preserving optimism and good mutual relations. Under this influence Mrs. New-Man also decides to become a Christian. She first turns to God in prayer in the presence of Zhenya’s family members. Then she attends a meeting of believers and repents in public. After that she gradually begins to change her way of life. Now she dresses modestly, organizes a charity Christmas evening for poor children; after a while she purchases a Bible and reads it regularly with awe. Her husband expresses resolute disagreement with this change in her views and suggests separating. She moves from their house to a rented apartment and continues living there in modesty and piety. She regularly attends believers’ meetings, administers charity, and reads the Holy Scripture. Later on she falls ill and dies, but before that she has enough time to be baptized. After separating, her husband goes abroad for a while. When he learns that she is ill he goes back but does not find her alive. Being very upset by her death, he starts thinking about God and eternity and reading the Bible.

The story is full of symbolic details. The family of New-Mans is German, but their last name should be obviously taken in its literal English meaning. In the

^[29] It is noteworthy that these stories were not included in the latest (2004) edition of this collection.
^[30] *Detskij drug*, v. 3, pp. 74-187.

context of the story it is apparent that the reader is to see them as people gradually coming to spiritual renewal. Zhenya's family is Russian, although his mother also has German roots. This probably suggests that the true faith may not necessarily come from Germans to Russians, but that the reverse direction is also possible. It is also remarkable that Mrs. New-Man, after obtaining her new faith, becomes markedly uncompromising in her relations with her family and consciously adopts hardship and suffering. In doing this, she behaves very meekly and sentimentally, often weeps, generally suffers from rapid changes of mood, and becomes inclined to personal modesty and charity. It is not clear from the text of the story why this behavior is so sharply rejected by her husband. It seems that the author of the story wanted to depict Mr. New-Man as the one who stopped thinking rationally and became imbued with spontaneous hatred to Christianity under the influence of a "devil's suggestion." The death of Ms. New-Man makes him a believer. The impression is that the author of the story symbolically sacrifices her (woman) for his (man's) salvation, thus suggesting to the reader that a male conversion is more important and more difficult to achieve than for a female. In terms of content (but not composition) the central point of the story is that a child, the 12-years-old boy Zhenya, actually brings the New-Man family to faith in God. He plays the role of a missionary-evangelist and thus fulfils the great and important spiritual task of his life, by bringing a "lost soul to salvation in Christ." Zhenya behaves solely as a bearer of the image of an "ideal child," as constructed by the world of adults. His natural childishness is outside the limits of this image, and therefore stays outside the limits of the story. Zhenya shows almost no signs of childish authenticity. He does not play with other children, does not frolic, does not break any rules, is always obliging and occupied mostly by studies, assisting his parents, prayers and lessons in spiritual music – i.e., only the activities expected from him by adults. By doing this, he apparently assures adults that he will grow up as a "true Christian." All other possible manifestations of his personality are not mentioned by the author, seemingly because he or she regards them as either unimportant or potentially harmful.

Another important aspect of the life of the children of believers in Soviet times was that they, as well as adults, were expected to feel some mystical experience of communication with God. The expectation was that God would answer children's prayers by manifestation of a special miracle. Accordingly, virtually every event of everyday life could be treated in certain circumstances as a miracle and response to prayer. Children were taught to regard every event of their life as a manifestation of God's grace and love. One of the issues of *Vestnik spasenija* published fragments of children's letters, telling about how God helped them after they prayed. Here are examples of such narratives: "When my dad was imprisoned, a believing aunt N. visited us often. I liked her very much. Then she was imprisoned as well. We wanted so much to visit her in prison, but we were not her relatives. And we prayed that we would be admitted for a visit. God answered our prayers. We felt very happy when we met"; or: "I have to go to a shop at the railway station. It's already dark. There are many dogs on the street, and they

scare me. I prayed that the dogs would go away. And indeed, they went away!”^[31]

Generally, the community of Evangelical Christians-Baptists placed children rather highly both in theological/interpretational discourse and social/church organization. Children were living the life of their community, participated in church services (“worshiping God,” “glorifying God” etc.), were perceived as important bearers of religious outlook and values. Since, according to the Evangelical-Baptist vision, feelings are the most important driver to conversion, children with their ability to evoke tenderness and compassion were regarded by the church as potentially more effective missionaries and preachers than adults. This also raised the value of children in the eyes of their community. On the other hand, the practices of collective activities in church fostered the formation of a children’s Christian milieu, special friendship among the children of believers, and thus the future solidarity of the community. Of course, church influence was actively supplemented by family upbringing.

Children in a family of believers

Believing parents, acting jointly with the church community, must raise their children “as Christians,” i.e. prepare them for conscious conversion, repentance, or acceptance of Christ as their Lord. “Of course, my parents should also be credited for my conversion: they prayed for me constantly,” recalled presbyter S. M. Shaptala.^[32] The influence of parents was not limited to prayers. Traditionally, family was the primary milieu of children’s socialization and adaptation to life.

Believing parents, mostly, although not completely, understood the purposes and methods of upbringing in accordance with theological interpretations and common practices adopted within the Evangelical-Baptist community. The value of family as “domestic church,” the ban on abortions and censure of contraception caused the widespread phenomenon of large Baptist families with many children. However, the number of children was still relatively moderate. The most widespread were families with four to six children,^[33] only rarely did they have ten or more. The scope of the family influenced many features of the everyday life of believers, particularly their preference for living in detached, privately-owned houses. Not only in villages and small cities, but even in some big urbanized regions believers mostly lived in their own houses, not apartments.^[34] A well-developed tradition of mutual assistance and support among community members helped a family of believers create a rather wide autonomous space within Soviet society. Here both parents and their children felt themselves relatively safe.

One of the important aspects of family upbringing was gender distribution of roles between parents. Who should be more occupied with upbringing, mother

^[31] *Vestnik spasenija* No. 1-2 (45-46) (1974): 33.

^[32] S. M. Shaptala. *Sovetskoe detstvo verujushchego*.

^[33] M. Ja. Lensu and E. S. Prokoshina, eds., *Baptizm i baptisty. (Sociologicheskij ocherk)* (Minsk: Izd-vo «Nauka i Tehnika», 1969), p. 49; N. Beljakova N. and A. Sinichkin A. *Kollektivnye prak-*

tiki tipichnoj obvinny evangel'skih hristian-baptistov v pozdnesovetskij period. Doklad na mezhdunarodnoj konferencii «religioznye praktiki v SSSR: vyzyvanie i soprotivlenie v uslovijah nasil'stvennoj sekularizacii», Moskva, RGGU, 16-18 fevralja 2012 g.

or father? Who actually did it more? Of course, if asked directly, an Evangelical Christian-Baptist would certainly say, both. However, in two-parent families where both parents were believers there was visible distribution of duties between father and mother. This was reflected in the process of family upbringing, and generally in the entire system of family interrelations. Father played a more significant role in family upbringing, because he was traditionally considered the head of the “domestic church.” The role of the mother was to assist him, including in upbringing. Traditionally mother took care of the little children, protected them from bad influences, cooked, laundered and tidied the house, even read them books aloud, but it was father who conveyed to them the “main truths” and how to employ them in life. Much attention was given to mother’s prayer. This socially passive activity was interpreted as the most spiritual and heroic of all possible motherly deeds for her children.^[35] Mother should also show an example of obedience to father, i.e. her husband. Women themselves often established and maintained this model of behavior as exemplary and normative. Father, in his turn, should teach strategically important things: how to “serve God,” how to realize the key patterns of Christian behavior in the external, hostile, “anti-Christian” world. In the worldview of a child and a family of believers, mother does not change the world: she only asks others (God, husband) to do so. Father, on the contrary, changes the world directly, transforms it by his own efforts, sometimes even struggle.^[36]

Since gender roles in Baptism were traditionally distributed, one may suggest that mothers played a more significant role in the upbringing of girls (as compared to boys) and established more confidential, personal relations with them. However, there is not much evidence to support this claim. In addition, the role of mother increased if the father, for some reason, was absent (“in bonds for God’s work,” i.e. imprisoned for violation of the legislation on cults, or somewhere on the move, underground, working, dead, etc.). If so, the mother also assumed a special duty of education of their children taking the place of the father. However, even then the father remained the main example, always present in a kind of virtual, spiritually symbolic space in the memory of his family as its head and the main educator. In the confessional literature that reflects the situation of that time, father is often described as a “saint,” a “hero of faith,” a “servant of God,” more important and worthy of imitation than mother. It was considered “holy” to “follow in father’s footsteps.” Some authors excitedly recall their being in the same place of exile where their fathers were exiled before.^[37] Father was a symbolic figure, a bearer of spiritual continuity that went back to Biblical images of

^[34] O. I. Panych, “Sociokul’turni tendencii rozvitku baptizmu v Ukraïni u 1960 – na pochatku 1990-h rokiv”. *Istoriya religij v Ukraïni. Naukovij schorichnik*. Kniga II (L’viv: Logos, 2006), pp. 414-420.

^[35] *Vestnik istiny* No. 4 (1977): 36.

^[36] In some cases the upbringing of children was assumed by a grandmother. This substantially

influenced the worldview and the notions about a woman’s place in church and society; see, e.g., the memoirs of Natal’ja Vins: N. Vins, *Rubezhij detstva* (Elkhart: Russian Gospel Ministries, 2000).

^[37] M. Horev, “Pishu vam, deti,” *Vestnik istiny* No. 1 (1983): 30; G. Vins, *Tropoju vernosti*, 3rd ed. (St. Petersburg: Biblija dlja vseh, 2003), p. 177.

the Apostles and faith heroes. This motif of continuity is very clear in the trilogy of N. Khrapov, *Schast'e poterjannoj zhizni* [*Happiness of a lost life*].^[38] Sometimes the heroic father figure is clearly opposed to an “everyday” and “subsidiary” figure of mother. For example, the memoirs of Natal'ja Vins, the daughter of well-known Baptist dissident Georgij Vins, are full of extensive stories about her father, his impressive speeches and deeds, whereas the image of her mother is marked by scanty remarks such as, “After the first delights mom goes to the kitchen to make dinner;” “Mama put several heads of garlic into the pocket of his jacket; she wanted to add some candies, but dad stopped her;” “Mama worried if we had time to catch the last bus to Yakutsk.”^[39] In some cases mother was remembered from childhood as a strong and “spiritual” person;^[40] however, generally her “shadowy” position or her place “in the kitchen” was common and was considered in Baptist families as normal. This position of mother was a part of everyday world of childhood.

Let us also analyze the process of children’s familiarization with the spiritual and religious values in a family of believers. First of all, children were actively accustomed to religious practices, such as prayer and reading the Holy Scripture. Adults believed that this secures the success of their children in the future spiritual and moral life. A “samizdat” evangelical magazine, *Roditeli i deti* [Parents and children], stated that the key problems of human life are always rooted in a bad family upbringing – namely, that parents did not pay enough attention to common prayer and reading the Bible together with their children. The authors of the magazine remarked that “family prayer is a kind of a first experience of practical application of faith in a child’s life.”^[41]

The view of spiritual upbringing was generally close to John Amos Comenius, whose works were carefully studied by Baptist preachers: “Let the children learn to honor God subconsciously, let them gain a SKILL. When they become conscious, it will be easier for them to do so. If you will not impart to them a habit of honoring God, in any case (again subconsciously) they will certainly gain other habits – either useless, or even harmful.”^[42] The key definitions for the most relevant description of Christian upbringing in the milieu of Evangelical Christians-Baptists are “skill”, “habit” and “discipline.” Due to this, children took prayer and reading the Bible as something habitual, self-evident, even commonplace, an unavoidable element of everydayness.^[43] This applies primarily to personal and collective family prayer, e.g. before a meal, during family meetings, before adopting

^[38] N. Hrapov, *Schast'e poterjannoj zhizni*, v. 3 (Gummersbach: Missionswerk Friedensstimme, 2000).

^[39] N. Vins, *Rubezhy detstva*, pp. 5,9.

^[40] Personal interview with P. D. Minayev, Donetsk, June 20, 2011. (Interestingly, people with such memories over time usually regard women who have an active position in life more tolerantly, admit their ability to create generally valid spiritual and cultural values).

^[41] *Roditeli i deti*. No. 1 (January 1976): 17.

^[42] Notes taken by A. Prokof'eva, Vyderzhki iz knigi J.A.Komenskogo «Izbrannye pedagogicheskie sochinenija» 1955 goda izdaniya, priblizitel'no vremja sostavlenija - konec 1950h – nachalo 60h gg., podcherknuto A.Prokof'evym). Personal archive of L. Prokof'eva, Donetsk.

^[43] For more details about the meaning of everydayness, see G. Garfinkel, “Issledovanie privychnyh osnovanij povsednevnyh dejstvij,” *Sociologicheskoe obozrenie.*, v. 2. № 1 (2002): 42-70

important decisions, or in cases of complicated situations and life difficulties.

Equally important was the way parents educated their children. The widespread understanding was that parents must be an example of pious life for their children, sincerely imitating Biblical models. Here is some of the advice given to parents in the magazine *Roditeli i deti*: 1. Be a good example for the children, not only when they see and hear you, but also when they don't. 2. If you see children's shortcomings, test your own condition, your actions, your wishes and aspirations. 3. When you find shortcomings, vices, misdeeds in yourself, correct yourself first, and then seek to correct the children. 4. You can guide children only if God guides you...^[44]

In this context the example of parents was indeed exceptionally important for upbringing and in many respects defined the child's future role in the church. Presbyterian S. M. Schaptala recalls:

The greatest influence on me in my education was the love and justice of my parents, their living faith and life devoted to God. Dad often brought me with him since the time I was seven when he had to go somewhere for church services; he introduced me to brother-ministers and their families and let me talk to them. Brother-ministers often visited our house... Some brothers lived with us for several weeks. There were moments when they talked to me and sometimes even helped me with my homework for school... I often witnessed the informal communication of brothers, listened to their statements, their discourses on various questions. Mostly it was reasoning about religion. Perhaps they believed that I did not grasp their sayings, that I am present because dad has no place to leave me, so that he was forced to bring me along. However, it was dad's strategy for my upbringing. For me it was a good school.^[45]

One of the favorite motifs of Soviet atheistic propaganda was reasoning about excessive severity and even cruelty of believers toward their children, justified by references to the Bible.^[46] Psychologists and anthropologists also remark that certain interpretations of the Scripture and Christian ethics may serve as a motive for violence, including in a family. "The Bible mentions children about two thousand times. There are numerous cases of child-sacrifice, stoning, simply beating them; the Bible repeatedly stresses the requirement of children's love and obedience; however, there is not a single hint of sympathy for children and understanding of their feelings."^[47] One cannot deny the fact of cruel treatment of children due to religious motives in the milieu of Evangelical Christians-Baptists,

^[44] *Roditeli i deti*, p. 21.

^[45] S. M. Shaptala. *Sovetskoe detstvo verujushchego*.

^[46] Atheistic authors report that the lives of believers' children were much more limited than the lives of ordinary children. The former were not allowed to go to the cinema, theatre, concerts, and were not allowed to play with children from unbelieving families. Apparently such restrictions were indeed widespread. See *Baptizm i baptisty. (Sociologicheskij ocherk)*, ed. by M. Ja. Lensu, E.S.Prokoshina, p. 145; P. L. Kaus-

hanskij, *S pretenzijej na istinu: O vzgljadah i dejatel'nosti jekstremistov ot baptizma* (Odessa: Majak, 1988), pp. 196-199; P. Pautin, *Dom s zakrytymi stavnjami* (Novosibirsk: Zapadno-Sibirskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1975), p. 149.

^[47] I. V. Nosko, "Detstvo kak psihosociokul' turnyj fenomen," *Social'naja rabota v Sibiri. Sbornik nauchnyh trudov* (Kemerovo: Kuzbassvuzizdat, 2004), pp. 118 – 132.(127) [<http://hpsy.ru/public/x2624.htm>]

although they are confirmed only by fragmentary evidence. However, violence was not the norm. A typical example of reasoning on upbringing is an instructive story in a Christian magazine about a son and his pious father.^[48] The narrative tells that the son came home drunk; the indignant father first turned him out of the house, but then changed his mind, found him, apologized and asked him to go back home. The story ends with a common prayer of father and son, where they both repent of their misdeeds before God: father for the wrong upbringing and edification of his son, and the son for his immoral action.

This idealized case has a symbolic meaning. Evangelical Christians-Baptists traditionally considered drunkenness as one of the most basic sins. This is because drunkenness was widespread in the social environment where Evangelical Christians-Baptists usually attracted neophytes. If drunkenness may be considered a certain form of social behavior, then its role in the formation of Baptist culture in Soviet times was exceptionally important. The rejection of this particular sin was the most evident and weighty demonstration of one's spiritual revival, "the second birth," which should come after the sinner has appealed to God. The testimonies of believers contain plenty of stories about people who renounced drunkenness under the influence of "God's transformative grace."^[49] Moreover, the believers usually supposed that, if one rejects God, one would almost certainly become a drunkard. Drunkenness definitely confirmed, on the one hand, the "sinfulness" and "fallen character" of this world, and, on the other hand, the moral and spiritual advantage of believers. Sobriety, together with honesty, in Soviet times was the basis of the symbolic capital of Baptists, which helped most of them to find employment and not to find themselves completely out of society. To lose this advantage meant somehow to discredit the entire Baptist community. That is why even insignificant use of alcohol was always interpreted as a "defection from the Church and God." The love to alcohol is also a sign of "love for the world," of adherence to "worldly pleasures," i.e. departure from "friendship with Christ." Drunkenness was considered a necessary attribute of the lives of worldly people, as well as attending theater, cinema, concerts and participation in other entertainments. Thus, the common belief of Baptists of this time was that a believer must avoid all these "amusements" and "corrupting shows" and bring up his/her children accordingly.

In the given case the story indicates what would be the normative reaction of a Christian father to the serious misbehavior or "disobedience" of his child. In fact, love, mercy and forgiveness are declared here as more legitimate values of parental attitude than punishment, severity and cruelty.

One should take into account that "obedient and God-loving children" in the milieu of Evangelical Christians-Baptists raised the authority of their parents in the church. The father of such children had much greater chances of becoming a presbyter,^[50] his opinions were more influential. The mother of such children also enjoyed significant authority. The believers had virtually no opportunities for

^[48] *Roditeli i deti*, pp. 18-19.

^[49] My personal observation.

^[50] Substantiated by Scripture: Timothy 3:12;

Titus 1:5-6.

social promotion in an atheistic society, so their authority within the local church/ community was all the more significant. That is why parents regarded bringing up children “in the Christian spirit” as a separate socially and personally important project; its success seriously influenced their self-esteem and standing within the community. Feeling this, parents became more emotional and tense, therefore more inclined to authoritarianism and violence in communication with “disobedient” children. On the other hand, the authority of parents also passed to the children. The children of believing parents, especially church ministers, had more opportunity to become leaders of their church community. Unlike the newly converted, they were always perceived as “kin,” i.e. as natural bearers of the Evangelical-Baptist outlook.

One more important aspect of parental upbringing was that they cultivated in their children, starting from the most tender age, the idea of their exceptionality, exclusiveness against the background of the erring and hostile “outside world”. Parents sincerely tried to impart to their children the idea that they are “special” and “alien” in this society, they belong to those “persecuted for faith” and should follow the example of their parents by heroically vindicating their view. In fact, children were prepared to become heroes and martyrs. External circumstances also contributed to this approach (I will give more details later in the text). A typical illustration is the incident reported in the memorandum of P. Kiselev, Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs in Donetsk region, concerning his visit to the Baptist family of Dina Mihailovna Gordienko (City of Gorlovka, January 1977): “I asked the hostess to send the children to another room... [She replied:] Since we’ll talk about religion, the children will stay here, let them sit and listen about the persecutions we undergo all our life for being believers.”^[51]

Interestingly enough, Baptists used for upbringing not only Christian, but also Soviet symbols of heroism and self-sacrifice. This is demonstrated by a verse called “The Christian eaglet.” Evgenij Nikiforovich Pushkov, a Baptist preacher and poet, addressed this verse to his son who was present when Pushkov was seized by the Soviet militia during an unauthorized church service:

...he took the hand of his father and cuddled up to it,
With as much strength as he had,
And he heard: “Oh my son, I am content with you,
You are faithful, my Christian eaglet!”

Father roughly and rudely was pushed aside,
People took him away, shoving fiercely,
“Oh my eaglet, don’t cry, and stand firm with all your force,
This is Christian destiny, darling!...”^[52]

Generally, upbringing in a Christian family was not limited to religious segment only. It embraced more integral development of personality, but this did not make it less Christian. Also, even though some families of believers preserved

^[51] State archive of Donetsk region, F. P-4021, op.1, d. 269, ll. 168-169.

^[52] *Vestnik istiny* No. 4-5 (2008): 3 ff.; English translation provided by Oleksiy Panych.

a rather high level of social autonomy, their children were not isolated from the influence of other socializing factors, including those of state policy, school and society.

Children of believers and Soviet society

Soviet society regarded the education of children as a sphere of its monopolistic influence.^[53] That is why the children of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the 1960s-1980s were at the center of a political struggle. Formally, the law did not forbid parents to educate their own children in a religious spirit, under the stipulation that this would take place at home by the mutual consent of both parents. However, the law made no provision for parents' wish to have their children present at church services, in Sunday schools, or Christian children's camps. State officials reported with anxiety that, among all Christian denominations, Evangelical Christians-Baptists proved to be the most active in defending their right to the religious education of their children, in the broadest sense of the term.^[54]

It is difficult today to estimate the level of pressure on the children of believers in Soviet society. However, one may argue that this pressure ranged from moderate to high. First of all, children were affected by repressions against their parents. In late Soviet times the most persecuted were the followers of the underground wing of the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood, who openly struggled against the Soviet legislation on religious cults. Their uncompromising position irritated elicited the hatred of the authorities.^[55] They created an effective system for collecting and disseminating information about the persecution of believers in the USSR; thanks to this we have more or less authentic information about the children of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. Especially active here was the Council of Relatives of Evangelical Christian-Baptist Prisoners – an underground organization that consisted mostly of the mothers of large families.

Bulletins and messages of the Council of Prisoners' Relatives describe various violations of the rights of believers. In particular, they calculated that during 1961-1970, 390 children of believing parents were interrogated by public prosecutors and militia in relation to the religious activity of their parents.^[56] Often children were called for interrogation by deceptive means; during the interrogation they were intimidated, threatened, and morally pressured. State authorities usually did not subject the children of believers to physical violence, but encouraged violence towards them by teachers and peers. It is interesting that one of the purposes of interrogations was the collection of information that would help to prove

[53] See M. V. Romashova, *Sovetskoe detstvo v 1945 – seredine 1950-h gg.: gosudarstvennye proekty i provincial'nye praktiki*.

[54] Gol'st, p. 91.

[55] W. Sawatsky, *Evangelicheskoe dvizhenie v SSSR posle Vtoroj mirovoj vojny*, pp. 182-230; T. Nikol'skaja, *Russkij protestantizm i gosudarstvennaja vlast' v 1905-1991 godah* (St. Petersburg:

Izd-vo Evropejskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2009) pp. 227-242; O. P. Lahno, *Cerkovna opozicija Evangel's'kih hristijan-baptistiv v Ukraini (1940-1980-ti roky)*, pp. 98-146.

[56] Arhiv nauchno-prosvetitel'skogo centra «Memorial» (Moscow), F.158: «Napominanie Pravitel'stvu SSSR o polozhenii baptistov, 13 dekabnja 1970 g.», AS № 871, p. 41.

that their parents forced them to participate in religious activities. In fact, children were forced to testify against their parents. Of course, it was important for the parents that the children would not divulge any information about church life, although, as we have already seen, this life actually was an integral part of their everyday childish experience. In this respect, a child of believing parents faced a difficult choice where every action reflected the extremity of his/her existence. This was the context of the formation of his/her notions of “love,” “faithfulness,” “sincerity,” “faith.”

Nikolaj Bojko, a presbyter from Odessa, tells in his memoirs how his children behaved during interrogation related to his being charged with underground religious activity:

...After another interrogation they got my brother to sign a statement that he'll bring my children to the prosecutor's office for interrogation in the presence of their teacher. He did not recognize the trap and brought three elder children (Lyuda – 11, Vera – 10 and Pavel – 9 years old)... Lyuda was brought into the room for interrogation. I could hear her crying all the time and saying – “My dad is good! My dad is good!” When they led her out of the room, she helplessly weakened and could not walk. It seemed that her legs grew numb because of worry and nervous tension. The other daughter, Vera, was too childish to understand the seriousness of the situation. During the interrogation she smiled all the time, said nothing, and agreed to nothing. They gave her candies, promised to purchase her beautiful shoes, just to make her say that dad forced them to go to the church meetings...^[57]

This narrative shows that the father, in addition to his natural compassion for his little children, also regarded it as important that they would “say nothing” and “agree to nothing.” It is easily imaginable that the everyday life of such family was extremely uneasy; its peace could be ruined at any moment by the invasion of state authorities. In such conditions a child was brought up in the spirit of special *love* and *faithfulness* toward his/her father; the task was *not to betray* the father in the hour of need, and at the same time *not to lie*, to be *honest* before God. This ought to manifest his/her personal *faith* in Christ. In such an atmosphere a child should from an early age perceive the state and its authorities as the “enemies of the people of God” and the source of unpredictable violence. Eventually believers formed the habit of mistrust toward state power and censure of it beginning from their very childhood.

In fact, in late Soviet times there was no large-scale violence against believers and their families. According to the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, in 1960s-1980s only 30 families suffered deprivation of parental rights.^[58] However, the threat of such deprivation, as well as other oppressions, existed constantly and had a strong psychological impact, creating an atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty.^[59]

^[57] N. E. Bojko, *Verju v bessmertie. Avtobiograficheskij ocherk*. (Moscow: Izd-vo «Hristianin», 2007), pp. 64-65.

^[58] Personal letter of V. M. Khorev to the au-

thor, dated March 01, 2012.

^[59] W. Sawatsky, *Evangelicheskoe dvizhenie v SSSR posle Vtoroj mirovoj vojny* (Mowcow: «IC-Garant», 1995), pp. 348-349.

No less important was that children's experience and feelings became a weapon in the ideological confrontation. The appeals of the Council of Prisoners' Relatives are full of colorful descriptions of the tragic destiny that befell the children of believers. The council's bulletin for 1970 published a number of children's petitions to the government of the USSR under the title, "The voice of prisoners' children." The list of their requests reflects not so much their own needs as the needs of the entire religious community. They demanded freedom of religion, changes of policy towards the church, the release of prisoners for faith, freedom of public preaching (e.g. the request to permit Billy Graham to preach at Luzhniki stadium in Moscow and the broadcasts of radio stations that transmitted Christian sermons). Sometimes the "voice of the children of prisoners" openly called for repentance. Political agenda and homiletic rhetoric were often a part of children's statements. For example, Pavlik L. addressed the government as follows: "When I completed the eighth grade, I was given very bad references, but I thanked God for it, because 'people reject Christ, if they persecute me, it means they confirm that I am with Him.' I want to tell our government that God loves them and wants to save them as well; we forgive them everything. [I wish] that the Bible would be studied in classrooms. [I wish] that great preachers could freely come to us and preach and that people were forgiven for their sins. [I wish] that all prisoners were released. They [the government] fight in vain against those who cannot be defeated. There are no bonds for God's Word. The children will stand up for their imprisoned fathers and continue the deed they initiated."^[60] Specific childish needs and requests were to let them enter higher education institutions in the future (at that time this was virtually impossible) and to stop oppression against them in secondary schools.

In late Soviet times, secondary school was one of the most active centers of pressure on the children from believing families. Its pedagogical orientation generally corresponded to the strategic purposes of the policy of "scientific atheism."^[61] School teachers were natural bearers of Soviet ideological agenda, including an atheist outlook. They were called to spread and consolidate this agenda in the worldview of young Soviet citizens. They were also heavily pressured to do that by Communist party organs and governmental enforcement agencies, which demanded that the school make a weighty contribution to the process of eradicating religion. How traumatic the school experience of a child from a family of believers would be largely depended on the moral and intellectual level of a particular teacher. The teacher could become a friend of such a child, protect him/her, sympathize with his/her feelings, or could be a manipulator, knowing his/her everyday life and habits, or initiate oppressions by setting other children against this one. In the data collected by the Council of Prisoners' Relatives teachers mostly appear as those who organized interrogations of children, literally luring them out of their homes under various pretexts; they also deliberately

^[60] *Bulletin Soveta rodstvennikov uznikov* No. 13 (1970): 10.

^[61] John Dunstan, "Soviet Schools, Atheism and

Religion" in *Religious Policy in Soviet Union*. Ed. by Sabrina Petra Ramet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.158-185.

underestimated these children's grades and references, and participated in their harassment and public humiliation.^[62]

One of the most traumatic situations for Baptist children was related to admission into the Pioneers. A special Pioneer neckerchief was an important symbol, a marker of Soviet identity. Among other symbols, it was actively used in extracurricular educational activities, during ritualized ceremonial events. This was intended to arouse students' patriotic feeling towards the "first Soviet state in the world" and further their solidarity.^[63] Many believers who took external symbols very seriously as the only available tool to mark their Christian identity were sensitive to this symbol and rejected it. For those parents who were loyal to Soviet rituals, the question of admittance of their children to the Pioneer organization was difficult because the religious community, especially the supporters of the Council of Churches, condemned this practice as anti-Christian.^[64] This directly affected their children, who were told that the Pioneer organization is atheistic and godless (which was actually true). In this respect, the child was pressured from two sides: his/her parents forbade or condemned wearing the Pioneer neckerchief, and the school condemned him/her for not wearing it. A telling story is depicted by S. M. Shaptala:

...children were forced to put on the neckerchief and were humiliated in front of their peers. I was told that one father, in order to protect his son from these humiliations, took the neckerchief and wrote on it a text from Bible: "God is love." When his son came to school in this neckerchief, the teacher, seeing him like that, decided that she had won. However, during the lesson the children began to grin and laugh. She asked the reason for this. They showed her the back of the Baptist, and, to her horror, she read on the tie the words from Bible: "God is love." After that she never again tried to force him to wear the neckerchief...^[65]

Natal'ja Vins also reports being pressured by teachers and classmates for refusal to join the Pioneer organization.^[66]

There are grounds to argue that children of believers perceived themselves as special, both in school and in any other children's group where they were a minority. They were notable because of the extra attention paid to them by teachers and other adults, and also for evident difference in manners. This caused special difficulties for socialization in such groups. The children of believers were treated as "aliens," just as society treated their parents.^[67] The conventional norms that usually regulate interrelations in the children's subculture did not apply to

^[62] Arhiv nauchno-prosvetitel'skogo centra «Memorial» (Moscow), F.158: «Sovet rodstvennikov uznikov EHB, Obrawenie U-TANU i dr. o presledovanii baptistov v SSSR, 13 ijunja 1967 g.», AS № 801, pp. 18-24.

^[63] *Ispol'zovanie Gosudarstvennyh simvolov SSSR v vospitatel'noj rabote: Sb. st.: Iz opyta raboty*, comp. G. N. Abrosimova, V. V. Berman (Moscow: Prosvewenie, 1987), p. 159.

^[64] Author's interview with S. M. Shaptala, March 01, 2010.

^[65] S. M. Shaptala. *Sovetskoe detstvo verujushego*.

^[66] N. Vins, *Rubezhny detstva*. pp. 24-25.

^[67] O. I. Panych, "Mif pro baptistiv u radjans"komu suspil'stvi 1950-1980-h rr.: marnovirstvo i propaganda," *Ukraïns'kij istorichnij zhurnal* No. 3 (2011): 123-142.

these children.^[68] They could be subjected to unauthorized actions with no subsequent moral responsibility. In the most extreme cases such children were beaten by their classmates for various reasons, or even without any reason, with the understanding that this would entail no punishment. A striking picture of such a childhood is given by Vladimir Hajlo, one of the followers of the Council of Churches, speaking about the life of his children.^[69] One of his sons, Sasha, was called a “vampire” by his classmates. Of course, nicknames are usually spread among children and teenagers. They are especially widespread among boys and “function as a diagnostic and evaluative tool, an indicator of like/dislike in the group.”^[70] They also signify the child’s place in the group, as a sort of “title.” It is easy to see that the association with a vampire in a group of teenagers indicated dislike, disapproval, and rejection. Also one should note that the word “vampire” has symbolic meaning. In Soviet times it was most often used to label a man who lives a parasitic life. Soviet propaganda regularly applied such definitions to believers. However, this scarcely mattered for the childish consciousness.^[71] Most probably the identification of a believer with a vampire was caused by applying a magic and mythological structure to human life. Indeed, a vampire is a mythological creature that appears in many fairy tales and other folklore sources. In the semiotic space of myth, a vampire is not alive but stays in between or on the border of the world of the living and the world of the dead.^[72] He represents the world of “aliens” and temporarily appears in “our” world. Thus, this nickname reflected children’s spontaneous perception of Baptist children as “aliens,” “living an erroneous life,” “not like everybody else,” and therefore the personification of evil, or something on the borderline of good and evil. It seems that the standing of a child from a believing family was very shaky, unstable, and not completely understandable to their school and street mates. Such a child did not deserve stable trust and respect and could be exposed to baseness, deception, violence, or be excluded from the group altogether for a while. Sasha Hajlo, judging by the memoirs of his father, experienced all this in his childhood.

Of course, Hajlo’s was an extreme case. There were numerous examples of more positive, peaceful and creative experience of interrelations between children of Evangelical Christians-Baptists and their surroundings^[73] However, it was extremely difficult for a childish mind to reconcile the objectively existing and subjectively created contradictions of Soviet reality. A child could overcome his/her psychological traumas and become a morally healthy, psychologically stable

^[68] S. G. Jakobson, “Psihologicheskie problemy jeticheskogo razvitiya detej,” in *Vozrastnaja psihologija: Detstvo, otrochestvo, junost’: hrestomatija*, comp. and ed., V. S. Muhinoj, A.A. Hvostova (Moscow: Akademija, 2007), pp.196-199

^[69] Arhiv nauchno-prosvetitel’skogo centra «Memorial» (Moscow), F.158: Hajlo V. *Zapiski verujuschego*, 20.07.1974 g., AS №2170. – S.23-25.

^[70] S. N. Majorova-Scheglova, *Detskaja subkul’tura – neinstitutionalizirovannyj sektor detstva*, p.4. [<http://www.childsoc.ru/doc/>

[child_sub_kult.pdf](#)]

^[71] See M. V. Osorina, *Sekretnyj mir detej v stranstve mira vzroslyh* (St. Petersburg: Piter, 1999), p. 278.

^[72] A. K. Bajburin, “Ritual: svoe i chuzhoe,” *Fol’klor i etnografija. Problemy rekonstrukcii faktorov tradicionnoj kul’tury* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1990), pp. 3-17.

^[73] A good example of such a “happy childhood” is the personal story of P. D. Minayev.

and socially adapted personality only by being powerfully backed by family and local church community. Of course, this also meant being adapted mostly to life among believers, i.e. to become a completely “churched” person. The life of Natal’ja Vins is an exemplary case of such adaptation. As a child, she felt rejected by her schoolmates, was mocked by her teachers, was expelled from a medical college. However, the careful attention of her family, the encouragement of believing friends and mentors, active participation in church projects (“being in ministry”) helped her to legitimize, explain, and justify her childish negative experience, frame it in a clearly structured worldview. The fact of special importance for her was that for all her life she felt herself a co-participant of the authority of her father Georgij Vins and her grandmother Lydia Vins.^[74] These people were dissidents, active fighters for the rights of believers in the USSR; in the eyes of the Baptist community they were regarded as respected church servants and “faith heroes.” The memoirs of Natal’ja Vins show that from her very childhood she believed that by her efforts she helps them in their feats.^[75]

Generally we may state that inimical treatment of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, widespread in Soviet society, affected their children in a special way. These children were closely watched not only by their parents and the local church community, but also by Soviet educational institutions. Their private life, everyday habits, and needs could become a weapon in the political confrontation between the Baptist community and state authorities. On the one hand, this made the children morally vulnerable, putting them before a complicated moral and spiritual choice. On the other hand, however, it also supported a sense of their own importance, exceptionality, and participation in something significant.

Conclusion

Childhood is an important phenomenon of social life. First of all, this is the period of rapid socialization: one learns the world, masters conventional social norms, values and patterns. The models of interrelations and worldview that one acquires in one’s childhood will appear to him/her normal, ordinary, and thus basically correct for the rest of his/her life. That is why social educational institutions, such as family, school and church, strenuously seek to influence children in order to cultivate in them a certain grounded and socially legitimate worldview. However, the influence of these institutions is sometimes contradictory and thus traumatic for a child. The childhood of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the late Soviet times is an impressive example of such relations. These children grew up in the conditions of a systematic clash of contradictory, often mutually exclusive outlooks and values rooted in different ideological systems, namely Evangelical Christian and Soviet atheistic. The struggle of the state of “scientific atheism” and the Baptist community over influence on the coming generation

^[74] Georgij Vins was the secretary of the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. Lydia Vins was the head of the Council of Pris-

oners’ Relatives from 1965-1979.

^[75] N. Vins, *Rubezhny detstva*.

affected the everyday life of the children of believers and the subculture of childhood among and around those children.

The practice of religious education and upbringing of children in the milieu of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the 1960s-1980s consisted in teaching them a specific confessional understanding of spirituality and holiness, involving them in church services, and imparting to them patterns of behavior in a society that was openly hostile to religion in general and “sectarian faith” in particular. Education was focused on the formation of the ability to defend and spread one’s faith, by joint efforts of family and the local church community. They formed the immediate environment of a child and successfully competed with Soviet schools.

Because of the anti-religious pressure of state institutions, first of all secondary school, the everyday life of the children of believers was politicized; they faced social loneliness in the midst of their peers and often also the necessity of making complicated moral choices. This gave them a feeling of both their defectiveness and exceptionality. In such circumstances they became more emotionally dependent on the support of their nearest family surroundings, and also on the social environment created with the help of a local church community. Thereby the policy of “state atheism” indirectly promoted the increase of church influence on the life and development of these children.

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