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INFORMATION REPORT

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THE SOURCE EVALUATIONS IN THIS REPORT ARE DEFINITIVE.
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(FOR KEY SEE REVERSE)

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Comment:

1. In the source description on page 1, read NIOPIK for NIGPik.



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- 3. Read Donets for Donetz in paragraphs 1 and 2.
- 4. Read Pereyezdnaya for Pereyesdnaya in paragraph 2, page 1.
- 5. Read Starobelsk for Staro-Belsk in paragraph 2, page 2.
- 6. In paragraph 6, read kulich for kulitch.
- 7. In paragraph 27, read Russian Orthodox church for Greek Orthodox Church.

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REPORT

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THIS IS UNEVALUATED INFORMATION

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1. When I was sent to the Soviet Union in the autumn of 1946, I hoped to find a firsthand answer to the questions which interested me about Christianity and the church in the USSR. At first, it seemed that there was a complete religious vacuum existing, because the small industrial town of Rubezhnoye on the Donetz River, which was our place of residence for four and a half years, did not have its own church. Even before the war, according to [redacted] the local population, there was no church in existence there. When I found sometime later a church designated on a wartime map of this area, I discovered that this was merely a Soviet camouflage maneuver, for in this place a large bread factory was located.
2. We discovered a church in a neighboring village of Varvarovka. It was in a state of desolation, as if it had been years since church services had been held there. It served as a grain warehouse for the collective farm which was located in this village. The nearest church not converted to other uses was located some fifteen kilometers from Rubezhnoye in the town of Pereyesdnaya on the Donetz.

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Another one was in the town of Staro-Belsk, fifty kilometers away. According to [] the local citizens, these were the only churches in the area of Rubezhnoye which had regular church services. We were not allowed to leave the immediate area of Rubezhnoye and consequently did not have the opportunity of attending any church services. According to reliable sources, these services were very well attended, and even the youth were to be seen there in noteworthy numbers. In addition, I was once told by a frequent visitor of the Staro-Belsk church that he had noticed a very young deacon serving together with the regular old priest, a sign that the clergy was not without new blood.

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3. In the USSR, membership in a church community is not mentioned. No mention of religion is made in the personal identity papers of the citizens. The churches, however, are required to have a list of five people, including the priest, who are responsible for the building and very likely for the pure religious nature of the church services. As far as I could observe, no church taxes were allowed and the churches were forced to depend upon voluntary contributions. [Churches in most parts of Europe, including Germany, levy a tax on their respective parishes.] I was told about a famous eye doctor in Moscow, a Professor PAVLOV, who regularly attended church services and gave most of his income to the church. "It is difficult to conceive that an academician can have religious faith", [] "but perhaps he can thank his faith for his fame and skill as an eye surgeon." Had the faithful in Varvarovka also had sufficient funds to cover the costs of restoring the church in their village, it could have again been put to the use for which it was intended. The poverty-stricken conditions under which the people lived, however, prevented their even thinking of such an idea. Even the factory town of Rubezhnoye, which was somewhat better off than the villages, could not afford a church bell.
4. Although the Communistic system had designated Sunday as the official day of rest, making it the outstanding day of the week, it was still a day of labor for the majority of the population. The introduction of the Voskresnik program, i.e., the system whereby a worker worked voluntarily without pay, stimulated Sunday activity to a great pitch. In this cheap way the government could keep its public parks, boulevards, and athletic fields open and in a proper state of maintenance. The female labor factions which are so common in the USSR were, of course, continually striving to make Sunday a day for household work and for the care of their own fruit and vegetable gardens.
5. Sunday, by the way, is the principal shopping day. The bazaar and the used goods market are both well stocked on Sunday. The country folk come from far away, sometimes as early as Saturday evening, to trade their produce for those items manufactured in the city. The state-owned business centers remain open until late in the afternoon, even on Sunday.

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6. Religious holidays in the USSR are not celebrated, and work is carried on in the normal manner. Even the German specialists, in the several years they spent in the USSR, were allowed only occasionally to celebrate religious holidays. This was strictly unofficial and under the plant director's personal responsibility. The manhours which were lost as the result of taking days such as Christmas and Good Friday off had to be made up by night overtime. In the latter years of our stay in the Soviet Union, a request of ours for the recognition of religious holidays was refused with the explanation that, if the holidays of the Soviet Union's fourteen religions were recognized, it would cause chaotic labor conditions, especially so when all Greek Orthodox religious holidays are in accordance with the Julian calendar and do not coincide with our celebrations. Thus the high Christian holidays went unnoticed. An exception was Easter, the biggest holiday of the Greek Orthodox church. On this day, in the bazaars and on the streets, one could hear in occasional whispered tones, the Christian Easter greeting, "Christ has risen", and the retort, "Christ has truly risen". It seemed that on this day the State was willing to offer some concessions to the population. In the last year of our stay in the USSR [redacted] the old traditional Russian Easter cake kulich was openly sold in the State-owned bakeries. I was informed that in the larger cities, such as Kharkov, church services, which were attended by representatives of the army and various governmental agencies, were carried out from midnight to dawn. Even the famous church choirs of the Greek Orthodox church were supposed to have drawn the attention of music lovers and their attendance at church services throughout the land.
7. Another sign of church life in the city of Rubezhnoye was seen in the occasional appearance of ministers or monks. These spiritual leaders could be seen walking around in crude black cowl-like coats, fastened with a leather belt worn around the waist and wearing black hats. I did not discover the purpose of their presence in Rubezhnoye, but it was obviously not for the collection of alms or contributions as they provided for themselves by shopping in the various stores.
8. One day very soon after our arrival, we noticed an old man at the local bazaar who, in spite of the cold autumn weather, sat quite still reading a book. He paid little or no attention to the milling crowd around him. His clothing was the same as the rest of the population, poor but strikingly clean and neat. He was collecting alms in his cap. [redacted] he was reading, [redacted] his manuscript; it was either a Bible or a prayer book written in the Slavonic tongue. As even the most educated Russians rarely mastered the script of this old church language, I assumed that this man was a priest. [redacted] I was convinced that he had been a priest at one time and very probably a member of one of the more learned orders. We did not lose sight of him as he occasionally appeared at the

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bazaar, not only for the pursuit of alms but also to sit and read. [redacted] once [redacted] with his book in another part of the city, [redacted] he was visiting sick friends. The conclusion I drew from all this was that he belonged to those "quiet ones of the land"; that is, priests and ministers who preach the gospel without any official church commission. In the apartments of older people, one could very often find ikons, but because of illiteracy the beliefs of the older generation would have completely degenerated had they not received spiritual guidance from this type of wandering priest.

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9. I did not notice, however, that the old priest who was so often seen in the market place was ever exposed to any ridicule for his quite obvious religious attitude; it seemed to me, as a matter of fact, that he was especially well taken care of with contributions, as was an apparently one-time nun who made a comfortable living out of her obvious pretense at prayer and constant reference to a large silver cross which she wore on her breast. Generally speaking, the population was always very generous toward the many beggars and pan-handlers who were so common in the market places and on the streets.
10. Many Soviets today actually believe that they have a strong tie with the church. A young factory girl once indignantly countered the insinuation that she was a non-believer with the fact that both she and her child were baptized. Still another factory girl often spoke of her godmother with whom she was still in close contact. The only thing that this girl knew about the Christmas celebrations, although she was quite conscious of the baptismal sacrament, was that on this day one was given the opportunity of telling fortunes. [In old Russia, Christmas Eve was marked with various customs, one of which was the telling of fortunes by reading tea leaves, molten lead, and soot from burned paper.] This reasoning is an example of the complete lack of religious conception in the USSR.
11. One could not escape the impression that the population had a certain hesitancy toward, and perhaps a superstitious fear of, things that had any connection with religion. A young customs officer [redacted] drew a cross from his pocket, held it in his hand and, with a solemn expression on his face, made the sign of the cross and then very quickly and carefully replaced the cross in his pocket. The sign of the cross is still used as the strongest form of oath. Once when two beggar children came to my door in search of food, they told me that their grandmother had told them to make the sign of the cross in order to insure their receipt of bread. Still another time an adolescent boy attempted to borrow some money from me in order to purchase the groceries remaining on his ration card. Since he was obviously a member of that class of people who had no fixed income, I hesitated to grant his request. This reaction on my part caused the youth to make the sign of the cross in an embarrassed manner as a symbol of his integrity.

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Incidentally I never had to regret the trust that I placed in this lad. Such signs of Christian and church customs are quite common, especially if one is alert to them.

- 12. The cemeteries in town and in the surrounding area gave one the impression of being in a complete state of abandonment. The graves were neglected in most cases and cattle grazed among them. Although the graves generally were marked with crosses, these crosses were merely symbols of a burial place and did not carry any religious connotations. Only the Greek Orthodox cross indicated a Christian grave. Such crosses, some primitively constructed of wood, others of iron crudely welded together, were quite common in the cemeteries. Graves of party functionaries were, of course, decorated with a red obelisk with the hammer and sickle. Christian funeral services could not be held at the grave as the appearance of the church in public was undesirable. I never witnessed any funeral processions with the accompaniment of priests.
- 13. To illustrate the effect of the somber mood of a burial upon children, one incident stands out in my memory. During the funeral services which were held with the permission of the authorities at the grave of one of our German colleagues, there appeared a whole row of curious Soviet children. They unthinkingly folded their hands and quietly looked on. When one of the children created a disturbance during the ceremony by speaking loudly, he was rebuked with a slap by one of his little companions.
- 14. We were informed that there was an Evangelical group in existence in the town and the surrounding area. This probably dated from pre-war days when the area had German settlers. Once [redacted] a middle-aged Soviet who was carrying a well-thumbed prayer book. He [redacted] he was an Evangelical and was on his way into the city to organize a prayer meeting there. Incidentally, two youngsters [redacted] belonged to such a prayer group. One was a gifted young girl who worked as an interpreter-translator and German typist in our institute. She made no secret of the fact that she was a Christian and that the Christian dogmas were not strange to her, [redacted] A young student who was a frequent visitor [redacted] belonged to this girl's circle of acquaintances. He was the son of a former priest who died in a concentration camp. This boy also considered himself a member of the Christian church, although he hardly had any knowledge of Christian teachings.
- 15. It is very difficult with such sparse data to distinguish between the orthodox church and its independent Christian branches. Hardly any differentiation between the various sects can be made. We have indeed many illustrations that during difficult times the differences existing among the various creeds are cast aside and their common belief becomes of prime importance. One has only to call to mind the common martyrdom shared by the ministers of all denominations at the time of the advent of Bolshévism in the city of Riga.

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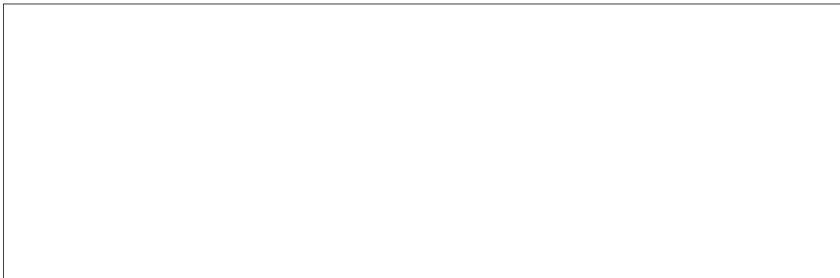
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16. We Germans in Rubezhnoye encountered no obstacles in living in accordance with our beliefs. We were allowed to give our children religious teaching, and I could hold religious services which, of course, had to be officially sanctioned as the services were regarded as public meetings where the participants had to be watched in accordance with Soviet procedure.

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18. The picture of Christianity in the Soviet Union would not be complete without also showing the other side. The official course of the Communist Party, as one could expect, has always been atheistically inclined. In a dictionary published by a government printing house in 1950, together with other definitions of the anti-religious movement, religion is defined as a superstitious and out-moded delirium of ancient times. The same was true of the other concepts connected with Christianity and religion, and their implications certainly did not point toward any change in the ideology of the government. [redacted] once overheard a conversation between two Party members who were concerned over the fact that persons of their class, especially the parents of young Komsomols, still allowed their children to be baptized.

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19. Ostensibly, the Party was very reserved in its attitude toward the church. When the question of religion was discussed, the issue was always defined as the necessity to eliminate superstitious adherences to religious beliefs. These discussions, however, never really approached a solution as to what extent this purge of the church's influence should be carried. Only once did I actually read a newspaper article which expressed itself directly against the church. It was aimed primarily at the Christmas celebrations.

20. The Christmas holidays, by the way, have been replaced by the official State celebration of the new year. This occasion is marked by a lighted Christmas tree as in western lands and the appearance of "Grandfather Frost", the Russian version of the Weihnachtsmann / Santa Claus, who brings children presents. This holiday is, of course, not devoted to "peace on earth"; I personally saw in the "House of Culture" in Rubezhnoye a Christmas tree decorated with such things as tanks, firearms, and other military-type toys. Children's toys, such as machine guns, military uniforms, and other warlike emblems, decorate the shelves of stores and are very popular items.

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21. Religious scriptures of any kind could not be obtained in any bookstores. On two occasions, I saw a copy of the New Testament for sale at the used goods market. One of these books was an old edition which was identified as such by the presence of both the Slavonic and Russian language, the latter being written in the old orthography. I could not determine if this book came from a state-owned publishing house, but I later thought it possible that it came into the Soviet Union through one of the [redacted] companies during the war. These two books were priced rather highly which was a possible indication of a demand for such books. [redacted] a middle-aged female teacher who was still quite attached to the church and occasionally attended services in a nearby church. She said that she would gladly pay a high price for one of these Bibles.

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22. If various religious manuscripts are published in the USSR at all today, they are issued very probably in small numbers and I assume that their distribution is effected through the officially recognized church. The young female office worker mentioned earlier [redacted] in the last year of my stay in the Soviet Union [redacted] she was very happy because at last she was the owner of a Bible, without indicating, however, exactly what she meant by this statement. One occasionally experiences surprises; I came across a book [redacted] from the lending library in the "House of Culture", that was written in novel form and pursued very definite Christian views. Each chapter was prefaced by a scriptural quotation and its source. The novel itself closed with a verse from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, chapter 8, verse 28: "And we know that to them that love God,..... all things work together unto good..." This novel was reprinted in 1928 in a governmental publishing house for the benefit of the Communist youth and its use was still sanctioned!

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23. In the schools, of course, there was no room for religious teaching. It was exactly as one young female teacher once explained: "My grandmother still believes; her great-grandmother, at the age of ninety, attended mass every Sunday in Pereyezdnyaya; my mother still believes a little bit; but religious belief for me was completely stunted in school." With this statement, she wanted to excuse any atheistically-inclined ideas she may have developed.

24. I must admit that, in my limited contact with cultured circles, I very seldom, if at all, ran across any convinced atheists. [redacted] such persons always expressed their surprise over how [redacted] connect religion with natural science, but they hardly ever attempted to disprove any [redacted] convictions. This seemed indicative of the fact that they themselves could find no feasible arguments against the faith in God.

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25. As a matter of fact, I have actually come face to face with a definite interest in religious and spiritual matters.

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This became especially evident during my imprisonment in the East Zone in connection with the events which accompanied the June 17 revolts in the Soviet Zone of Germany. My Christian convictions became a regular subject during my numerous interrogations before a Soviet court. Although I was told that they were not the object of the investigation, these convictions were still of importance in the evaluation of my character, and the subject was always in the foreground during the numerous interrogations. Here again my interrogators expressed their surprise as to how it was possible for me, as a scientist, to support my faith in God. They never attempted, however, to contradict me or to label my beliefs as absurd. They actually tried to closely follow my trend of thought and I am certain that my openness toward these things actually helped me in receiving my freedom as quickly as I did.

26. If I were to attempt to reconstruct a picture of the plight of Christianity in the Soviet Union from the sparse and occasional mosaic pieces which I was able to observe, the following conclusions could be made:
27. A church, the Greek Orthodox church, exists in the Soviet Union. It is tolerated by the Government but, at the same time, closely watched so that it will not gain any definite control over the populace. It exists in poverty and under great handicaps. Its spiritual mission, which is the guidance of the population and especially of the youth, cannot be completely accomplished because of these barriers and obstacles. It is also incapable of maintaining the heritage and the traditions of the faith of past generations, although much of it can still be found in this land of organized godlessness. Perhaps that is why the Soviet is called a religious human being. This probably also explains why the faithful gather in small groups and remain conscious of their common Christian faith without attaching themselves to the official church. These groups become gathering points for the seekers of faith, especially the youth. It is of little importance to which denominations these groups belong; they can call themselves whatever they like, but their basic Christian precepts will be alike in all denominations.
28. The ideology of the Communist State is atheistically inclined and the education of the youth in the schools will always conform with this pattern. But the power of conviction is missing in this atheism, because the search for the truth always stands in its way. The Soviet Union, in the situation that it is today, has become a land ripe for the missionary and the teachings of the Bible. This fact must be a holy warning to all Christians of the world; and there should be concern foremost in the minds of all Christians to save their fellow brothers in the East, in spite of all handicaps and difficulties.

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