

KONSTANTIN BONDAR

Life in God and for God



*«Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven».
Matthew 5:10.*

God calls those, who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, blessed and happy. What is the source of this happiness? In being persecuted? Of course not! Those, who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, inherit the kingdom of God, and this is a source of their happiness. Being persecuted, cast out, and rejected is a very painful experience, but it is those who suffer for the sake of righteousness that will receive the kingdom of heaven and have the gates of heavenly paradise opened to them.

This article is dedicated to such “persecuted for the sake of righteousness” people, and one of them is Konstantin Bondar and his family who currently resides in Sacramento, CA.

Konstantin was born in Ukraine, in the village called Kuchivka of the Kamenets-Podolskiy region on February 24, 1940. In 1941 when the war began, his father was taken to the battlefield. His father was a kind person with a soft demeanor. In 1943 he was surrounded and severely wounded after which he lived less than a month and passed away. His wife was left to care for three children. Konstantin’s sister Yelena was the oldest daughter of his father from the first marriage. Her mother died when she was a little girl. Konstantin’s father remained unmarried for a long time until he met and married Varvara Mikhailovna Skakun. They had two children - Konstantin and the youngest sister Yuliya. When their father died, Yelena was 13 and went to work at a collective farm, which was in great need of workers. Konstantin remembers how his mother would leave for work and lock him and Yuliya for the entire day in their home. In those difficult times, there was no food and heat, and the war took the lives of many people. At the age of three, Yuliya died from malnutrition. Having gotten a different job, his mother quit working in the fields, which helped the family survive.

His mother was a zealous Christian and attended a neighboring village every Sunday for a time of worship. Regardless of whether, mud, rain, or snow, mother did not miss any services. The morning Sunday services were forever engrained in the children's memory.

There was no one who could take care and watch over Kostya (Konstantin) at home while his mother and the older sister were at work. An elderly woman who was an elementary school teacher and rented a room in their home, offered to take Kostya with her to school. He was a very patient and obedient boy and eagerly attended school despite the long walk to school. The teacher noticed that Kostya was just as good as the other students, who were a lot older than him, and left him in her class predicting that he will do great in school and will win medals awarded for good academic performance. Her words came true. In 1956, while being two years younger than his classmates, Kostya graduated school with a gold medal awarded him for getting straight A's. However, he was not given a medal because he was a "sectarian", which is what they called all of the Christians at that time. That was how Kostya got his first taste of injustice that so often oppresses people and segregates them into categories.

After finishing school and getting all the necessary paperwork, he moved to Lvov to get into the Polytechnic Institute. When he was in line to submit his paperwork, he heard an announcement that all candidates should get their passports ready, and that without the passport the candidates would not be accepted. Konstantin came to enroll with his friend both of whom left the line in disappointment. They were not informed that the attestation from the head of village was sufficient for them as a passport. In order not to lose time, he went to the Mining School, and after graduating with straight A's, he graduated as a mine timber-man. He asked for permission to work in the mines of the Rostov region where his cousin lived. It is in this town in one of the mines was the beginning of his career. That same fall, he was accepted into the Novocherkasskiy Polytechnic Institute for evening classes. Two weeks before enrollment, he was baptized and became a member of the local church of Evangelical Christian Baptists. The mine supervisor was informed of his baptism. When Konstantin came to the office to get his paycheck, he was told that he was not getting one and that he should go to the mine's communistic party organizer. The party leader talked for a long time about the bright future of communism and its horizons. At the end of the conversation he said that he will regret it if Kostya does not cut his ties with the religious affiliations.

Persecution in the Polytechnic institute also began. Konstantin was summoned by the dean and warned that religion interferes with the development of the thriving communistic society. The first semester of the Institute Konstantin finished well, but during the second one he was summoned once again and warned: the concept of a Christian and an engineer are incompatible; if he will not quit his sect, he will be forced to serve in the army where he will be re-disciplined.

He was sent to serve in the Turkish border control near Akhaltsihin. At first, he served at the outpost, and then he was taken to the headquarters since he was a student of the institute and was considered to be educated. That is how private Bondar became a scribe in the headquarters and served there for eighteen months. Everything seemed to be going well and fine, but at one point Konstantin was informed that the KGB department was interested in him since they were learned that a Baptist was serving in their ranks, and more than that, that he was serving in the headquarters. There was a considerable commotion at the headquarters: who failed to notice that Bondar Konstantin is a Baptist?!

Major Shurga reported to the higher authorities that the Baptist was removed and isolated, and that the army was no longer in any threat. The work of re-disciplining has begun. After talking to the local newspaper journalists, the headquarters' leaders demanded Konstantin to write an article for the "Komsomol Truth" newsletter about his denial of his faith. If he does not comply, he will be sent off to a remote outpost where "a winter is twelve months and the rest is summer." Private Bondar did not write the article and was sent to an outpost on the border of Turkey. Just as he was warned, the service on the border was not easy; however, having grown up in adversity, he adapted to the environment and accepted this difficult lifestyle.

There was another audit and another conclusion: a soldier who does not have a clean record cannot serve on the border, especially if he is a Baptist. From the outpost he was moved to MIA (Ministry of Internal Affairs) office in Krasnodar. Since Konstantin served in the headquarters before and had incomplete high education, he was to serve in the base of the battalion. While in Krasnodar, he found a church and, when there was an opportunity, he began attending. After being demobilized, he return to Shakhty town and went back to his old job. Since he played a guitar, he organized an orchestra at the church and was active in all of the church events. After completing the second semester of the studies at the institute, he was accepted into the third. During one of the lessons, he was told that the dean was summoning him.

During the meeting, the dean informed him that he was expelled from the institute for non-attendance which was clearly a lie.

Konstantin went to see the principal of the institute who after hearing him suggested him to join the communistic party if he really wanted to get a high education.

Konstantin refused to go along with another trap and went home being disappointed in another one of the injustices that he faced. He



was praying to God, and after receiving the answer, he fully dedicated his life to the Lord. At the church he was ministering to the youth and was later chosen to oversee the youth department. While being in Sukhumi with the youth, he met his future wife Larisa. Their wedding was on January 1st, 1966 in Shakhty town which resembled the youth convention more than a wedding. Less than a month later, the neighbor who was part of the local police, secretly informed Konstantin that he saw a report on the prosecutor's desk with an arrest warrant for Konstantin. Not losing any time, Konstantin and Larisa took their belongings and moved to Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Karachaevsk city, with the invitation of the church pastor Y. V.

Gidenko who was presently in their church. In the morning, the police force came to arrest the youth minister, but did not find him.

The young family began to adapt to the new church. Konstantin organized a string orchestra which was performed by the church youth. At the initiative of the youth, there were Bible courses offered.

The church youth decided to give Konstantin a birthday present on February 24th: as a present, eleven of the young people decided to be baptized. The church leaders tried to talk them out of it since it was still very cold, but they were resolved in their minds to go through with it. The baptism took place in the Mara River at night so that the local authorities would not interfere. The weather was wonderful; Ivan Adamovich Punk who is Konstantin Bondar's father in law attended the baptism.

For breaking of the law that prohibited baptism, the pastor of the local church was called to give an account. The pastor took Konstantin along with him. As in all of similar cases, there was no discussion in conversations like this: the government authorities tried to push their ideology, and the Christians defended God's truth. After the meeting, the police did a thorough search; it was in 1966. Shortly before that, all the Christian literature was taken outside of the city, so that there was nothing to be found. Instead of it however, they confiscated all of the music instruments. Konstantin decided to attempt to get them back and went to the police to ask for that. As he entered the office, he was informed that he was arrested. When he asked for a permission to inform his wife, his request was denied. A special transportation was summoned and he was taken to the inquisitional center, called Sezo in Russian.

That same day a few other people were arrested: Aleksey Kolomiytsev, (father of A. Kolomiytsev who is the pastor of the "Word of Grace" Church in WA state), an elderly brother whose last name was Bezmatniy and who was 78 years old, and sister Yevgeniya Shimkina who was the Sunday school teacher and was 8 months pregnant. They were all taken to the prison in Cherkess and were placed in separate cells.

The interrogation has begun and the main thing that they wanted to know was the whereabouts of I. A. Punk who was Konstantin's father in law. They were offered freedom in exchange for the information. After a while, everyone was transferred to common cells, where people served their first term and were not yet so embittered. The first thing that they were asked by the other prisoners was what are they in for; statute 142 and 227 was not familiar to them. When Konstantin said that they are there for the faith in God, there was no end to the questions. For three days K. Bondar talked about God, Bible, and recited Bible verses from memory. The prisoners were surprised; is it really possible that there are people in the country who are imprisoned because they believe in God? Because of propaganda, the people believed that there was freedom of religion in the country.

Cellmates treated K. Bondar very well, and if someone was being released, they were asking for a poem or something from the Bible to take with them. When there was provision given by the relatives and had to be split, Konstantin was always asked to ration it among them and said, "You are an honest person, we trust you".

The court date was set to September. There were 147 witnesses in the case, and a public defender was offered but Konstantin refused his assistance. The conviction was as follows: Kolomiytsev - three years of imprisonment, Gidenko - four years of imprisonment, the elderly man who was 78 years old - three years of high-security imprisonment, sister Yevgeniya - two years (she gave birth in prison). That is what the freedom of religion looked like! Konstantin along with another brother, Hariton Chekhov was given two years probationary and were released. Bondar explained to the brothers who attended the hearing and took him home to Karachaevsk that the reason for his release was that the authorities were trying to track down his father in law I. A. Punk who was in the illegal standing and was overseeing the Council of Churches ECB at that time.

Konstantin's family was closely watched and constantly searched at any time of day or night and was encouraged to cooperate with the authorities. His wife Larisa was asked to talk her father to turn himself in, and if not, they would take out her husband. Entrusting all things into the hands of God, they began to pray and then moved to Zaporozhye. Konstantin got hired to the factory as an electrician. After some time he was approached by an individual who said: "Lieutenant Colonel Sokolov (KGB agent, in Karachevo-Cherkesi of religious issues) says hello!" They were discovered even here. The Bondar family decided to move to Sukhumi.

While in Sukhumi, Konstantin became a photographer, purchased a small house where they lived until they move to the U.S. While here, Konstantin was once again ministering in the church. Men's choir was organized under his leadership and was taking an active part in the inter-church Bible study. There was no such pressure on



the Christians in Abkhazia, and the Bondars family could live and serve the Lord. However, the spying did not end, especially when there were guests over. As soon as the guests entered the house, the government vehicle stopped on the opposite side of the house, and they were being watched.

Sometimes the sound of bugging was heard from inside of the vehicle, and the bugging was especially thorough when there were guests from out of the country. The main thing was that there was no threat of being detained. It seems that the KGB agents discovered that besides the Bible truths, this house did not discuss anything else.

There was a point in the Bondar's family when they began to talk about moving out of USSR. The reason for this was the Helsinki Treaty where it was declared that a person had a freedom to choose to live in any country. A few families, including Konstantin's family, sent letters to the country's capital, to Moscow, with a request to allow them to leave the country. Over the course of ten years, as the family began to wait and pray, Konstantin's family received a few invitations from different countries, but Russian government denied each of them. The family continued to wait and pray. In the summer of 1987, there was a letter from Moscow with an indication that they were allowed to leave the country in three days. Georgia's government was more humane and suggested to them to ask the relatives outside of the country to submit a new summons request to come to America. You may say this was a humane step on behalf of the Georgia's government.

The summons did come from the U.S. Bondar's family sold the house and donated the finances to the church in Sukhumi. After gathering all of their belongings and praying with the whole family, on January 5th, 1988 they left for Moscow. This was the first family which was leaving to the U.S.

Upon their arrival to Moscow, there was a very thorough inspection of the entire luggage, which lasted about six hours after which they left for Vienna, then Rome, and finally the U.S.

On February 17th, 1988, they came to Baltimore, Maryland and were greeted by Yelena Bondar who had the same last name and who offered them shelter. They went to church on their first Sunday. The pastor of this church helped Konstantin to get a job as a hotel attendee. The entire family was surrounded by attention and affection. When Plato Harchla found out that the church had immigrants from Abkhazia, he came to Baltimore. Everyone wanted to see and hear the first family of Baptists who came to the United States.

Konstantin received an invitation to attend a convention in Ashford and came with the pastor of the church in Baltimore. This was a time of wonderful fellowship where

he was able to see old friends and make new ones. While being there he also found out about the church in Sacramento which had a great spiritual need. The pastor of the church Daniel Terentyevich Loktev was sick and could no longer shepherd the church, and the church was praying for God to send them a new pastor. A guest from the Soviet Union, Brother Yakov Kuzmich Duhonchenko who knew Konstantin very well, was also present at the convention and nominated him as a candidate.

After receiving the invitation, Konstantin departed to Sacramento. Upon his arrival, Daniel Loktev's son Michael Loktev welcomed him at the airport. On Sunday, Konstantin preached on both services, answered questions, and shared about the condition of believers in the Soviet Union. After some time he received a letter which stated that the church decided to invite him to become a pastor of the Church of Bryte, which at that time was a body of 17 members. On October 1, 1988, Konstantin and his family permanently moved to Sacramento. This year was the beginning of the third wave of immigration from the Soviet Union, and the first family of this wave was the Bondar's family. On April 19, 1989, K. Bondar was ordained as a pastor of the Church of Bryte. By that time, the church welcomed another 8-10 families. In January 1990, the church had about 45 people.

Having received a stable job and permanent residence, Konstantin's family sent summons to their parents and all of their relatives, followed by phone calls and letters from all the Soviet Union cities with requests for summons. Bondar's family summoned 260 summons, and the entire family supported the process of sending them. The written requests for summons had to be verified, typed, and sent out; they had to pay \$150 and above to the people who agreed to make the summons. When the amount of the summons requests came flooding in, those who sent the summons agreed to do so for the price of \$100. A few summons were paid for by the church, but Bondar's family paid from their own pockets for many of them. Then there was an organization in New York, which sent out Israeli visas and allowed to receive the visa payments upon the arrival of the immigrants, which lightened the load for the Bondar's family. This was an expression of trust to Konstantin and his family as to the clients with a good and impeccable reputation. The Bondar's family ministered in this way willingly and followed through the process to the end. The summons were given to all: Baptists, Pentecostals, and everyone who requested it. Nikolai Ignatyevich Pekun, who is one of the Pentecostal pastors, was also invited. The first families of their invitation were the families of Sadoma, Morgunov, and Naranovich. In a year and a half, Bryte church grew to 350 members totaling up to

500 with the children. However, with the growth of the church and the addition of new members, the church also had difficulties because there was a unification of cultures and nationalities.



In 1990, Konstantin was chosen as a secretary of the Pacific Coast Association of Baptist churches. He also ministered in the newspaper “Our Days”.

In April of 1991, Konstantin’s assistant becomes the head pastor of the Bryte Church because K. Bondar at that time was working in manufacturing field and because of the lack of time, he could not do both the church ministry and hold a secular job.

In 2010, Bondar becomes a member of Slavic International Pastoral Association; he was also its chairperson and took an active part in it.

Currently Konstantin is retired, but continues to minister for the Lord. He is a pastor, preacher, Bible study leader, and lectures on health issues



for the elderly at “Altamedic” center. Konstantin’s family has four children (two sons and two daughters), as well as five grandchildren.

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