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Paul B. Anderson and the 1956 delegation of US church leaders to Moscow

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Abstract. Paul B. Anderson (1894–1985) stood out as a leading Western advocate for Orthodox Christians in the USSR. In March 1956 Anderson traveled to Moscow as a key member of a delegation representing the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA for meetings with leaders of several Christian church bodies. He acted based on knowledge of Orthodox history and Soviet politics and was the only Russian-speaker in the US delegation. He took a moderate, balanced, and diplomatic approach – avoiding both the uncritical celebration of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) or the condemnation of the church’s leaders due to their cooperation with the government. The Moscow visit, and the visit to the US that followed, contributed to a strengthening of ties among these church organizations and the 1961 entry of the ROC into the World Council of Churches. However, the meetings also illustrated the challenges of engaging in church activism during the post-Stalin era. This account demonstrates the significant contribution of Anderson to the building of informed and constructive connections among the believers of the US and USSR.

Keywords: Paul B. Anderson, Russian Orthodox Church, US Protestants, ecumenism, interconfessional relations, Young Men’s Christian Association

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Пол Б. Андерсон и поездка церковных лидеров США в Москву в 1956 г.

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Аннотация. Пол Б. Андерсон (1894–1985) был на Западе ведущим защитником православных христиан в СССР. В марте 1956 г. Андерсон отправился в Москву для встреч с лидерами христианских церковных организаций в роли ключевой фигуры делегации, представляющей Национальный совет церквей Христа в США. Являясь единственным русскоговорящим членом в американской делегации, он формировал свою позицию с опорой на глубокое знание православной истории и советской политической жизни. Подход Андерсона отличался умеренностью, сбалансированностью и дипломатичностью, поскольку он избегал как некритического восхваления Русской православной церкви (РПЦ), так и осуждения православных лидеров за их сотрудничество с правительством. Визит в Москву и последовавший за ним визит в США способствовали укреплению связей между этими церковными организациями и вступлению РПЦ во Всемирный Совет Церквей в 1961 г. В то же время эти встречи продемонстрировали, что существовали препятствия на пути активизации деятельности церкви в эпоху постсталинизма. Статья наглядно показывает важный вклад Андерсона в налаживание грамотных и конструктивных связей между верующими США и СССР.

Ключевые слова: Пол Б. Андерсон, Русская Православная Церковь, протестанты США, экуменизм, межконфессиональные отношения, Ассоциация молодых христиан

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Paul B. Anderson (1894–1985) stood out as a leading Western advocate for Orthodox Christians in the USSR. He developed close relationships with a wide range of Russian, European, and American church leaders, wrote insightful articles and books, and spoke out on the challenges faced by believers in the Soviet Union. In March 1956 Anderson traveled to Moscow as a key member of a delegation representing the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) for meetings with leaders of several Christian church bodies. This trip received significant media attention and generated debate due to the complicated relationship of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) with the government of the USSR and due to the range of

political views among US Christians. During his participation of the 1956 trip he demonstrated empathy for believers, among whom he had worked for nearly forty years. He acted based on knowledge of Orthodox history and Soviet politics and was the only Russian-speaker in the US delegation. He took a moderate, balanced, and diplomatic approach-avoiding both the uncritical celebration of the ROC or the condemnation of the church's leaders due to their cooperation with the government. His role stood in contrast to Eugene Carson Blake, the public leader of the trip. Blake demonstrated ambition for ecumenical advances and optimism for progress-based on relatively little knowledge of Orthodox Christianity or global politics. The success of this highly publicized 1956 program depended on the quiet expertise of Anderson. The Moscow visit, and the visit to the US that followed, contributed to a strengthening of ties among these church organizations and the 1961 entry of the ROC into the World Council of Churches. However, the meetings also illustrated the challenges of engaging in church activism during the post-Stalin era.

This article surveys the career of Paul B. Anderson before describing preparations for the 1956 meetings and key points of the meetings in the USSR and the US. Attention then focuses on participant reflections on the exchange and analysis of the long-term significance of the meetings. The article is based on analysis of recent additions to Paul B. Anderson's records held at the Kautz Family YMCA Archives at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, USA, as well as his published works. This article builds on the substantial wave of recent scholarship on the history of the Russian Orthodox Church¹, church-state relations in the USSR², the ecumenical movement³, US-Soviet cultural relations⁴, and the connections of politics and religion in the Cold War era⁵. Recent studies rely on the exploration of new archival sources, application of new analytical perspectives, and reconsideration of political assumptions. This article, based on recent additions to an archival collection and historical scholarship, sheds new light on the contribution of Anderson to the building of informed and constructive connections among the believers of the US and USSR.

¹ For one recent reflection on this era in the history of Russian Orthodox Church, see [Bourdeaux 2017].

² The relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Soviet state during this era is analyzed in [Chumachenko 2000].

³ Paul B. Anderson's ecumenical work with the YMCA is discussed in [Miller 2013]; additional key works include [Gill 2006; Raiser 1998].

⁴ Two important recent studies on this topic are [Saul 2016, Richmond 2003].

⁵ For recent discussion of the interaction of politics and religion during the Cold War, see [Haberski 2012; Preston 2013; Stevens 2010].

I. Career of Paul B. Anderson

Anderson worked as an enthusiastic advocate for Russians from his first trip to Petrograd in 1917 until his death in 1985. He had a long-term, in-depth involvement with Slavic life and made a serious attempt to understand language, history and culture. He provided leadership or support for almost every aspect of the Young Men's Christian Association's (YMCA) service among Russians. From 1920 to 1924 he lived in Berlin and participated in a variety of service programs among emigres. By 1924 60,000 refugees had settled in Paris, so he and his YMCA colleagues transported their services to the French capital. Anderson emerged as the Association's most influential leader during its outreach in Paris. He assisted both the Russian Student Christian Movement and the YMCA Press. He also contributed to the new Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris (later renamed the St. Sergius Theological Academy), a program which prepared priests for service. During these years his understanding of Eastern Christian worship and thought grew, and he received recognition as one of the first western experts on religion in the Soviet Union. He offered his most in-depth commentary on the revolution and Christianity in his book *People, Church and State in Modern Russia*, published in London in 1944. Reflecting during the war, Anderson provided a detailed account of the current status of the ROC within the context of the Soviet Union. He moved permanently from Paris to the United States in 1947. His full-time work with Russians ended at this time, but his service to the world Orthodox community continued until his death.

II. Preparation for the Meetings

The 1956 visit by representatives of US churches to meet with church leaders in the USSR received attention as the first of its kind in 35 years⁶. (Earlier groups had visited for a variety of more narrow goals.) The program served as a significant example of many US-USSR cultural exchanges which multiplied in number in the years that followed and provided participants with critical insights into the experiences of their counterparts. The 1956 exchange trips originated

⁶ YMCA press release about Paul B. Anderson after March 1956 trip to USSR. P. 1. Box 4/11. Folder: "1950s Smith", Paul B. Anderson personal papers, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, Andersen Library, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minn (hereafter PBA KFYA).

in a decision made by the World Council of Churches (WCC). This council met for its second assembly in Evanston, Illinois, in 1954 and approved a call for member churches to promote fellowship with churches in countries with communist governments in order to promote understanding, Christian fellowship, and “the reconciliation of the nations”. Walter Van Kirk, executive director of the NCC’s Department of International Affairs, carried out the details of the Evanston decision. He made many arrangements with church and government organizations to make the 1956 trips possible [Brackenridge 1990, p. 91]. Eugene Carson Blake, president of the NCC, requested an official invitation from Patriarch Aleksii in 1955. He expressed a desire to visit “as a means of increasing mutual understanding and making manifest the spiritual fellowship which is ours in Christ” [Brackenridge 1990, p. 89]⁷. Blake, stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church in the United States from 1951–1966, influenced many Protestant leaders in the US at the time due to his efforts to promote ecumenism and civil rights. He later served as General Secretary of the WCC from 1966–1972 [Brackenridge 1990, p. 89].

NCC trip planners selected nine men which would represent member denominations [Brackenridge 1990, p. 92]. The organizers of the exchange attempted to plan opportunities for understanding, relationship building, and reconciliation. However, the issue of political peace drew the most attention. Church leaders expressed concern about a recent statements on the Korean conflict by Metropolitan Nikolai of Krutitsky and Kolomna printed in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* [Brackenridge 1990, p. 93]. The Cold War context shaped the significance of the 1956 trip in multiple ways: the Korean conflict had broken out from 1950–1953, Joseph Stalin had died in 1953, and Nikita Khrushchev was consolidating power through promoting destalinization and a new goal of “peaceful coexistence”. In the US, Senator Joseph McCarthy had led a campaign against suspected communist sympathizers until his death in 1957 [Brackenridge 1990, p. 90].

Blake served as leader of the 1956 deputation and acted as spokesperson with the media. He openly addressed arguments that the trip was an example of “communist collaboration” and “anti-Americanism” [Ibid. p. 89]. During this era US church leaders frequently expressed sharp criticism of communism with a variety of strategies [Brackenridge 1990, p. 90–91]⁸.

Anderson wrote a brief article on religion in the USSR which was published in a Methodist magazine less than a year before the March

⁷ Aleksii I (Simanskii) served as Patriarch of Moscow from 1945–1970.

⁸ For more on one example of criticism, see [Fea 1994].

1956 trip, and trip participants apparently received copies⁹. In the article he provides up-to-date information (based on documentary evidence) with his usual moderate style. He points out the contradictions of church-state relations in the USSR without adopting an uncritical approach to statements from within the USSR or a harsh denunciation of the ROC for cooperating with authorities¹⁰. Anderson explains why it was simply impossible for Orthodox leaders to operate in full independence¹¹. He followed the Soviet press carefully and analyzed documents to inform his opinions; he explains, “A characteristic document in Russia today is the government decree on religion, dated November 11, 1954, and signed by Khrustcheff, General Secretary of the Party. In this, religion is castigated because it is opposed to science, which is the root and sap of Communist philosophy; yet Party and government functionaries are explicitly instructed not to offend ministers of the cult or to interfere with freedom of conscience”¹². He describes the paradox experienced by registered religious organizations in the early Khrushchev era. The Orthodox and Evangelical Christian-Baptist churches openly express their faith in public worship services, but their leadership structures allow the government to carefully inspect the activities of the leaders and believers. In addition, the state forbids organizations from organizing activities for the religious formation of children and youth or speaking out openly on issues related to government policy¹³. He also makes an observation which is especially relevant to the 1956 church leader visit: “The Soviet government and the Churches – Orthodox, Evangelical, and Armenian – welcome visitors to Russia, where they are feted and generally helped to gain an impression of ecclesiastical well-being”¹⁴.

In May 1956 the nine-member delegation of Protestant church leaders – seven clergymen and two laymen – represented NCC denominations during the 12-day visit to the USSR. As noted earlier, Blake led the group and represented the Presbyterian Church in the United States. At the time, Anderson served as associate executive

⁹ For example, this article by trip participant Herbert Gezork utilizes material from Anderson’s article: *Gezork H. What We Saw and Heard in Soviet Russia // Advance: The National Journal of Congregational Christian Churches*. 1956. May 16. vol. 148, no. 10. P. 4–6, 28. Box 4/11, Folder: “1950s Smith,” PBA KFYA.

¹⁰ *Anderson P.B. Religion in the USSR – 1955 // The Living Church*. 1955. June 19. P. 11. Box 4/11, Folder: “1950s Smith,” PBA KFYA.

¹¹ *Ibid.* P. 11.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* P. 23; see [David-Fox 2012].

secretary of the International Committee of YMCAs of the United States and Canada. The delegation also included Roswell P. Barnes, associate general secretary of the NCC, Franklin Clark Fry, president of the United Lutheran Church in America, Herbert Gezork, president of Andover Newton Theological Seminary, D. Ward Nichols, a bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Henry Knox Sherrill, presiding bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church, Walter W. Van Kirk, executive director of the NCC department of international affairs, and Charles Coolidge Parlin, a lawyer and Methodist layman. Donald C. Bolles, editor of the council's magazine *Outlook*, accompanied the group as an aide¹⁵. The council represented 30 Protestant and Orthodox denominations with 35.5 million members¹⁶. This delegation did not include Orthodox leaders, but this changed for later trips by the organization to the USSR¹⁷.

III. Meetings in Moscow

The group arrived in Moscow on March 11 and returned to New York on March 23¹⁸. The trip included a brief stop in Prague, Czechoslovakia, and a visit with Orthodox and Protestant church leaders¹⁹. On March 14 the group visited the residence of Patriarch Aleksii for a meeting with the patriarch and Metropolitan Nikolai, who supervised international relationships for the ROC²⁰. At a meeting on the first day, Van Kirk initiated discussion by reading a statement outlining the position of the NCC on world justice and peace²¹. The tense dis-

¹⁵ "Protestant Churchmen Begin Trip to Moscow," newspaper clipping, Associated Press, New York, newspaper title, date, and page number not included, Box 4/11, Folder: "1950s Smith," PBA KFYA; Toward Mutual Understanding: Two-Way Visit of American and Russian Churchmen // National Council Outlook. 1956. Feb. 26. P. 9–10.

¹⁶ Clerics Leave for Russ Visit, clipping from Milwaukee newspaper, March 9, 1956, 12, Box 4/11, Folder: "1950s Smith", PBA KFYA.

¹⁷ For a trip summary, see Churchmen Visit Russia // The Christian Century. 1956. Apr. 18. P. 480–482.

¹⁸ Call Visit to Russia a "Distinct Success" // Christian Advocate. 1956. Apr. 12. P. 14 (470). Box 4/11, Folder: "1950s Smith," PBA KFYA.

¹⁹ *Bolles D.C.* American Churchmen in Russia // National Council Outlook. 1956. April. vol. 6, no. 4. P. 4. Box 4/11, Folder: "1950s Smith", PBA KFYA.

²⁰ *Ibid.* P. 5; Nikolai (Yarushevich) was appointed as Metropolitan of Krutitsky in 1944 and Metropolitan of Krutitsky and Kolomna in 1947. In 1946 he was appointed chairman of the External Church Relations Department of the Moscow Patriarchate. He ended his service in 1960 and died in 1961.

²¹ *Ibid.*

cussion which followed challenged Metropolitan Nikolai's statements in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* which portrayed the United States as the aggressor in the Korean conflict and guilty of mistreating prisoners and conducting biological warfare²². The NCC requested a correction and stated that understanding requires truth²³. Nikolai replied that the statements were issued during a time of tension between the two countries and insisted that "we must forgive and forget"²⁴. Tension also surrounded discussion of the World Peace Council – the Russian Orthodox Church held a position that all churches should join the Communist Party-supported council and support an unconditional ban on nuclear weapons²⁵.

The group met on March 15 with leaders from the USSR in the meeting room of the Holy Synod of the ROC. Two Lutheran archbishops participated: Gustav Turs of Latvia and John Kiivit of Estonia. Bishop Vartan of the Armenian Church and Vasily Zhidkov of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists joined as well²⁶. The next day the group visited a service of the Baptist church in Moscow – "the only Protestant church in the city". Blake, Fry, Anderson, Nichols, and Gezork preached brief sermons; Anderson spoke in Russian. One record estimated that 2000 attended in a building with seating for 1200²⁷. On March 17 the group visited the Trinity-Sergius Lavra at Zagorsk and the Moscow Theological Academy²⁸. On March 18 the final group meeting concluded with promises of continued work toward understanding and peace. On March 19, the group toured Leningrad for ten hours as guests of Metropolitan Elevation. They visited St. Isaac's Cathedral, the monastery of Aleksandr Nevsky, the theological academy, the Palace of the Pioneers, and a service at the St. Nicholas Cathedral²⁹.

²² Churchmen Visit Russia // *The Christian Century*. 1956. Apr. 18. P. 481; see Mitropolit Nikolai. Rech' na vtorom vsemirnom kongresse storonnikov mira // *Zhurnal moskovskoi patriarkhii*. 1950. Dec. no. 12. P. 12–16. URL: <http://www.jmp.ru/ya43.php?ys=50&my=12&rm=VZHM&sr=501208> (Accessed 1 July 2020); and Mitropolit Nikolai. Rech' na obshchegorodskom mitinge trudiashchikhsia g. moskvy // *Zhurnal moskovskoi patriarkhii*. 1952. Apr. no. 4. P. 22–23. URL: <http://www.jmp.ru/ya43.php?ys=52&my=04&rm=VZHM&sr=520407> (Accessed 1 July 2020).

²³ *Bolles D.C.* Op. cit. P. 5.

²⁴ Ministers in Moscow // *Time*. 1956. Mar. 26. P. 52. Box 4/11, Folder: "1940s Smith," PBA KFYA.

²⁵ American Churchmen Visit Moscow Square // *Chicago Daily Tribune*. 1956. Mar. 14. part 1. P. 2. Box 4/11, Folder: "1950s Smith," PBA KFYA.

²⁶ *Bolles D.C.* Op. cit. P. 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.* P. 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.* P. 26.

Throughout the visit, the delegation discussed peace, theological education, religion and science, religious freedom, and the relationship of Christianity with other religions. According to Gezork, all conversations with church and government leaders were conducted in “friendliness” and “frankness.”³⁰ The group met a wide range of church leaders, including Metropolitan Nikodim³¹ and Archimandrite Pimen³². These church leaders provided a range of information on religion to the delegation. For example, the group learned that 55 Orthodox churches were “in use” in Moscow; this compared to 500 before 1917³³. Major Soviet newspapers (*Trud, Pravda, Izvestia*) reported on the visit by American pastors³⁴.

IV. Meetings in the United States

After this trip to Moscow and Leningrad, eight church leaders from the USSR visited the US from June 2–13, 1956, as guests of the NCC. The group included leaders from Russian Orthodox, Armenian, Baptist, and Lutheran churches; two men came from the Baltics and one from Armenia. As in Moscow, the visit included friendly conversations and more challenging moments; according to one host, the leaders from the USSR “politely ignored pickets of a splinter church group that rushed well-worn placards from one whistle stop to another”³⁵.

The delegation from the Soviet Union was led by Metropolitan Nikolai³⁶. Archpriest Michael Slavnitsky, dean of St. Vladimir’s Cathedral in Leningrad, represented the parish priests of the Orthodox Church. The group also included Vladimir Ivanovitch Talizin, professor of church law at the Moscow Theological Academy, Bishop Sahak,

³⁰ *Gezork H.* What We Saw and Heard in Soviet Russia // Advance: The National Journal of Congregational Christian Churches. 1956. May 16. vol. 148, no. 10. P. 4. Box 4/11, Folder: “1950s Smith,” PBA KFYA.

³¹ *Ibid.* P. 5; Nikodim (Rotov) was later appointed as chairman of the External Church Relations Department of the Moscow Patriarchate (1960–1972) and Metropolitan of Leningrad and Ladoga (1963–1978).

³² *Churchmen Visit Russia.* P. 481; Pimen (Izvekov) later served as Patriarch of Moscow from 1971–1990.

³³ *Gezork H.* *Op. cit.* P. 6.

³⁴ *Churchmen Visit Russia.* P. 480.

³⁵ *Maynard E.H.* Russians Among Us // Christian Advocate. 1956. Jun. 28. P. 10. Box 4/11, Folder: “1940s Smith,” PBA KFYA; for a trip summary see *Russian-American Visitations: A Prelude to Understanding // Christianity and Crisis.* 1956. Jul. 9. P. 92–94.

³⁶ *Ibid.* P. 10.

great sacristan of the Holy See of Echmiadzin, Jan Kiivit, archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Estonia, Gustav Turs, archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, Alexei Leonidivitch Andreev of Kiev, vice president of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, and Alexei Nickolaivitch Karpov, pastor of the Baptist Moscow congregation, senior presbyter of the Moscow district. Donald Lowrie organized the visit for the NCC; he was a long-time YMCA leader for ministry among Russian Christians, and friend of Anderson, who also participated³⁷.

On Sunday, June 3, the group divided to visit three churches in New York City: the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. Nicholas, the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine, and an Armenian church. On Monday, June 4, the group visited Yale University and met at Seabury House in Greenwich for theological discussion. The conversation turned to the promotion of peace—which had been a difficult topic in Moscow. Walter Van Kirk, director of the department of international relations of the NCC, stated, “Our Russian guests must be told that within our churches there is a widespread view that the peoples of Lithuania, Latvia, and Esthonia do not enjoy that measure of freedom and justice which might well be theirs were they given the opportunity, in free and secret elections, to assert their views.”³⁸

The delegation flew to Toledo for a general board meeting of the NCC, where they were greeted by Blake. The guests met for dinner in a parish hall of a Lutheran church and discussions of church activities throughout the week, such as religious education and scouting. The group then visited Seville, Ohio, a small town with under 1000 residents. Residents greeted the group at a meeting hosted by the Methodist church³⁹. The group then traveled to Philadelphia, where they visited a seminary, urban ministry programs, and Westminster Press⁴⁰. In Washington DC they attended services and visited Mount Vernon. All returned to New York City before departure. Blake summarized the trip in this way: “Already our conversations have gone far enough to clear up some of our very real misunderstanding of the actual situation of churches in the Soviet Union. We believe that this trip is giving them an entirely new understanding of religious life in the United States.”⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid. P. 11.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid. P. 27.

⁴⁰ Russian-American Visitations: A Prelude to Understanding // Christianity and Crisis. 1956. Jul. 9. P. 92.

⁴¹ *Maynard E.H.* Op. cit. P. 27.

V. Reflections on the Exchange

After the return from Moscow, Blake, Anderson, and other US delegation members expressed their reflections in a variety of publications and signed a joint statement which was published in the *National Council Outlook* magazine. This statement shows support for the churches of the Soviet Union and indicates a desire for continued friendship and interaction. However, the NCC also expresses concern for the limitations placed on church activity and the requirement of supporting the government's foreign policy agenda. The statement avoids direct criticisms of specific church or government leaders. In many ways, the document reflects the article by Anderson described above in this article. The statement opening echoes the plan for the trip: "Our Mission was to church leaders in Russia. We knew in advance of our going that it would not be easy to achieve understanding, let alone agreement. But we believed that in a time of world tension, with deep cleavage between East and West, Christians of varying backgrounds and traditions should talk with one another in frankness in an endeavor to clarify differences and to seek areas of agreement. This we did."⁴²

VI. Significance of the Exchange

The significance of the 1956 exchange program can be demonstrated in at least three ways. First, these visits led to the solidification of ties among these church organizations and the 1961 entry of the ROC into the World Council of Churches (WCC). Second, the visit illustrated the challenges of engaging in church activism for the promotion of peace during this era. Third, the visits highlighted the significant contribution of Anderson to the development of informed and substantial partnerships.

The question of WCC membership for the ROC had been considered well before 1956. In 1948 the Patriarch turned down an invitation to attend the first assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam⁴³. However, a "steady growth in contacts, visitations, and mutual study" led to application and acceptance of the ROC into the WCC at the 1961 New Delhi Assembly. At this time the Orthodox Churches of Roma-

⁴² A Beginning Has Been Made – An Appraisal of the Visit to Russia // National Council Outlook. 1956. Apr. vol. 6, no. 4. P. 3. Box 4/11, Folder: "1950s Smith," PBA KFYA.

⁴³ For views of Russian Orthodox church leaders on the ecumenical movement, see [Anderson 1952].

nia, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia also became members⁴⁴. The 1956 meetings were a key step in this process, as the US delegates encouraged leaders from the USSR to consider participation [Brackenridge 1990, p. 95]⁴⁵.

At the 1956 meetings church leaders from the US and USSR affirmed a mutual stand for world peace. However, just a few months later these joint affirmations were tested by the Hungarian revolt. For example, Blake wrote to Metropolitan Nikolai and encouraged him to support the right of the people of Hungary to decide their own political future. Blake was disappointed when this statement did not appear, even though Nikolai replied that his church would “labor unceasingly for peace” [Brackenridge 1990, p. 94].

Anderson did not lead the exchange program, but his in-depth knowledge of the cultures, religions, and politics of the USSR clearly guided the meetings of 1956 and the actions of the NCC into the 1960s. He had participated in key meetings of the ecumenical movement along with Russian church leaders. For example, he took part in the Stockholm 1925 Life and Work Conference and accompanied Metropolitan Evlogii and other Orthodox leaders to most of the ecumenical gatherings which led to the formation of the WCC⁴⁶. Later in 1956 he participated in a theological delegation to the USSR by the Church of England led by Arthur Michael Ramsey (who later served as Archbishop of Canterbury). He also made another trip to the USSR for the NCC in December 1961⁴⁷. It was no surprise that Anderson was appointed as consultant in the Department of International Affairs of the NCC for a two-year term, 1962 and 1963⁴⁸. This followed his 1961 retirement from the YMCA. According to the position announcement, “His work in the National Council will include research, interpretation and counsel on such matters as international affairs in relation to Russia and Eastern Europe, questions of communism, and the ecumenical movement with particular interest in the Eastern Orthodox Churches”⁴⁹. His responsibilities included leading another

⁴⁴ *Anderson P.B.* The Entry of the Moscow Patriarchate into the World Council of Churches: Implications for Member Churches in the USA. February 12, 1961. P. 1. Box 4/11, Folder: “1960s Smiths,” PBA KFYA.

⁴⁵ For a recent study on the ecumenical movement and Eastern Orthodoxy, see [Zeilstra 2020].

⁴⁶ Announcement of 1962 assignment to National Council of Churches. P. 1–2, Box 4/11, Folder: “WWII,” Subfolder: “Keep for PBA Family Archives,” PBA KFYA.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* P. 2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* P. 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

delegation of the council to visit church leaders in the USSR in August–September 1962 and hosting church leaders from the USSR in February 1963⁵⁰.

Anderson's NCC appointment led to the formation of *Religion in Communist-Dominated Areas* and his service as founding editor; this periodical published translations from Soviet journals and newspapers. As editor, he attempted to “assure balance and truth” in reporting on a “paradoxical situation” in which Christian churches attempt to serve under a government which attempts “to uproot all religion from the minds and habits of the people” [Anderson 1971, p. 29].

Anderson did not take on his NCC responsibilities without an awareness of the thorny problems which needed to be addressed, such as Soviet government manipulation of church leaders, or the wide range of US Christian views on interacting with organizations in the USSR. Soon after he returned from Moscow in 1956, he wrote, “We have entered a period of Soviet foreign policy in which we may see a correlation of Church, State, and Party objectives and policies.”⁵¹ Later in 1961, he reflected on the potential opportunities and challenges of ROC participation in the WCC such as the control of the ROC delegates by the government of the USSR and the reaction by anti-Communist Orthodox in the US to the activity of the ROC in the WCC⁵². In 1956 he shared his opinion on the best approach to the inherently complicated opportunity of building relationships across the Iron Curtain: “American Churches, Christian organizations, and individual Christians should prepare intelligently and thoroughly to meet this situation; in particular by studying”: Marxism-Leninism, Eastern Orthodox history, theology, culture, and worship⁵³. When Anderson wrote these words, he had been studying Russian realities for nearly forty years through his research and relationships.

Anderson's memoirs confirm that his colleagues on the exchange trip were limited in their ability to understand the challenges faced by Christian leaders in the USSR: he writes that one meeting “revealed how little even our best church leaders knew of the content and pervasive influence of Marxist atheistic philosophy, not even enough to ask

⁵⁰ U.S. Christians to Swap Visits with Russians // Atlanta Constitution. newspaper clipping without page number. 1962. Mar. 2. Box 4/11. Folder: “1960s Smiths,” KFYA.

⁵¹ *Anderson P.B.* General Conclusions Coming out of Experiences in the Soviet Union, March 11–21, 1956. April 16, 1956. P. 1. Box 4/11. Folder: “1950–1959,” PBA KFYA.

⁵² *Anderson P.B.* The Entry of the Moscow Patriarchate. P. 1–3.

⁵³ *Ibid.* P. 1.

provocative questions and certainly not enough to counter militant atheism...” [Anderson 1985, p. 134].

To fully appreciate the value of Anderson’s knowledge and experience to the 1956 exchange program, it is helpful to compare his work to the activity of the most prominent leader of the US delegation, Blake. As noted above, Blake was a well-known leader among Protestants in the 1950s and a champion of church unity and denominational merger. However, as one historian who writes with appreciation of this leader states, “As an American conditioned to think only in the tripartite religious division of Protestant, Catholic, and Jew, Blake admitted that his knowledge of Orthodox Christianity prior to the 1956 trip was woefully inadequate” [Brackenridge 1990, p. 95]. As noted earlier, the 1956 trip received criticism from anti-communist groups. After returning from Moscow, Blake acknowledged denunciations of the trip but stated that it was “much less than we really expected” [Blake 1956, p. 184]. Blake demonstrated significant concern for the people of the USSR and appreciation for the ROC. However, he also operated with a very limited understanding of Orthodox Christianity, Russian history, or Soviet politics.

Anderson worked to build honest relationships with leaders of officially recognized churches in Communist countries and support their interests. His conversations with leaders in 1956 in the Soviet Union continued during his return trips. His memoir details his multiple one-on-one conversations with Patriarch Aleksii [Anderson 1985, p. 148].

Anderson also built sturdy partnerships with exiled church leaders and dissident believers and spoke out on their behalf. This balance depended on his long-term connections and in-depth knowledge of issues facing churches. He labored as an outspoken champion of human rights, and the National Council of Churches provided a platform for his work as consultant and advisor from 1962 until 1972. For example, the NCC provided funding for the periodical edited by Anderson, *Religion in Communist-Dominated Areas*. However, after 1972 the council provided far less support for believers facing discrimination and persecution in the USSR; during the 1970s the council promoted programs which optimistically communicated that the condition of believers was improving, in spite of evidence to the contrary⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ [Elliott 2021, p. 56–58, 61]; for multiple perspectives on the interaction of Christian churches with politics, see [Mojzes 2018].

VII. Conclusion

The 1956 church exchange program clearly strengthened connections between leaders of the US and USSR, in spite of complex political difficulties. These events demonstrated the quiet and steady role of Anderson in promoting lasting connections during a divisive era. Anderson clearly believed that the 1956 exchange trips were valuable in a limited but enduring manner; he later wrote, “On each successive visit to the USSR, or, when meeting Russian churchmen who have come to the West, I have been left with the conviction of the lasting impression of these encounters, and of their reciprocal significance in the church life of both East and West” [Anderson 1971, p. 33].

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