

DOCUMENTS OF UKRAINIAN SAMVYDAV

**A UKRAINIAN PRIEST'S APPEALS
FROM A SOVIET LABOR CAMP**

SMOLOSKYP SAMVYDAV SERIES

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Edited by Bohdan Yasen

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of Ukrainian political prisoners in the U.S.S.R.

S M O L O S K Y P S A M V Y D A V S E R I E S

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A Ukrainian Priest's Appeals From a Soviet Labor Camp

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PREFACE

The author of the two letters which make up this number of Smoloskyp's series *Documents of Ukrainian Samvydav* is Rev. Vasyl Romanyuk, a Ukrainian Orthodox priest who was arrested in 1972 and is now serving a 10-year sentence on a



A photograph of Rev. Vasyl Romanyuk and his family. Romanyuk met his future wife, Maria Markivna Antonyuk, while both were in exile. She spent ten years in a Soviet concentration camp as a political prisoner; now she works as a nurse. Their son Taras is now 16 years old.

charge of "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda." The moving spirit behind his letters is the same belief, or, at least, the hope, that sustains most of those imprisoned in the Soviet Union solely for their personal, political, or religious convictions—the hope that the West, and especially its political and moral leaders, cares about human rights in the U.S.S.R. and will take a stand in their defense. Vasyl Romanyuk—an Orthodox priest, a Christian who has suffered much for his faith—addressed his letters to Pope Paul VI and to the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

Vasyl Romanyuk was 22 years old when in 1944 he was first arrested for "nationalist and church activity." His native Western Ukraine had just been overrun by the Red Army; the secret police which came on its heels was hard at work rounding up those suspected of anti-Soviet sentiment. The night of his arrest, Vasyl Romanyuk saw his brother Tanasiy shot to death while trying to escape from one such NKVD squad, which had come to take the Romanyuk family to Siberia. His father soon died from the severe conditions and hard work of the exile; Vasyl himself served a 10-year term in a concentration camp.

Vasyl Romanyuk returned from imprisonment and exile and went on to complete his theological studies at the seminary in Moscow. In 1970, while serving as the parish priest in the village of Kosmach in the Ukrainian section of the Carpathian Mountains, he was suspended from his duties for one month for telling his parishioners in church that they should hold on to their traditions. His home was searched in connection with the second case against Ukrainian historian Valentyn Moroz, whom the authorities unsuccessfully tried to arrest in Kosmach in April 1970. When Moroz was finally arrested in September 1970, and tried and sentenced to a total of 14 years of prison, labor camp, and exile, Rev. Vasyl Romanyuk wrote a letter of protest to the Supreme Court of the Ukrainian S.S.R. "And what did Valentyn Moroz do?" he asked. "Openly and on principle he wrote a few essays filled with a sincere anxiety for the spiritual possessions of his nation, for its fate, for humaneness and justice. A person filled with concern about his nation and its people was tried for 'undermining order'."

Vasyl Romanyuk was himself arrested in January 1972 during the mass wave of arrests of the Ukrainian intelligentsia. Charged under Article 62 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian S.S.R., he was tried in closed court in June 1972 and sentenced to 10 years' special-regime labor camp and five years' exile. On August 1, 1975, while in Camp ZhKh 385/1 in the Mordovian A.S.S.R., Rev. Vasyl Romanyuk began a hunger strike in protest against violations of human rights in the U.S.S.R., vowing to continue it until the camp authorities returned the Bible they had confiscated from him. As far as is known, he was still on the hunger strike as of February 1976, kept alive, no doubt, by force feeding.

The case of Rev. Vasyl Romanyuk has several elements in common with the cases of most other Ukrainian political prisoners. He was repressed in large measure because of his defense of another political prisoner. Secondly, rights guaranteed him by the constitutions of the Soviet Union and the Ukrainian S.S.R.—in his case, the right to own a Bible—were violated. And like most of those political prisoners who have been tried under the laws of the Ukrainian S.S.R., Vasyl Romanyuk has been sent to serve his sentence outside the territory of his own “sovereign” republic.

Among those who have come to the defense of the imprisoned Ukrainian priest has been Nobel Peace Prize winner Andrei Sakharov, in his 1974 open letter to Party leader Leonid Brezhnev and President Nixon. In November 1974 Ukrainian political prisoners Shumuk, Karavansky, Kurchyk, and Saranchuk wrote to Sakharov’s Moscow-based Human Rights Committee: “What was the Rev. Vasyl Romanyuk sentenced for? Because the local authorities had voiced negative opinions about him and because he stood up in defense of the repressed Moroz? Is this a criminal act?” In October 1975 four Russian dissidents—L. Borodin, N. Ivanov, V. Rodionov, and Yu. Orlov—wrote to Michael Bourdeaux of the Center for International Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science, appealing for his help in bringing the plight of Vasyl Romanyuk to the attention of those in the West who might be able to help him. A second appeal appeared a month later in the *samizdat*, signed by L. Bogoraz, I. Alekseyeva, and Orlov.

Andrei Sakharov made another strong appeal for help for Vasyl Romanyuk in his message to the international hearings on violations of human rights in the U.S.S.R. in Copenhagen in 1975, which became known as the “Sakharov Hearings.” Sakharov wrote:

I consider it important that the Hearing should speak up in defense of those prisoners of conscience in the U.S.S.R. known to it . . . such as the heroic inmates of Vladimir Prison and of the Perm and Mordovian Camps. One of them is Vasily Romanyuk, a priest who has been again sentenced in a closed court to ten years for religious activities and for a few words of sympathy for Valentyn Moroz. Romanyuk’s first arrest in 1944 and his first ten-year sentence did not have even this flimsy pretext [and was accompanied by] the death of his father from hunger and the

murder of his young brother. In 1959 Romanyuk was rehabilitated, yet at the time of his second trial in 1972 he was declared to be an especially dangerous recidivist. Romanyuk has carried out a prolonged hunger strike in protest against the injustice meted out to him. His life is now in danger. I call on the participants at this Hearing to do everything in their power to save Romanyuk and to alleviate the lot of his destitute family. The fate of Father Romanyuk is a true reflection of the position of religious life in our country.

In the West, Smoloskyp has initiated a campaign in defense of Vasyl Romanyuk, urging that Bibles be sent to him through Soviet embassies in the West.

Vasyl Romanyuk has pleaded his own case to the Soviet authorities in, by his account, more than 400 letters. Finding these efforts fruitless, in the summer of 1975 he turned to Pope Paul VI and the World Council of Churches, two symbols of moral authority in the West who have up to now remained largely silent on the issue of violations of human rights in the U.S.S.R. In his letters, which also found their way into the *samvydav*, Rev. Vasyl Romanyuk does not plead for himself. Rather, he asks the Holy See and the World Council to help form international commissions which would look into violations of human rights by the Soviet authorities, and makes special appeals for help for imprisoned Ukrainian women and for those Ukrainian dissidents who have been confined in Soviet psychiatric hospitals.

His Holiness, Pope Paul VI of Rome

The Vatican

From Vasyl Omelyanovych Romanyuk,

A repressed priest of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine

AN APPEAL

Your Holiness!

During the last few years the trampling of elementary rights in the U.S.S.R. has reached such an extent that even for the slightest manifestation of a dissenting viewpoint, a human being is incarcerated for many years in a concentration camp or a psychiatric hospital. In 1972 in Ukraine alone, repressions were carried out against approximately 800 people. Some were sentenced to long terms and are being held in the concentration camps of Mordovia and the Urals, others were fired from their jobs, expelled from academic institutes, evicted from living quarters. Among those so repressed are many women. Some of them received long terms of imprisonment, while the Soviet Femida [the mythical goddess of justice—*ed. note*] paid no heed of the fact that among them were some who are sick and some who are mothers with small children. The Soviet government talks a great deal about peace and friendship among peoples and in every way possible curses the “Chilean junta,” while it cruelly suppresses all dissent in its own house.

I consider it my duty to ask Your Holiness to consider the inhumane treatment of the repressed women. In the Mordovian concentration camp there are several score of women repressed for their beliefs. Among them are several Ukrainian women known to me personally: the poetesses Iryna Stasiw-Kalynets and Iryna Senyk, physician-biologist Nina Strokata-Karavanska, artist Stefa Shabatura, schoolteacher-philologist Nadia Svitlychna, and Oksana Popovych. The sole guilt of these women was that they, like also all those repressed, did not think the way the “high and mighty” had wished.

I ask Your Holiness to demand from the Soviet government that it cease trampling upon human rights, that it free all those repressed, first of all the women, and grant permission to leave

this horrible country to all who so desire. I must add that the named women, as a protest against the highhandedness and lawlessness to which they have been subjected, have refused to work during the International Women's Year, for which they are being threatened with new court action and starved for nearly half a year now in punitive cells and solitary confinement.

It has become known to me that some ranking members of the Catholic and Protestant churches have been awarded the so-called "Lenin Prizes for strengthening peace among peoples"; therefore, I would like to use this opportunity to remind them that if they believe in the good intentions of the Soviet government, let them try to persuade it to stop suppressing the elementary freedoms and religious convictions of the people, because only then will its grandiloquent words about peace and friendship among peoples have real meaning. If the Soviet government refuses to fulfill these demands, then it will become clear that it does not want peace, but is merely trying to deceive world public opinion. For without justice, any kind of peace is impossible and all Christian dignitaries who received the aforementioned award should, in that case, refuse it.

A country where any semblance of justice has been destroyed, where the long-time preaching of rabid atheism has brought up a man-brute is incapable of any kind of peace and cooperation with other nations. I, for example, wrote approximately 400 complaints and statements because of the highhandedness and lawlessness to which I have been subjected. I got nowhere. From everywhere came the inhuman and cold words: "You were sentenced correctly." And there are people who have written thousands of such complaints, but no one listened to them—there you have an example of progressive Soviet cannibalism.

The Soviet Union is the fiercest enemy of Christianity (especially Catholicism), of national religious rites and traditions. The KGB investigator told me during my inquest that "the Church in the U.S.S.R. should be curtailing rather than expanding its activities, and therefore those church workers who try to force their convictions upon the believers are undesirable for us and we will fight against them." For three years now, I have been writing to all the jurisdictions for permission to obtain a Bible. Their answer to me is always that I shall not receive it, that "we shall not allow you to engage in religious propaganda

here.” This is how freedom of conscience really looks in the U.S.S.R.

Your Holiness! In this brief plea, I do not have a chance to list all the facts relating to the trampling of human rights in the U.S.S.R. Anyway, there is really no need to do so, for in the West there are many documents that testify to the terrible crimes against peace and humanity perpetrated by this government during a time of peace. Therefore I and my colleagues hope that the Most Holy See will help form some kind of an international committee to examine the facts relating to the trampling of human rights in the U.S.S.R. We also ask that representatives of the international community be allowed to visit us, so that they could become convinced of what is happening here. I should remind Your Holiness that not only concentration camps and psychiatric hospitals are being used against dissidents—there have also been cases of simple physical destruction. In 1970 the painter Alla Horska was killed in Kiev; that same year a priest of the Orthodox faith was killed in Lviv Region, while Volodymyr Osadchy, brother of the presently repressed Ukrainian writer Mykhaylo Osadchy, was recently killed in Sumy. This list can be continued for quite some length. Even before my arrest, I myself was threatened with physical punishment and with a psychiatric hospital. The chief warden of Vladimir Prison told me the following bit of “wisdom”: “I tell you that all of you anti-Soviets should be simply locked up in psychiatric hospitals, because you are not normal people. You see what power we wield, the tanks and rockets we have, that Nixon himself comes to us, that in any case America will soon be on her knees before us, and yet you dare to criticize the Soviet authorities. Normal people, obviously, would have no part of something like that.”

Your Holiness! It is with great hope that we turn to your Shrine, to all of Christiandom in this Holy Year, and to all people of good will, so that they would raise their voice of protest against all that has been mentioned in this appeal. And as for myself, as a sign of protest against the cruelty and inhumanity being inflicted on dissidents, and against the prohibition of my having a Bible, I proclaim a hunger strike starting the first of August 1975.

*Most humble servant of Your Holiness,
Vasyl Romanyuk, priest.*

The World Council of Churches

The City of Geneva

From Vasyl Omelyanovych Romanyuk,

A repressed priest of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine

AN APPEAL

Beloved Fathers and Brothers in Geneva!

I consider it my duty as a Christian and a believer to call to your attention the disregard of elementary human rights in the U.S.S.R. This is the fourth year that I sit in prison, though I committed no crime; I have been unable to win any small measure of justice. I was a priest in a well-known Ukrainian village in the Hutsul region, Kosmach. For the sole reason that I came to the defense of the unjustly repressed Ukrainian historian Valentyn Moroz, KGB workers fabricated a so-called "criminal case" against me and sentenced me at a closed trial to ten years' deprivation of freedom.

This is not the first time that similar lawlessness is being inflicted upon me. In 1944 I, the son of an impoverished peasant, was unjustly arrested at a military recruiting office only because communists characterized me as a "nationalist-churchgoer." I was sentenced to ten years, while my parents were exiled to Siberia, where my father died from the hard work and hunger. My brother Tanasiy Romanyuk, a minor, was killed by Stalin's henchmen for the sole reason that he fled from the house when our family was being taken away. A certain practice existed in those times, that when anyone from a family was sentenced, the rest of the family was also to be subjected to repression. Now, under Brezhnev, this tradition has been renewed, the only difference being that now the relatives are not exiled to Siberia, but are subjected to repressions right on the spot, that is, they are chased out of their jobs at various institutions, from institutes, and living quarters. On top of that they have to suffer

all kinds of other unpleasanties. In 1972 in Ukraine alone, repressions were carried out against more than 800 people, some of whom were sentenced to long terms and are now imprisoned in the concentration camps of Mordovia and the Urals, while the rest have been chased out of educational institutions and from various places of employment, denied living quarters, etc. And it is an awful thing that among those so repressed there is a large number of women, some of whom have been sentenced to long terms. I will mention the names of only those with whom I am personally acquainted. They are the poetesses Iryna Stasiv-Kalynets and Iryna Senyk, physician-biologist Nina Karavanska, the artist Stefa Shabatura, schoolteacher-philologist Nadia Svitlychna, Oksana Popovych, and others. In protest against the highhandedness and lawlessness to which they have been subjected, these women have refused to report for work during International Women's Year. And for this they have been held for almost a half year in punitive and isolation cells, although all of them are in a poor state of health. The question arises, how is it that a country which constantly trumpets about peace and cooperation among peoples, and sheds crocodile tears over the "bestial acts of the Chilean junta" itself disregards elementary human rights and does not even shy away from the cruel treatment of women, sick ones at that! In addition to all this, people are thrown into psychiatric hospitals for their convictions and subjected to forced "treatment." Several people whom I had known to be completely sane individuals were placed there: the Ukrainian physician Mykola Plakhotnyuk, Zynoviy Krasivsky, Yosyp Terelya, Yuriy Byelov, Lupynis, and others.

I ask the World Council of Churches to create a commission for the investigation of these existing facts of violations of human rights in the U.S.S.R. It is essential that immediate action be taken to save the lives of those dissidents who have been repressed unjustly, who have been thrown into the concentration camps and the psychiatric hospitals. I ask that either representatives of the Council or foreign correspondents be allowed to visit us, so that they could become convinced by their own eyes of the bestial acts that are inflicted upon us by the Soviet junta. I have written nearly 400 protests and statements on account of the highhandedness and lawlessness inflicted upon me by the Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Court; from all sides, however, I receive the same stereotyped reply: "You were sentenced

correctly." For about three years now I have been striving, I have been writing to various jurisdictions to be allowed to receive a Bible from home, but always I get a categorical refusal. "Religion is a bourgeois ideology, and we cannot allow you to engage in religious propaganda here," is the answer I get from camp officials. This is what freedom of conscience looks like in the U.S.S.R.

I have learned from the newspapers that some churchmen in the West have dared to accept the so-called "Lenin Prize for strengthening peace among peoples." I have no doubts about the sincerity of the intentions of these honored people; however, I am firmly convinced that they do not know the subject with which they are dealing. So that they may become convinced of this, I appeal, through the Council's Secretariat, to these "patriots," Catholic as well as Protestant: Help us, dissidents who are repressed here, especially those who have been thrown for many years into the Soviet concentration camps, and, above all, the women! Help us, so that we would have the opportunity to leave this horrible country, where a human being is sentenced for ten-fifteen years solely for his convictions! When the Soviet government heeds you and stops persecuting dissidents, that is when you will have the moral right to wear those laurels. Otherwise, you should refuse these awards, so as not to become accomplices in the crimes that this government has committed and continues to commit!

So that this appeal of mine would touch the hearts and minds of all Christians and people of good will, I, in addition to my signature here, declare a hunger strike beginning with the first day of August 1975, in protest against the cruel suppression of elementary human rights in the U.S.S.R., and demand the immediate rehabilitation of all those unjustly repressed.

Sincerely,

Rev. Vasyl Romanyuk

P.S. If you are not able to do anything to ease our plight, then I ask that you at least help me obtain a Bible. I will continue my hunger strike until I have a Bible in my hands, and I ask you, dear Fathers and Brothers in Christ, to help me in this.

