

Documents

Official Statement of Soviet Baptist Leaders

The All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the USSR (AUCECB) the governing body of what is commonly known as the Russian Baptist Church, issued an "Information Bulletin" in March this year. The text is printed below.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" Rom. 5:1

Christians of the whole world are aware of the fact that for the Lord peace is the same as life itself. May the year 1977 be a year of life, love and hope for everyone for whom Christ is a personal Saviour. In 1976 more than 6,500 new souls, who acknowledged Jesus as their own Saviour, were accepted through water baptism into the Church in our country. During that period of time 43 new churches were opened throughout the country.

Trusting in God we believe that 1977, too, will be a blessed year for our brotherhood. Already now many churches are getting ready to perform water baptisms over new converts in March-April in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and other cities. The enlarged Plenum of the AUCECB took place in Moscow on 9-11 February, at which the members of the All-Union Council, superintendents and some of the pastors of local churches were present.

The participants of the Plenum heard the following reports: "Unity in Christ", given by the Rev. A. Klimenko, chair-

man of the AUCECB; "Seek Peace and Pursue it", given by the Rev. A. Bychkov, General Secretary; and "A Minister of the Church - Champion of the Purity of Evangelical Teaching", given by the Rev. J. Doukhonchenko, Deputy Chairman of the AUCECB and Superintendent for the Ukraine. Forty participants took part in the discussion which followed the reports; they approved the reports and made many valuable suggestions.

The enlarged Plenum adopted a resolution which noted that since October 1975 (since the previous AUCECB Plenum) the Lord had richly blessed our united brotherhood in the work of proclaiming the good news of the salvation of sinners, in the work of encouraging and teaching the children of God, of enlarging and strengthening the brotherly ties with believers of an Evangelical persuasion.

More than 13,000 new members joined the local churches of our brotherhood through water baptism during 1975-76. More than 2,000 brothers and sisters in the faith, who had left for other movements, came back.

The centenary of the Russian Bible was celebrated in 1976 with special thanksgiving to the Lord. On the initiative of the AUCECB, last year really became a jubilee year and was celebrated with the publication of an edition of the Bible and with solemn services in local churches.

During the same period believers in Estonia received hymn books, and those of German nationality received Bibles in

their native language. The publication of a Russian hymn book is awaited. The journal *Bratsky Vestnik* and calendars are regularly issued.

New candidates were enrolled for the Bible courses: at present, in the first and second years, 97 students are studying.

In 1976 some of our Baptist leaders visited the Far East, Siberia, Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, Belorussia, the Baltic States and the Southern regions of Russia and the Caucasus. The Lord helped elect many blessed servants and ordain them for service as superintendents, pastors, and deacons.

As we consider the blessings of God given on the road which completed the 110th anniversary of our brotherhood's history, we exclaim: "Ebenezzer — hitherto hath the Lord helped us" (1 Sam. 7:12).

Participants at the Plenum spoke about the unity with Christians of Evangelical Faith, and stressed that we were united by a common faith in Jesus Christ as personal Saviour and as the One who has baptized all of us by the Holy Spirit in one body; we are likewise united by baptism in holy water by faith, and by the call to every child of God to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to know Jesus Christ more deeply.

The Plenum recommended to the Presidium, to the superintendents, to the pastors' councils, and to all the ministers of local churches to strengthen the unity with all who belong to our brotherhood on the basis of the Word of God and the observance of the Agreement of August 1945. The Plenum recommended that mutual talks and services be organized and that students be enrolled in the Bible courses.

The Plenum of the AUCECB heard the Presidium's report about the work being done to prepare a more complete creed of our united brotherhood. Mention was made of the zealous free will offerings of the churches for the All-Union Council which had made possible the spiritual work of the brotherhood. The ministers of ECB churches are being called to teach God's people to preserve the purity of Evangelical teaching. The Plenum approved the international activities of the AUCECB. It was emphasized that the Presidium had held an international meeting of Baptists in Mos-

cow in March 1976, and had established contacts with the European section of the United Bible Societies. In 1976 contacts with brothers and sisters were carried on in different countries of the world. Representatives of the AUCECB for the second time took part in the World Pentecostal Congress which met in London in September 1976.

Delegations of the AUCECB took part in the conference and meetings of international church organizations throughout the world where they contributed to the creation of a spirit of peace, love and cooperation among Christians. Responsible service by our brotherhood in international religious organizations is an expression of trust. The participants of the Plenum supported the spirit of cooperation and friendship among nations, which has developed since the signing of the Final Act of the Helsinki Declaration on Security and Cooperation in Europe. The government of our country was the initiator of the meeting in Helsinki and of the signing of the Final Act.

With all believers and people of good will, our united brotherhood constantly prays for peace, disarmament, and the prosperity of all nations so that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. The enlarged Plenum of the AUCECB criticized the actions of some people abroad who are hostile to peaceful coexistence and who interfere in the domestic affairs of our country. God commanded all human beings on earth to "seek peace and pursue it". We find peace in Christ and in Him we obtain power for service in the world. The Word of God says: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth" (Eph. 4:29). This is addressed to those who try to implant enmity in our brotherhood. Believers of the AUCECB are flesh of the flesh of their people who are building a society based on the principles of social justice.

The Plenum unanimously approved the AUCECB Presidium's participation in preparing for the International Conference of representatives of all religions in Moscow during June 1977.

For 110 years our brotherhood, with God's help, has carried on its service in the vast territories of our earthly Fatherland. In joy and in grief, and in peaceful labour we always stand with our multi-

national people (John 17:15 and Rom. 9:3).

As we continue along our earthly path, let us value the time and be quick to do good to all people, putting into practice the great commandment of Christ to love one another and to be one (Matt. 5:48).

The great feast of Easter is approaching. With joy and exultation in our hearts we greet all the children of God with the words:

CHRIST IS RISEN. CHRIST IS RISEN.
CHRIST IS RISEN.

March, 1977

Moscow, USSR

Soviet Weekly Attacks Four Churchmen

The Soviet weekly, *Literaturnaya gazeta*, printed an article entitled "Freedom of Religion and the Slanderers" which appeared on 13 and 20 April, 1977. It attacked four well-known members of the Russian Orthodox Church: Alexander Ogorodnikov (see also RCL Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 45-47), Fr. Gleb Yakunin, Lev Regelson (see also RCL Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 9 & No. 4, p. 9) and Fr. Dmitri Dudko (see also RCL Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 21-31). The article was written by Boris Roshchin. We print below an abridged translation of it.

Previously such attacks in the pages of *Literaturnaya gazeta* have heralded the arrest of the individuals referred to, and the threat of arrest is made very clear in this article, particularly in the case of Fr. Gleb Yakunin and Lev Regelson. In the sentence on p. 189, "In every article, in every letter of Yakunin, Regelson and company there are knowingly false fabrications defaming the Soviet system, the Soviet State (our emphasis) and the Soviet people", the words emphasized correspond almost

exactly to Art. 190/1 of the RSFSR Criminal Code, which provides for up to three years' imprisonment.

Roshchin, the author of the article, descends to the level of a bitter personal attack. For example, he states that Fr. Yakunin was dismissed from the Moscow Seminary "for indecent behaviour", but does not offer any substantiation for this accusation. He states that Lev Regelson and his wife have not worked for some years "and do not want to work". In fact Regelson lost his job some years ago because he did not hide his religious convictions, and has been unable to find work since. He therefore has no means of support for his wife and five children. But this does not prevent Roshchin criticizing him for receiving, quite legally, from the West "about a thousand roubles" (£900) a year. Roshchin even reproduces a private letter from Regelson to an American citizen (p. 189) although Art. 128 of the (old) Constitution of the USSR states that "secrecy of correspondence (is) protected by law".

Regularly certain Western newspapers and radio stations loudly publicize "facts about the persecution of religion" which, they say, is taking place in the Soviet Union. [...]

We could probably just laugh at all this, if it were not that in the newspaper articles and radio broadcasts figure the names of specific people, to whom measures of forcible "atheist re-education" have allegedly been applied, names of people who have undergone "repression" solely for their faith in God. [...]

The Western press, as is well known, prides itself on its freedom. In the

present case this has turned out to be a freedom from the norms accepted in the civilized world. One of these norms, by which decent people are usually guided, is formulated by jurists in this way: the burden of proof rests with the prosecution. In other words, it is not Soviet institutions which are obliged to justify themselves and prove that they do not persecute people "for faith in Christ". On the contrary, those circles which are making such accusations, the editors of a series of newspapers and radio stations in the West, must prove the justice of their assertions. There are no exceptions to this rule, neither in this case, when