

## News in Brief

*"Baptists" were Pentecostals.* In the bibliography of our last issue, a document (DS/72/B/51) was listed under the Baptist heading. It was dated 6 February 1972, and told of the breaking-up of an unregistered meeting in the home of G. S. Mashkovsky, Stupino, Moscow Region. Since no further details were available on the individuals involved, it was assumed that they were Baptists. Michael Rowe (who contributes to this issue a review of a book on Pentecostals in Eastern Europe) informs the CSRC that Mashkovsky is in fact a Pentecostal. This document is thus one of the very few *samizdat* (self-published) documents from Soviet Pentecostals to be available in the West.

*Albanian priest executed – for what?* On p. 39 of our last issue, we reported the execution of a priest – Father Shtefen Kurti – for secretly baptising a child at the mother's request. Radio Tirana on 29 April confirmed the fact of the execution, but denied Western reports of the motive. The Albanian radio service claimed that Fr. Kurti had been executed for spying on behalf of the Vatican, Great Britain and the United States. It added that he had been sentenced in 1946, also for spying, to twenty years but released early in 1962, after which he continued his former activities.

*Catholics from East and West* met in Poland on 10-11, November 1972. This was the International Symposium of the "Berlin Conference of Catholics from the European Countries". Its title was "Service to Peace and Political Commitment". Representatives from 16 countries took part, including Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and the Soviet Union. The Soviet representative was Fr. Viktoras Butkus, who spoke of the Lithuanian Peace Committee and the friendly links between Lithuania and Poland. The meeting was reported at length in the English-language journal of the Polish Catholic organization PAX: "Catholic Life in Poland" (No. 1, 1973). PAX operates with the backing of the Polish government.

*A new Cardinal for Poland.* Archbishop Dr. Boleslaw Kominek has been elevated to the rank of Cardinal by Pope Paul VI, reports the English-language press survey *Catholic Life in Poland* (published by PAX), February 1973. Archbishop Kominek serves in the diocese of Wroclaw (formerly Breslau). The journal describes the elevation as an "acknowledgment by the Holy See of the work and attitude of the Catholic Church in our land" and also as a crowning stone to the "final normalization of the Polish Catholic administration" in the Western and Northern lands. It is the first time since the fifteenth century that Poland has had three Cardinals.

*Polish Catholics should be bold in their witness,* said a pastoral letter from the Polish bishops, read in churches on 3 May (see *Tablet*, 19 May 1973). The bishops expressed strong feelings on state-imposed atheism and called on believers to withstand this pressure fearlessly. They said: "Have the courage to confess Christ and his Church publicly, in school, at the university, at work, in the office. Do it without thinking of the consequences you might suffer . . . We must become apostles of our surroundings."

*Mr. Joseph Ton*, a Romanian Baptist teacher, who studied theology at Regent's Park College, Oxford from 1969-1972, and returned to Romania in July 1972, has been appointed a tutor at the Baptist seminary, Bucharest, as from January 1973. In addition to 15 hours lecturing each week, Mr. Ton will also be the pastor of a Baptist church in the city.

*Atheist literature is declining*, complains A. Belov, senior editor of the large Soviet publishing house *Polizdat*. Writing in the Soviet journal *In the world of books* No. 2, 1973, he states that the number of atheist publications has actually fallen in the last few years; that editorial sections have been closed down in publishing houses; that there is, for example, a serious shortage of atheist books in the field of art. He also mentions the lack of textbooks explaining the principles of Soviet legislation on religion.

*The ninth volume of "Theological Works"* has been published by the Russian Orthodox Church. This scholarly journal contains articles of a high standard, including one by Pavel Florensky on iconography. The collection was "signed for print" on 9 March 1973.

*Nine Jehovah's Witnesses were sentenced* in Lithuania to terms of imprisonment ranging from two to five years, according to the Russian-language Lithuanian newspaper *Soviet Lithuania* of 1 April 1973. The trial was held in Klaipeda, Lithuania's third largest city, and lasted over a month. In October 1972, the émigré Lithuanian information agency ELTA-Press published this report in its Rome bulletin: "On 11 March this year, a meeting of 'Jehovah's Witnesses' was held in Lithuania, in the village of Juodalange (Rokiskis district), the home of their spiritual leader Vilius Arajus, aged 70. Among those who gathered there were delegates from the communities in Klaipeda (Vilius and Stefanija Kukutis); Moletai (Benediktas Stalnio); Utena (Tadas Serelis); Saulazoliai (Kazimiera Valskus and Vale Ilginis) and from Latvia (Ivan Maskolenka and Elzbieta Kraus) . . . The participants in this gathering were arrested and imprisoned because, as the Lithuanian Party newspaper *Tiesa* wrote on 5 August, 'the teaching and theology of this "community" is contrary to socialist order and to morality . . .'" A series of three articles in *Soviet Lithuania* in February and March this year (see Bibliography) carried the attack further, stating that Arajus was the leader of the groups in Lithuania and Latvia. The newspaper report of 1 April states that the following persons were sentenced: V. Arajus, T. Serelis and I. Susnys to five years strict regime; P. Babonas to five years; V. Anuzis and V. Kukutis to two years; E. Krauzaitis to two and a half years; S. Kikutiene and K. Valskus to three years probation.

*Mgr. Pham Nang Tinh*, bishop of Bui Chu (North Vietnam) has received permission to request from the diocese of Paris objects necessary to the spiritual life of the Christian community: in the first place fifty Latin breviaries and papal documents. Fr. Carat, who lived in Hanoi from 1954 to 1960 and who has just spent five months in territory controlled by the North Vietnamese army, has stated that "religious liberty" in the North is restricted to freedom of religious services. "We have no more schools, but we still teach the catechism in the

churches by means of the prayers." There are no seminaries except the one in Hanoi, where ordinations are rare. There are about 15 "peace priests" who support Marxism and have been forbidden to practise by the episcopate. (Translated from *Catacombes*, May 1973, p. 8).

*Baby girl dies after christening*, alleges the newspaper *Soviet Moldavia* of 10 June. The baby was the third child in the Bursuk family from Kopchak village. The article says that the christening was carried out in five degrees of frost, after which the baby caught pneumonia and died nine days later. The priest who carried out the ceremony is named as Fr. Daniil, from the town of Soroki. Soroki is in the north of Moldavia, Kopchak in the south – in the same region where young Ivan Moiseyev lived (a Baptist who was murdered in the Soviet Army last July). It is said that Fr. Daniil visited the village from time to time. The writer states that the tragedy occurred because atheist propaganda in the village is totally inadequate. If it were improved, people would have no time for Fr. Daniil. A number of newspapers recently carried the news that a Ukrainian communist had been expelled from his candidature for Party membership because his child had been christened (*Pravda*, 16 June).

*Reform Baptists persevere under pressure in Tadzhikistan* – this is the message from an article in the newspaper *Communist of Tadzhikistan* on 24 June. The writers of this article speak of the leader of an illegal Sunday school, Yakov Yantsen, in Dushanbe. Yantsen is accused of running the school in an aggressive manner in order to enhance his reputation with the group's leader, Ivan Plett. When this failed, he is said to have run away from the city, but an appendix to the article tells that he has returned and is continuing his former activities – for which he must be called to account. They also reveal that Ivan Plett has served a sentence for "violating Soviet laws on cults", but "did not learn his lesson". After his release, he went to a secret meeting in Chimkent, Uzbekistan, where he was elected reform Baptist leader for the whole of Soviet Central Asia.

*Vladimir Maximov has been expelled* from the Union of Soviet Writers. The news of his expulsion (on 26 June) first reached his sister, who lives in Israel. He has also been summoned to a "routine check-up" at a psychiatric hospital and friends fear that this may be the preliminary to an enforced detention. Maximov is an Orthodox believer. One of his novels, "Seven Days of Creation" is to appear later this year in English.

*Soviet Union calls for religious freedom*. At the Helsinki security talks, the Soviet Union on 4 July put forward a general declaration of principles, to be discussed further by special committees with those suggested by other countries. The Soviet proposals included the call for respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms "including freedom of religious belief". However, at the subsequent press conference, it was asked why this paragraph departed from the agreed recommendations by not mentioning freedom of thought and conscience. (Report in *The Times*, 5 July 1973).

*The Orthodox Cathedral of the Resurrection in Chernigov, Ukraine has been closed*, reports Paul Wohl of the *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 July 1973. The

congregation was told to use a small wooden church outside the city, which was quite unsuited to their needs.

#### WESTERN REACTIONS

. . . to the situation of believers in communist countries. We invite readers to submit possible entries for this new section of "News in Brief".

The Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands has written to the families of 45 Soviet Baptist prisoners with Easter greetings. They have informed the Soviet Ambassador to the Netherlands about their action to avoid misunderstanding - they desire friendship and understanding between the peoples of Europe. They also sent a letter to the Czech Minister of Culture requesting information about the alleged withdrawal of preaching permission from six Czech pastors.

More than 100 young Christians representing 13 countries travelled to Moscow to demonstrate in Red Square against the persecution of Soviet Christians. One party of 50 was stopped by the police at Kalinin and escorted back across the border. They displayed slogans and white crosses on the journey, and reported that many Christians greeted them joyfully. The return of this group was reported by the *Daily Telegraph* on 9 May 1973. Of the 60 who reached Moscow, only 16 managed to get to Red Square, where they testified in Russian to passers-by before most of them were arrested.

Bishop Monrad Norderval of Norway presented a letter to Mr. Kurt Waldheim, General Secretary of the United Nations, during his visit to Oslo on 10-11 May. The letter speaks of the violations by communist countries of the Human Rights Declaration. The General Secretary is requested to give priority to the establishment of a High Commissioner for Human Rights, so that documents of appeal from Christians in communist countries can be properly investigated.

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## Universal Declaration of Human Rights

**Article 18:** Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.