

matter. It is true the believers wanted the chairman himself to come, but he, seeing that the matter was about to be discussed, disappeared into the woods, and during working hours it was necessary to seek him out there.

Kuroedov's representative announced authoritatively: "All is now agreed. Draw up another list of the 'twenty' [i.e. *dvadtsatka*] for the District Committee of the Party." But what has the Party got to do with the matter?

The believers went to the chairman of the village *soviet*, Khunduchko, hoping for the opening of the church. He told us that Kuroedov's representative had nothing of the kind in mind and that he had told him, Khunduchko, privately that the church could never on any account be opened, as it was in a state of disrepair, and he himself would set up a commission to determine what repairs were necessary. The authorities were evidently worried about the state of the church building; but why did they then fine the believers Maria Khamovna Prokopchuk, Hanna Danilovna Prokopchuk and Adam Yurkovich Ivanov, ten roubles each simply because they had tidied up the church?

They then went to Moscow to see Kuroedov. "What's going on?" the believers asked. But they were not allowed

to see Kuroedov. They then wrote him a declaration, signed by three people, which explained the matter. Kuroedov sent an unknown paper to his representative in the region, together with the declaration that had been sent to him. The [CRA] representative said that he had sent all the papers to the executive committee of the district *soviet*. At the executive committee of the district *soviet* they again called the believers names, but gave them no reply, telling them not to interrupt their work, as though this were not their work.

An art expert came from a museum in Kiev and wanted to inspect the church, but the officials of the village *soviet* would not let him in. Drunkards, however, often go there to drink together, and they are mostly Party members.

Finally, the chairman of the village *soviet*, Maxim Cheberaka, found a way of settling the matter. He gave the villagers a paper to sign, allegedly an undertaking not to let pigs out of their private plots, but above the signatures he added a secret declaration to the effect that the church was not required. After that no further declarations for the reopening of the church were accepted by the executive committee of the district *soviet*.

21 February, 1979

Pentecostals Write to the Pope

Since 1973 there has been a growing movement for emigration among Soviet Pentecostals (see "Soviet Pentecostals: Movement for Emigration" by Michael Rowe in RCL Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 170-4). Those wishing to emigrate see no place for a Christian in Soviet society. The following document, dated 25 May 1979, is addressed to the Pope and Roman Catholic Cardinals "of the free world", and is signed by 52 Pentecostals representing 20,000 believers who wish to emigrate.

APPEAL

TO THE CATHOLIC FATHERS: THE MOST HOLY POPE JOHN PAUL II AND THE CARDINALS OF THE FREE COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD.

FROM PENTECOSTAL AND BAPTIST CHRISTIANS OF THE EVANGELICAL FAITH.

Most Holy Father and Cardinals - fathers of the great Catholic Church! We, Christians living on the territory of the Soviet Union, are trying to leave the Soviet atheist State. Our aim in appealing to you is to ask for your help in emigrating.

The trouble is that emigration from the Iron Curtain territories is complicated by many factors, the most important of which is the fear of the Soviet authorities, who are guilty of cruel acts of barbarism, that if believers emigrate, their usurping regime will be exposed for what it is and their position will be undermined.

However, the whole world already knows what the horrifying dictatorship of atheism has led to, so the emigration of believers from the country can hardly hasten the process of disintegration of the system, which grew up so fast and is

now dying. The system is searching in vain for scapegoats, for it is itself the scapegoat which must bear all the blame.

We, who have suffered much in this country, see no sign of repentance in those who have been making us suffer for 60 years. On the contrary, according to a new decree of the State and the Party, our position is getting worse, so we have no choice other than to leave our earthly fatherland, which has been turned into a house of slavery by the communists. These are not mere words, but the tragic fruit of painful experience.

This letter is an appeal to you from widows and orphans whose husbands and fathers perished in Soviet concentration camps or were shot, also from prisoners who are serving heavy sentences for their faith in God and from their families.

You, as fathers of the Christian faith, successors to the very Apostles of Christ, should not react sceptically to our appeal merely because we ourselves are not Catholics.

In the most difficult times of our epoch, God has made you pastors of the great Catholic Church, to bring to completion the spirit of renewal among believers. Atheism is the chief enemy of Christianity: of Catholics and Orthodox, Pentecostals and Baptists, Lutherans, Quakers, Mennonites, and so on. Over many long centuries, a deadly split has existed between Christians of various doctrines, as between the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, the warring branches of Israel (books of Judges and Kings). It is now obvious who profited from this, for God has given Christians of various denominations a terrible lesson by handing great Christian Russia, which used to take such pride in its holiness, over to atheist captivity and slavery. But "when pride cometh, then cometh shame" (Proverbs 11:2) and now all of us must weep over what has happened. Atheism, or rather the spirit of Antichrist, having found a dwelling and a throne in the land of Russia (Revelation 2:13 and 13), is now threatening to bury the whole wonderful Christian civilization. It cleverly exploits the age-old differences between believers, in order to widen and deepen the ancient schism of hostility between the Churches, as between the branches of Israel. After

such a tragic experience, shall we still go on distinguishing between those belonging to Paul and those belonging to Apollos, when cruel atheism stands ready to bury the whole household of God? (Corinthians 3:4-9). The Apostles teach us that even if we have the highest gifts, but have not love, all the efforts of the believers will come to nothing (I Corinthians 13). [...]

Let us remember that the tribe of Esau perished and disappeared off the face of the earth for ever, because on the day when a calamity befell his brother Jacob, when he was bound and carried into captivity by his enemies, Esau looked on with malicious joy and was even as one of the enslavers (Obadiah 1:12). If we likewise remember that the same fate almost befell the nation of Israel, after they demanded the death of Jesus from Pilate, shouting "His blood be upon us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25), we should not forget the eternal rule of all the saints, which God gave to Solomon: "Forbear not to deliver them that are drawn to death and those that are ready to be slain" (Proverbs 24:11). This was also the good mission of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who came to seek and to save the lost (Matthew 18:11).

So Christ's people perishing within the borders of Soviet power should not be merely objects of contemplation or passive sympathy, but rather of brotherly love expressed in giving help where it is needed.

We have raised the banner of emigration in the hope that our brothers abroad will respond to our call for help and will not pass us by, like the priest and the Levite in the Lord's parable (Luke 10:30-37), but will show us the same kind of love as the good Samaritan, for we are truly like the man lying wounded on the road.

For 60 years, Russian Christians have been tormented by Communist bandits. Like the daughter of Zion, they stand spreading out their hands, saying "Woe is me, for my soul is wearied because of murderers" (Jeremiah 4:31). And God, who sees the whole world, looks down to see how the saints unaffected by our circumstances are reacting to this. Will they remain indifferent, or will they feel our pain, as if they themselves were in our situation?

You know, most Holy Father John Paul II, although not in full measure, but from personal experience, what Soviet power means and what torments it has subjected Christianity to, for present-day Poland is almost one of the republics of the USSR. Cardinal Slipyi knows this in full, because he spent many long years in the captivity of Soviet concentration camps and has seen how the demon of death is master there. The atheist regime, however, redoubles its efforts every year, so that every Christian movement which does not cooperate with the evil power is regarded as an enemy of the socialist ideology and the socialist construction of communism. Although delegates sent abroad from the registered churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists and the Moscow Patriarchate say that there is full religious freedom in the USSR and that no-one is persecuted for his faith, we are witnesses that this is a lie which the ordinary Christian would not even utter; this is said only by the godless or by those who, as the prophet Daniel says, have "forsaken the holy covenant". Because of their traitorous activities, thousands of the best Christians perished in the terrible confines of the GULag archipelago. Now, in their service to the Beast which is Antichrist, they are trying to drive all believers into the "fold" of registered churches, under the aegis of the Soviet Law on Religious Cults (1929), which after forbidding priests and believers to engage in any activities – can find nothing to allow them. We have no prejudices against registration as such, if the law allowed what is Caesar's to be given to Caesar and what is God's to God. But the anti-evangelical law on cults demands that Christians and their clergymen should give to King Herod both what is Caesar's and what is God's. What use is it to follow Christ without the hope of eternal life? But that gift of life in Christ Jesus is guaranteed only if we are faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10; John 14:21; Matthew 22:21; Mark 12:17). The Soviet law on cults became a law of blood because Christians who remained true to God would not bow to its demands and so were thrown into prison and either perished there or returned to their families as cripples after serving long sentences. It is because of these never-ending repressions that we feel we must leave this country, especi-

ally since our children and grandchildren are experiencing worse times and even more unbearable circumstances. It is now impossible for the majority of believers to live here without being defiled by sin. And we feel that the voice of the Angel of God which has told us to leave this apostate land, has been rightly and opportunely interpreted by us (Revelation 18:4). And we ask your brotherly help in this, most Holy Father and Cardinals. The great Apostle Paul, whom you have succeeded, wrote to ministers of the faith in the person of his colleague Timothy: "If any provide not for his own and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel" (1 Timothy 5:8).

As we understand that the Church of God is indivisible and its Head is our common Saviour, who is Lord of all who call themselves Christians, we should like above all to see you – in your high calling as bishops – as our brothers, to whom our sorrows and our need to emigrate are not merely something concerning outsiders.

For over two years we have been waging a massive campaign, directed at the atheist State, for permission to emigrate (and for many years before that many people were trying individually to obtain the same). It is very difficult for us, we are not allowed to leave and the majority of us do not have the means to emigrate. We have very large families and our children pray together with us for the Lord's help.

On 25 August 1978 many of us renounced Soviet citizenship. We do all this so that we will not be subject to the Antichrist and to obtain, if possible, freedom to lead a quiet and peaceful life in Jesus Christ abroad in your countries.

So, if your hearts are inclined towards us, as ours are to you, then in the name of the Lord do all in your power to bring our hopes to fruition. In our fight for emigration, we remind the Christians of the whole world that they should be watchful in case they fall into the same *captivity*, which Russian Christians are now experiencing, lest they should then be forced – like us – to seek such a difficult way out.

May God bless you in deeds of love and may he direct your high service towards justice and aid to those fleeing from the atheist Babylon.