

mitted his crimes and showed repentance during the time he was serving his sentence. Gong said at the court trial that he would abide by the law and pledged allegiance to the country." These bare facts, as reported by the government agency, were repeated *verbatim* in several papers. Headlines added some embroidery: "Paroled bishop promises to snap Vatican ties" (*Hong Kong Standard*, 6 July 1985); "Silent Church suffers blow" (*South China Morning Post*, 6 July); "A bishop 'repents'" (*Newsweek*, 15 July and *Time*, 15 July). Informed by Xinhua, we are told that "the ex-bishop kissed the ring of the Patriotic Bishop of Shanghai and promised to act under his guidance; he was welcomed by the Shanghai diocese". The "patriotic" bishop of Shanghai is Zhang Jiashu. He said: "As long as Gong obeys the law and is patriotic, he may lead a happy evening of his life and pursue his religious studies" (*China Daily*, 6 July).

The local press was sceptical about the veracity of these reports. The wording was strangely reminiscent of that used when the legitimate bishop of Canton, Tang Yiming, was released after 22 years in prison. He too reportedly "repented", a claim he later strenuously denied. Xinhua itself, in the course of an interview with Gong, con-

tradicted itself: "The second Xinhua report contained some intriguing differences from the first" (*Hong Kong Standard*, 6 July). Nothing in what Gong said hinted at repentance, let alone at a break with the Vatican.

China experts surmise that Gong's release may contribute to "an understanding" with the Vatican. Such a trend has long been in the air. It is an open secret that there have been diplomatic feelers. Moreover, the Chinese government is aware that it can in no way count on the CCPA. The overwhelming majority of Chinese Catholics have shown admirable boldness in confessing their faith. Impartial observers are convinced that it is a wise pragmatic gesture of the Chinese government to prepare to abandon its sinking religious ship in view of the fact that Fu Tieshan, the "patriotic" Bishop of Beijing, admits that "there could be three million Catholics in China who have kept a secret allegiance to the Vatican" (*South China Morning Post*, 7 November 1984). This means eighty per cent of all Chinese Catholics. Reconciliation with the Vatican, therefore, has become a useful need. It should, considering Beijing's wish "to learn truth from facts", be heeded.

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## USSR Baptist Congress

The Union of Evangelical Christian-Baptists in the USSR held its national congress on 21-23 March 1985 in Moscow on the theme of "Let your light shine before men". It was the sixth congress since the Union's inaugural congress in 1944 but, counting all the previous congresses of its two constituents, the Baptist Union and the Evangelical Christian Union, the congress was the 43rd. The present constitution requires the holding of a congress every three to five years. In fact slightly more than five years had elapsed since the previous congress in December 1979 (see *RCL* Vol. 8, No. 3), and the congress thus failed to be held in the centennial year of the first Russian Baptist Congress in 1884.

The main report on behalf of the Presidium of the Union's Council was delivered by Alexei Bychkov, the General Secretary. The statistics quoted by Bychkov reflected

the same moderate progress that had been reported five years earlier. Since 1979 40,000 new members had been baptised and 5,600 received from unregistered Pentecostal, Baptist and Mennonite congregations. It was reported that 268 new congregations had registered. [Other reports indicate that in Ukraine alone, 3,000 Pentecostals joined the Union, and that 84 of the registered congregations were in Ukraine and a further 26 in Moldavia. The Moldavian churches had also baptised 2,500 new converts. These figures are a good indication of the relatively greater strength of the Baptist churches in these two republics — Moldavia, for example, with little more than one per cent of the USSR's population, had over six per cent of the new members.]

Basic Christian literature also continued to be published or imported. Ten thousand Russian Bibles were imported via the Un-

ited Bible Societies, and a further 5,000 were printed in the Soviet Union. Also distributed were 40,000 New Testaments, 50,000 hymn-books, 2,000 German Bibles, 7,000 German New Testaments and 7,000 German hymn-books. Some books of the Bible in Russian braille were also imported. Yearbooks were published in Russian, Estonian and Latvian.

Since 1979, 214 students have completed the Bible Correspondence Course, of whom fifty received special training as choir-leaders. Twenty-four of the students came from churches outside the Union: 18 from independent Pentecostal churches, three from independent Baptist churches, two from independent Mennonite Brethren churches and one from a Church Mennonite congregation. Training for Christian work was not limited to the formal correspondence course, however. Sixty choir-leaders took part in special seminars to develop their skills, and seminars for pastors were held in a number of areas. Despite these efforts there was still a shortage of pastors in a number of regions and republics. Bychkov suggested the appointment of full-time pastors to serve two or more congregations, greater use of younger men in pastoral work and more opportunities for women to use their gifts in the service of the church, including preaching. Bychkov also reported on discussions on unity with Pentecostals and Mennonites from within and outside the Union. Two meetings with independent Baptists had also been held.

No estimate of total membership, was given, nor was the net increase in membership of churches in the Union reported. However, the Ukrainian churches increased their membership by 6,000 and the total increase might be expected to be twice this figure, roughly the same as during the previous five-year period. The publicly stated membership statistics are widely believed to be underestimates, as almost certainly not all baptisms are reported. Although in theory each new member reported could have received a New Testament there certainly were not enough new Bibles to go round, let alone to make up for the shortfall over the past decades. Almost all reports from regional superintendents emphasised the need for far more Christian literature.

The 546 delegates to the Congress were elected at some sixty regional and republican conferences attended by a total of over

8,000 representatives of local churches. Over forty percent were aged between fifty and sixty. Young people and women were barely represented — only ten delegates were under thirty and there were just nine women. Fourteen nationalities were present, with Ukrainians as the largest group and the largest minorities being Russians and Germans.

A new All-Union Council was elected by the Congress. A number of members retired, but there were no substantial changes. The Council then proceeded to elect the Presidium. Andrei Klimenko, who had served as President for ten years, was elected Honorary President and was succeeded by Vasili Logvinenko, a vice-president for the past five years. Other senior officers of the Union remained unchanged. The Presidium was increased in membership to thirteen and four new members were appointed: Janis Tervits, Latvian superintendent and formerly a non-voting member of the Presidium; Ivan Bukati, Belorussian superintendent; Karl Sedletsky, Moldavian superintendent; and Stepan Karpenko, superintendent for Donetsk region, Ukraine. Additionally four non-voting members were appointed.

The Congress adopted an appeal to "all Christians of the world" which focussed largely on peace. While calling for a "mutually verifiable arms reduction programme until all the swords are beaten into ploughshares" the appeal singled out the US "Star Wars" programme as "painful and horrific".

Although about four hundred people attended as guests only eight of them were from abroad, compared with thirty in 1979. They included international representatives of the three major denominations belonging to the Union: Gerhard Claas, Baptist World Alliance Secretary, and Knud Wumpelman, European Baptist Federation Secretary; Paul Kraybill, Executive Secretary of the Mennonite World Conference; and Robert Mackish, European representative of the Assemblies of God. It is possible that the number of foreign guests might have been greater if the Congress had not been arranged at relatively short notice. The pre-Congress conferences, which have previously taken place some months before the Congress, this year were held only a few weeks beforehand, the Ukrainian conference just six days in advance.