

RESOLUTION OF THE SECOND SEMINAR OF THE INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

We, the participants in the Christian Seminar which took place in Moscow from the 30th of September through the 2nd of October 1988, are summing up in this resolution the main results of our work. This Seminar was organized by a working group focused at the previous seminar which was dedicated to celebration of a millennium of Christianity in Russia.

During the course of this seminar there was general consensus that a new era in the relationship between Church and State has begun and there appeared an aspiration towards brotherly relations and a realization of the need to coordinate activities. The flaw in the ideological atmosphere in the country towards believers has been manifested by:

- the freeing of a number of well-known prisoners of conscience;
- the official pronouncements about the soon to be announced repeal of the discriminatory legislation of 1929;
- the return to the Russian Orthodox Church of the Danilov and Tolgskiy Monasteries, the Optiniy Desert Monastery, parts of the Kiev-Pecherski Monastery, and several churches;
- the registration of new religious communities including the Diveyvsкая Community;
- giving several members of the clergy the opportunity to be quoted in the press and to appear in other means of mass communication.
- registration of passports in order to be baptized or get married was repealed;
- the Millennium of Christianity in Russia was very widely celebrated. On April 29th, M.S. Gorbachev received in Kremlin the Most Holy Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Pimen.
- foreign Bible societies were permitted to donate books of the Holy Scripture to the Moscow Patriarchate for distribution among believers;
- lately the Christian community has not been subjected to raids from the militia or KGB during seminars in private apartments;
- on the last day of the celebration of the Millennium of Christianity in Russia the foundation was laid for a new Church-monument;
- anniversary editions of the Bible and prayer books appeared. For the first time in the history of the Russian Church the Ukrainians received the Holy Scripture in their own language.

All these undoubtedly positive changes, often mentioned during interviews given by the ruling members of the higher order of clergy in the Russian Orthodox Church and by the executives of the Council on Religious Affairs, appear to be couched in ambiguity characteristic of current reforms. Unfortunately the hierarchs as well as government officials intentionally ignore this, this concealing the ambiguity.

As of this moment, Father Vladimir Rusak is imprisoned and Father Sigitas Tamilyavichus is exiled. According to our sources, nearly 200 prisoners of conscience continue to be deprived of freedom. We consider it a disgrace that in the Moscow Patriarchate not one of the hierarchs has raised his voice in the defense of the prisoners of conscience.

In by-passing numerous solemn promises given by the heads of our government and contrary to the law requiring nationwide discussion of the most important problems concerning social and government life, the project on legislation regarding the freedom of conscience is being worked on in secrecy. Numerous appeals by the Christian community to the legislative organs (see Appeal to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR dated Sept. 12, 1987, which carried more than three thousand signatures) are being ignored. The representatives of the Church are not involved in this task.

The matter raised by the Orthodox community regarding the necessity to change the 52nd Article of the Constitution is not being considered. This Article guarantees atheists the freedom to promote anti-religious propaganda while the believers have no such equal rights.

Having returned to the Church a negligible part of the houses of worship seized during the initial years of the Soviet regime, the government receives a double advantage: firstly, using its own finances, the Church restores ruined buildings and monuments dedicated to history and culture; secondly, the government gains ideological capital in the eyes of the world. Museums of atheism are housed in many Russian Orthodox houses of worship (the Kazan Cathedral in Leningrad, the Cathedral of St. Casimir in Vilnius) which in an insult to the feelings of believers.

To date many religious communities are denied registration. Many cities with population of over a million (Novosibirsk, Gorkiy, Sverdlovsk and others) have only one house of worship each; in the eastern part of the country the Churches are dispersed thousands of kilometers from each other. East of the Trinity - Sergius Monastery there is no other monastery or a religious school.

The New Rule, solemnly accepted by the Local Council (1988), is still ineffective in the provinces because of resistance from the representatives of the Council on Religious Affairs.

The means of mass communication remain inaccessible to believers and an objective view of life in parochial communities is totally absent in pages of the press. Christians cannot find their point of view reflected in the official press.

I.

We have agreed that the most urgent problems confronting the Church are:

1. Christianization of that part of the populace for which perestroika, aside from all else, brought out the thirst to associate themselves with the national religious tradition.
2. Being allowed to express grief about the prisoners of conscience and the condition of those who are denied rights because of their religious activities.
3. Nationwide debate on the need for new legislation concerning religion and cults.
4. Establishment of a proper method of distribution of Bibles in order to prevent possible abuse of the help coming from our brothers worldwide.
5. Return to the practice of private charity in the daily life of believers through the collection of donations and the creation of charity funds.
6. The right to print and distribute religious literature in the necessary quantities and to freely import it from abroad.
7. The right to freely conduct priestly activity all over our country, particularly in hospitals, old age homes and prisons.
8. The right to conduct religious seminars, meetings and conferences without the necessity of securing permission from government officials.
9. Repeal of taxes for the clergy; the Stalin decree of 1943 is still in effect.

In light of the latest events in Armenia, Georgia and other regions the participants in the seminar consider it imperative to fight for the right of people to live according to their faith, tradition and the national forms of organization that pertain to their spiritual and social lives.

II.

We have agreed that in order to resolve the aforesated problems, the following concrete actions are imperative:

1. Publication of the Acts of the Local Council of 1917-18 which were the most democratic and were imprinted with blood of martyrs and confessors.
2. Appoint clergy to now empty pulpits and to increase the number of eparchies in the eastern part of the country.

3. Legalize and further develop the activity of numerous Sunday schools and groups involved in the study of Holy Scripture and Holy Devotion.
4. Organize a campaign for total political amnesty because we feel that in a democratic state no personal convictions can be used as a reason for criminal repression.
5. Obtain the removal of limitation on residence permits for the entrants to monasteries.
6. Obtain for the members of Russian diaspora permission for admission to monastic vows and entrance as lay brothers into the St. Panteleimon Monastery on Mount Athos.
7. Appoint an editorial group for preparation of our legislative bill regarding freedom of conscience and strive towards a nationwide debate.
8. Strive towards legalization of the Russian Orthodox Church (underground), taking into account the demands of its members.
9. Assist in the restoration of legal status for the Greco-Catholic Church in the Ukraine.
10. Insist on adoption of alternative service rather than the compulsory service in the Soviet Army for those citizens who, according to their religious convictions, can not take up arms.
11. Send letters to the Stockholm Bible Institute as well as for the Scandinavian Bible missions with information on distribution of Explanatory Bibles within the USSR and a suggestion to create an effective control mechanism.
12. Demand from the State Customs Office a report as to the fate of Bibles which have been confiscated to date.
13. Create community libraries and reading rooms containing Christian literature.
14. Add a section in the "Bulletin of the Christian Community" on catechism for the population.
15. Send a telegram of sympathy and solidarity to the Christians of Armenia.
16. Appoint an organizing body to develop basic principles of the Christian movement in the USSR which will be presented for discussion at the next seminar.

We decided to dedicate the next seminar to the 70th birthday of the great Russian writer Alexander Isaevich Solzhenitsyn and to conduct "Solzhenitsyn Readings" on December 10-11, 1988 in Moscow.

Realizing the significance of our seminars in the lives of the Christian community and "trying to preserve a unity of spirit in the union of the world" (Ephesians 3:4), we thank

the Lord for the opportunity to assemble again in His Name to resolve our urgent problems.

Participants in the Seminar of September 30 - October 2, 1988,

Signatures:

priest Valentin Dronov - St. Danilov Monastery

priest Valeriy Lapkovskiy - Kerch.

priest Viktor Grigoriev - Pskov eparchy

deacon Sergei Burdin - Tobolsk

Alexandr Ogorodnikov - Moscow, "Bulletin of Christian Community"

Valerij Nikolskiy - Pskov, journal "12"

Vladimir Osipov and Evgeniy Pashnin - the Action Committee "For spiritual and biological salvation of the people"

Mikhail Baizerman - Moscow, "Bulletin of Christian Community"

Viktor Yagodin - Moscow, "Bulletin of Christian Community"

Roman Ulyanitskiy - Moscow

Aleksandr Gordeyev - Moscow

Mikhail Buryakov - Frunze

Naum Borchehukov - Tbilisi

Valeriy Zaitsev - Aleksandrov, Vladimirskaya oblast'.

Eduard Malishev - Moscow

Igor Triger - Belgorod

Georgiy Chansuriya - Tbilisi, NDP

Georgiy Akhalaya - Tbilisi, NDP

Konstantin Gamsakhurdiya - Tbilisi, NDP

Nijole Sadunajte - Vilnius, Lithuanian Catholic Church

Nikolay Muratov - Moscow, Ukrainian Catholic Church

Andrey and Elena Petrov - Moscow, "Bulletin of Christian Community"

Vladimir Gershuni - Moscow

Liya Ivaska - Riga

Nikolay Maksimov - Kiev, "Bulletin of Christian Community"

Viktor Rassolovskiy - Donetsk

Irina Yazilova - Moscow

Elena Korotkova - Moscow

Mikhail Bombin - Riga, "Bulletin of Christian Community"

Sergej Bogustov - Riga, "Bulletin of Christian Community"

Aleksandr Petrov - Moscow

Natalya Babasian - Moscow

Aleksandr Aleksandrov - Novosibirsk, E. Kh. B.

Pavel Obovanskiy - Moscow, "Bulletin of Christian Community"

Natalya Sokolova - Moscow

Translated from Russian by Leonidas Tax