

dead, I ask God's forgiveness for all their sins and for my own personal sin. During the Sacrament of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, being in a state of special grace, abiding in the shadow of heaven, worshipping the Lord who draws near to us and having the honour of being united with Him, my heart overflows with a joy which is not of this world, and is ready to call out like the Apostle Thomas: "My Lord and my God." Oh what happiness and, at the same time, what a great and long *podvig* (spiritual feat).

Such, my friend, were the feelings and experiences I went through before and after taking monastic vows. When I recall all this, I am shocked by the realization that but for the help of God's grace, I would not have endured the experiences of those days – days which I will never forget. "Look, brother, arm yourself," a certain *starets* was gently trying to persuade a newly-confessed monk, "arm yourself now for your entire life. What you are now experiencing will never be repeated. Sorrows will come; recall these minutes then – they are sufficient to last your whole life." Lord, what a deep, glorious truth! Praise be to God for everything!

Complying with your wishes, my dear friend, I have revealed to you the experiences of my heart – my feelings on finally taking my vows. A providential event helped me in this – I got hold of the manuscript of the Most Holy Serafim Zvezdinsky, in which His Grace shared his experiences when taking his vows. The marvellous agreement between the Most Holy Serafim's description and my personal experiences, plus the fact that we took our vows in the same place, we stood at the altar for the same amount of time, we even shared the same name prior to taking our vows – all this not only increased my resolution to set forth my experiences, but also resurrected my past feelings in their former strength. Impressions which poured down upon me filled my heart and now I have told you, my friend, of those great blissful experiences.

I ask the blessing of God on this small work and ask that the grace of God will open the hearts and minds of those who read it, those seeking salvation, and those who are concerned to fulfil His Holy will, as it is written: "Show us Your ways, O Lord; teach us Your paths."

With childlike trust and boldness of faith in simplicity of heart, we will wholeheartedly follow Christ along the way to the Heavenly Kingdom.

Sakharov Appeals for Vins

Andrei Sakharov, the well known nuclear physicist, has been involved in the Soviet civil rights movement since 1970 when he and others formed the "Committee of Human Rights". He has now taken up the case of the imprisoned Baptist pastor, Georgi Vins.

TO THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES – AMSTERDAM

I ask you to intercede for Georgi Petrovich Vins, the well known Baptist religious figure, who was elected by his fellow-believers as Secretary of the Council of Evangelical Christian and Baptist Churches.

Vins, like other members of his family, has several times been arrested and subjected to other illegal persecutions. Recently he has been compelled to hide from the threat of another arrest. In March 1974 Vins was arrested in Kiev

and charged with vagrancy. Protesting against this arbitrariness, he has already for more than four months been on a hunger strike which is threatening his life. The trial is expected in the coming weeks, and he is once again threatened with a prison sentence.

Vins enjoys enormous authority and love among his fellow-believers. By interceding in his defence you will be helping all the Evangelical Christians and Baptists who have now been persecuted for many years by the authorities in the worst traditions of religious intolerance of the Middle Ages and of the Tsarist authorities in the time of Pobedonostsev, in the 1890's.

Arrest, the breaking up of prayer meetings, fines, discrimination in schools and at work, and, as the height of inhumanity, the taking away of children from their parents – all this is the lot of the Baptists and to one degree or another of many other religious groups who are inconvenient to the authorities (Uniates, Pentecostals, members of the "True Orthodox Church" and several other groups). These illegalities demand the intervention of the world-wide public.

Freedom of conscience is an individual part of freedom as a whole. Honest people throughout the world should defend the victims of religious persecutions wherever these take place – in little Albania or in the vast Soviet Union.

11 September 1974
Moscow

Andrei Sakharov,
Academician

Pastor Vins in Prison

Georgi Vins was born in 1928. He received a higher education and holds two degrees, one in economics and one in engineering. As a leader of the initsiativniki he was arrested in 1966, tried in November and sentenced to three years in a labour camp. The following document is taken from A Family Chronicle (to be published in English) by Vins, in which he describes the life of his family. He calls it "an ordinary chronicle of a normal Christian family, one of the many thousands in our country". In March this year Vins was re-arrested. RCL Vol 2, Nos. 4-5, pp. 37-38 published a letter from his four children, who fear for his life.

August 1966

The first weeks and months of imprisonment pass slowly by. Despite the very strict isolation of Lefortovo prison, a link between the Christian prisoners is gradually established and functions successfully. I know about almost all the believers who are held here. All are cheerful and steadfast in their trials for the faith. There are now about 30 of us in the prison. Some have already been sentenced. Some have already had meetings with their relatives. My relatives are alive and well: my mother was present at one of the trials. I am told that she was very sad. My darling mother.

Once again prison has visited you and I. Since you were 23 years old your life has been passed in the shadow of prisons and camps: first those of your