

9. Hiero-deacon ZAKHARI (GAVRILYUK)  
10. Hiero-deacon IGNATI (DZYUBANIN)

11. Hiero-deacon NIKOLAI (BREKHACHEV)  
12. Monk VASILI (SAFIYEV)

## Orthodox Believers Refused Registration

*According to the 1929 Law on Religious Associations all religious groups in the USSR must be registered with the local government authorities (soviets) if they wish to meet for worship. To form a new congregation, a group of Christians must choose 20 sponsors to represent them. This group of twenty believers, (the dvadtsatka from dvadtsat=twenty; sometimes translated as "parish council") must then apply to the local soviet for registration. Should their application be refused, a group of Christians cannot legally meet as a congregation, nor can they lease from the State, or build, a church or prayer house for their services.*

*The following two recent documents reveal the difficulties which have faced two particular groups of Orthodox Christians in the Soviet Union. One group from the town of Kotovo (Volgograd region) wanted to register as a new congregation and reopen a disused church, and another group from the village of Balashovka (Berezhno district) wanted to reopen a church for worship which had been closed during Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign (1959-64). Both groups faced insurmountable obstacles from the local soviets concerned.*

To the Chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) attached to the Council of Ministers of the USSR, comrade Vladimir Alexeevich Kuroedov, from the sponsors (dvadtsatka) of the Orthodox Russian Church of Kotovo in Volgograd region

### APPLICATION

We, the inhabitants of the town of Kotovo in Volgograd region, Christian believers of the Orthodox Russian Church, on the basis of Art. 52 of the Constitution (basic law) of the USSR, which we, citizens of the USSR, approve and support, proceeding from the Resolution on religious organizations of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of 8 April 1929 and the revisions and addenda inserted by decree of the Presidium of the

Supreme Soviet of the USSR of 23 June 1975, following upon the provisions of the report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the 25th Party Congress, made by the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, comrade Leonid Ilich Brezhnev, remembering Lenin's pronouncement, "in our society everything that serves to promote communism is morally acceptable" and that "... whatever serves to promote communism is democratic", bearing in mind para. 1 of the Draft Decree on freedom of conscience in ecclesiastical and religious organizations, to the effect that "Religion is the private affair of every citizen of the Russian Republic" - address this application to you as follows: at a meeting of our community of Orthodox Christians we raised the question of the registration of our community and the opening of a building as a place of prayer. We therefore selected 25 sponsors, from each of whom we have a declaration, and we also have the minutes of the meeting of the sponsors. In July 1978 we sent our petition to the executive committee of the Kotovo district soviet of people's deputies. They should have sent it to the regional soviet, etc., as laid down in the Resolution.

But the secretary of the executive committee of Kotovo district soviet, comrade V. D. Klochkova, to whom we addressed our petition, took from us a list of 216 Christians - members of the Russian Orthodox Church - the minutes (No. 1) and the declarations of the 20 sponsors, and promised to give us the decision of the executive committee.

But unfortunately, instead of making a decision the executive committee began a campaign against the believers which was conducted in the most unworthy manner and, in our opinion, employed methods contrary to the Constitution.

For example, the secretary of the executive committee of the district soviet, V. D. Klochkova, said, "we will turn

your children against you!"

We agree: the Church is separated from the State and it is the right of all citizens to campaign against religion, but . . . why go to the lengths of causing dissension within the family? After all, V. I. Lenin said that "the family is the nucleus of the State." We were received by the chairman of the executive committee of the district *soviet* of people's deputies, P. F. Poltavsky, on 1 September 1978, and he told us the same thing and added that there were churches in the neighbouring districts, "so go and pray there, for goodness sake, particularly as buses go there."

Believers are usually elderly people, who have in their time benefited the State by their labours in civilian life as well as, of course, with military service - we need to perform our religious rites. Illness prevents us from travelling 50 odd kilometres in overcrowded buses.

Our illnesses were not acquired in the practice of these rites. We worked and lived according to our conscience and our new life or, if you wish, at the risk of sounding pompous, according to our sacred participation in the affairs of our country, of which we ordinary people, citizens of the USSR, are a part. This is proved by the number of workers' and military medals received by members of our community of Orthodox Christians.

A further proof is the fact that the International Lenin Peace Prize was awarded to the late Patriarch of all Russia, Alexi.

Indeed the Russian Orthodox Church is always for peace on earth.

In the law it is written - the Party and the government always considered and still consider it necessary to avoid giving offence to believers. Confirmation of this may be found in the basic law of the Constitution where it is written that the citizen is granted the right to profess any religion and is guaranteed freedom of conscience.

However, no notice was taken of the law and we were treated otherwise. Thus, for instance:

1. One family left our group of believers simply because their son was getting his official permit for a journey abroad and was told he would not get his papers until his parents had made a written declaration that they had left the *dvadtsatka*.

2. Approaching Pavel Andreevich Buravlev, a member of the Orthodox *dvadtsatka*, people's deputy comrade Boris Ivanovich Krasulin, sneering maliciously, called him a praying mantis and told his wife: "if he does not stop being a member of the Orthodox *dvadtsatka*, let him find another family." This started a row in the family and the matter had to be taken up with the Public Prosecutor.

And there was a great deal more unpleasantness on the part of the executive committee.

We, the sponsors of the Orthodox *dvadtsatka*, called upon the deputy chairman of the executive committee, comrade M. Ya. Shein, who told us: "We forbid you to hold any kind of assembly and you must not hold any prayer meetings, otherwise legal proceedings will be taken against you."

In spite of all claims to the contrary by the local authorities, we believe in our basic law, which is recognized by all the people of our country and which guarantees freedom of conscience, i.e. the right to profess any religion and to perform religious rites. On the basis of the above-mentioned we beg you, Chairman of the CRA in the USSR, comrade Kuroedov, Vladimir Alexeevich, to consider our application seriously, namely:

1. That our Orthodox community (of sponsors) of the Russian Orthodox Church may be established permanently.
2. That a decision should be made in favour of the Orthodox Christians concerning the lease of the old building of the former church and the small house (of the former caretaker) adjoining it, together with the plot of land surrounding it.

We therefore earnestly entreat the Council of Ministers and you, as Chairman of the CRA in the USSR, comrade V. A. Kuroedov, not to refuse our request.

Please reply to the sponsors of the Orthodox community with your decision and instructions at the following address:

403 810 Kotovo Volgograd region  
17 Angarsk street  
Litvinova, Anna Mikhailovna

A list of the sponsors, numbering 25 in all, is attached herewith. We are sending you the original, but a copy is being kept

in the files of the sponsors of the Russian Orthodox church [of Kotovo].

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REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMITTEE FOR  
THE DEFENCE OF BELIEVERS' RIGHTS

Seventeen years ago, during the Khrushchev persecution, the church in the village of Balashovka, Berezno district, Rovno region, was closed. This closure was justified by the authorities on the grounds that there were few parishioners, and the priest had ceased to officiate. The icons and church utensils had been retained. About seven years ago members of the old *dvadtsatka* addressed a petition to the authorities requesting the reopening of the church, but with no result. After the adoption of the new Constitution [7 October 1977] believers, including members of the old *dvadtsatka*, wrote a declaration to the executive committee of the district *soviet* asking for the church to be reopened. The declaration was accepted, but no reply was received. They were received by chairman Mikhailyukov, and later by his deputy, who told them to "go and pray in Berezno". But the central town of the district [i.e. Berezno] is a long way away, bus services are irregular and the church in Balashovka serves four villages - in one of these alone there are more than a hundred believers. They applied to the executive committee of the regional *soviet* in Rovno, as well as sending a complaint to the executive committee of the district *soviet*, but no answer was forthcoming. Then they themselves called on the chairman of the executive committee of the regional *soviet*, but he was not there; they returned and he was still not there. However, his secretary told them that the chairman did not deal with such matters and sent them to the representative of the CRA, Lichkavaka, but he sent them back to the chairman, who was again absent.

After that they went to the executive committee of the district *soviet*. There they responded to the believers' request and sent a paper (what paper was not clear) to the village *soviet*. The paper produced the following reaction: the officials of the village *soviet* said they would send the petitioners to prison, and the secretary of the village *soviet*, Khunduchko, turned them out of his

office altogether. Among the petitioners there was a certain Yekaterina Nikolaevna Zubchik, who was a deputy of the village *soviet*, and Khunduchenko [Khunduchko above] was annoyed with her: "Had we known that you were going to write declarations, Yekaterina, we would not have elected you as deputy." This was a funny thing to say, since it is the deputies who choose the secretary and not the other way round. But he was in no mood for subtle distinctions and proceeded to call the 30 villagers sitting before him Banderites [Ukrainian nationalists] and hooligans, and fined one of them, who was disabled, 50 roubles. The believers then asked him if he would just tell them where to take their application. But for asking such a question another fine was paid by the disabled villager, Nikolai Sitnikov, for hooliganism. The fine was imposed by the executive committee of the district *soviet*. Sitnikov complained to the Public Prosecutor, but without any result. After that, the secretary of the district *soviet's* executive committee stopped receiving the believers altogether; he would threaten them with the police and then rush out of his office.

Again they went to the executive committee of the regional *soviet*. There they were told the fine had been imposed justly.

They wrote to Brezhnev, Kosygin and Kuroedov: in reply they were sent cards acknowledging their letters, and notifications that their declaration had been passed to the regional authorities. There they were told that it had been sent to the executive committee of the district *soviet*. The group members were absolutely exhausted. How many times did they have to call at Mikhailyukov's (the chairman of the executive committee of the district *soviet*) office without being given an appointment. At last an appointment was made, but they waited four hours in his waiting-room, and when he finally agreed to see them, they were told that he did not wish to talk to them.

In the end, however, they succeeded in drawing attention to their cause. In the autumn of 1978 a representative of Kuroedov came to the village and visited the village *soviet*. And a representative of the district *soviet's* executive committee took part in the discussion of the

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