

The 1979 Baptist Congress in Moscow: A Western Observer Reports*

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The degree of democracy and openness displayed by Soviet Baptists at the 42nd Congress of the All-Union Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in Moscow seems to have impressed most western guests.¹ The election of the Union's governing body, the All-Union Council, was for the first time demonstrated to be genuine by the refusal of the Congress to elect one of the official nominees. Criticism of the procedure for the elections was briefly aired, the draft text of the revised AUCECB statutes (their constitution) received some public examination and explanation, and delegates spoke openly about issues that concerned them. Nevertheless, one was left with the impression that the leaders would have preferred to do without discussion of electoral procedure and of the statutes, and that they found some of the more frank contributions from the floor unwelcome. The degree of democracy achieved at the Congress seemed to be the result of pressure from below rather than to have been arranged by the leadership of the Union.

The Congress itself took place in the Moscow Baptist Church, which also houses the offices of the Union, from Tuesday to Thursday, 18-20 December 1979. The official opening was a communion service on Monday evening, and the Congress was followed by a press conference on Friday morning. There were two main items of business: the adoption of the revised statutes and the election of the All-Union Council. The rest of the time was taken up with procedural matters, reports on the work and finances of the Union and speeches by delegates.

Some of the delegates were unhappy about the way in which the Congress was to be conducted. They circulated a memorandum to all delegates,² urging them to insist on procedural changes designed to make

*According to an officially-produced Soviet booklet *42-oi Vsesoyuzny sezd evangelskikh khristiyan-baptistov v SSSR*, Michael Rowe, as "deputy of the director of the Institute Kerstan (sic) College", was one of the "prominent religious figures from abroad" who "took part in the work of the Congress". In fact, he was admitted to the Congress as a representative of the Methodist Church, and he took no active part in the proceedings at all. He was only an observer. *Ed.*

the leadership more accountable to the Congress, and to assert the rights of the Congress as the supreme decision-making body of the Church. They appended a detailed agenda with commentary, giving the minute-by-minute planned timing of the Congress (the official agenda merely gave the times of the sessions and the business to be covered in each) and showing how much time was to be spent on items irrelevant to the proceedings, such as musical interludes and greetings from foreign guests.

The first day of the Congress opened with greetings from Metropolitan Yuvenali of the Russian Orthodox Church, Dr Glen Garfield Williams, General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches (but introduced simply as a Baptist pastor), and Dr Robert Denny, General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance. After this, the Presidium of the Congress and a number of Congress commissions were elected, without any discussion, on the nomination of the outgoing All-Union Council. However, a number of delegates did attempt to inaugurate discussion of the agenda and particularly of the electoral procedure. There was a call for a debate on whether the Presidium (the executive responsible for the day-to-day running of the Union and in practice for most of the planning and decision making) should be elected directly by the Congress, rather than by the All-Union Council. General Secretary Alexei Bychkov argued that the Presidium was responsible to the All-Union Council and should therefore be elected by the Council, not by the Congress. He proposed that there should be no further discussion and no separate vote on the procedure, and put this proposal to the vote. The proposal was carried, and the agenda and the procedure were then approved. Bychkov began to deliver his report on the work of the Union, but was forced to stop to allow the question of procedure to be re-opened. The earlier voting had been confusing, and some delegates protested that they had not been sure whether they were voting on the procedure or on whether to vote separately on the procedure. A few more delegates were allowed to speak from the floor, and they put very forcefully the view that the Congress as the supreme body should elect directly both the Presidium and the individual officers of the Union. The issue was then put to the vote: the existing procedure was, however, approved by a clear majority.

The General Secretary's report was optimistic in tone.³ There had been a net increase in membership of 11,000 over the five-year period 1974-78.⁴ While 37 declining rural churches had been closed, 203 new churches had been registered. Literature printed or imported during this period amounted to 150,000 items, and the Union's bi-monthly journal *Bratsky vestnik* (*Fraternal Herald*) had increased its print-run from 7,000 to 10,000 copies. More hymn books were at the printers and 20,000 Bibles just printed in Leningrad were to be distributed. The first consignment of these were handed to delegates during the course of the Congress. Good relations were enjoyed with autonomous congregations (registered congregations

independent of the Union), a number of whose young people had been admitted to the correspondence course for preachers run from Moscow by the Union. Unity with Mennonites was satisfactory, though some churches remained outside the Union. On the other hand, there had been virtually no contact with the leaders of the (unregistered) Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians and Baptists.

The Treasurer's report by A. I. Mitskevich showed a healthy financial situation. Expenditure since the 1974 Congress had been 3,876,320 roubles, with a surplus of income over expenditure of more than 300,000 roubles. The balance in the bank on 1 December 1979 was 450,000 roubles. M. V. Melnik, the chairman of the auditing commission, gave his approval of the accounts and reported with some satisfaction that the commission had achieved a cut in the expenditure of the International Department, despite having funded a seminar for Baptists from socialist countries in Moscow in March 1979.

The draft of the revised statutes was then introduced by Ya. K. Dukhonchenko, the chairman of the constitutional commission. He reported that the draft was the work of a ten-man commission and that the All-Union Council had unanimously recommended its adoption at its meeting in August. Dukhonchenko said that the text of the statutes had to correspond with Soviet law, and recommended an article in the October issue of the atheist journal *Nauka i religiya* (*Science and Religion*) which stated, among other things, that parents have the right to teach their children the faith: he urged parents to take advantage of this right. No provision was made for a debate on the statutes, but it was announced that written comments and questions could be submitted, and that they would be answered the next day.

In the event four clauses in the draft statutes caused the greatest concern, and of these the most controversial was the proposal to make the final qualification for membership the attainment of the age of 18. Clause 24a had been drafted as follows:

A person who has believed in Christ as his personal Saviour, has experienced rebirth through the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, has received believer's baptism and has attained the age of majority may be a member of the local church.

Dukhonchenko reminded the delegates that Soviet law requires that members be no less than 18 years old. Even if age were not mentioned in the statutes, the churches would still have to obey the law. The new wording made possible the baptism of young people, who could then enrol as members when they reached their 18th birthday. Bychkov then proposed voting for the whole draft of the statutes. After protest from the floor a vote was taken on whether to vote separately on the four clauses.

However, since there was no opportunity to draft amendments, the Congress voted against this proposal—though by no means unanimously. The whole draft was then put to the vote and approved.

On each of the first two days a theological paper was delivered in addition to the business. On the first day the paper was by Robert Voesu, senior presbyter of the Estonian churches, entitled *The Will of God is your Sanctification*—the theme of the Congress. The second paper, by Pyotr Shatrov, Presidium member representing the Pentecostals, was called *My Covenant is a Covenant of Life and Peace*.

The rest of the second day was given over to speeches by delegates, interspersed with music and greetings from foreign guests. Both forms of interlude were sometimes used to calm the atmosphere after particularly emotional or controversial speeches. Most of the delegates chosen to speak were in some way representative of areas or pressure groups: for example, there were delegates speaking on behalf of the Moscow Baptist youth group (representing youth throughout the Church), a delegation from Kirgizia, and representatives of Estonians, Latvians, Germans, women, choir-leaders, Pentecostals.

A number of concerns came to the fore during the delegates' speeches. The most prominent of these were the situation of young people and the availability of Christian literature. The delegate speaking on behalf of Baptist youth accused the leadership of the Churches of alienating young people; she wanted more to be done to train them in spiritual matters. Other delegates agreed that particular attention should be paid to the needs of young people, and the creation of a youth department at the Union offices was suggested. It was pointed out that this would require the permission of the Council for Religious Affairs.

The need for more Christian literature was particularly acute in Central Asia. Delegates complained that they often had nothing at all to give to new converts. There was also a desire for more literature in languages other than Russian, above all Ukrainian.

A number of delegates expressed disquiet about participation in the ecumenical movement, particularly the World Council of Churches. One speaker proposed that Soviet Baptists should attend as observers, but withdraw from membership. Ecumenism abroad was often found to be a hindrance to unity at home, and was one of the objections to the ECB Union raised by members of unregistered churches. There was also dissatisfaction with the personnel chosen to represent the ECB Union abroad: it was suggested that more elected representatives should travel abroad, instead of appointed members of the International Department.

A number of changes in the running of the Union were proposed. Both the President and the General Secretary should have fully empowered deputies to share their workload and to ensure that decisions could be taken in their absence.⁵ Another suggestion, which was not adopted, was

that the leaders should be elected for a set term, after which new people should replace them.

Several delegates raised problems they were experiencing over buildings. Baptists in Dushanbe, capital of Tadzhikistan, had tried to make extra accommodation by building a veranda on to their church, but the work had made the building unsafe. When they began extensive rebuilding the authorities banned the work, leaving them in a difficult position. In Leningrad the church had held a permit for an extension for over a year, but there had been no progress because of lack of co-operation from the authorities. In Chernovtsy, Western Ukraine, the congregation had had no proper facilities at all since leaving an inadequate building which they had shared with the Seventh-Day Adventists. The situation had reached a stalemate because the local authorities would not give them a building until they removed the temporary structure in which they were meeting.

By comparison with the Congresses of the 1960s, at which unity with the breakaway Council of Churches (the *Initsiativniki*) was the central issue, the 42nd Congress almost ignored the problem. A representative of the delegates from Chernigov region, Ukraine, suggested that an appeal for unity be sent to the Council of Churches. This was approved unanimously. Delegates from Volhynia and Rovno regions proposed that a similar appeal be sent to those Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) who were not members of the Union, whereupon another delegate pointed out that the non-Union Mennonites should not be left out either. After this, V. F. Vasilenko, a former supporter of the Council of Churches and now the senior presbyter for Vinnitsa region in the Ukraine, D. L. Voznyuk, representing Penetecostals, and Ya. Ya. Fast, representing Mennonites, were invited to pray for unity.

The third day was reserved for the elections (during the long morning session), conclusions and an evening service of celebration. In the event the Congress ended almost in disarray: the elections continued into the afternoon session, the delayed evening service was abandoned not long after it had started, and the guests were asked to leave and the delegates to remain for another closed session. Even at the press conference the next morning the final results of the elections could not be announced.

It was reported that several of the leaders had come under fire from delegates. Three of the elderly (and less popular) leaders, A. I. Mitskevich, S. P. Fadyukhin and M. P. Chernopyatov, had retired, and the brunt of the criticism had fallen on three of the younger leaders, all based in Moscow: A. M. Bychkov, the General Secretary, M. Ya. Zhidkov, the Vice-President, and P. K. Shatrov, the Pentecostal representative on the Presidium. In order to ensure that the members of the All-Union Council enjoyed the general confidence of the Church, candidates required the positive votes of two-thirds of the delegates in order to be elected. In contrast to other well-known figures who were elected with virtually no



Above The cover of the unofficial Czech journal *Spektrum* No. 2, as reprinted by *Index on Censorship*. The photograph, which appeared inside the original edition of the journal, depicts a sculpture by Olbram Zoubek, himself the subject of an article in *Spektrum*. The journal is analysed by Alexander Tomsy pp. 180-7.



Left Fr Josef Zvěřina, a Catholic priest and the best-known theologian in Czechoslovakia. After 13 years in prison he was released and during the Prague Spring became Professor of Fundamental Theology at Czechoslovakia's only Catholic seminary at Litoměřice. He was dismissed in 1970 and lost his state licence to exercise his pastoral duties. He was one of the first signatories of Charter 77, and has contributed to the journal *Spektrum*. (Both photographs © Keston College)



Above A delegate addresses the 42nd Congress of the All-Union Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, held in the Moscow Baptist Church, 18-20 December 1979. See the article and documents pp. 188-200.



Above Guests from Soviet Churches at the Baptist Congress.



Above Dr Robert Denny, General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, preaching at a service before the start of the Baptist Congress. At his right elbow sits A. I. Mitskevich, retiring Assistant General Secretary; and behind the latter, his successor, I. S. Gnida. On the far right of the picture sits A. M. Bychkov, General Secretary of the Baptist Union; and behind him, M. Ya. Zhidkov, pastor of the Moscow church and one of the Union's vice-presidents.



Left A. M. Bychkov leading prayers at a service before the start of the Congress. (All photographs © Geoffrey Locks)

opposition, Bychkov received the support of only 80 per cent of the delegates (still a relatively comfortable margin of about 70 votes), while Zhidkov received 70 per cent support (a margin of less than 20 votes). Shatrov failed to receive sufficient support. Bychkov tried to rally support for Shatrov, arguing that failure to elect him would endanger unity with the Pentecostals, but Shatrov himself seemed resigned to the loss of his position; and on a second vote the Congress rejected him still more decisively.

There seemed to be a number of reasons for the lack of confidence in the three men. Bychkov and Zhidkov are widely considered to have been tainted during frequent foreign trips by theological liberalism and ecumenism, both alien to the prevailing fundamentalism of Soviet evangelicals. Bychkov was also criticized for not bringing up his children with a stronger commitment to the Church. The Pentecostals interpreted the vote against Shatrov as discrimination against themselves, and claimed that he was unpopular because he was acting effectively on their behalf. Although there are, in fact, still some difficulties in relations between Baptists and Pentecostals, six other Pentecostals nominated as full or candidate members of the All-Union Council were elected, so there was obviously some opposition to Shatrov in particular. Baptists (and for that matter unregistered Pentecostals) distrusted Shatrov on the grounds that he was too sympathetic to the secular authorities.

Shatrov's failure to be elected made him ineligible for continued membership of the Presidium, a fact which caused deadlock. The newly elected All-Union Council, bearing in mind the susceptibilities of the Pentecostals, asked their delegates to choose any two of the other Pentecostals elected to the All-Union Council to represent them on the Presidium. The All-Union Council itself recommended V. S. Glukhovsky, deputy senior presbyter for Ukraine, and D. L. Voznyuk, senior presbyter for Ternopol region, Ukraine, both of whom had already served on the Council. A caucus meeting of the Pentecostals apparently rejected this solution, and the unexpected closed session on Thursday evening was called in an attempt to persuade the Congress to reverse its decision on Shatrov and prevent a Pentecostal walk-out. The Congress, however, refused, and the issue was left unresolved at the close of the Congress. No announcement was made at the following morning's press conference, which was abruptly terminated when the leaders had to leave to attend a crucial meeting, presumably on this issue. Subsequently it emerged that the Pentecostals had accepted the proposed compromise, but it has yet to be seen whether the tension has been dissipated sufficiently to keep the Pentecostals within the Union. Much depends on the attitude of the authorities to the possibility of an independent Pentecostal Union.

The remainder of the Presidium appointments indicate a desire to strengthen the Presidium by increasing its numbers and making it more

representative, and also to enhance the authority of the Moscow-based leadership by appointing outsiders to key positions. While A. Ye. Klimenko (himself an outsider brought in five years ago) remains as President, a newcomer to the Presidium, V. Ye. Logvinenko, who was pastor of the Odessa church until May 1979 when he was transferred to Moscow to become deputy senior presbyter for the RSFSR, has been made a vice-president. Ya. K. Dukhonchenko, senior presbyter for Ukraine, has been made first vice-president, while M. Ya. Zhidkov, pastor of the Moscow church and previously senior vice-president, has been demoted to third. I. S. Gnida, previously one of Dukhonchenko's deputies and a member of the Presidium without any special responsibility, has been appointed Assistant General Secretary in place of A. I. Mitskevich who retired. Both Logvinenko and Gnida are widely respected and should have sufficient authority to take decisions in the absence of Klimenko and Bychkov. The new Treasurer (Mitskevich had combined this post with that of Assistant General Secretary) is another outsider and newcomer to the Presidium, N. A. Kolesnikov, hitherto senior presbyter for Kazakhstan.⁶ Robert P. Voesu, Estonian senior presbyter, becomes a member of the Presidium without special responsibility and Ya. Ya. Fast remains the Mennonite representative. A new category of candidate member of the Presidium (with the right to speak but not to vote) has been created. Two candidate members were appointed: Janis Tervits, senior presbyter for Latvia and Lithuania; and Traugott Quiring, a leading Mennonite and senior presbyter for Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan and Turkmenistan.

The 1979 Congress can be regarded as fairly representative of the membership of the whole Church. Although few of the 525 registered delegates were elected directly by their churches, the vetting of delegates at conferences held at regional and republic level did not have the effect of rigging the membership, as the opposition to some of the proposals of the leadership demonstrates. Representation was on the basis of one delegate to every 500 members of local congregations, so the Congress reflected exactly the geographical distribution of the membership, and nearly enough its national composition. Almost half the delegates were Ukrainians, and just over a quarter Russians. Of the other nationalities the Germans had the largest representation, followed by the Belorussians, Moldavians, Estonians and Latvians. Another eight nationalities (including Lithuanians, Georgians and Armenians) had between one and three delegates each. Thus 15 of the 22 nationalities claimed to be represented in the Union were present. The majority were pastors or deacons (almost all ordained but most in full-time secular employment), and of the lay people only five had no particular responsibility in the local church. Over half of the delegates were industrial workers, and almost a quarter were white collar workers (this figure presumably included full-time church

workers). Amongst the remainder, pensioners outnumbered collective farmers, and there were two housewives. Young people, women and ordinary church members were definitely under-represented amongst the delegates. Of the 525 delegates, 33 had higher education (though three had not completed their courses) and the rest had full or partial secondary education. Two-fifths had been church members for over 30 years and a further one-third for 20 to 30 years. About half were over 50 years old and a further third were aged 40 to 50. Only 24 were under 35 years old. Nevertheless, well over half the delegates were attending their first Congress, although this was the fifth to be held in less than 20 years.

A greater representation of young people at the Congress would probably have increased the number of critical voices. As it was, the majority of delegates seemed satisfied with the level of democracy in the Church, and voted clearly for the continuation of the *status quo*. Some delegates criticized privately the lack of awareness in this area: the Ukrainian delegation in particular seemed to have voted solidly for the leadership's proposals, and there was a rumour (probably apocryphal) that at least one Ukrainian delegate had been selected not by the church or the regional conference, but by the chairman of the local collective farm. Certainly, most of those making tape-recordings of the proceedings seemed more interested in the musical items than in the reports and speeches. Nevertheless, by comparison with other recent Congresses, delegates were more outspoken than ever before and more were prepared to speak and vote against the existing leadership. It was the first time that a leader had been voted out of office by a Congress.

The improvement in the quantity of religious literature available has not met demand; it seems rather to have whetted the appetite. The project for a seminary in Moscow was clearly welcomed by delegates (a suggestion that some training facility be established in Kiev was loudly applauded by the Ukrainians) and there will be much disappointment if it has not been opened by the next Congress. The 43rd Congress is due by 1984, but could take place as early as 1982, as the statutes now leave open the precise frequency, specifying only every three to five years. The exact date depends as much on the secular authorities as on the church leaders. This Congress clearly took place with the full co-operation of the authorities, who arranged for delegates to have leave from work (only a small number of chosen delegates failed to arrive), and booked a hotel, a cafeteria and a fleet of buses for the exclusive use of delegates. The buses even had a militia escort to and from the church. The authorities may be somewhat nervous about allowing another Congress sooner rather than later. They can expect that delegates will continue to press their leaders to ask the authorities for even more freedom (for example, to organize youth work), and that they will not be satisfied by marginal improvements. The leaders too may well wish to have a full five years before their performance comes

under scrutiny again. In the meantime they have to walk the tightrope between what the churches want and what the authorities will allow.

¹E.g. Denton Lotz in *European Baptist Press Service*, 4 January 1980; Dr Glen Garfield Williams, quoted in *Conference of European Churches News*, No. 79-28; and Dr David Russell, in *Baptist Times*, 3 January 1980.

²See document in this issue of *RCL*, pp. 199-200.

³See extracts in this issue of *RCL*, pp. 196-9.

⁴There had been 45,734 new members or members received back into fellowship, and 34,768 deaths, defections and expulsions. No figure was, however, given for the total membership of the Church.

⁵This proposal seems to have been heeded in the appointment of the new Presidium. See pp. 193-4 *infra*.

⁶It remains to be seen whether the authorities will sanction these moves by allowing Logvinenko, Gnida and Kolesnikov to become permanent residents in Moscow. When Klimenko moved to Moscow he had to be satisfied with a home outside the city. By the time of the Congress Logvinenko was still staying with friends. By contrast, when Shatrov moved from Leningrad to Moscow he found a flat without difficulty.

Appendix

Alexei Bychkov Reports to the Congress

The key address at the 42nd Congress of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, held in Moscow in December 1979, was the report on the work of the All-Union Council by its General Secretary Alexei M. Bychkov. In the event the time allocated for this report was insufficient and Bychkov concentrated on the achievements at home over the previous five years, compressing or omitting those parts of his report dealing with the ecumenical and international activity of the Union and the position of Christians in a socialist society. The full text was, however, circulated, under the title Report of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists. We include two extracts, one on the development of theological education, which was delivered in full (pp. 9-13 of the Report), and the other from the section headed "The principles of social service by Christians of evangelical denominations in the USSR", which was largely skated over (pp. 34-7 of the Report).

With regard to the training of spiritual workers, we can report to the Congress that in the period under review our Bible Correspondence Course (BCC), inaugurated in 1968, continued its work of giving

theological training to ministers belonging to the ECB Union and also from autonomous and unregistered congregations and groups.

What have we gained from our Bible course?

Our experience of its work for more than ten years enables us to say that the Bible course has become a theological school for our multinational brotherhood. On this role of the course A. V. Karev [Bychkov's predecessor who died in 1971. *Ed.*] said at the 1969 Congress: "Thanks to the existence of the Bible course we are engaged in the systematic elaboration of the theology and especially of the dogmatics of our Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood. In the 100 years of existence of our brotherhood this was the one thing which was lacking more than anything else: a theological basis." (From the journal *Bratsky vestnik*, No. 2, 1970, p. 33.)

From 1968 to 1979, 272 ministers of our churches completed the Bible course. In the period under review 207 students were accepted for the course (five intakes) of whom 84 had completed their studies by 1979. Of these two intakes, ten people dropped out and four completed their

studies but were unable to take the examinations because of ill health. In 1980 we are preparing another 34 students of the BCC for graduation. At the present time 109 brothers are studying on the Bible course. We can assess the authority and value of our Bible course by the positive comments of the ministers who have completed the course and by the desire of many ministers of our own church and of churches close to us to study on the BCC. We have been thanked by the leaders of the Church Mennonites for the training of one of their ministers on our course. The Methodist brotherhood in the Baltic republics has asked us to accept a candidate for the BCC. The graduates of our Bible course are serving at the present time as senior presbyters, presbyters and deacons of local churches. Many of them were promoted to this service after completing the BCC. Half of all those now serving as senior presbyters or their assistants have completed our Bible course at various times. This is a great help to our brotherhood in improving evangelistic work at the local level, educating ministers and members of our churches, strengthening the unity of our brotherhood and also warding off various winds of doctrine which bring harm to Christ's churches.

The syllabus is being extended and its quality improved. At the present time theological subjects are at various stages of being worked out—moral theology, comparative theology—and also the history of Evangelical Christians and Baptists and textbooks on ministry through music. In connection with the extension of the syllabus we have changed the BCC from a two-year to a three-year programme with a fresh intake and a graduation each year.

To improve musical and choral work and in accordance with the proposal of the previous Congress, a group for teaching choir masters and leaders of orchestras has been organized at the BCC. In 1979 we had the first intake of 13 choir masters for this group. The syllabus is intended to last two years. A great deal of work has been done at the BCC on working out the teaching and methodological material. A series of lectures on singing and music in ECB churches is almost ready.

In fulfilment of the decision of the previous All-Union Congress, the Presi-

dium of the AUCECB has given great attention to the improvement of singing and music in the local churches, and has introduced a section on "Singing and Music" in the journal *Bratsky vestnik*, in which material by the experienced choir masters and musical specialists of our brotherhood is published. Positive reactions to this section from those engaged in the ministry of music in the local churches testify to its important role and value. At this Congress we again affirm that our brotherhood should develop and instil only highly spiritual music which bears the blessed power of the love of God for all men and calls men onto the path of spiritual rebirth, renewal of one's covenant with the Lord and sanctification. We expect from the leaders of our church singing deeply thought-out and expert recommendations on the preservation of the purity of evangelical singing, both choral and congregational, and also good advice on form, content, melodies and reverent means of performance, taking into account the national traditions of our unified brotherhood.

Apart from the above measures, in the period under review the Presidium of the AUCECB organized two seminar meetings for choir masters and musical leaders under the auspices of the BCC. At these meetings, ways of eliminating shortcomings in evangelical singing and in the orchestral accompaniment of services were discussed. There was also a seminar meeting for senior presbyters of the RSFSR at which vital spiritual matters were examined. This was the first time such meetings had taken place, and they were welcomed in the brotherhood. We intend in future to hold similar meetings to resolve problems arising in the life of the brotherhood.

A few words on shortcomings in the work of the Bible course. In the period under review, we were obliged for various reasons to exclude eight brothers from the BCC; and four brothers, although enrolled in the course, in practice did not participate. By no means all graduates of the BCC are willing to work where they are particularly needed. In order to avoid regrettable occurrences like these, we recommend that local churches and senior presbyters be more painstaking in the selection of candidates. Another failing is delay in the preparation of lectures in

new disciplines. Our Bible course with a syllabus of 11 disciplines demands great effort on the part of the students. Therefore those who devote themselves to the study of theology must be ready to overcome difficulties in their studies. For its part, the Presidium of the AUCECB is taking measures to improve the work of the BCC. It is strengthening the leadership, preparing teaching material and improving the methodology of the teaching.

In the period since the last Congress we have also examined the possibility of opening a Theological Seminary for our brotherhood. Today we can tell you only that this matter remains at the stage of receiving positive consideration. For the purposes of training lecturers for the Seminary and the Bible course, the Presidium of the AUCECB has sent four students to theological colleges abroad, to Zürich (Switzerland) and Bukow (GDR). Thanks to sound training in foreign languages these brothers were able immediately to begin their study of theology and the ancient languages of the Bible. The Presidium of the AUCECB has decided that in future it will send to colleges abroad only those students who already have an adequate knowledge of a foreign language. The conditions for learning foreign languages in our country are entirely favourable. We expect senior presbyters soon to recommend to us worthy candidates for higher theological education [. . .]

* * *

Christians in our country live in society: they are an integral part of it, and have their share of responsibility as equal citizens. What are the possibilities for Christian witness in this situation?

Let us examine some basic characteristics of our society.

a) In socialist society there are no contradictions between labour, and capital, and people's basic needs are satisfied according to their labour. We, as Christians, recognize here the hand of the Creator, who gave life and mercy, and are ready to take our share of responsibility for the prosperity of society (Jer. 29:7), constantly offering prayers of intercession—I Tim. 2:1-5. We recognize that a developing society meets problems, which

are sometimes very acute. Our Christian hope demands that we should not ignore the shortcomings and problems of our society and that we should make a positive contribution towards overcoming and eliminating them. Christians always remember the words of Scripture, "and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord" (Col. 3:23). Thus, performing their daily labour in society, believers in Christ profess their Christian hope founded on God's promises, which far surpasses the model of even the best conceivable society on earth. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (I Cor. 2:9; John 14:1-3).

b) In socialist society, labour is a matter of honour. This is fully confirmed in the Biblical statement "if any would not work, neither should he eat" (II Thess. 3:10). Therefore we fully approve of the right to work—as well as the right to leisure—as one of the basic rights of man. For us it is important that socialist society should strive to make its own the positive cultural-historical heritage to which Christian traditions also belong.

c) Socialist society campaigns for peace. This striving for peace corresponds to the ancient and fundamental Christian hope—Matt. 5:9. The peace—*shalom*—of which the Bible speaks originates in the reconciliation of God with man and of people with one another—II Cor. 5:19. The teaching of Jesus Christ also envisages respect for those whose views differ from our own—Matt. 5:44-5. Peace, as God's promise, inspires us to unite with all people of good will and to pray constantly and to labour for peace on earth and for the pouring out of God's great blessings on this world.

We welcome the fact that the laws of our country forbid any expression of animosity or hatred on religious grounds. Therefore differences in philosophy (*mirovozzreniya*) should not be reflected in the practical service of believing and unbelieving people to society. In this context we welcome the passing of important laws, designed to strengthen law and order and legality, at the last session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in December of this year, and we hope that the further elaboration of legislative acts, in accordance with the new Constitution, will also

affect the legislation on the activity of religious societies.

Our Constitution guarantees freedom to profess one's faith. However, the opinion predominates in society that religion is a survival of the past. We are called purveyors of "obsolete ideas". Some Christians are saddened by the threat of this widely-held view, by arguments used against faith in God in the name of the omnipotence of science and the independence of man, and also by the sufferings and injustices that hold sway in the world. We are asked the question: "Where is your God?" We answer: "The Lord is my strength and my song, and is become my salvation" (Psalm 118:14).

The mercy of God is the foundation and essence of our hope. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

a) Our hope cannot be defined on the basis of factors such as the character of society, or its benevolent or hostile attitude to the Church. Our hope arises like a lighthouse above the turbulent waters of history. It has its beginning in the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in the justifying mercy of God and in his promises. Sometimes it is not easy for us to lay all our hopes on God's promises and to devote ourselves to a service which seeks neither reward nor recognition. This service sometimes demands sacrifices of us. But on this path we discover the liberating power of the cross, as the Lord's victory. In the light of Golgotha we learn to live as the apostle Paul lived: "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich;

as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (II Cor. 6:10).

b) This life of hope is a gift of the Holy Spirit, with which we are filled afresh as we hear God's word, pray and have fellowship in the light of his presence. The significance of the local church and its spiritual life is most important for the confirmation of our hope. Some regard our emphasis on the role of the local church as a necessity imposed on us by external circumstances. But we consider that our stress on worship rests on a new understanding of the foundations of our hope.

We rejoice that Christians in other countries who have conducted various experiments in church structure are coming to the very same understanding: that the local church and its spiritual life have a primary importance for the profession of our hope.

c) God created man in his own image, after his own likeness—Gen. 1:26. From this it follows that all people living on earth depend on God, regardless of whether they recognize it or not. The striving for God is embedded in the heart of man through the striving after love and truth. For us the hope is fully justified that God is the God of history, and that the eschatological hope, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20), must be commensurate with the great mercy and long-suffering of God towards his highest creation—man. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).

Advice to Delegates

Two unofficial documents were circulated among the delegates and guests at the Congress. The purpose of the originators of the documents was to bring certain issues to the attention of the delegates. One document, entitled Standing Orders of the All-Union Congress of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (with Commentary), gave a detailed breakdown of the agenda of the Congress and exhorted delegates to insist on full discussion of

particular points and not to allow certain leaders to chair sessions in view of the way they had done so in the past. The other, Memorandum to Delegates of the 42nd Congress of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, raised in particular the issue of the accountability of the leadership of the Union to the Congress and the way the leaders were elected. This document appears here in full. It is published for the first time.

MEMORANDUM
TO DELEGATES AT THE
42nd CONGRESS OF EVANGELICAL
CHRISTIANS AND BAPTISTS

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

Beloved brothers and sisters! In order that the work of the Congress should be spiritually fruitful it is essential that delegates to the Congress should be on a special spiritual plane and that they should obey the orders of the Holy Spirit, who speaks directly through God's people: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

TAKE NOTE OF THE FOLLOWING
ADVICE

1) In order to avoid problems with timing at the Congress it is desirable that delegates' reports and speeches should be brief.

2) The last Congress concluded with the announcement: "We have received 78 written proposals. A committee will be set up to consider these proposals." Delegates are advised to ask for a report on this promise and to have the matter included in the agenda of the Congress.

3) At previous Congresses the election of a new All-Union Council took place on the last day of the Congress at a final session, but this gave far too little time for the proper election of a new leadership. We propose that the new All-Union

Council should be elected on the second day of the Congress after the reports of the Presidium of the All-Union Council have been delivered and debated. Voting should be secret. All delegates should support this request when the agenda is being discussed.

4) It will be the right thing to do to request the old Presidium of the All-Union Council to leave the podium while the elections are held and thereby hand over their plenary powers to the Congress.

5) The number of candidates put forward for election must be at least a third higher. For example, if 30 ministers are to be elected to the All-Union Council, there must be at least 40 candidates on the voting list; for the seven-member auditing commission, at least ten candidates, etc. This is the only method which will make possible the election of worthy pastors of God's people. This question must be raised when the procedure of the Congress is being settled.

6) It must be the Congress itself, and not the Presidium, which elects suitable brethren to key posts in the new governing body of the Union: i) the President and his deputies; ii) the General Secretary; iii) the Treasurer. This matter must be discussed and a decision taken during discussion of the agenda.

7) We must be especially careful when electing committees which will put forward candidates for the new All-Union Council and the scrutinizing committee: one of the delegates ought to check the number of votes cast.

GOD BLESS YOU ALL.

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