

Christianity is Alive in the USSR

Some years ago Dr. Fred Schwartz wrote a book *You Can Trust The Communists (to be Communists)*. His thesis is that communists are extremely trustworthy. You can trust them to stick to their faith in Marxism Leninism. They have not changed their oppressive and revolutionary tactics. Despite all its various types, propaganda about détente and peaceful co-existence, communist dictatorships do not allow freedom of expression and religion.

In July-August, 1975, the United States, Canada and 33 European nations joined at Helsinki to sign a proclamation of friendship and peace. It was an empty exercise. The Kremlin's treatment of Alexander Solzenitsyn, Andrei Sakharov and other dissidents demonstrate that "You can trust the communists to be communists. They have not changed their philosophy."

Persecution in Soviet Russia is a harsh reality. Most people are aware of the fierce harassment of the Jews in the Soviet Union. Much has been written about this tragic fact. Much less has been said and written, however, about the intense persecution of the so-called "Iron Curtain Christians," particularly those who refuse to co-operate and compromise with the Soviet authorities.

The Russian Orthodox church, the former state church, is experiencing some measure of tolerance. The Soviet authorities even permitted Metropolitan Nikodim to head a massive Russian Christian delegation at the World Council of Churches' Fifth world assembly that met at Nairobi, Kenya.

The hardest hit in Russia are the Christians who separated in 1961 from the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptist Churches because they were of the opinion that this union permitted too much government intervention. Some of these Christians have been put into psychiatric hospitals. Children have been seized and taken away from their parents.

Michael Bordeaux tells in his book *Faith On Trial In.. Russia!* of a thirteen year old girl kidnapped and forcibly put in a children's home, because her parents taught her Christianity. The parents have even been prevented from seeing their daughter freely.

He tells the story of a Christian whose house was taken away from her because worship had been held there. This is what happened. "While she was out at work, policemen and auxiliaries drove up to the house. They loaded all her possessions into the vehicle, seized the deeds of the house, turned her elderly mother into the street and posted a guard with a dog outside. In the meantime, the authorities had called Kuznetsova from work and informed her of the sentence that her house was to be confiscated. All petitions for its return were fruitless. As a result, she has become a vagrant, normal living conditions having been denied her...."

Georgi Vins, the leader of the separated Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the USSR has been sentenced to five years in a labour camp and five years of exile. His wife has been deprived of her work permit and all her possessions have been taken away. But despite all these afflictions, the church in Soviet Russia is still alive and thriving. After years of atheistic propaganda and molestation, she has not gone down on her knees.

As we listen to Western leaders promoting détente, we should remember the plight of these Russian Christians. Détente does not ring true when basic human rights are denied. If human rights are not going to be available behind the Iron curtain then détente is not worth having.

Last year some 12,000 Swiss Christians marched in a mile-long procession carrying large placards and banners telling the story of the persecuted Church in Russia. As they marched, all church bells in Zurich tolled in unison, symbolically awaking the people to the plight and hardships of those suffering for their religious convictions.

As we are confronted to day with so many different causes and needs, it is so easy to forget the persecuted church in the USSR. Remember these Christians. Speak and pray for them.

Johan D. Tangelder
January, 1976