

# Pentecostal Documents from the USSR

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The latest Pentecostal documents (see pp. 25-30 for examples) from the USSR come from an apparently new source, the "Information Service of the Pentecostal Movement". We have yet to see whether it will appear regularly. The first two (and so far only) bulletins tell of events in the Kaluga region of Central Russia where virtually nothing was known about Pentecostal activity. They also give us details of a leader known from another document and from the Soviet press – Ivan Petrovich Fedotov.

The Pentecostal movement began in Russia just before the First World War and grew considerably in the 1920s, particularly in the Soviet Ukraine, and in the Baltic republics, Eastern Poland and Moldavia, which were all incorporated into the USSR in 1939-44. Most Pentecostals took the name Christians of Evangelical Faith. Within the USSR they shared in the general suffering of the 1930s, but in 1945, unlike most denominations, they were unable to obtain legal registration and were forced to seek a union with the Evangelical Christians and Baptists (ECB). An agreement was reached in August 1945 enabling Pentecostals to register, though normally at the expense of their independence as local congregations which had to amalgamate. Many Pentecostals are dissatisfied with this arrangement and periodically re-establish independent congregations. This means that a varying proportion of Pentecostals fall under the ECB label; there is a constant coming and going which makes it impossible to state their number, but, although they are widespread, one can say that in most districts they are not nearly so numerous as the Evangelical Christians and Baptists.

Hitherto Pentecostal documents have been comparatively rare, far fewer than the appeals, letters and other documents from the *Initsiativniki* Baptists. Those registered by *RCL* so far come from three sources only, and of these nine out of 11 (DS/1973/P/1 and DS/1974/P/1-8, listed in *RCL* Vol. 2, Nos. 3 & 6) emanate from the congregations at Chernogorsk (Krasnoyarsk province, Siberia) and Nakhodka (Soviet Far East), which, although separated from one another by thousands of kilometres, are together writing appeals to the Soviet government for permission to emigrate and to world public opinion for help in achieving this. This same group (then all resident in Chernogorsk) turned in January 1963 to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow for help in emigrating from the USSR after

appeals to the Soviet government had been turned down.<sup>1</sup> Although apparently acting in isolation, these Pentecostals seem to receive news from fellow believers in the European part of the USSR.

The other two documents (DS/1972/P/1 & 2, listed in *RCL* Vol. 1, No. 6) also indicate that there is some kind of contact between many Pentecostal congregations. The first document is a copy of an official report about an auxiliary police raid on G. S. Mashkovsky's home in Stupino, near Moscow, where an illegal prayer meeting was being held. His name has been associated in the Soviet press with that of Ivan Fedotov, the harassment and arrest of whom lie at the centre of the latest documents (see *Documents* pp. 28-30). Among those present at this meeting was apparently the son of Vasily Ryakhovsky, one of Fedotov's co-defendants at the trial in Drezna, near Moscow, in April 1961 (reported in *Literary Gazette* of 13 May 1961 and elsewhere). The second document, complaining of harassment of Korosten, Vinnitsa region, in the Ukraine, mentions both Fedotov and Ryakhovsky as well as Ivan Levchuck and Viktor Belikh, Ukrainian leaders involved in the struggle for an independent Pentecostal movement since the Second World War. The latter are probably among the signatories of an appeal to the Soviet government of early 1957<sup>2</sup> in which they asked for permission to set up a Pentecostal Union independent of the AUCECB.

The person of Ivan Fedotov provides a link between these documents and the new ones. The kind of harassment suffered by Fedotov and his congregation is familiar from both religious and non-religious *samizdat*: the refusal to register a person, particularly a released prisoner as a resident in the town he wishes to live in; the dramatic police raids on the homes of individuals; the elaborate interference with a meeting, by taking names and addresses, photographing the proceedings, attempting to disrupt the meeting by letting a drunk loose in the midst; and Fedotov's arrest, not only on a charge connected with religion (art. 227, section I), but also for "defamation of character" (*oskorblenie lichnosti*) (for saying that Soviet officials "burst in like the Gestapo") and "disobedience to the authorities" (*nepovinoventie vlastyam*) (for asserting that the believers had a constitutional right to hold a wedding service on 4 August after the police had told them to disperse). The authors are aware that similar things happen to the *Iniitsiativniki*, but note that while the latter have been suffering persecution for 13 years Pentecostals have been persecuted continuously since the 1930s and are declared completely "outside the law".

Yet there are signs that the Soviet authorities are changing their position on the automatic outlawing of Pentecostals. The first document of

the new set (see *Documents* pp. 25-28) reports how the regional plenipotentiary of the Council for Religious Affairs arrived at a wedding, and what he said to the believers after the service. He sought to appear benevolent. He implied that if only they had asked permission for the wedding two weeks in advance then all would have been well. He added "you'll be persecuted as long as you hide . . . We'll punish you for not registering." He outlined the conditions for registration, which, the authors of the document claim, contradict the Gospel and are unacceptable to Pentecostals, and are the same as those required of the *Initsiativniki*. Whether this includes amalgamation with the Evangelical Christian and Baptist congregation (as would presumably be the case with the *Initsiativniki*) is not clear; however, such amalgamations are not popular with Pentecostals, nor with many Baptists. Recent Western sources<sup>3</sup> speak of Pentecostal congregations being registered separately in recent years, and so does the Soviet Baptist magazine *Fraternal Herald*: in the second issue for 1971 (p. 76) I. S. Gnida, a Baptist leader in the Ukraine mentions the registration of autonomous Pentecostal congregations.

So Pentecostals are now not excluded automatically from registration. Although the setting of unacceptable conditions may at first appear to be almost the equivalent of a ban, there is an important distinction. In some places local authorities seem to have a less intolerant attitude to religion than in others. Evidently some Pentecostals feel that they can work within the legal requirements and that (perhaps) the conditions on registration may not in fact be fully enforced. Such believers are therefore able to achieve legality. Thus the Pentecostal aim since the Second World War, and especially after the honeymoon period of unity with the Baptists from 1945 to 1947, of achieving legal recognition as an autonomous denomination appears to be one step nearer, despite the recent arrest of yet another leader.

<sup>1</sup> J. C. Pollock's book *The Christians from Siberia* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1964) describes this incident and its background very fully. However, he does not make it clear that Christians of Evangelical Faith are in fact Pentecostals.

<sup>2</sup> See *Pentecost* no. 42, Dec. 1957, p. 16, published by D. Gee from Kenley College, Surrey.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. S. Durasoff, *Pentecost behind the Iron Curtain*, Logos International, Plainfield, N.J., 1972.