

but were dismissed from school because they were Christians. In all establishments of higher education there is a mandatory course in atheism and it is necessary to pass an exam in this to graduate. There is a mandatory question on the personal convictions of the student. The question is simply, 'Do you believe in God?' Christians usually fail this exam because of their belief in God. I was studying medicine. Before being dismissed from my studies I was told that medicine and Christianity could not be reconciled. Officially we were never told we were dismissed because of our faith. They always tried to find some other reason. I was told that my dismissal was because I had missed lessons. My father was in hiding at the time and my grandmother was in prison. Because she was sick I had to visit her and that was why I missed many lessons. So this was the official reason for my dismissal. But when I was in personal contact with leaders of my school I was told the real reason for my being dismissed was my faith.

*What is the most difficult aspect of being a Christian in a communist country?*

It is hard to say which is the most difficult. I believe that the trials the church has to suffer are good in some ways because it helps Christians in their spiritual life. If a Christian is able to overcome the difficulties, his faith will be strengthened. One of our greatest difficulties is not being allowed to evangelize on a wide scale. We are trying to do this but it must be on a small scale because it is still forbidden. When our young people witness to unbelievers in buses and trains there is usually a willingness to receive Christian literature. They are very happy if we can at least give them a gospel of John. But most often we do not have anything to give to these people. So what we would like most is to have both the literature and the freedom to distribute it. And I must add that interest among unbelievers is very

great, especially among young people and students.

*You place a great deal of importance on literature. Is it true that some Russian Christians are risking a great deal to print materials clandestinely?*

I have here a hymn book. It was printed on an underground press in the Soviet Union. Here is *The Bible and Science*, a book for unbelievers. This, too, was printed in the Soviet Union. And here is a Christian magazine, *Messenger of Truth*. It contains articles by Spurgeon, Moody and others. It also contains news about the life of churches in the Soviet Union, poems, photographs of prisoners, and so on. Before we had our printing press we used a kind of spirit duplicator.

*Did you bring these books with you when you left Russia?*

No, I couldn't bring them with me from the Soviet Union. I got them here in the west. They were brought out secretly.

*What kind of Christian literature is most needed?*

Children's literature is important. You are very fortunate with the amount you have in the west. I have worked with children and I know how difficult it is without materials to make the lessons more vivid and alive to them.

*In Russia, Christian witness is being carried on in conditions of extreme difficulty. In the west it is much easier. Do you think Christians here are using this privilege wisely?*

When I came to this Conference and saw

years. Her children were taken from her and put into a special house. This was about 10 years ago, and now all her children are grown up and are Christians! Another miracle was that of a famous hockey player who listened to the radio broadcasts. After one of the broadcasts of Earl Poysti he was converted right there by his radio. There are very many examples like this.

*Can you comment on the relationship between the official church and the underground church?*

I am a young person and I know that at this age level, relations between the unregistered and the registered churches are very good. We get a lot of literature from abroad, and we print some too. Very often we share such literature with those in the official churches.

*Do you feel the state should not involve itself in church affairs?*

Yes, Russian Christians do not want to touch political, economic and other questions. The church is a purely religious movement. We want to live only as the Bible tells us and as Christ has commanded us. We believe that the government should not have a say on the life of the church. The church should be separate from the state. We have a scriptural principle to 'render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and to God the things which are God's'.

*Do you see a possibility of co-operation with the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches?*

I have had no contact with Catholic believers in the Soviet Union, but we had some contact with the Orthodox. There is a great spiritual revival in the Orthodox Church. Our Baptist believers have very

many good contacts with Orthodox young people.

*To what extent is Alexander Solzhenitsyn known among evangelical Christians in Russia and, if he is known, how is he viewed?*

Solzhenitsyn is well-known to everyone in Russia, but it is impossible to read his books. They are not printed in the Soviet Union. If one of his books was found in your house, you would go to prison. Because of this, not many people have read them. But what he writes about our life in Russia is true.

*What are you doing right now and what are your future plans?*

I am helping my father. He wants to write a book about the life of Christians in the Soviet Union. He needs help, and I help him. I speak some English and he cannot, so when he travels I can help him.

*Do you have plans to travel to European churches and encourage people to work for East European Christians?*

The main work of my father here in the west will be to do as much as possible for believers in the Soviet Union. This includes providing information about the life and difficulties of Russian Christians. Our whole family will be involved in this as much as possible.

*Do you have any hopes of ever returning to Russia?*

I would very much like to return to the Soviet Union. I would do that as soon as it becomes possible. And I would add that Christians in the Soviet Union have

in the Missionary Exhibition how much Christians are doing all over the world, it surprised me. I am very happy that all this is being done. In the Soviet Union we had no idea of the extent of missionary work in the west. Sometimes we heard about it over the radio, and some western visitors told us about their work. This made a very great impression on young Christians in Russia. For example, we heard about the ship *Logos* that is sailing around the world with Christian literature, and this made a big impression on us.

*What about Christian organizations in the west which are working to aid Christians in the Soviet Union. Have they been a help to you?*

In the Soviet Union we do not know the names of all the missions. We just knew we had Christian friends in the west. We knew they were sending us Bibles, that they were praying for us, that they wrote us letters and in every way tried to support us. This was very good for us. When we were experiencing hard times, we knew we were not alone.

*What do Russian Christians think of those in the west? How do they form their impressions?*

In the Soviet Union we know comparatively little of Christian work in the west. But we did have Christians coming to visit us, and telling us about what is going on. Sometimes we formed impressions of western Christians by our contact with these visitors. They were not always good. Perhaps the differences were mainly cultural, but there was much that we could not understand when western believers came to us. We could not understand all they did. Because of language difficulties we cannot really get to know visitors well, and perhaps we sometimes gain a wrong impression because of this.

great hopes for freedom to preach the gospel. We are preparing for this. And we would ask you to pray for this, and even prepare yourselves to travel there and work there if God directs. Who knows? One day it may be possible for missionaries to move there and take residence in the Soviet Union!

*Do you really think this will happen?*

Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God all things are possible. He can accomplish this miracle, and it will need a

## And the persecution continues . . .

The struggle of Christians in the Soviet Union goes on. Even as Natasha Vins addressed the press conference in Switzerland, Russian police were planning new moves. Some took place before the month ended. . . .

January 5—The houses of 7 Baptist believers in the Ukrainian city of Tchernovitsy were searched by police looking for Christian literature. Several arrests were made, including Michael Kushnir (42), Vladimir Kostenyuk (51) and Victor Kostenyuk (45). What they are accused of and where they were taken is unknown.

January 13—Pastor Dmitri Vasilievich Minyakov's wife was seriously ill when KGB agents raided their home. To avoid arrest Dmitri was forced to escape and has since continued his ministry in secret. (On February 18, Dmitri's wife died. Because of the danger of arrest, he could not attend the funeral. Later he appeared at her graveside, knelt briefly and prayed . . . then escaped again.)

January 19—Staff workers of the Christian publishing house were arrested at 8 a.m. while working in Stariye Kazaki, a village of the Ukraine. They are Sergei Bublik (23), Liubov Kosachevich (28), Tamara Buistrova (31) and Galina Yuditseva (32).

*Do you think that western Christians are too materialistic?*

It is difficult for me to say. I have met very many true, spiritual and mature Christians here in the west. But perhaps, because of my circumstances, I have met only with Christians who are deeply committed and who are working to reach the world for Christ.

*What can western Christians visiting the Soviet Union do to help?*

If they can speak the language, it is possible to talk to people discreetly, even on the street, about God. It is possible for every tourist to take at least one Bible and perhaps a New Testament. There are also gospels available in Russian, together with an explanation of God's plan of salvation.

*Can you tell us something of how Christian radio programmes from the west are received and what they mean to the people?*

Radio programmes are a great encouragement for us because many Christians are in isolated situations. They come together and listen to these radio programmes and it is a very big help for them. The broadcasts are very good for unbelievers too because sometimes it is impossible for them to meet a believer. I know some people who have become Christians because they heard the gospel on these radio programmes. I will give one example. In one village there were no believers at all. One woman started to listen to the radio broadcasts. She accepted Jesus Christ as a result and was converted. Then she invited her family to listen with her. Later she invited her other relatives. Soon a whole church was founded even though there had never been one preacher in that village. Because of her witness to others about Christ, she was imprisoned for 4

miracle! But God is already beginning to do the 'impossible' in China. Why not Russia?

*What is your advice to Christians in free Europe today? What should we be doing with our freedom?*

Use your freedom as much as you can, because you do not know what will happen in the future. Today's possibilities may not last very long, so we should do all we can while we have time.

Later, in the village of Kaducky, the homes of Paul Belokon, Jacob Zoplava and Anna Zoplava were raided. Materials confiscated included a printing press, paper cutter, printing supplies and Christian literature. In spite of the confiscation of this press and the arrest of workers, another press continues to operate.

January 27—Vladimir Shelkov died in Tabaga, a strict regime labour camp near Yakutsk. The 84-year-old Christian leader from Tashkent had spent 23 years of his life in labour camps. Natasha's father, Georgi Vins, comments:

*I am well acquainted with conditions in this camp, having spent the last 4 years of my imprisonment there. The camp is specially controlled by the KGB, and the administration is experienced in the battle with religious activists in conditions of imprisonment.*

January 28—Pastor Mikhail Khorev (49) of Kishinev, Moldavia, was arrested in Leningrad. This was his third arrest having already served 5½ years in prisons and camps for his faith in God. His wife Vera later appealed for the assistance of a Christian lawyer from abroad because of the impossibility of obtaining sympathetic legal representation in the Soviet Union.