

Missions Festival Held by Underground Christian Group

Mark Barry
August 1972

The last July saw the second annual "Festival of Missions to the Communist World," sponsored by an international organization, Underground Evangelism. UE's purpose is to aid the underground church in Communist lands by supplying Bibles, Gospels, hymnals, and numerous other pieces of Christian literature.

In existence for over eleven years, the organization has printed over 400,000 Bibles and 2,000,000 Bible-teaching pamphlets and book-lets--in the languages of the captive nations--in the last year alone. The material is smuggled into Communist countries by special couriers who follow extensively pre-planned routes and drop-off procedures to safely deliver the precious literature. UE also has begun radio evangelism beamed into certain Communist nations.

The value of this work is difficult to appreciate fully. Bibles are virtually banned books in Communist countries. Underground Christians often must share a painstakingly hand-written Bible amongst dozens of fellow believers. UE's film, "To Russia with Love," filmed 60% behind the Iron Curtain, records an actual group of underground Christians at a service receiving a shipment of Bibles and related literature from Underground Evangelism. The exquisite joy and gratitude on their faces attests to their dire need, which is still far from being fulfilled.

One of the most formidable tasks in which UE is engaged is the translation of the Bible into the new modern Chinese dialect. Modern Chinese bears little resemblance to that used even 60 years ago. Furthermore, because of the intense anti-religious propaganda the Chinese have been subjected to since 1949, the Bible must be paraphrased into the style and vernacular of the Chinese youth so as to gain wider acceptance. Once the massive challenge of translation is completed in the next few years, it will enable the 800 million Chinese people to be exposed to the most widely read book in the world, most of them for the first time.

Underground Evangelism's conference featured a number of speakers whose testimonies and reports were fascinating. Most widely publicized was Sergei Kourdakov, the young Soviet seaman who jumped ship off the western coast of Canada last September. Kourdakov was formerly a Communist youth leader and led 150 raids on underground churches, burning Bibles and beating Christians. After noting that one particular Christian girl continually attended underground meetings despite vicious beating, he tore out a few pages from a Bible he was about to burn. Upon reading the contents, he said his life was changed. He is now a devout Christian who makes numerous appearances in Canada and the U.S. to tell of his life.

Two more inspiring speakers were Rev. Haralan Popov and Stephan Bankov. Rev. Popov was the largest Protestant church in Bulgaria until he was arrested and imprisoned along with other leading pastors. He remained in prison for over 13 years, and endured severe torture as well. His story of amazing faith and dedication is told in his book, *Tortured for his Faith*.

Mr. Bankov, also Bulgarian, filled the shoes of a pastorship after all the pastors of the underground churches in his region were arrested. He continued in this capacity for a number of years until he too was arrested and strapped to an electric chair in order to extract information concerning members of his churches. He miraculously escaped Bulgaria with his family upon release from the secret police.

Additionally, Dr. Paul Kauffman, one of today's foremost China experts, told of the diversity of missionary work being attempted at present in relation to China. He also spoke of the history of missionary activity in China and lamented that various opportunities to evangelize this nation were not taken advantage of years ago. "Brother Carlos," whose real name was not revealed, has been performing missionary work in Communist Cuba for nine years. He spoke of the deep underlying roots of Christianity in Cuba and the spiritual awakening he feels is currently taking place behind the Sugar Cane Curtain.

Also speaking were Congressman Earl Landgrebe, who related his Bible smuggling and distribution experience inside the Soviet Union last winter, and Dr. Oswald J. Smith, noted international Christian missionary.

The growing number of Christians in Communist countries who are meeting and worshipping illegally by necessity and at great personal risk is a reality. Their oppressive situation starkly contrasts with the freedom of religion enjoyed in non-Communist nations.

Americans often have five or more bibles in their homes, many of which gather dust, while behind the Iron Curtain one printed Bible may be passed around a group of families who slowly hand-copy portions little-by-little for their personal use. These persecuted believers stand as superb examples of the sacrificial, dedicated Christian, truly bearing the cross of suffering humanity.