# Keston Newsletter

No. 5, 2008

*The Jokhan Temple in the centre of Lhasa*

## Ethnic Squeezing on the Roof of the World

**by Patrick Rosebery**

The new Chinese Communist government stepped into Tibet in 1950. By 1959 the Dalai Lama, spiritual head of a very religious Tibetan population, was on his way into exile. He has never returned. During the Cultural Revolution of the '60s and early '70s hundreds of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries were destroyed; monks killed or tortured. Anyone suspected of less than full-hearted support for the Communist Party was at severe risk of imprisonment or worse.

Since the death of the tyrannical Chairman Mao, the rhetoric and tactics of the Chinese towards Tibet have softened – but the overall policy remains the same: to suppress Tibetan expressions of nationhood and national culture and gradually to make Tibet just another province in the enormous Chinese empire. Some of the monasteries have been rebuilt – and even have monks – though it is not clear how far these men are servants of the state whose primary purpose is to attract hard currency tourists and to present a more acceptable face to the world as China opens up under the gaze of globalisation.

The city of Lhasa, capital of Tibet, conjures up romantic images of the mountain kingdom of Shangri-La; of monks and temples and snow-capped mountains, virtually inaccessible to the outside world. The mountains are still there and parts of the old city remain. But Lhasa has gradually become an increasingly Chinese

*The Pong Chu River in Tibet on the way to the Nepalese border*

Communist city of wide streets and municipal squares. The visitor has to look round carefully to find the small old Tibetan streets and traditional houses that survive. The ethnic cleansing of 40 years ago has given way to ethnic 'squeezing' under which 2000 new Chinese settle in Lhasa every week, steadily making the Tibetans a minority in their own country.

Since last summer it has been possible to travel by train all the way from Shanghai, on the east coast of China to Lhasa. The whole journey takes three days. Until last year the track ran out in Golmud in the Chinese province of Qinghai, but home to many ethnic Tibetans. The extension to Lhasa, extending over 700 miles across the high Tibetan plateau, reaching a height of 17,000ft (5200m) is a marvel of engineering. It is the highest railway in the world (so high that the cabins are pressurised) and crosses – for over 24 hours – some of the least inhabited land in the world.

But sadly, this technological masterpiece is also an instrument of repression: not only was it, no doubt, built by not entirely voluntary labour but it also now acts as an easy way to bring more and more Chinese to live in Tibet. At over $4bn, it also cost, in four years, more than the entire education and health care budgets in Tibet since the Chinese first invaded in 1950.

The journey is, however, spectacular. The terrain even at such heights is remarkably varied – from mud desert and rocky lunar landscapes to high alpine pasture and moorland with yaks, sheep and the odd gazelle grazing, tended by farmers in traditional clothes made of fleeces and yak wool. The farmers live in the – very – sparsely situated villages, or as nomads as the sight of yurts, the thick yak hair tents, well prepared for all weathers, attests.

Yaks are central to so much in the Tibetan way of life. Not only are they strong ploughing and baggage animals, their meat is like coarse-grained beef (yak steaks, yak burgers and yak sizzlers are popular on the menus in Tibetan restaurants though the Tibetans themselves tend to eat the meat dried). Their milk and butter are used in the two staples of Tibetan food – yak butter tea (just bearable when boiling hot, congealed when cooler) and tsampa, a mixture of barley flour, yak butter and milk – nutritious, no doubt, but not immediately appealing. Yak wool is used extensively as are yak hides, not least in making the coracles used to cross the major rivers which run between the mountain ranges.

*Tibetan yak*

Culturally most important is the role yak butter plays in Tibetan Buddhism. All the candles in the temples are made from it, giving a distinctive pungent smell; slabs of butter are bought by pilgrims to use to top up the candles in pious devotion; and butter is even used to make statues to place before the altars.

Another yak dairy product gives its name to the annual yoghurt festival – so called because yoghurt is eaten as a festive dish – at which the unfurling of an enormous tanka (a wall hanging, often an image of the Buddha) on the side of a hill forms the centrepiece of a celebration. Given the close links between Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan nationalism, such a festival can also

*A tanka bearing the image of the Buddha is unfurled*

act as a magnet for wider demonstrations of

*Dalai Lama's summer palace*

cultural identity. When walking up to the monastery outside Lhasa to witness the unfurling, it was difficult not to be swept up by the devotion of the pilgrims who appeared to have come from across Tibet; not all, like one man, prostrating himself all the way, but nonetheless determined to show their devotion and their allegiance. It was significant that the music (long horns) and dancing by the monks were cancelled by the authorities at the last minute, presumably to reduce the risk of unrest.

So the Chinese authorities allow the Tibetans some religious activity; they also seem to allow locals visiting the former palaces of the Dalai Lama to pay their devotions to anything that was his – but this is far from religious freedom as the strictly enforced ban on any pictures of the Dalai Lama illustrates.

China will claim that it has transformed a desperately poor, feudal society into a country with much higher basic standards and the opportunity of greater wealth. But at what cost? Our Tibetan guide illustrates the point well. He has a son of 14 whom he has not seen for four years after an agonising choice between sending him to a boarding school in mainland China, where he can expect to have the prospect of a good job in the flourishing economy, or keeping him in Tibet with the prospect of economic struggle. He also has a three-year-old son for whom he had to pay a large fine to the Chinese authorities since his arrival broke the national 'one child' rule.

The Dalai Lama is now in his seventies. His death – and choice of the next Lama – could be the last chance for Tibetans to show their independence and – all too probably – for China to take the final levers of power over Tibetan Buddhism.

*Tibetan monks form a circle and move in meditation*

What can we in the West do for a country that was once regarded as strategically important enough for the British to send an expedition to take control in 1904? Not, I suggest, military force. But we can do more to publicise the plight of the Tibetans internationally. Where better to start than as the Chinese take centre stage in the run up to this year's Olympics?

*The Potala Palace in Lhasa*

# AGM 2007 talk on the Altai

**by the Chairman**

I was persuaded by the Council to give the talk at this year's AGM. It was suggested that I should speak about Keston's Encyclopaedia which is currently our main research project and thus an important aspect of what your subscriptions are supporting. I have already written a little about two Encyclopaedia fieldtrips in the *Newsletter*, so you will be familiar with some aspects of this great project. I have, of course, taken part in relatively few of the total number of fieldtrips since the Encyclopaedia team have, over the past ten years, travelled to every corner of the Russian Federation. However, one fieldtrip which I thought particularly interesting was the one which I took part in to the Altai – an area little known in the West.

*Encyclopaedia Team in Barnaul*
(left to right) *Sergei Filatov, Roman Lunkin, Xenia Dennen, & Anastasia Strukova*

The Altai is in southern Siberia and is composed of the Altai Krai (about 169 thousand sq km in size) and the Altai Republic (over 92 thousand sq km). The latter only became a republic within the Russian Federation in 1991. Before, from 1928, this small mountainous country on Russia's border with China, Mongolia and Kazakhstan, was a mere autonomous oblast within the Altai Krai. The Altai people only form 30% – 60,000 – of the present population, the majority being Russians. The Altai Krai is flat in comparison with the Republic; I noticed that vast stretches of once cultivated fields now lay abandoned and unkempt.

The Encyclopaedia team consisting of myself, Sergei Filatov, Roman Lunkan and Anastasia Strukova, flew overnight to the capital of the Altai Krai, Barnaul. With a time difference with London of six hours, we arrived just as the sun was rising, and found a Siberian taxi-driver to take us into town whose face was a picture of goodness, round, smiling, mirroring the warm Siberian September morning light. He became our driver for the duration of our Altai fieldtrip.

It was Sunday and 'City Day' when every trade and profession – some in traditional Russian costume, some disguised as carrots, tomatoes or marrows, and others, more romantically, as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza – all processed through the streets of Barnaul, passing the statue of Lenin in the main square. It reminded Roman Lunkin of the Soviet celebrations which his parents used to enjoy in Communist days. The youth of Barnaul looked the same as anywhere else in Europe, in hipsters and fashionable tops, whereas women of my generation seemed to go in for hair dyed fair on top but dark brown below – a strange fashion which I only noticed in Siberia.

**History**

The Altai people from the 14th – 16th century belonged to the independent Khanate of Dzhungaria which was never islamised, but between the late 16th and early 17th century adopted Tibetan Buddhism. In the first half of the 18th century it was conquered by China, forcing many Altais northwards; contacts with Tibetan Buddhism were broken, leading the Altai people to return to their ancient traditions of shamanism and paganism. Faced with constant attacks from both the Chinese and Kazakhs, in 1756 the Altai people successfully petitioned the Russian government to incorporate their territory into the Russian Empire on condition that their traditional forms of religion were respected.

Christianity reached the Altai before this in the 17th century with the arrival of many Old Believers who wanted to escape government oppression, as well as of German Lutherans, Mennonites and Catholics as from the 18th century onwards. Then in the 19th century the Russian Orthodox Altai Spiritual Mission was founded in 1830 by the great Russian Orthodox scholar and now saint, Makari Glukharyov, who translated the scriptures and liturgical texts into the local Altai language.

All his missionaries had to learn Altai. By 1917 the Altai Spiritual Mission had 31 sections and had succeeded in baptising 47,000 people. However, Makari Glukharyov's campaign to translate the scriptures also into spoken Russian led to his dismissal by the Holy Synod in 1843 and a new policy of russification which offended Altai national sensibilities. Altai nationalists today, particularly in the Republic, still identify the Russian Orthodox Church with Russian domination and thus resist its influence.

**The Altai Krai Today**

By 1945 the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) had been almost totally destroyed with only three churches still open. During *perestroika* the ROC was re-established with the Diocese of Barnaul and Altai formed in 1994. Bishop Anthony, in charge until his death in 2001, who was from the Ukraine, filled most posts with his Ukrainian mates and brought the church into disrepute because of financial corruption and his many links with the FSB and army. His successor Bishop Maxim (Dmitriev) has tried to clear the church of corruption and improve theological education. Currently the diocese has 158 parishes.

Unfortunately, as in many areas of the Russian Federation, the ROC's attitude to other Christian denominations is extremely negative. The Altai Krai has many other denominations – Baptists, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Charismatics and Catholics as well as a great many Old Believers – but the Orthodox leaders campaign against them. The Governor and city authorities, in contrast, are even-handed and have not sided with the Orthodox. They and local businesses approve of, and indeed help finance, the Protestants' social work – for example among drug addicts and the prison population.

To give you a taste of the multi-faceted religious make-up of the Krai I will describe four groups whom I personally met – Reform Baptists, Old Believers, Catholics and an unusual Russian Orthodox commune.

The Reform Baptists, or *Initsiativniki*, had been immensely brave during Soviet times, and their community in Barnaul, founded in 1961, had often signed *samizdat* documents which we received at Keston. It was difficult to find the Barnaul community (we had no telephone number), they still refused to register and were very wary of the local authorities. In the end Anastasia flagged down a car and

*Reform Baptist Church in Barnaul*

negotiated a price (something I would never do!) and we set off downtown at hair-raising speed. Poor Anastasia was terrified – I simply shut my eyes. In the end we arrived in one piece at 8 Prospekt Entuziastov, in front of a gothic-style church, built with western money in 1995, surrounded by typical Soviet blocks of flats. The parish had created a garden around the church which transformed the area into an oasis: there Anastasia and I sat on a bench, waiting for the church's pastor to arrive, after we had persuaded the churchwarden that I was a 'friend' from the West because I had read about and helped to publicise their situation before *perestroika*.

The pastor, Ivan Shevyrnev, a metal worker and lathe operator from Krasnoyarsk, told us that about 350-400 attended church on Sundays; women were not allowed to cut their hair and married ones had to wear a scarf; members were encouraged to avoid watching television but computers were permitted for work ('though not use of the Internet). Contact with the official Baptists had been closer during Communist days, said Pastor Shevyrnev; now there was none at all (nor with other denominations) but many from the official Baptist church were joining his church's ranks. The Reform Baptists found they were often attacked in the press, and conflicts had arisen with the local authorities when they had gone out to evangelise, pitching tents and setting up bookstalls.

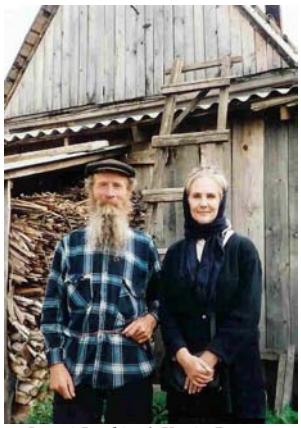
Since the 17th century schism within the ROC, many Old Believers had sought refuge in the flung-flung corners of the Russian Empire, and

many found their way to the Altai. We were therefore keen to visit the Old Believer church in Barnaul, a large white structure, called the Church of the Protecting Veil, with its walls half-built. Building had started in 1997, but the local authorities, although holding the Old Believers in high regard, gave them only moral but no financial support. The site-manager, Vladimir, who had become an Old Believer as an adult, told us that their original church had been confiscated in the 1930s, and blown up in 1968. In 1988 they had been given a small house-church, and now some local firms were helping provide materials for their new building. About 300 belonged to this parish plus 100 children. They had organised a publishing group and had a well-organised information and distribution network for their publications. The congregation was close-knit, he claimed, and included some icon painters. One of their members, a German, was a Ministry of the Interior colonel who had been allowed by his bosses to keep to Old Believer rules and not shave off his beard!

A fascinating aspect of the ROC in the area was a commune founded in 1991 by Ignati Lapkin, originally an Old Believer whose openness to other Christian denominations had led to his expulsion. The commune was located in an isolated village called Poteryaevka and did not belong to the Moscow Patriarchate but to the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (since May 2007, however, the two have been officially united). Ignati Lapkin had been converted in 1961 (he told me that he knew the exact moment) and had become an indefatigable preacher during Soviet days. He had been arrested more than once, and had organised secret services in his small wooden house which I visited. He had recorded over 200 tapes, which included the whole of the New Testament, Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, some of the works of St John Chrisostom, the *Confessions* of St Augustine, and much else. Groups of people in Siberia had regularly gathered round tape-recorders to listen to these texts. Now he was a lecturer at the Barnaul Technical College from where many new young converts had come to join his commune.

*Poteryaevka Commune*

Roman Lunkin and I would never have been able to find the commune had we not had the help of Lapkin's wife, Nadezhda, and the charming taxi-driver with the sunny round face. The journey involved a two-hour drive along the main road; then we had to cut across the fields for 16 kilometres, down bumpy tracks which were impassable in spring and autumn, with no signposts.



*Ignati Lapkin & Xenia Dennen*

I had been warned to wear a skirt, no earrings or lipstick, and to cover my head. Clean-shaven young Roman, however, with his shirt tucked into his jeans was 'improperly dressed' in the commune's view, where all the men were bearded and wore their shirts hanging loose with a rope for a belt. But the atmosphere was most friendly. The commune consisted of 50 members in 14 houses. Most of the members were well-educated – indeed one spoke good English, and had come out to the commune for six months to teach in their school. Each family built their own house and tended their own land and animals. Lapkin's brother was an Orthodox priest who led the services in their tiny church where men and women stood on opposite sides and had to adhere to strict rules about punctuality as well as dress. Lapkin himself had written a bible commentary and was keen that the liturgy be celebrated in modern Russian.

The Catholics of Barnaul, registered as a parish in 1992, had been unable to get back their 19th century church, which stood on the city's main street, and instead had been allowed to build a large parish centre far from the centre. One evening Sergei Filatov and I set off in a taxi to find the Roman Catholic priest, Fr Roman Caly (from Poland), who lived and worked at this centre which included a Chapel of Christ the King, consecrated in August 2002. We managed to meet him and the one nun (from the Czech

Republic) who worked with him (she told us that in the past there had been three American nuns).

Fr Caly had first come to Barnaul in 1990 for just four days with only three addresses of Catholics in his pocket. He discovered that a group of Catholics, headed by an 80-year-old German woman known as Baba Lena, had been meeting in different flats over the years. Baba Lena had performed baptisms and marriage blessings during the long period

*Roman Catholic Centre in Barnaul*

when no priest was available. In 1993 Fr Walter Bachmann, from Germany, came to Barnaul and began building up a Catholic congregation after which Fr Caly took over.

Fr Caly was aware of the Orthodox Church's hostility: the previous Orthodox Bishop Anthony (died in 2001) had maintained some contact with him, but the present Bishop Maxim had refused to attend the Catholic chapel's consecration. 'All "sects" have been removed to the edge of the city', said Fr Caly. Even the distribution of soup to the poor by Catholic nuns had been condemned by the Orthodox Church because it was 'Catholic soup'! In 2002 there had been many attacks on Catholics in the press, and Fr Caly felt that he was closely watched.

**The Altai Republic**

After five days in the Altai Krai our round-faced taxi driver drove us the four hours to Gorno-Altaisk, the capital of the Altai Republic (this was the only way to get there since the buses were unreliable) where we planned to spend four days. We arrived in blazing sunshine and found the one and only hotel (the shell of a new one, built in the late '90s, stood forlornly beside it, with grass growing out of the cracks in its rapidly collapsing concrete) which faced a statue of Lenin and proved a bit of a shock: the rooms did not have even pipes for hot water. I was put on a different floor from the Russian members of the team. The only difference in our rooms that I could see was the door: mine was newer and had a better lock. When I looked at the ceiling I saw about 14 insects and dreaded lest they be bed bugs, which I knew could sometimes parachute onto your bed. How relieved I was to learn they were only ladybirds.

The Altai Republic was less 'Russian' than the Krai – the distinctive faces of the Altai with their slanting eyes were much more visible. Here Altai religious traditions had been preserved: shamanism and Burkhanism, a religion founded at the beginning of the 20th century, as well as Buddhism were the three main religious strands which we found interweaving and overlapping.

Burkhanism, or the White Faith (Aktyang) was founded during the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905) when the Altai people identified with the victorious Japanese. A white 'burkhan', or horseman, the spokesman for a mythic god-like figure from the Khanate of Dzhungaria, was said to have appeared to a shepherd called Chet-Chelpan in July 1904 and to have issued instructions, which two other horsemen helped interpret. News of these events quickly spread until within eight days over 4000 Altais had gathered in the Tereng Valley to worship the white 'burkhan'.

*An-chi & his wife with Xenia*

A small group of Buddhists, founded in 1990, who had the support of the Altai Republic's President, Mikhail Lapshin, claimed that Burkhanism was at root a form of Buddhism and managed to get Buddhism declared the national religion. The Encyclopaedia team, however, sensed that Buddhism was not deeply rooted and that in fact pagan practices and beliefs predominated. To find out more we had to meet some Buddhists – this had proved impossible during an earlier fieldtrip in 1997 when the Buddhists had been very secretive,

refusing to speak to any Russians. Now I was able to help: I rang one of the pillars of the Buddhist group in the capital called An-chi, who was thrilled to hear that an Englishwoman had come to Gorno-Altaisk. He wanted to talk to me and immediately came over to the hotel following a visit to one of the Buddhist holy sites, a high mountain on the border with China. He rushed over, still in his tracksuit, apologising for not being better dressed. Meanwhile Sergei pretended to be my 'manager' and the note-taker for this 'English journalist'.

An-chi was a journalist who had trained in Moscow at the Gorky Literary Institute, had previously worked with the Altai Republic's government in its press department, but had just lost his job for refusing to close down the main opposition newspaper. We gathered from him that there was considerable hostility

*Vitali Kozmin, the* Ponchokh

to the dominant Russian population among the indigenous Altai people who, as An-chi demonstrated, were very proud of their ancient family roots and traditions; he told me at length about his clan, the white Kipchaki, a princely group whose warriors had fought with Genghis Khan, he said, and came from near the Mongolian border. Afterwards, amongst ourselves, we named him 'Tsar of the Altai'! He proved to be an excellent contact through whom Sergei and I were able to meet other members of the small Buddhist community.

An-chi organised a meeting with the Buddhist community's teacher, or *Ponchokh*, in a

*Altai-chi*

restaurant where traditional Altai food was served. Unfortunately much of the food consisted of hunks of mutton dripping with fat which Sergei could not eat and which gave me dreadful indigestion. The *Ponchokh* was a Russian called Vitaly Kozmin who had received advanced training in India and Tibet and felt his mission was to help build up Buddhism in the Altai. However, he admitted there were only a very few Buddhists and that they, sadly, had little interest in serious spiritual matters such as Buddhist forms of meditation. But 15 young Altai men had been sent off to Buryatia – an area of Russia which is traditionally Buddhist – to train, and five were now back in Gorno-Altaisk, he told me.

Straight from the restaurant we were driven by An-chi to the main press centre to meet Altai-chi, the leader of the Buddhist community, who turned out to be a passionate Altai nationalist whose favourite film was *Braveheart*. He believed that Buddhism should be his nation's religion and resented the presence of Russians in his country (indeed he quarrelled with the *Ponchokh* in front of me) but as he talked it became clear that he still identified with his childhood pagan roots. He vividly described how his family had worshipped the sun, how his grandmother would make him go to bed as soon as the sun set, and, swinging her stick over his head, would stop him sitting up and listening to the sound of children playing outside.

**Paganism**

It seemed to us that behind the attempts to establish Buddhism was in reality a complex sea of white and black magic practices, hidden shamanism, a paganism which was fluid, ever-changing, with no central structure or written formulae. For example, we discovered a White Faith movement led by a philologist turned businessman called Sergei Kynyev who

studied at the Institute of Altai Studies. He had been working since 1995 for a revival of the White Faith and described the Altai as 'the centre of the world' or 'the umbilical cord of the world'. He believed that 'the spirit of the Altai' had called him to rescue the Altai people. From 1995-1998 he had travelled from village to village, opposing archaeological digs which had not been preceded by special rituals; the latter, he believed, would prevent the 'underworld' being disturbed and its spirits let loose. He organised missionary groups to visit Altai villages and spread the White Faith, and had established a series of White rituals through which he claimed he received occult knowledge about the Altai.

One evening Anastasia and I visited Anton Yudanov, the director of the Altai Republic's national theatre. He was a highly sophisticated actor, steeped in Russian literature, who had found his 'soul', he told us, by returning to his homeland, to its ancient religious traditions and to the White faith or *Ak-tyang*. He kept well away from 'black' shamanism. In the past, he recounted, he had had an inner crisis when he was 50 after training in Moscow at the Shukinsky drama school and developing a successful acting career. He had returned to the Altai where he had recovered by becoming steeped in Altai pagan culture. He was now a *skazatel*, a story-teller, he said, and had second-sight. He told us that he was in touch with the Altai's 'living soul', prayed to all corners of the Altai from the top of its holy

*Anton Yudanov playing the* topshur

mountains and worshipped every plant, animal and river. He had talked to many of the wise old men and women in Altai villages and had learned the art of making a *topshur*, the Altai traditional stringed instrument, which he treated as a living being and with which he sang to me, using a strange husky sound from the throat.

*Altai Cultural Centre* (left to right) *Alexandr Barrin, Xenia Dennen, Sergei Filatov*

Further evidence that the White Faith was a living reality emerged when An-chi drove Sergei and me on a day's expedition south to the small town of Chemal on the river Katun, a mountain torrent, where we visited an Altai Cultural Centre. This consisted of three wooden *yurts* with a director called Alexandr Barrin, who in Soviet times had been head of the local collective farm. He was delighted to see some foreign visitors, donned his traditional Altai fur hat, hung up for all to see a banner with a blue, yellow and red stripe, displaying his clan's symbol (a wolf's head) and with lecturer's baton in hand, began to describe to us the past traditional way of life in the Altai. In the *yurt* where we were sitting he pointed out an altar to the White Faith – connected with the sky, he explained – which stood at one end, and at the other end an altar to the underworld.

**Christian Groups**

I was fascinated to discover a remnant of the 19th century Russian Orthodox Altai Spiritual Mission on the outskirts of the small town of Chemal not far from the Altai Cultural Centre. A tiny wooden church, St John the Evangelist, restored by a rich 'new Russian' during *perestroika,* was perched on a minute rocky island – called Patmos – in the middle of the river Katun. To get to it I had to negotiate a narrow suspension bridge, hanging thousands of feet above the pale green icy waters of the river.

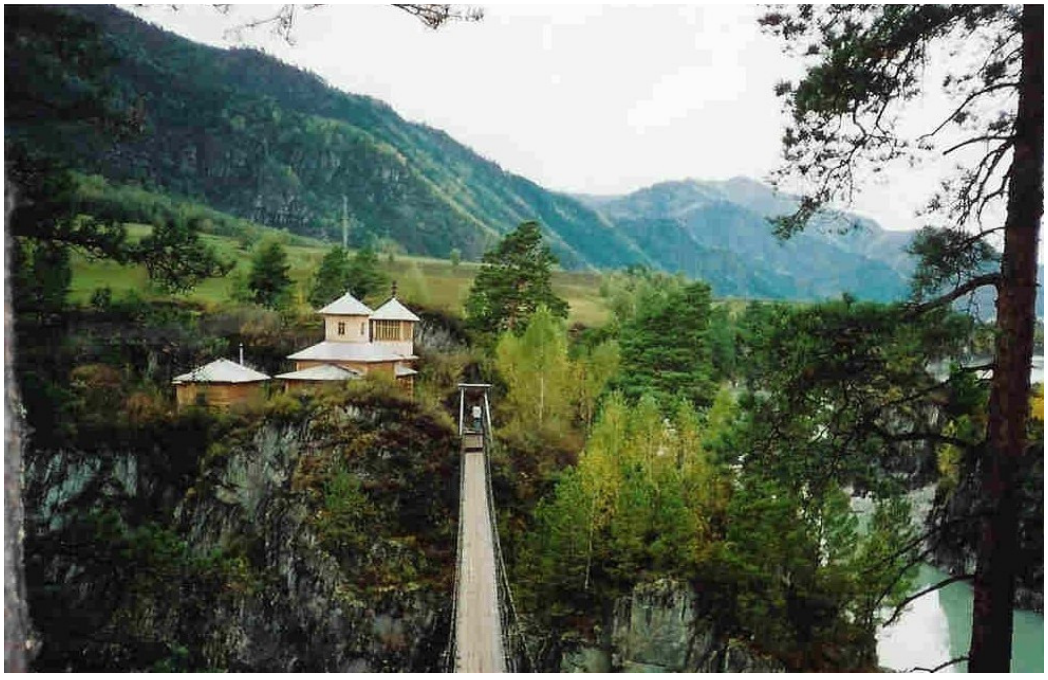
Because Russian Orthodoxy is identified with Russian colonialism and russification, it is on the whole not popular among Altais who defend their national identity and resent any Orthodox missionary work. Such activity was described by Altai Buddhists as 'spiritual aggression' and banned altogether at a meeting of the Altai intelligentsia who all supported Burkhanism. Nevertheless, there are Russian

Orthodox churches in most regions of the Republic: 22 parishes (compared to 158 in the Altai Krai), with just 10 priests and 2 deacons. Although St Makari Glukharev is seen as a friend of the Altais, today's small number of indigenous Altai Russian Orthodox clergy are considered traitors. The fierce independence of the Old Believer tradition in the Altai also contributes to the anti-Orthodox feeling in the area.

Other Christian groups have a small hold too in the Altai Republic. In the capital we found various Pentecostal groups: the 'New Life' Pentecostals since beginning their evangelistic work in 1995 had an Altai as pastor and 150 members; the 'Word of Faith' group was founded by Russian missionaries from Kazakhstan and now had 40 members; some Russian missionaries from Vladivostock had set up 'the House of Life' charismatic group and now had 10 members. A small *incognito* Catholic community had been established in Iogach on Lake Teletskoe (210 km from Gorno-Altaisk), a beautiful place from where we were able to admire the snowy peaks of the Altai Mountains in the distance. Originally the Catholics had wanted to build a church on the banks of the lake after an Austrian woman called Agnes Ritter had had a vision of the Virgin Mary in which she was told to build a church 'of all nations'. Apparently she had raised enough money for a new road to be built as far as the lake's shores – no doubt useful to the local authorities who wanted to develop the area for tourism – but had then been told that no church could be constructed. As we walked beside the lake we noticed that a small wooden Russian Orthodox chapel had been built instead.

* * *

The Altai is an area of the Russian Federation where a number of religious traditions interweave, overlap and sometimes clash. Russian Orthodoxy is by no means the predominant faith. In the Altai Krai 'sectarians', as the Orthodox would call them – that is any denomination, including the Old Believers, which is not Orthodox – are more numerous than Russian Orthodox, and in the Altai Republic paganism predominates. The strange religious mix in the Republic was exemplified for me by its President, Mikhail Lapshin, who had his home blessed not only by a Buddhist monk, but also, for good measure, by a Russian Orthodox priest and a shaman.



*Church of St John the Evangelist on Patmos at Chemal*

# Keston and Baylor

## Keston Center for Religion Politics and Society

The new Keston Center for Religion Politics and Society was opened at Baylor University, Texas, during the 50th Anniversary celebrations (26 and 27 November 2007) of the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies within which the new Keston Center is housed.

*Entrance to the Keston Center*

Both the Chairman, Xenia Dennen, and the President, Michael Bourdeaux, were invited to Baylor for these celebrations and attended the first Board meeting of the new Keston Center on 26 November. Keston's library and archive had been successfully transported to Baylor during August 2007, but the new Center's Director, Dr Christopher Marsh, admitted that the collection was far bigger than he had anticipated and thus would take some considerable time to organise, catalogue and store. Remarkable progress had been made, however, and fine premises adapted with the main research room named after Michael Bourdeaux; the entrance passageway was lined with filing cabinets; and an attractive display cabinet had been built just inside the door. Already five scholars were using the archive.


*Display cabinet with* (left to right) *Malcolm Walker, Lorna Bourdeaux & Dr Marsh*

*Passageway with shelving and filing cabinets*

During a reception in the Dawson Institute Michael and Xenia were able to accompany Baylor's Provost and Senior Vice Provost round the Center: Michael regaled them with stories about various aspects of Keston's history, about the photograph on one of the walls depicting an underground press made by Baptists during the Soviet period, and Xenia told them about how documents from the KGB archives and the USSR's Council for Religious Affairs had been added to the collection.

Following a concert of English church music and madrigals in Michael's honour, a dinner was held at which Michael spoke as well as the founder of the Dawson Institute, Dr James Wood.

During the second day of the celebrations a Roundtable was organised. In the morning Dr James Wood spoke about how and why he had founded the Dawson Institute: he had understood the need for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of church-state relations involving a number of different subjects, and so had begun by regularly meeting with the head of the politics department, history department and religious studies department; later the sociology and philosophy departments were drawn in. Gradually lectures were organised, conferences arranged, and visiting lecturers invited to contribute (Michael was a visiting lecturer in 1972). A graduate degree programme was eventually launched and in 1968 the church-state research centre established. In 1993 a PhD in church-state studies programme was started.

*Michael Bourdeaux shows Baylor's Provost round the Center*

After lunch Michael spoke appreciatively about the new Baylor-Keston relationship and described how and why

*Michael leads afternoon session of Roundtable*

Keston was founded. He said: 'I was struck by the way in which Dr Wood expressed his ideology on founding the Dawson Institute. I could have repeated his words almost verbatim.' Both he and Dr Wood had understood the need to study, in an historical and political context, not just the state's relations with Christian denominations, but with other religions as well. Michael then went on to describe some of the most significant events in Keston's history – his visit to the USSR in 1964 which had inspired him to found Keston; the remarkable activity of Russian Orthodox, Baptist and Catholic dissidents; the significance of Pope John Paul's election and his visit to Poland in 1978; the millennium celebrations in 1988 of the Russian Orthodox Church, and finally its role during the 1991 putsch when Gorbachev was imprisoned. Czechs, Poles, Slovaks and Romanians had approached him, he recounted, asking why Keston was only working on the USSR. As a result the archive had gathered in material on all these areas as well. Michael ended with the words: 'I hope that the archive will produce many doctoral theses.'

There will be close cooperation between Keston UK and the Keston Center at Baylor: a member of Keston's Council of Management will attend Board meetings of the Keston Center, and Dr Christopher Marsh, Director of the Keston Center, will attend Council meetings after being made a Council member at Keston's 2007 AGM.

*First Board Meeting of the new Keston Center (photographed by Dr Marsh, the Director)*

(Left to right) *Dr Christopher Marsh, Revd Dr Michael Bourdeaux, Dr James Wood, & two members of the Dawson Institute's academic staff, Dr Barry Hankins & Dr Charles McDaniel (both former students of Dr Wood)*

# Home News

**The Annual General Meeting was held on Saturday 3 November 2007 at St Andrew's Holborn in London. Mr Tim Abraham, a long-standing Keston member, was elected to the Council. The Chairman reported that following the unanimous decision of the members at the 2006 AGM, Keston's library and archive were packed up in August 2007 and shipped to Baylor University in Texas USA. The Chairman thanked Malcolm Walker, Keston's archivist, on behalf of the Council, for all his many years of devoted work and wished him God speed for the future, as he would be leaving Keston's employment at the end of the month. The Council was in good heart, said the Chairman, as Keston was in a healthy financial state; by knowing the dimensions of Keston's yearly income the trustees would be able to plan for the future. The members voted unanimously to change Art.44 of the *Articles of Association* to read: *"The Director for the time being of the Keston Center for Religion Politics and Society at Baylor University, Texas, USA, shall serve as a member of the Council ex officio."* It was felt that the presence of the new Center's Director at Council meetings and the attendance of at least one Keston trustee at the Center's Board meetings would help promote regular cooperation between Keston UK and the new Baylor Center. The Council, said the Chairman, intended to monitor the future use of the archive, to suggest new acquisitions, keep abreast of any digitisation and make sure that Keston had access to digitised material.**

**The Encyclopaedia *Religious Life in Russia Today* is due to be completed in the spring of 2008. Six volumes plus an introductory volume of essays have already been published and the text of the final volume will shortly be delivered to the publisher. Since the Encyclopaedia fieldtrip to Tula and Ryazan about which the Chairman wrote in the last *Newsletter*, she has taken part in a fieldtrip to Pskov and Staraya Russa in April 2007, to Saratov in November 2007 and finally to Ekaterinburg in January 2008. The Council would like to maintain a skeleton Encyclopaedia team in Russia as their research is so valuable and to continue publishing the *Russian Review* on the Keston website which the team produce each month. This internet publication has proved popular with Russian readers and articles are frequently picked up and re-printed by leading Russian religious websites. The trustees would like to see an English edition of the Encyclopaedia published, but substantial funding would be required which is beyond Keston's current means. Meanwhile, therefore, they are considering funding a translation of one section – possibly that on St Petersburg – as a pilot scheme. The trustees also plan to get Keston's website redesigned and to publish additional material to the *Russian Review* on it.**

**As Keston has now vacated the premises at 38 St Aldate's, Oxford (this took place at the end of November 2007) please use our new address PO Box 752, Oxford OX1 9QF. In future John Hanks, the Company Secretary, will not only be dealing with financial matters but also with all Keston's day-to-day administration, and will be able to answer any telephone calls (the number is still the same 01865-792929). There has been a small alteration to the name of Keston's website which is now www.keston.org.uk. Please address any e-mail messages to admin@keston.org.uk.**

**On Saturday 12 January Michael Bourdeaux spoke on "The Role of the Church in Lithuania's Struggle for Freedom" at a Prayer Breakfast organised by His Excellency Vigaudas Usackas, the Lithuanian Ambassador, at the Churchill Hyatt Regency Hotel in London. Apart from the Ambassador and Michael Bourdeaux, there were two other main speakers: a Conservative MP, Desmond Swayne (New Forest) and Professor Vytautas Landsbergis. "It was my privilege," writes Michael, 'to sit next to the latter at breakfast. I had met him several times before (most notably when he was head of *Sajudis*, the Lithuanian independence movement, in February 1989). There are few people on this earth whom I admire more: it was he who faced down Gorbachev in 1990 and thus led the way to success for democracy and his country's freedom. He is now, after being the first President of free Lithuania, an MEP." We print below part of Michael's address:**

**'Two years ago a very senior Lithuanian priest, Fr Vytautas Brilius (head of the Salesian Order) visited Keston Institute in Oxford. We sat around a table and I spoke about the book I published in 1979, *Land of Crosses*. I said, "That's one of the names in my book" – and I read out part of a long passage referring to Mrs Ona Briliene, a teacher in Vilkaviškis. She was dismissed from her job as a schoolteacher in 1970. She appealed against her dismissal and the case came to court. Under cross-examination she said, "Yes, I'm a believer. I go openly to church – I've had enough of secrecy. I hid my beliefs for 21 years, but I see no reason to do so any longer…" She was briefly reinstated after the hearing, but finally dismissed a few months later. Fr Brilius sat silently – tears in his eyes. "She's my mother," he said. "She brought up all the children as Christians, and many of those in her class became believers too." I do not think any incident in my nearly 40 years of association with Lithuania has ever brought home more strongly the way in which persecution of the church achieved precisely the opposite of what the perpetrators intended. Dismiss one schoolteacher – and you get a class of believing children. […] It was in Lithuania that the cry for religious liberty became a national watchword. It coalesced with the eventual demands of *Sajudis* for political freedom. Where did this all start? […] In my own researches, the starting point was a document, simply entitled *Memorandum*, which saw the light of day in 1972. Its story is astonishing. It was a short document, produced by a determined group of young Lithuanian Catholics, and distributed clandestinely around the parishes. […] Amazingly, those copies of the *Memorandum* which survived the depredations of the KGB were bundled up in Vilnius and taken by hand to Moscow. Nijole Sadunaite told me she could not remember taking that particular document to Moscow – she did this with so many documents so many times. But it was almost certainly her […] The bearer of the document – with divine inspiration – decided not to deliver it to the Communist Party headquarters in Moscow. Instead there was a meeting with a British journalist, who did not dare take it out, but handed it to a friend in the British Embassy. He, in turn – breaking diplomatic protocol – addressed it to me at Keston College (as it then was) in Kent and sent it through the diplomatic bag. I unpacked this treasure early in 1973 – and from that moment I became determined to write a book about the Catholic Church in Lithuania. […] A year ago the Honorary Consul of Lithuania in Wales suggested that this document, by rights, should reside in Lithuania itself – and I had the honour of returning it last July to the person who had originated it, Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius. […] My work for Lithuania has been one of the key inspirations of my life.'**

# Relocating the Keston Archive and Library

## How We Moved 10,000 Books and 120 File Drawers Across the Pond

**by Christopher Marsh**


*Piles of packing cases outside 38 St Aldate's, Oxford, wait to be filled with Keston's books & documents*

Oftentimes God prepares us for a task in a way that makes little sense at the time, or that even seems a waste of time. Such was the case with a job I had during the summer between my master's and doctoral studies. Only days before I was to marry my wife, I was hired to work as an 'international operations specialist' for a logistics company working out of the Bradley International Airport in Connecticut. While I was happy to have a job to return to after my honeymoon, I never imagined that the experience I gained there with shipping aircraft engines and textiles across the world would ever be of use to me in an academic career. But in the months during which the Keston Institute and Baylor University worked out the details of the transfer of the Keston archive and library, my knowledge of international shipping and land, air, and sea freight certainly came in handy.

Once the ink was dry on the legal agreement between Keston and Baylor, the issue of shipping the collection from Oxford to Waco, Texas, became a reality. While we had initially planned to hire a British shipping company to handle things for us, once the shipping contract for nearly £50,000 was received, which greatly exceeded all of our estimates and resources, my fate became clear – I was to use my experience from that summer long ago to get this collection moved, and in a way that would be within our budget resources while also making sure that nothing in the precious collection was put at risk. So, in early August 2007 five of us headed off to Oxford with the goal of getting the entire collection packed up and shipped out in four days. Joining me were Suzanne Sellers, the office manager of the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, Bill Hair, the associate dean of Baylor University Libraries, graduate

student Jon Mizuta, and independent contractor Tim Platt. Certainly, it would take divine intervention to achieve this ambitious goal!

Things got off to a great start – right off the plane at Gatwick we were able to hire two vehicles, one a cargo van and the other a Jeep equipped with GPS (which greatly facilitated our travel around London and Oxford). The next stop was the warehouse of Connoisseur International near Heathrow, with whom we had made prior arrangements to transfer via tractor trailer the boxed collection from a car park in Oxford to their warehouse, and then on to Portsmouth for its sea journey to Galveston, Texas. Indeed, having arranged similar shipments that summer, I felt confident in my abilities to plan that stage. But how were we going to actually pack up this collection and get it to that car park?

*Christopher Marsh* (left) *negotiating some extra help in the Heathrow warehouse*

It was at this point that Our Lord came to my aid. The shipper had told us that they were not able to provide packing help, which is why I had brought my 'team' with me. At one point, while I was standing alone in the warehouse, one of the young guys from the warehouse came over to me and mentioned that he and a few of his pals might be able to help us out. After a few minutes of negotiating, we had added four more to our team! As we headed off toward Oxford, I was feeling a lot more confident in our mission. This feeling almost immediately left as we got lost trying to leave the area around Heathrow Airport and head out towards Oxford.

Once in Oxford we visited Keston to try and figure out a game plan for packing the collection in two days. It was already late Friday afternoon, we had only slept a few hours on the flight over, and we had just spent the whole day getting the shipping arrangements in order. Whatever confidence we had at this point quickly vanished as we looked around the Keston Institute, which was filled wall-to-wall with boxes. This was not how I had remembered it, while for the others this was the first time they had seen the collection. In preparation for shipping everything, Malcolm Walker had wisely brought boxes that had been in other locations down to the first floor and into the hallway. While this would prove very useful the next day as we packed everything, it was certainly an intimidating sight to see upon arriving. With all of us feeling somewhat nervous and quite a bit jet-lagged, we headed out for the Black Horse Inn to check in and get some rest.

The next morning the sun was shining, the temperature cool, and our friends from Heathrow showed up right on time. A tractor trailer was dropped off in the car park, and we had our cargo van to make runs back and forth between the Keston Institute on St Aldate's and the car park down near the railway station. We broke ourselves down into separate crews: one to box things in the Institute; another to load the cargo van and make the runs to the car park and back; and another to load the tractor trailer. We worked all day, only stopping for lunch at the Head of the River pub, where we were able to recuperate and replenish ourselves. By Saturday evening, we had packed up about half the collection, and were pretty sure we had overcome the majority of unexpected obstacles that had cropped up that morning, including locating pallets, getting access to our tractor trailer (which was blocked in the car park by the many buses dropping off tourists), and not being kicked out of the car park itself (which a parking attendant had attempted to do early that morning).

On Sunday morning we got off to an early start again, this time with more confidence in how things would work, but with some trepidation over the fact that we needed to have everything packed up and out of the Keston Institute that evening if we were going to stay on track. The second day certainly proved a bit easier, as the whole team had developed a rhythm and was working like a well-oiled machine. The only obstacle we had to face that day were shoppers who illegally parked in the courtyard at 38 St. Aldate's, and actually blocked our access. So, we quickly started stacking boxes in our spaces and then would only move them when one of our trucks came back to park – if they wanted these spots, they were going to have to work for it! We finished up in plenty of time that afternoon, and ended off our stay in Oxford with a wonderful dinner with Michael and Lorna Bourdeaux and Malcolm Walker in Iffley. It was a relaxing end to a very stressful operation.

*Trailer blocked by tourist bus*

Our work was not done yet, however, as we still needed to get the shipment from Oxford to Baylor University. The first step was to get the second tractor trailer delivered from the car park in Oxford to the warehouse at Heathrow. While normally this would have been an easy operation, the main road was blocked by a group of protestors who were demonstrating against the expansion of Heathrow Airport. Although several hours late, the trailer eventually arrived and work began on moving the contents from the tractor trailers to a sea container. Meanwhile, our team headed off for a London hotel and a three-hour tour of London.

While we all arrived safely back in the States the next day, the Keston collection sat in a warehouse for a week before beginning its three week journey across the pond. In early September it arrived in Galveston where it cleared customs and was delivered to a warehouse in Waco. From there the collection reached Baylor in five separate deliveries to a Baylor University warehouse, where several graduate students – but primarily Jon Mizuta – organized the boxes and began to deliver them to the collection's new home at the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies. By late November, during the 50th anniversary of the Dawson Institute, we had unloaded most of the books, the entire photo archive and artwork collection, and a small amount of the research files. Now, under the guidance of Larisa Seago, originally from Samara in Russia – the new Keston Center's archivist – work is being conducted daily to process the materials and begin the long process of cataloguing and preservation. The Lord has blessed us in this regard as well, as it is truly the hand of God that delivered us a native Russian speaker with work experience at the University of Pittsburgh seminary here to central Texas!

*Packing operation completed* (right to left) *Christopher Marsh, Michael Bourdeaux, Malcolm Walker, Bill Hare, Jon Mizuta & Tim Platt in Michael's garden in Iffley*

# Cult of St Nicholas

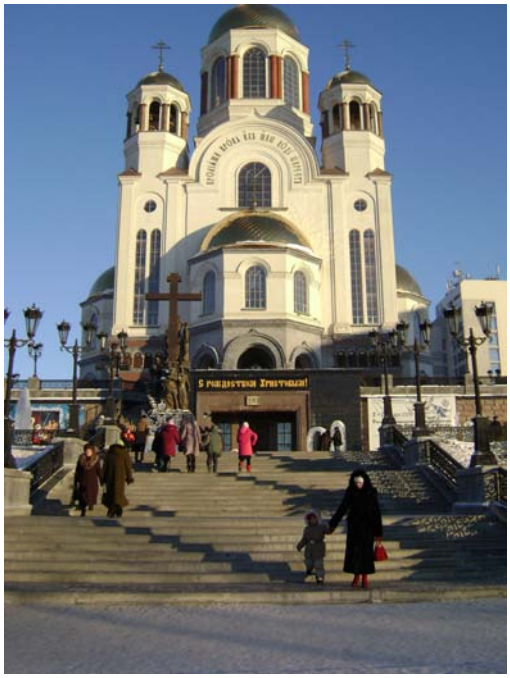
**by Xenia Dennen**

The cult of '*ded-moroz*', or Father Christmas, was apparent at every street corner in Moscow when I was there this year for Orthodox Christmas (7 January). Elaborately decorated Christmas trees were everywhere, even outside the entrance to the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour where one stood embellished with large phallic-like red candles. Yet, at least in Russia the Orthodox Church has kept alive a veneration for St Nicholas the Wonder-Worker, the 4th century Bishop of Myra who suffered under the Emperor Diocletian, and became renowned for his care of the poor and needy before gradually being transmogrified in 19th century America into a plump, jovial, pipe-smoking Father Christmas who was more often than not identified with advertisements for Coca Cola. Many churches in Russia are dedicated to St Nicholas and many icons of him have been painted. But I discovered on this trip yet another cult of St Nicholas, that surrounding the last Russian Tsar, Nicholas II.

*Martha lights a candle*

I had arrived in Moscow to join the Encyclopaedia team for their final fieldtrip – to Ekaterinburg – before the last volume of the Encyclopaedia was to be delivered to the publisher at the end of January. On Christmas morning I joined Sergei Filatov (head of the team) and his small daughter Martha at the Moscow University Church of St Tatyana for the liturgy. Martha was demurely bescarfed and had emerged like a butterfly from her thick snowsuit-chrysalis (it was -17) to reveal an elegant blue velvet dress. In the middle of the church was the crib, a bower made of fir tree branches within which was an icon of the Nativity placed on a lectern, which members of congregation venerated at intervals. After the service we all bundled up in our winter gear and, joined by the family of Martha's godfather and other friends, we all went off to Sergei's flat to celebrate.

Two days after Orthodox Christmas the Encyclopaedia team arrived in Ekaterinburg – it was -24. I was first shown round a remarkable convent, the Novo-Tikhvinsky Convent which now has 150 sisters (all those I saw looked extremely young). It had an icon-painting studio, a high-powered embroidery



*The Church-on-the-Blood*

unit using the latest technology, and a section devoted to translating Ancient Greek and Church Slavonic texts into Russian. In the studio I noticed an icon of Nicholas II and his family with photographs of the face of each member laid out; the sister painting this icon was studying the facial features of each family member and incorporating some aspect within the strict rules of iconography. Then, accompanied by one of the sisters, I was driven into the centre of Ekaterinburg to see the large shrine which has been built where once stood the Ipatiev house in which the royal family were murdered.

*Icon of the royal family in the convent studio*

The new church is called the Church-on-the-Blood. A lucrative trade in artefacts commemorating the last Tsar was evident in the shrine shop: a variety of plates depicting Nicholas II or the church were on sale, as well as many icons of him and his son. Even tiny bags of soil from the place where the family's burnt remains were dumped could be purchased. The iconostasis within the church incorporated icons of each royal family member and another of them grouped together. One part of the

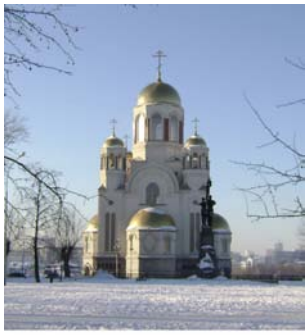
*Nicholas II & the Tsarina in the iconostasis of the Church-on-the-Blood*

church I found deeply moving: this was a quiet sanctuary built above where it was thought the family were shot. The liturgy was regularly celebrated on this spot.

Soon after this visit I listened to a talk about Nicholas II given by a well-known Moscow priest, Fr Artemi Vladimirov, and broadcast on the diocesan television channel, 'Union', which runs programmes round the clock. With the centenary of the royal family's murder in 1918 looming, Fr Artemi in a sing-song voice exhorted his listeners to pray to Nicholas II and described the place where the family died as Ekaterinburg's Golgotha: 'When you pray to him, your heart is given peace….Even the tsar's heart was human and so he felt the weight of the cross….He was guided by Providence.' While listening to this priest's honeyed tones, I could not but think of Nicholas II's political incompetence and bad judgement which brought his country to disaster. Alas, I'm afraid I felt far from peaceful.

*Icon of the royal family in the iconostasis*

But I discovered I was not alone in my misgivings about the cult surrounding Nicholas II. During an interview in Ekaterinburg's Old Believer Church of the Nativity with Mefodi Matyukin, the parish treasurer, I asked about this cult. Matyukin, a former colonel in the Russian army who had helped in the Chernobyl clear-up operation, was forthright in his condemnation. He considered that Nicholas should never have been canonised. 'I don't like all the commercial business which is being built up round the cult. Why have we been told to repent for the murder of Nicholas II and not for the murder of other tsars, like Paul I and Alexander II? And, anyway, Nicholas wasn't even tsar at the time of his death. He was associated with disreputable people like Rasputin and did much to harm the Russian people,' protested Matyukin. There may be others who think like this Old Believer former soldier, but I suspect such criticism is unlikely to be heeded by those planning the centenary events of 2008.



*Church-on-the-Blood photographed from the back*

# Putin and the Patriarch

**by Michael Bourdeaux**

High on a ladder in a remote village 30 miles down an unmade road beyond Kostroma in the far north of European Russia, Fr Georgi Edelstein holds bricks in his disabled hand and, with the other, cements them into a gap in a wall of his country church. A gang of convicts is helping him with the reconstruction work – 'The state destroyed my church: you can help rebuild it,' Edelstein had told the local mayor.

Similar scenes of repair and rebuilding can be seen in many of Russia's 89 regions as the Russian Orthodox Church enjoys a startling revival. Restored churches can be seen everywhere. Official sources state that there are now some 28,000 parish churches, 732 monasteries and convents and many priests are in training in new seminaries.

The extent of this revival would have been unimaginable when Mikhail Gorbachev achieved power in 1985. Even under Brezhnev believers were still being imprisoned; all were deprived of Christian education and literature.

Such apparent contradictions in the status and role of the church go back to the early Soviet era when Metropolitan Sergi, under severe duress, signed a declaration of loyalty to the Soviet State in 1927. It has never been repudiated. The last act of a group of bishops in the Solovki island prison in the Arctic

Ocean was to compose a letter denouncing Sergi's policy, but they died alone. Stalin granted no privileges in return for the compromise; the terror mounted, until World War Two brought a change.

In 1943 Stalin summoned the free bishops to the Kremlin; the resulting concordat remains the norm even today: there would be no criticism of government policies by church leaders. The State would control church institutions and appointments; only with the accession of Gorbachev did this change. He sanctioned a new law in 1990 granting complete freedom of religion, but many, both Communists and leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church, regarded this as a licence for anarchy and before long President Yeltsin yielded to the old guard, both secular and religious. His law of 1997 accorded – for the first time since before 1917 – a privileged position for the Orthodox Church (along with other 'traditional religions' – Islam, Judaism and Buddhism). Protestants, Catholics and all other Christian denominations had second-class status.

This law contradicts the separation of church and state proclaimed by the Constitution, but is not widely implemented by the police or the judiciary. However, local attacks against Protestants do occur. In Kaluga on 27 December members of *Nashi* ('Ours', the extremist pro-Putin youth movement) smashed all the windows of a Baptist and a Pentecostal church on the same night. Was this locally co-ordinated, or did a directive come from above? The law is semi-dormant, but could be animated at any moment, should the Kremlin wish to lean on minorities.

Even without this, however, the Moscow Patriarchate acts as though it heads a state church, while the few Orthodox clergy who oppose the church-state symbiosis face severe criticism, even loss of livelihood. In recent times no bishop has criticised any aspect of Kremlin policy. Patriarch Alexi II has on several occasions blessed the Russian army, most notably when it was about to descend on Chechnya, to destroy Grozny, the capital, and beat the local people into submission. Orthodox priests recently sprinkled holy water on a new Triumph surface-to-air missile. On 4 September last year the Patriarchate marked the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Soviet nuclear arsenal with a thanksgiving service in the new Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. The building teemed with senior military personnel wearing badges in honour of St Serafim of Sarov, whose monastery is near Arzamas, a centre of the nuclear industry.

Long since, the Moscow Patriarchate defrocked Fr Gleb Yakunin, a Moscow priest who, as an elected deputy in 1990, had privileged access to the KGB archives and discovered that the collaboration between some bishops and the state security agencies had been worse than even he had imagined. The church has never properly investigated this, clearly because so many of the bishops, not least the Patriarch himself, rose to power with the say-so of state authority.

Sometimes it is the local bishop who acts as an agent of secular power. Fr Sergei Taratukhin was imprisoned in the 1980s as a Soviet-era dissident. In prison he became a believer, later trained for the priesthood and became chaplain in Penal Colony No.10, near Chita in eastern Siberia. He served there seven years, befriending an inmate, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, condemned by a Moscow court in 2005 for financial misdemeanours in a trial widely seen as politically motivated.

Taratukhin became convinced that Khodorkovsky was a political prisoner and campaigned for him. Bishop Yevstafy, his diocesan, intervened and removed him to a remote parish. Taratukhin objected, so his bishop defrocked him. Now the priest has appeared abjectly contrite on TV, in a scene reminiscent of clergy who recanted their anti-Soviet activities in former days. The bishop has offered him forgiveness and partial reinstatement – he now organises rubbish collection and shovels snow from the paths around Chita's new cathedral.

The evidence of Keston Institute's Encyclopaedia *Religious Life in Russia Today* (now nearing completion with the imminent publication of the eighth volume in Russian) supports the contention that, although the Russian Orthodox Church is not established in law, in practice the state treats it as such.

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