

Keston Newsletter

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*Archbishop Malkhaz Songulashvili (centre) presides at the Maundy Thursday Eucharist during Holy Week 2008
Canon Alan Dennis, Sub-Dean of the Episcopal Cathedral of St John the Divine, New York, stands behind him*

Converted by Muslims

by Malkhaz Songulashvili
Archbishop of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia

At its National Council in 2006, the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia passed an amendment to its constitution which states 'the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia is the Church for Georgia'. This amendment was the result of radical changes within the life of the Church which inspired its current commitment to preach forgiveness and reconciliation to all in Georgia and to serve all those in need, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or social background.

Background History

The Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia was founded in 1867 in Tbilisi, Georgia's

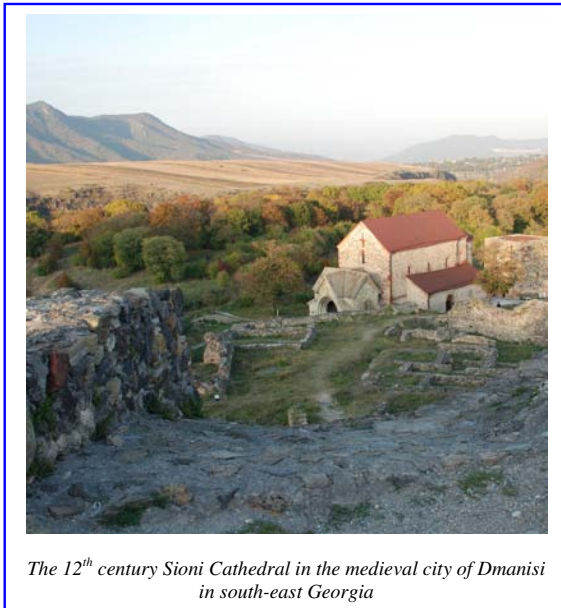
capital, at that time a provincial centre within the Russian Empire in the South Caucasus, known as the Transcaucasus. Georgia had been incorporated into the Russian Empire following the Georgyevsk Treaty, an agreement reached by Georgia and Russia – both Orthodox kingdoms – in 1783. The Treaty required Russia to defend Georgia against Muslim invasions, but King Irakly II of Georgia who signed the agreement did not realize what would be the consequences. In 1801 when King George XI of Georgia died, the Russian Empire violated the Georgyevsk Treaty, forced the Georgian royal family to abdicate and ultimately abolished the East Georgian Kingdom of Kart-Kakheti. Soon

after the other Georgian political entities – the Kingdom of Imeretia, the Principalities of Guria, Samegrelo, and Svanety – were also occupied by Russia.

The Georgian Orthodox Church

By the early 19th century the Georgian Orthodox Church was in a parlous state, weakened by numerous invasions of Georgia. The British and Foreign Bible Society records have preserved a report, which quotes the words of the Georgian Orthodox Archbishop Dositheos of Telavi:

‘He spake with deep concern of the state of education among the clergy, which in general consists in their being able to read the Church



service; very few of them having an adequate knowledge of Holy Scriptures. Religion, he said, was more cultivated among the females in Georgia than among the males; yea, than among the priests themselves.’

Rather than being strengthened through Georgia’s incorporation into what was after all another Orthodox country, the Church was in fact undermined by Russia. Its autocephaly was abolished in 1810 and its hierarchy merged with that of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Russia’s Holy Synod, which governed the Russian Orthodox Church and was closely allied to the Russian government, appointed an Exarch to govern the Georgian Orthodox Church, who, apart from the first one, was always ethnically Russian and had no

understanding of Georgian culture and spirituality. Gradually the Georgian language was eradicated from the liturgy, Georgian devotional art, icons, frescoes, and illuminations were replaced by Russian devotional art, and Russian became the language of theological instruction. The Church and its clergy were thus alienated from the Georgian people.

Birth of the Evangelical Baptist Church

In such a political setting the Baptist movement in Tbilisi was born. Through a German Baptist settler called Martin Kalweit who had come to Tbilisi in the early 1860s, Eastern Christianity merged with the radical ideas of Europe’s Reformation. From the start this new Church was focussed on mission and aimed to reach various ethnic and national groups. It had a sense of catholicity, of belonging to the wider body of Christ’s Church, and a sense of international ministry. The German Baptist newspaper, *Missionblatt*, reported that as early as 1884 the Baptist Church in Tbilisi was supporting Christian work in Spain and China. Its preachers spread the newly acquired faith to other parts of the Russian Empire so that Tbilisi and Georgia came to be considered the cradle of the Russian Baptist movement.

After the Russian Revolution, Georgia became an independent nation for a few years. Although Lenin initially recognised its independence along with that of some West European nations, Georgia was annexed by the Red Army in 1921 after fierce resistance in the suburbs of Tbilisi.

Ironically the capital fell thanks to a Georgian conspiracy. Stalin, a Georgian, did not wish his home country to remain outside the boundaries of the Soviet Union; this would have made him a foreigner in Moscow where he was soon to replace Lenin. Sergo Ordzhonikidze, also a Georgian, led the Red Army to his homeland and after Georgia’s surrender sent the following infamous telegram to the Kremlin: ‘25 February 1921. Tbilisi. To Lenin and Stalin. The Red Flag is flying over Tbilisi. Your Sergo.’

The Revd Ilia Kandelaki

The independent Georgian Baptist Church was founded during the brief period of Georgian independence and was led by a man of vision, the Revd Ilia Kandelaki, a Georgian who was converted in 1913 and baptized in Vilno

(Vilnius today) Lithuania. The first Georgian Baptist service was held on 19 March 1919. Iliia Kandelaki, who felt no antagonism towards the Georgian Orthodox Church and admired the spiritual and cultural legacy of Georgia, believed that the newly established Georgian Baptist congregation should serve all the people of Georgia and nurture a deep Christian faith.

In his report to the 1926 Baptist Congress in the USSR he bemoaned the religious situation in Georgia:

'[...] in the heart of the Georgian, religious feeling has been almost totally atrophied; but in our view this is not hopeless because religious feeling has not been stifled through natural evolution, but artificially suffocated from the outside. Before the Revolution, in order to avoid any kind of political threat from Georgia, the Russian tsarist government invested much effort and vigorous measures in weakening and russifying the Georgian nation. Much attention was given to the Georgian [Orthodox] Church, because, as I have already reported, for many centuries it was the main source of Georgian culture. For this reason the Georgian [Orthodox] Church was oppressed and Georgian priests who opposed the implementation of tsarist policy were exiled. Very often in Georgian villages Russian priests were appointed who did not speak any Georgian. Even the senior Bishop with the title of Exarch of Georgia had to be a Russian from European Russia. The principal of the Theological Seminary had to be a Russian Archimandrite from Russia, and the Georgian language was not taught to future Georgian priests in any teaching establishments. Subsequently even [ethnically] Georgian priests often became agents of russification. Thus was the Georgian [Orthodox] Church ravaged. Georgians first lost respect for the Church, then all their religious feeling cooled and died. Now we can clearly apply to them the words of the song: "Your temple, once so beautiful, has been desecrated, the altar of the Lord is buried under a heap of ashes."'

Iliia Kandelaki was quite open about his wish that the Baptist Church become the church for all of Georgia, and not just for the Baptist community, at a time when (in 1926) non-Orthodox churches were still under the illusion

that the Soviet regime was a God-given gift to the churches which had suffered persecution under the Russian Orthodox Church before the Revolution. When Lenin died in 1924 non-Orthodox churches sincerely mourned his death: during my research in the Keston Archive I discovered a number of letters and telegrams from Baptist and other church leaders to the Kremlin, one of which read, 'Dear Lenin, even though you did not believe in God you were our brother'. Such people believed that the Soviet regime was their ally, and although before 1927 they saw how the Russian Orthodox Church and its clergy were persecuted by the Soviet regime, they did not realize that the same could happen to them.



Baptist house communion, June 2007, in the city of Zugdidi, western Georgia

At the 1926 Baptist Congress Iliia Kandelaki spoke about his vision for Georgia and called everybody to support his cause:

'Today believers in Georgia are faced with a mountain of a task – to revive faith in God among the Georgian people and to call them to Christ. We are a small weak group and the task before us is immense. Humanly speaking it is ridiculous to think we can contribute to this mission, but that which is impossible for men is quite possible for God. Therefore we are firmly convinced that, with the Lord's help and with your support, dear brothers and sisters, we will climb this mountain, and the Georgian people will not be excluded from the list of those who, clothed with white robes and with palms in their hands, will praise God before the throne of the Lamb.'

Iliia Kandelaki was quoting here from the Book of Revelation (7:9-12) and referring to the martyrs without realizing that a few months after publicising his vision for Georgia he

would himself be martyred. He was killed on 23 August 1927 in East Georgia when he was returning from a preaching mission to the village of Kisiskhevi.

Soviet Persecution

The Baptist press described Ilia Kandelaki's assassination as 'an assault by bandits on the life of a minister'. Soon, however, it became clear that his assassination marked the beginning of Soviet persecution against the non-Orthodox churches, which was to continue until the collapse of the Soviet Union. The USSR's anti-religious policy varied during certain periods but in general it involved the closure of churches, the arrest and exile of clergy and active laity, infiltration of congregations, murder, humiliation and discrimination of various kinds.

The Church's main mission during those years was to survive the repressive regime and keep church life going, so it developed what the Revd Karl Heinz Walter of the European Baptist Federation has called 'survival theology'. It is self-evident that this theology would lead religious communities in general and the Baptist community in particular into isolation from the rest of the society. In such circumstances the mission and vision of the Gospel was minimised; in other words the Church was driven into a ghetto and deprived of its right to serve the wider community, losing in the process many of the faculties that make up the essence of being a church. Obviously Ilia Kandelaki's vision for the Church in Georgia had, for the time being, to be put on one side.

The collapse of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of a new era in the life of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia. Georgia became independent again and with the joy of freedom the symbols of Soviet occupation were swept away: monuments of Lenin and other Soviet leaders were pulled down, their portraits and those of Marx and Engels were burnt. That was the easiest part of the revolutionary changes of the early 1990s. However, a country's independence does not necessarily bring freedom of mind. The people of Georgia

still had to learn how to live in this new world and how to use the new situation as the foundation upon which to build a civil society.

Georgian Orthodox-Baptist Relations

The Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia along with the majority Georgian Orthodox Church and other religious groups could have contributed to the democratic development of the country. This sadly did not happen. Much to the disappointment of the Evangelical Baptist Church, the Georgian Orthodox Church got entrapped in religious nationalism and distanced herself both from the Baptists and other denominations. This was particularly painful for the Georgian Baptists because during Soviet times they and the Orthodox, faced with the same anti-religious policy, had developed exceptionally good relations and a great sense of fellowship.

For the Georgian Orthodox Church the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia was the only ethnically Georgian Church with which they could easily relate. A high point in Orthodox-Baptist relations occurred in the late 1970s when a theological dialogue was held during which the participants produced a fascinating document – to this day a unique example of Orthodox-Baptist understanding. At the time both sides agreed that it would not be long before the two communities could participate in 'common worship'. In the



Archbishop Malkhaz Songulashvili (left) & His Holiness & Beatitude Ilia II, Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia & Archbishop of Mtskheta & Tbilisi, meet in 2007



Ecumenical meeting 2007: (right to left) Archbishop Gerasim (Georgian Orthodox Church), His Holiness & Beatitude Ilia II (Catholicos-Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church), the Very Revd Jonathan Greener (Dean of Wakefield Cathedral), the Rt Revd Stephen Platten (Bishop of Wakefield) & Archbishop Malkhaz Songulashvili

introduction to this extraordinary document we read:

‘With the blessing of Ilia II, Catholicos-Patriarch of Mtskheta and Tbilisi, head of the Georgian Orthodox Church and president of the WCC, on the one hand, and the leader of the Georgian Evangelical Christian Baptists, on the other hand, the foundation for regular dialogue has been laid. The aim of this dialogue is to bring Christian believers into closer spiritual and fraternal relations, to exchange opinions about the faith, and in consequence to introduce common worship for Christian believers in Georgia.

Participating brothers in the dialogue from the Orthodox Church and from the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church assume that if Christ is their true Lord, all obstacles, however difficult and burdensome they may seem, will be overcome through divine love, patriotism, and unshakable faith. A step will then be taken towards a common Christian faith and common Christian worship.’

During the dialogue, as the resulting document testified, the participants discussed such subjects as baptism, the Eucharist, confession, the place of Mary, Christ’s mother, and the saints, the Holy Trinity, hierarchy, the cross, symbolism, rituals, icons, and produced some fascinating conclusions and suggestions for both churches, some of which have been implemented by them.

Despite the achievements of this dialogue, relations between the two Churches deteriorated when the Soviet Union collapsed and Orthodoxy became associated with Georgian nationalism. Religious nationalism within the State and the nationalistic impulses within the Georgian Orthodox Church combined to open the way for religious violence to erupt in the country. The Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia was excluded from national life, and for a number of years the State orchestrated extremist groups, led by Orthodox Archpriest Basil Mkalavishvili and the Society of the Cross, which organised campaigns against religious minorities. These extremist groups were banned in 2003 after the Rose Revolution when a new government came to power, which was determined to stop religious violence. Although the new government successfully achieved this goal, complete religious liberty has not as yet been attained and Georgia still has a long way to go.

Georgia and Chechnya

The Evangelical Baptist Church gradually regained its vision of becoming the Church for Georgia well before the Rose Revolution. This process was prompted by an historical event – the second Chechen war – which took place during the period of religious violence before the Georgian elections. In late 1999 many Chechen refugees started entering Georgia

through the snow-capped mountain passes in the north. News about the refugees' appalling situation reached Tbilisi in December, during Advent: the death of women and children was reported by the mass media but provoked little response from the Georgian public. This was not surprising since Chechens, like other North Caucasian Muslim tribes, had been the traditional enemies of Georgia.

Before Chechnya discovered that it had oil it was very poor and often had to struggle to survive. In the late Middle Ages, like other North Caucasian tribes, it developed an economic system based on kidnapping: the Chechens would raid Christian villages in Georgia, kidnapping young men and women in order to sell them in the slave markets of Istanbul or to get ransom money from the families of those kidnapped. Understandably the Chechens had long been hated by the Georgians.

Possibly an even stronger reason for this hatred was Chechnya's support for Abkhazia during the latter's civil war with Georgia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. During this war Chechens fought against the territorial integrity of Georgia and were particularly cruel towards Georgian civilians. Shocking reports of Chechen atrocities circulated: after the capture of a Georgian village in the Gagra district, all

the situation of its fellow Baptists in Grozny, the Chechen capital, and heard about the kidnapping of two young Baptist women from the Grozny church, neither of whom was ever found. Just as shocking was the discovery of the deputy Baptist minister's head in Grozny's market place.



A Baptist worshipper

Aid for Chechen Refugees

On the second Sunday of Advent 1999 Naira Gelashvili, a famous Georgian woman writer, came to the Baptist Cathedral in Tbilisi and asked to speak to the congregation about the Chechen refugees. She was well-informed about the situation in the mountains and the refugee camps and said: 'I have visited all the churches in this city asking for help for the refugees but none of them were willing to help.'

After her appeal to the congregation I asked them for a response: what should they do about these refugees who happened to be their traditional enemies? There was silence. I could guess what they were thinking: that the Chechens had inflicted suffering and death on Georgians and now were getting their just deserts. But at the same time everybody felt that such an attitude was somehow wrong. Suddenly the silence was broken by an elderly lady who stood up and said: 'Bishop, why don't we cancel Christmas and give the money we have raised to the Chechens!?''



Maundy Thursday 2008: Archbishop Malkhaz washes the feet of his people

the inhabitants were herded onto the village green and beheaded by the Chechens, who then proceeded to play football with their heads.

Georgian Baptists also had a particular reason for hating the Chechens. The Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia kept in touch with

Clearly we could not cancel Christmas, but nevertheless that Sunday something extraordinary began to happen in the life of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia. From that day onwards the entire community became involved in Chechen relief work, collecting



Archbishop Malkhaz censuring the congregation in the Baptist Cathedral

To affirm its new sense of identity, the Church has consecrated a chapel, dedicated to St Luke, in its large multi-purpose social centre, Betheli. In the chapel's apse, on the right and left of Christ the Pantocrator, there are two frescoes. The one on the left depicts the return of the Prodigal Son – a symbol of humanity's reconciliation with the Father – while the one on the right depicts the Good Samaritan – a symbol of the Church's commitment to serving all those in need.

warm clothing, vegetables, onions, potatoes, sweets... all for their enemies! After delivering our first cargo of goods we realized that the refugees needed more than material help. We started to get emotionally involved with the lives and suffering of the Chechen people; the homes of Baptist clergy became places of refuge for Chechen refugees; Christians and Muslims would pray in separate rooms, and then in the evening they would come together for dinner and celebrate their common humanity.

At first the Chechens were suspicious: why were Christians helping them when even local Muslims in Georgia were reluctant to have any contact with them? Soon our initial formal relations with the Chechens developed into genuine friendship and partnership. With the help of Muslim clerics from the refugee camps, we set up a school for Chechen refugee children, and over a period of a year, well before any international aid agencies stepped in, about 1,100 children were fed every day in the school dining-hall. The Church also supplied all educational materials required and provided continuous care.

A New Mission Discovered

This encounter with our traditional enemies has certainly been one of the most important experiences for the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia. By helping and serving the Chechens the Church escaped from its isolation and acted as an agent for peace and reconciliation on behalf of Georgia and on behalf of all Christians. The Church has now taken some bold steps towards becoming the Church for Georgia through its involvement in the political, cultural, religious and social life of the country.

Leaders of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia now sometimes say that they have been converted to Christianity by the Muslim Chechens, because their encounter with them helped the entire Baptist community to see the Gospel in all its fullness and to make the message of forgiveness, reconciliation, peace, and service of the poor an integral part of the Church's ministry. The Church realized that if it could serve the needs of the Chechens, it could also minister to everyone in Georgia who needs help and affirmation. The Church is now on its way to becoming the Church for Georgia.



From the sanctuary (left to right) Bishop Merab Gaprindashvili (Evangelical Baptist Church), Archbishop Malkhaz Songulashvili, & the Rt Revd Stephen Platten (Bishop of Wakefield) give the blessing at the end of an ecumenical service in the Baptist Cathedral (2007)

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Last year the Baptist Cathedral was presented with the Cross of Nails by Coventry Cathedral in recognition of its ministry of reconciliation, and was later renamed the Peace Cathedral.

Edward Lucas: *The New Cold War: How the Kremlin Menaces both Russia and the West*

by Michael Bourdeaux

The New Cold War has been making waves all over the media: a reasoned, non-sensational account of the politics of Putin's Russia. Readers of this *Newsletter* will not purchase it for new insights into church life, for they will have already read much more in these pages. However, the author, Edward Lucas, is a long-time friend of Keston, whom you can hear speak at our next AGM (1 November) and every page illuminates the political background to our research and publications.

Edward Lucas was formerly a resident journalist in Moscow and is now Central and East European correspondent of *The Economist*, one of the world's most influential publications on its subject and related politics. One of his earliest assignments saw him enter Lithuania just after it had declared unilateral independence from the Soviet Union, while the situation was still volatile and dangerous. As a stunning gesture of intent, the local authorities issued him with 'Lithuanian Visa No.1', which I have seen.

These pages throw light on many issues which receive only a passing reference – or none at all – in the secular press, eternally wedded to the subject of President Putin's bad relations with the West and the politics of oil and gas. It's not that these subjects do not appear in this book – indeed, they are fully discussed – but Lucas fills in so much background. For example, he writes chillingly of the plot behind the bombing of private apartments in Moscow and Ryazan, blamed on the Chechens as an excuse for a genocidal war against them but now, in the view of the author and many others, almost certainly proved to be the Kremlin's work.

Lucas charts the systematic curtailment of press and TV freedom and the murder of many journalists who have tried to investigate sensitive issues (47 in 15 years, by his reckoning). He notes that incarceration in psychiatric hospitals is in use again, a common tactic against dissidents in Soviet times. He cites the repression of the Mari-El people in

the Lower Volga region, a nationality ethnically linked with the Finns. Suppression of much of the British Council's work in Russia (December 2006) came just in time for its inclusion.

He quotes what Fr Vsevolod Chaplin, a chief spokesman of the Moscow Patriarchate, says about the Roman Catholics: 'After the breakdown of the Soviet Union a great number of people in the Roman Catholic Church decided that was the moment when it was possible to conquer these big territories and huge populations' (p.158). From my personal experience I know this to be untrue – indeed, it is a scandalous statement. I was an adviser to the Catholic charity, Aid to the Church in Need, in the early 1990s. Their intentions were humanitarian and generous to the Russian Orthodox Church: Catholic money was designated without strings to help rebuild Orthodox seminary education. The supply ceased only when these very seminaries became hotbeds of anti-Catholic propaganda.

Keston members will be horrified to read of Putin's persecution of ethnic Georgians on Russian soil, something which I did not know. I strongly recommend this book and it concludes with a call to action. Writing of the Baltic States and other nations formerly incorporated in the Soviet Union (p.276) Lucas concludes: 'A central message of this book is that the world's richest and strongest free countries must stand behind these small states now under threat from Russia. It may be inconvenient, costly or even painful to do so, but if we do not win the New Cold War on terms of our choosing, we will fight at a time and place chosen by our adversary, and the odds will be tilted against us.'

Sadly, one does not hear a single voice belonging to any party in Westminster proposing such a policy. There are more votes in criticising immigration from countries which have recently joined the European Union.

Home News

We are delighted to announce that this year's Annual General Meeting on Saturday 1 November will be held in the Great Chamber at the Charterhouse in London. As it is All Saints' Day there will be a Eucharist at 11 a.m. following which the Master, Dr James Thomson, will welcome Keston members and tell us about the history of this former medieval monastery. We will deal with Keston business at 12 noon. Lunch will be provided by the staff of Charterhouse. Nearer the time we will circulate a form which we would urge you to complete so that we know how many will be attending. This year we will need to ask you to help us cover the cost of the lunch.

After lunch at 2 p.m. we will be able to listen to two speakers, Archbishop Malkhaz Songulashvili, leader of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia, and Edward Lucas, the Central and East European correspondent of *The Economist* and author of the recently published book, *The New Cold War*. Archbishop Malkhaz is currently a Keston Scholar working on a DPhil at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. As well as being Archbishop of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia since 1994, he was made Ecumenical Canon of Norwich (2005) and Wakefield Cathedrals (2006) and was decorated with the Lambeth Cross by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

After both talks there will be time for questions and discussion. The day will end with tea at 4 p.m. Please put this date in your diary and come to what will be a fascinating day. Farringdon underground station is only five minutes' walk away from the Charterhouse (Charterhouse Square, London EC1M 6AN).

Now that Keston's financial position is stable, the trustees at their March Council meeting decided to offer some scholarships for those working on the history of religion during the communist period. Information about Keston scholarships is currently on the website. Those selected will receive funding for a term at Baylor spent working in the Keston Archive or for research in other important and relevant archives.

At last year's Annual General Meeting, a question was asked as to what were the criteria for life membership. Members who make a substantial donation to Keston, or write to the Chairman in confidence that they intend to leave Keston a legacy, will automatically be made life members.

Michael Bourdeaux writes:

I have been busy this year writing obituaries for *The Times* and *The Guardian*, but work at my desk was broken up in April by one of the most interesting trips I have ever had to Russia. It seemed modest, compared with some in the past – a week in Moscow only. However, it was for BBC Radio 4 and was arranged at rather short notice. This was to record the latest in my occasional series for 'Sunday Worship', which goes out on Radio 4 after the 8 a.m. news. The Revd Stephen Shipley and I have now travelled together to Russia for this purpose no less than eight times and have made seven programmes (sometimes we did a 'Choral Vespers' for Radio 3 as well).

For the first time we concentrated on an individual, rather than a season or an anniversary in the Orthodox Church. For a considerable time the idea had been floating around in my mind of trying to publicise the life, death, and legacy of the last Christian martyr of Soviet atheism, Fr Alexander Men, who was murdered in September 1990. I cannot tell his story here – that must wait for the programme (to be broadcast on Sunday, 7 September at 8.10 a.m.) – and also for articles which *The Times* and the *Church Times* have commissioned to coincide with the broadcast.

What impressed me and made the trip so special was the evidence we gathered about the huge influence that Fr Alexander's legacy commands, both from his published work, new titles among which are still appearing, and also the devotion of his personal followers. The programme is cast as a meditation, not a documentary as such, but we follow in his footsteps, meeting his brother, his widow, lay people whom he converted and priests who officiate in the churches associated with him. One moment I must recount: I wrote part of the text of my linking commentary sitting at Fr Alexander's desk in the study of the house at Semkhoz, Sergiev Posad (lovingly preserved exactly as it was by his widow). I have rarely been more moved.

We still have some finishing touches and editing to do, so the final form of the programme is not yet clear in my mind, but I hope we can convey just something of the significance of one of the greatest Christian figures of the second half of the 20th century.

In July I am giving ten lectures in two weeks at a 'Phoenix Institute' summer school in Vienna (mainly students from Eastern Europe and Latin America) and in late August I leave for a cruise through the Baltic for Saga. All of our lecturers are preparing to speak on the theme, 'Before the Wall Came Down' on the Saga Ruby – perhaps there may be some of you who might be able to join us.

Metropolitan Laurus

by Michael Bourdeaux

If ever a man faced the task of reconciling the irreconcilable, it was Metropolitan Laurus. The Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR), of which he was head from October 2001, had, for eight decades, represented the uncompromising face of anti-communism. Moscow was the enemy.

In 1927 Metropolitan Sergi in Moscow was forced to sign an agreement with Stalin's aggressive atheist regime, in which he proclaimed that the 'joys and successes' of the Soviet State would be the 'joys and successes' of the Orthodox Church. The horrified reaction could not be openly expressed in Russia, but in the free world an alternative church administration came into being at Karlovac (in present-day Croatia). This was not a 'schismatic' church, as it was vigorously portrayed later by the re-emergent Moscow Patriarchate, but consisted of people who were determined to keep alive the ancient traditions of Russian Orthodoxy while they were being destroyed in the homeland.

After many vicissitudes, and with branches worldwide, ROCOR established its headquarters and built a new monastery complex at Jordanville, a rural village in Upstate New York. To the astonishment of many, Metropolitan Laurus brought the two branches of the Russian Orthodox Church together in a ceremony in Moscow in May last year, a lavish televised occasion attended by President Putin in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. This building was itself a symbol, having been rebuilt in the 1990s after being razed to the ground 60 years earlier.

Metropolitan Laurus was born Vasili Mikhailovich Skurla at Ludomirovo (in present-day Slovakia) on 1 January 1928, his birth therefore almost precisely coinciding with the origin of the Church he would eventually lead. He never knew any life outside it. At the age of eleven his father, an impoverished exiled Russian widower, allowed him to join the local monastery. At the end of the troubled war years, all the monks moved to

the new monastery at Jordanville in 1946. He was then 18 and this is where he would spend the rest of his life, apart from travelling when necessary to represent his Church. In 1948 he took monastic vows, adopting the name Laurus (Lavr in Russian). He was ordained priest in 1954 and consecrated bishop in 1967.



In October 2001 Laurus was elected fifth head of ROCOR. Under his aegis, the Holy Trinity Monastery at Jordanville became not only a more beautiful, but a more open place. The surrounding peaceful countryside could have been transplanted from Russia; husbandry of its lands ensured prosperity; religious activities proliferated. An intensive Orthodox music summer school brought in students from all over the

USA and welcomed choir trainers from Russia. A re-invigorated publishing house inaugurated a fine new series of volumes on the history of the Russian Church.

The atmosphere there was inclusive rather than exclusive: times were changing under Metropolitan Laurus. Inevitably, there was opposition to plans for re-unification with the Moscow Patriarchate. Did not, after all, ROCOR occupy the moral high ground? In truth, with the collapse of communism and the achievement of religious liberty, there was no sign of a mass defection from the Moscow Patriarchate and ROCOR continued to sit on the sidelines. Only some 78 Russian parishes and 84 clergy formed the associated 'Free Russian Orthodox Church' and then these endured internal schisms over the re-unification issue.

For those living outside Russia, practicalities began to override unending debates over the legitimacy of the Moscow Patriarchate (which Stalin had established at the end of World War II). 'We are tired', a priest at Jordanville said, 'of visiting Russia, but not being able to take communion in our own churches'.

How did Metropolitan Laurus draw together the irreconcilable sides? What he aimed at was inter-communion rather than structural unity. Hierarchies and jurisdictions would remain distinct: importantly now the Moscow Patriarchate will not appoint Laurus's successor, but ROCOR will hold its own election. Laurus was the first head of his Church ever to visit Moscow; he did not, however, live long enough to see how this historic step would ultimately bring together (or not) all the disparate strands of his Church.

In an interview with the Russian *Kommersant* newspaper during the preparatory visit (2006), Metropolitan Laurus claimed: 'The Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia has fulfilled her service of witness by contradicting blasphemous lies and stating to the world the truth about the persecution and sufferings of the Russian Orthodox Church at the hands of the godless state, and about the numerous martyrs and confessors of the faith of Christ.'

Deacon Vladimir Tsurikov, responsible for the publication programme at the Holy Trinity Monastery, summed up his legacy: 'His prayerful life guided him to the end of his days. The last week before his repose, Metropolitan Laurus spent an average of ten

hours a day in church, participating in services with the monks during the first week of Great Lent.'



Metropolitan Laurus (left) & Patriarch Alexi

The Keston Archive

Soviet Church Delegation in New Zealand: 1987

Kenneth Prebble before retirement was a senior and well-known Anglican priest in New Zealand, his last post being Archdeacon of Waitemata in the Auckland Diocese. Michael Bourdeaux met him during his first visit to New Zealand in the 1970s; they discovered they were graduates of the same Oxford college, and became firm friends. Later Kenneth Prebble visited Keston and, determined to help publicise the true position of the churches in the USSR, decided to join a small Keston support group founded in New Zealand. In May 1987 a Russian Orthodox delegation was invited to visit New Zealand by the National Council of Churches (NCC). What ensued is described vividly by Kenneth Prebble in his memoirs which he entitled My Brush with Communism.

I had found a job as an actor, and was thoroughly enjoying it. There were not many male actors around to play old men's parts, and it was such tremendous fun, besides providing an addition to my slender pension, but in 1987 there was a call to arms.

One day I read in the newspaper that a prestigious deputation of Russian clergy was about to descend on New Zealand in three weeks time at the invitation of the NCC. My first move was to contact John Childers

[Pentecostal minister and leader in Auckland of Voice of the Martyrs, an interdenominational organisation which defends persecuted Christians. Ed.] and we reviewed the situation together. We knew that the object of the delegation would be to present a bland picture of the Soviet Union where communists and Christians were living in harmony, and where, although the Soviet Government did impose certain restrictions on religious activities, it was quite possible to live one's life as conscience and belief dictated. Our task was

simple – to tell the true story of what was really happening.

Our first task was to discover just when they would arrive and where they would be speaking. We thought it best not to enquire ourselves but to ask others to telephone the NCC office instead, but they found the office staff to be cagey and vague. It was here that a nun, sister Eileen, came to our rescue; though retired herself and living in Auckland, she had younger friends in her Order, living and working all over New Zealand whom she contacted by phone – would they enquire from the local secretary of the NCC just when, where, and which Russian clergyman would be holding a meeting in their town? In this way we were able to build up a picture of their plan some time before it was officially published.

The deputation would arrive in Auckland and be officially welcomed by the NCC at a service in St Matthew-in-the-City on the evening of 16 May. The next day they would preach in both the Anglican and Roman Catholic Cathedrals, and in some of the bigger non-conformist churches. The deputation would then split up into two parties, one to work its way south towards Wellington, holding meetings in the bigger centres on their way towards Wellington, while the other would fly directly to Dunedin and work their way up to Wellington, where they would all preach at services in the capital much as they had done in Auckland. On the following day they would hold a combined lunchtime meeting in St Andrew-on-the-Terrace, a mere stone's throw from Parliament. To my mind this church plays much the same role as St Martin-in-the-Fields in London, as a place where matters of general interest can be discussed.

But we had more difficulty discovering the names of the delegates. I have kept a file of all my correspondence during the affair, which starts with a flurry of faxes between Auckland and Keston in the ten days before their arrival, giving a list of names, and then another fax the next day correcting one of the names and substituting another. Jane Ellis, who appeared by this time to have become Keston's principal researcher, would give us a short biography of each person on the deputation, also the names of those Christians who were currently in trouble, the charges against them, their prison sentences, and the place where they were serving their sentences. By referring to the date when she had sent the information Sister Eileen would look it out in her records, which

we would cyclo-style, and send to all parts of the country where there were branches of the Voice of the Martyrs (VOM). John Childers gathered a team from the Auckland branch for me to conduct a training session in the technique of asking questions and how to follow them up with further questions. We just had the time, with no margin to spare.

Sister Eileen, John Childers, and I – what an unlikely triumvirate! – a retired nun, a Pentecostal minister and a renegade Archdeacon – but God can only use what comes to hand at the time. Now let my reports to Keston tell their own story.

Kenneth Prebble to Michael Bourdeaux 18 May 1987

Greetings to you, Alyona Kojevnikov, Jane Ellis, and anyone else who has taken the trouble to help us with information over the past fortnight. Its time I sent you an interim report.

The Orthodox delegation arrived on 16 May, consisting of: Bishop Antoni of Stavropol and Baku, Archimandrites Iosif Pustoutov and Manuil Pavlov, Archpriest Boris Udovenko, Protodeacon Andrei Chizhov, and interpreter Sergei Gordeev. They are being sponsored by the Conference of the Churches of Christ in Aotearoa – the new name for the NCC. The host and sponsor is Dr Alan Brash.

Battle honours for the week-end go to the VOM, and their leading member in Auckland, the Revd John Childers, the Pentecostal minister to whom I introduced you. The decision was to go to every meeting and to put questions, all based on *Keston News Service (KNS)* information about: individuals, e.g. Rusak, Ogorodnikov etc; 'Peace'; Gorbachev's attitude to religion.

The questions were carefully thought out beforehand – e.g. Why has Rusak been sent to prison? [*Deacon Vladimir Rusak was tried in September 1986 and sentenced to seven years' strict regime camp and five years' exile.* Ed.] What can he have done to merit such a savage sentence? What is the Church doing to help Ogorodnikov in his present difficulties? [*Alexander Ogorodnikov was tried in September 1980 and sentenced to six years' strict regime camp and five years' exile.* Ed.] Why does the USSR have such a huge standing army? Why conscription? Why does it not recognise conscientious objectors? Why does not the Soviet Union withdraw from

Afghanistan? In view of Gorbachev's speech in Uzbekistan in November does it mean any change in Soviet policy? [*Hostility to religion had still been evident in November 1986 when Gorbachev, while in Tashkent, sharply denounced Party members who took part in religious ceremonies, but there was an indication of change in December 1986 when Andrei Sakharov, leader of the human rights movement, was allowed to return from exile. In February and June 1987 there were two amnesties of political and religious prisoners, and during that year a significant number of Soviet press articles portrayed religion and some believers in a positive light.* Ed.]

Events over the weekend were as follows.

Saturday 16 May

Liturgical welcome in St Matthew-in-the-City (Anglican). Ralph Taylor (who can look very respectable when he wants to) standing in the porch, handing out leaflets to everyone who went in. John Childers takes front seat, just a few feet from the delegation. As soon as the service starts, puts up a poster with enlarged photo of Rusak with 'Free Rusak' written over it, lights candle and prays. (The photo you sent arrived just in time the day before. We got it on to a sophisticated photocopying machine and it 'blew up' to about 24" x 15" very satisfactorily.) Other supporters were there as well. The delegation looked *very* displeased, the NCC hosts looked *very* displeased, but couldn't do a dammed thing about it!

9.30 a.m. The Bishop and another Canon at the Anglican Cathedral. John Childers there again with his poster, candle etc. Others met him after the service with questions.

10 a.m. Other Russians at Pitt Street Methodist Church. No questions invited, but VOM team stood in the porch giving out leaflets. The Minister ordered them out, so they went outside in the street. The minister very angry, pursues them into the street and seizes the leaflets.

11 a.m. Reception of delegates at St Patrick's R.C. Cathedral. John Childers goes in to the back of the church, takes a small table into the central aisle, fixes up his poster with candle and kneels in prayer throughout the service. As the procession comes out after Mass, it has to divide and flow round him. The people follow, expressing encouragement and sympathy. Monsignor Arrahill, the Administrator, comes up afterwards and tells

him to 'keep up the good work'. The Bishop and Udovenko are taken off to lunch at the Presbytery, where Arrahill and a Dominican friend of mine, Fr Eugene O'Sullivan, have undertaken to press them with more questions about Rusak.

7.30 p.m. Summerville Presbyterian Church, Remuera. After service there is question time at which members are pressed with questions on the lines indicated above. Alan Brash (NCC leader) is quite furious, and says at the conclusion that he is 'disappointed' that a Presbyterian church should 'allow' such questions to be asked!

At another service, held at the same time in a Baptist church, the minister refuses to permit questions when he saw the questioner was John Childers. The minister was, apparently, extremely angry.

I did not attend any of the meetings – simply provided information, and suggested questions. Udovenko seems to be a man worth watching. He speaks very good English, has a pleasing manner. Went on a delegation only two months ago to New Jersey. John Childers guessed that he may be the real leader. He had several talks with him during the day. He told John that he had not heard of Rusak before. He then asked him when he had been arrested and tried, and when John told him, seemed genuinely surprised that it was so recently.

I will keep you informed on the further progress of the delegations as news comes to hand. We have no idea what the Keston support group members may have in mind as the time has been short to organise anything.

Personal news: I finished my novel last week – very timely as I've been offered a part in a production of *The Sound of Music*. Rehearsals start on 25 May and the show to run from 4 July to 29 August. Isn't life one long joke! – and one long tragedy!

Kenneth Prebble to Michael Bourdeaux 21 May 1987

I had not meant to write again before the weekend, but there is a piece of news which I think I should report to you at once.

The Russians were in Dunedin last night, and were at an Anglican church, where there was a fairly strong team of VOM people. They displayed Rusak's picture again and lit their candle, and then followed up with questions on

the lines we had recommended. At the social gathering which followed, one of the VOM team approached Manuil Pavlov informally about Rusak. The consistent line of the Russians up to now has been that they've never heard of him.

Manuil beckoned his questioner aside, and, together with someone from the VOM team who speaks Russian, got them into a side room and said: 'We know about this man, but we have to work with the system. He will be released in a month's time.' The VOM man is Dieter Klier, who was born in a German concentration camp, now married to a New Zealander and living in Dunedin. I just heard yesterday that their other team was to be speaking that evening at a Baptist church in Palmerston North – in time for me to ring up one of my sons and his wife to ask if they would go along and ask questions about Fr Sofronov. We are aiming to add in an extra name here and there as opportunity presents itself. There should be a *very* useful development at the weekend. I'll keep you in touch.

**Michael Bourdeaux to Kenneth Prebble
29 May 1987**

We were quite astounded here by the superb organisation of your consistent attempts to do something really effective with the Russian Orthodox delegation as recounted in your letters of 18 and 21 May. I read the first of these at our general staff meeting last Monday and people were perched on the edge of their chairs. I decided not to publicise what you said about Deacon Rusak in your second letter, for fear of spoiling what might be a very hopeful development, but a message has gone to the Archbishop of Canterbury who is especially concerned for him.

It seems your retirement from 'active service' on behalf of Keston College is a remarkably vigorous and fruitful one. Have we, by the way, found a coordinator for our work?

The negative response of a number of clerics is too horrifying to believe, except that there are many similar instances on record during the Soviet Church delegations to the United States. I flatter myself (probably wrongly) that such a response would be scarcely possible here. Anyway, the campaign has obviously been amazingly effective and I would ask you to pass on my admiration to all the organisers and activists as opportunity arises.

In breathless anticipation of your next report and wishing you success for your new stage appearance, Lorna and I send you and Mary our warmest Christian love.

**Kenneth Prebble to Michael Bourdeaux
9 June 1987**

Thank you for your encouraging letter of the 29 May. I am so glad you were all pleased with our efforts. Here is the third instalment of my report. It includes the following papers:

- a) A report which I asked John Childers to provide.
- b) The material which I drew up for distribution to our team of questioners in all the centres where we had been able to learn that the delegation were going.
- c) An article from the Protestant journal *Challenge Weekly*, describing the meeting in Hamilton, which is probably fairly typical of many other meetings.
- d) The article in the Dunedin based Catholic weekly, the *Tablet*, which links Pustoutov with Yakunin.

Although information is as yet incomplete, a pattern has emerged; a fairly impressive ecclesiastical delegation, strongly supported by the NCC, began with a liturgical welcome and ended ten days later in a fiasco in Wellington. A meeting had been arranged for Monday 25 May in St Andrew-on-the-Terrace, which, as you know, is Wellington's St Martin-in-the-Fields, and was moved at the last minute to the Diocesan Retreat House in Lower Hutt, at which only Gordeev, the interpreter, turned up. We understand that one of our teams pursued them there and gave him a pretty torrid time. What caused this dramatic change of location? I was hoping that by this time I could give you some firm information, but as yet none has come to hand. However, we think the most likely explanation is that the delegates will have, in one way or another, got wind of the Pustoutov-Yakunin scandal which we had managed to give to two journalists in Auckland. [*Iosif Pustoutov, a monk from the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of External Church Relations, had testified against Fr Gleb Yakunin at his trial in August 1980 when he was sentenced to five years' camp and five years' exile.* Ed.]. The two journalists were quite independent of each other. Bernard Moran is the Auckland representative of the *Tablet*, hence his article, excellent in itself, but only appearing a week

after the delegates had left the country. The other approach was from Michael Gowing, a reporter for a private radio station. He approached John Childers after the delegates had left Auckland, inviting John to do a radio interview with him.

We thought that a radio interview would be inadvisable, as John could easily be trapped into making some allegations that he could not substantiate. Instead, we furnished Gowing with the information about Pustoutov and Yakunin. Gowing's plan was to pass this on to a fellow journalist in Wellington, who would attend a reception in Wellington on Sunday 24 May and ask Pustoutov about the affair. We even dared to hope that, in the hands of a secular journalist, it might hit the national dailies (see 1 Kings 22: 34 - 35) but apparently this did not happen, perhaps because the coup in Fiji was occupying the full attention of the media. However, whether Gowing's plan was carried out or not, something must have happened to cause such a collapse the following day.

Perhaps we have managed to send a signal to the NCC that they cannot bring a delegation from the communist world without it being subjected to public scrutiny. Who knows? The Council for Religious Affairs in Moscow may also have got a message.

The NCC and the public do not appear to realise that I have had anything to do with this exercise, and it is better that they should not, so will you please keep the details fairly confidential? – 'though, by all means share it with your staff at Keston. However, there are some important lessons to be learned.

- 1) How much can be achieved by a small group of people at short notice. I doubt whether many more than 50 people in all parts of New Zealand were engaged in this exercise.
- 2) How a few people, who do not normally see each other, can come together and pool their resources. For instance, I have not kept my *KNS* – having seen our little house I am sure you can understand. I have simply sent them out on a round robin to a few people who are interested. However, Sister Eileen in her spacious convent has access to a photocopier, and has

prudently made a copy of each *KNS* as I have forwarded it to her, and has been able to supply me with all the references as they came through on the telex. John Childers has a friend with a computer, which has turned out all my notes and questions, which have been sent to little teams of enthusiasts up and down the country, wherever we heard the delegates were going. John Smith, a former parishioner of mine at St Paul's, now runs a prosperous business importing fabrics, and has every conceivable gadget, telex, fax, a very sophisticated enlarger etc, and gladly put it all at our disposal, and generously footed the bill for all communications.

- 3) We seem to have hit upon the right style of question to inflict the maximum dismay and confusion. A few hints on technique could be useful. Stand when asking a question, and remain standing while the answer is being given, and at the conclusion fire a supplementary. If the delegate feigns ignorance, one can always say: 'Then let me tell you....' A team of questioners should not sit together for obvious reasons, but should position themselves fairly near the front to catch the chairman's eye when questions are invited, and try to follow one upon the other. They should not take printed material to the meeting, but rather notes of their own, and treat the specimen questions as models for something which they can put in their own words. All these are just common sense, but I pass them to you on the basis of our experience, for I think this strategy can be adopted in a number of countries.

I'm sorry, I haven't found anyone to take over the general organising for Keston in Auckland. I will let you know if I do – and, in spite of this spate of activity, I remain retired myself! Thank you for your good wishes for *The Sound of Music*. Believe it or not, they are going to make me dance! Well, why not? After all they are paying me.

Bishop's Vendetta Against Fr Pavel Adelheim

Fr Pavel Adelheim is one of the Russian Orthodox Church's (ROC) heroes from the communist past. He was ordained in 1959 and served in Uzbekistan under Bishop Ermogen (Bishop of Tashkent 1953-1961) – one of the few bishops who protested against the restrictions placed on the church during the Khrushchev anti-religious campaign of 1959-1964. Fr Pavel helped to build a church in a remote village called Kagan and for this was arrested in December 1969. While in a labour camp the authorities staged an accident as a leg. After his release from returned to Uzbekistan to serve moved first to Latvia for a few 1976 where he has lived ever

Fr Pavel became an expert in published a book entitled Church Canons and in Practice in which the ROC as uncanonical. Parish Encyclopaedia team in early has no rights, he is not protected law'. Clergy and laity have no views – 'the right to a voice



Fr Pavel Adelheim in his kitchen speaking to the Encyclopaedia team in 2007

canon law, and in 2003 Dogma according to the he criticised the governance of clergy, he told Keston's 2007, are powerless: 'A priest by church canons or by the opportunity to express their belongs to the bishop alone'.

Fr Pavel's bishop, Metropolitan Evsevi of Pskov and Velikoluksky, developed a personal dislike for him, took away a school which he had established, removed him from one of his parishes in 2002, and was furious when he published his book on canon law calling it 'the work of the Devil' and describing Fr Pavel as 'a servant of the Devil'. In 2003 Fr Pavel's car was tampered with, leading to an accident which was intended to kill him. To undermine his work at the Church of the Myrrh-Bearing Women, the bishop imposed on the parish Fr Vladimir Budilin, who proved a disruptive influence. The final blow fell this year: on 22 February the bishop issued Decree No 7, which dismissed Fr Pavel. We print below Decree No 7, Fr Pavel's letter to Metropolitan Evsevi, written the day after his dismissal, and an open letter – 'Cry of the Soul' – from Fr Pavel's wife, Vera Adelheim.

Decree No 7, issued by Metropolitan Evsevi, 22 February 2008

In connection with the on-going intolerable situation in the Church of the Myrrh-Bearing Women in Pskov, and your refusal to attend a session of the Pskov Diocesan Court, called to resolve the conflict between you and Fr Vladimir Budilin, a priest at your church, and considering also your open hostility to former clergy at your church, you are released from the post of priest-in-charge at the Church of the Myrrh-Bearing Women in Pskov and will remain a priest at the said church.

Letter to Metropolitan Evsevi from Fr Pavel Adelheim, 23 February 2008

Your Grace,

Decree No 7 dated 22 February 2008 continues the groundless repressive action which you have inflicted upon me for the past 15 years.

The Bolsheviks punished my grandparents and parents, who were innocent. As an innocent person I was tried and mutilated in prison. 'Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers' (Matt. 23:32). All of us have now been pronounced innocent, some posthumously, and I was rehabilitated after 40 years.

In the years ahead your decree will be judged as an example of injustice. It contains the same kind of slander as the sentence meted out to me. Without any investigation you pronounced me the guilty party of an 'intolerable situation', although many witnesses have come forward and many letters in my defence have been sent.

- 1) You were not able to indicate what concrete acts I had committed. Nothing untoward has happened in the Church of the Myrrh-Bearing Women. For the past six months I have celebrated the liturgy daily within a peaceful environment. Fr Vladimir Budilin broke eucharistic

fellowship with the priest-in-charge [i.e. Fr Adelheim. *Ed.*], he has not received communion with me, he has not observed liturgical rites and those of other sacraments, he has arrived late for services, for no valid reason he has not come to the church for six months. This was all stated in reports which you have ignored for a number of years. The attitude of the diocesan leadership to infringements of a priest's duty and Christian ethics committed by Fr Vladimir Budilin is baffling. Fr Vladimir's sin is described in Decree No 7 as an 'intolerable situation in the church'. Because of his sin, you have judged and dismissed the priest-in-charge.

- 2) My refusal to appear in the Diocesan Court was based on canon law: I was to be tried without presentation of the indictment. *Diocesan Court Regulations* do not permit a trial without a statement of the crime and the indictment, as a Diocesan Court has the power to consider indictments which lead to defrocking and excommunication (5.1). Instead of an illegal trial you could have invited Fr Vladimir and me for a discussion, but you did not want to do this.
- 3) 'Open hostility to former clergy' – this is a lie. For the 20 years during which I have been priest-in-charge at the Church of the Myrrh-Bearing Women, the following have served as priests:
 - a. Archimandrite Elevation Popov, now in charge of the Church of the Dormition.
 - b. Fr Vladimir Georgiev, now in charge of two city churches.
 - c. Fr Mikhail Melnikov, now in charge of the Church of the Resurrection.
 - d. Fr Evgeni Naidin, now in charge of the Matveev Church.

The Church of the Myrrh-Bearing Women became a seedbed for future incumbents. I have maintained good relations with all of them.

In 1997 you took away from me the church which I built in Bogdanovo. You dismissed

me groundlessly from the Matveev Church in 2001. Without establishing any guilt, in 2008 you took away a third church which I had raised up out of ruins. Having given me nothing, you have taken everything from me.

You expressed personal hostility towards me during my first audience with you in March 1993, not concealing from me the consequences which were to oppress me over the next 15 years. Dismissal is the final blow; will annihilation follow? For what?

Can one judge an innocent person? The greatest example is Christ the Saviour. He asked: 'Which of you convicteth me of sin?' (John 8:46). But all the same 'the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft and put him to death' (Mark 14:1).

So I now go forth to my own small Golgotha, and repeat to you, as Bishop, that great prayer which Our Lord spoke to those who were crucifying him: 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34).

Despite all the ill you have done me, with love in Christ.

**Open Letter from Vera Adelheim
to Metropolitan Evsevi,
29 March 2008**

Cry of the Soul

The cock crew and Peter remembered the words of Jesus, and wept bitterly (Matt. 26:74-75).

The writer of this letter is the wife of Fr Pavel Adelheim who has served within the ROC for 50 years, who suffered, to the shedding of his blood, under the godless communist regime and was repressed, and now is persecuted by the ROC and the Moscow Patriarchate through your person without just cause and without trial.

Like you I was born in the depths of the country. My father and four of my uncles died at the front, laying down their lives for their faith and fatherland. Another four uncles lived through the war and were honoured with the epaulettes and decorations of generals and colonels. Both my grandfathers got to Berlin. I was brought up according to strict rules. My grandfather gave me three instructions: 'don't steal, don't lie, don't swear'. I have abided by

these rules from my youth upwards. When I finished school at 17, I married and went off to faraway Tashkent, where my husband and I lived in a paradise of warmth and love shown to us by remarkable priests and bishops.

When Fr Pavel built a church in Kagan and was arrested, I was left with three children and without means. I was not abandoned, although everyone was in need. Bishop Ermogen, exiled in the Zhirovitsy Monastery, sent me part of his pension. Fr Mili Rudnev, who had seven children, helped me. Many shared their last crust with me. I did not feel alone, trusting in God and in good people. The Soviet authorities evicted my children and me from our flat, but God came to our aid. Those were different times and the Church, too, was different then.

We were happy until we met you. When you arrived life became frightening. There is no basis for your hatred, which, like hell fire, ignites within you. Fr Andrei Taskaev describes Fr Pavel as having ‘persecution mania’. It is I who have such a mania, not him. Every time a car stops outside, or a letter arrives, or the bell rings, my heart sinks as it did during the arrests of 1937. Night and day throughout these years the thought of death has never left me.

My heart aches for good reason. *Novaya gazeta* [a liberal newspaper opposed to the government. *Ed.*] asks: ‘Have they really “banned” a priest?’ (No 53, 2003). The attack on Fr Pavel Adelheim [a car accident was deliberately engineered in 2003 with the intention of killing Fr Adelheim. *Ed.*] was provoked by the publication of Episcopal curses in *Blagodatnye luchi* [*Rays of Blessing* – a church publication. *Ed.*] (No 2, 2003). Who sent the murderer who tampered with the steering wheel? Who, having forgotten God, ordered the murder? ‘He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn!’ (Psalm 2: 4). Fr Pavel’s life was preserved!

Fr Sergi Ivanov came to disrupt our peaceful parish. Without a thought for the church’s traditions established over a period of 20 years, he started a fire. Must the parish be destroyed? Must ‘the spirit and the life’ (John 6: 63) be killed? On Forgiveness Sunday, Ivanov tried to justify himself before the people: ‘I didn’t come of my own free will. The Bishop gave the order: either take off your pectoral cross [i.e. be dismissed. *Ed.*] or go to the Church of the Myrrh-Bearing Women.’

Last year you sent him to break up the parish of St John the Baptist: Fr Andrei Davydov left the diocese, his congregation fell apart, and its members went off to other churches. Ivanov bragged: ‘More than once I’ve been given the command to bring order to other parishes’. If you don’t like the spirit of a congregation or its priest, you rip it apart. That is why the time has come for Fr Pavel to prepare for the way of the cross; the end is near. But where are his parishioners to go?

During 15 years of persecution, you have destroyed everything in which the soul and ten years were invested: you took away three churches, a school, a home for the disabled, various enterprises, the health and peace of a family and marginalized Fr Pavel – for those less resilient your ‘pastoral care’ can lead to sickness and suicide.

Fr Evgeni Boroda from Dno hanged himself when he lost the parish where he had served for 45 years – all his life from the time of his ordination. A ban undermined the health of Igumen Roman Zagrebnev: he had a stroke and lost the use of his legs. Fr Vladimir Andreev, banned for ten years, became bedridden. How many of them have you destroyed? Why?! What end have you in store for Fr Pavel? He will endure and hold out!

It is more difficult for me to survive with my bad heart and a pacemaker. Your intrigues and machinations have broken my heart. Don’t blame others: it is you who do evil through others. From this you get the word ‘evil-doer’. It is more difficult to pin a crime on the instigator than on the perpetrator.

When my husband was released from prison where he lost a leg, he went to see the bishop walking with a wooden leg and wearing someone else’s cassock. The bishop was touched and rewarded him with a pectoral cross which you intend to take away from him. The godless were persecutors; now a bishop of the ROC is oppressing us. You have turned the ROC from being a Church of martyrs into a Church which persecutes. It is no surprise. Our Lord Jesus was also persecuted and crucified by religious leaders. ‘Crucify him, crucify him!’ they cried, thirsting for the blood of the Son of God. It is the same thing all over again. Now a bishop is destroying the people of God.

Fr Pavel is not the first and will not be the last. You have taken revenge on many. ‘The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to

destroy' (John 10:10). You are 69. Think about old age and death – you cannot stop the passage of time! The cock is already crowing! From those to whom much has been given much will be required.

Each person has his destiny. You are making human sacrifices. You have sacrificed us, and

with you we will face God's Judgement: a white mitre does not whitewash pastoral crimes.

Goodbye! Until we meet at the Last Judgement.

Unrequited Love: Catholics and Russia

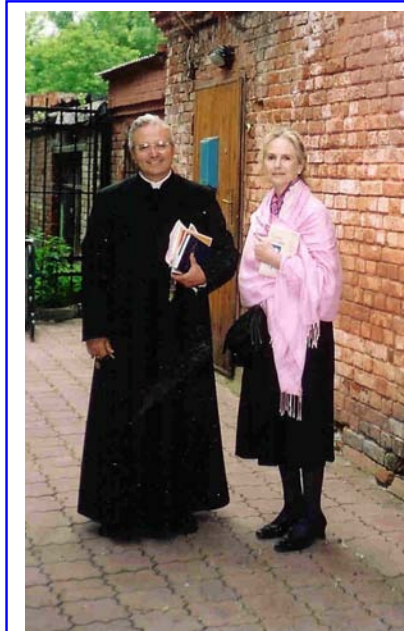
by Xenia Dennen

Since the 1988 dramatic change in official policy towards religion, Catholic parishes in Russia have been revived with the help of Catholic clergy who have come to Russia with open-hearted generosity, wanting to cooperate with and help their Orthodox brethren. But this attitude of mind has been met, so far, with hostility from the Orthodox side. In Nizhni Novgorod Fr Mario Beverati made approaches to the local Orthodox bishop but was cold-shouldered; he wanted to cooperate with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in caring for the poor and needy, and discovered the Orthodox were not interested; he wanted to promote Catholic-Orthodox reconciliation and found a tiny contemplative community consisting of two Catholic nuns to pray for unity, and was upset when these plans were stopped and even attacked in the local press.

Fr Mario from the Argentine was appointed in 1997 by Archbishop Kondrusiewicz to head the only Roman Catholic parish in the city. There had been Catholics in Nizhni Novgorod since the 17th century. In the 19th century the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary was built at the foot of the hill on which stands Nizhni Novgorod's kremlin. By 1914 there were about 5,700 Catholics in the area and the congregation in Nizhni Novgorod had grown so large that a new church was built on Studyonaya Street. Services continued there until 1929 when the church was closed and its

priest, Fr Antoni Dzemeszkewicz, arrested and imprisoned on Solovki. He was shot in 1937.

On Studyonaya Street today there is a gateway into a courtyard where two dilapidated 19th century houses stand next to the one-time



*Fr Mario Beverati & Xenia Dennen
in Nizhni Novgorod*

Catholic church, which, after the Revolution, had been at first converted into a hostel, then used as a radio station, until in the 1960s it was finally turned into a Centre for Scientific-Technical Information. In the far right-hand corner of the courtyard the former 19th century stables have been turned into the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The revival of the parish began in May 1993 (there were about 600 Poles and 300 Lithuanians in the area) when five Roman Catholics started to gather for prayer, and by 10 February 1994 a Catholic parish was registered. The city authorities at first gave them just a third of the 19th

century stables and in that small space they created a chapel dedicated to the Holy Family, which Archbishop Kondrusiewicz consecrated on 30 November 1997. A year later the parish was given the rest of the stables and by Christmas 2000 was able to celebrate mass for the first time in the newly completed church.

The parish was much involved in the care of the poor, the unemployed, the elderly, street children and the homeless and had a particular commitment to the family, to supporting children at risk and single pregnant women.



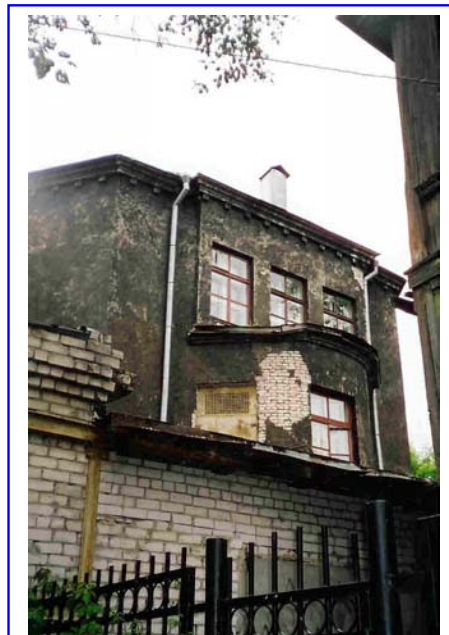
Lyudmila Vorontsova (left), a member of Encyclopaedia team, Bishop Georgi & Xenia Dennen

In order to help such people the parish acquired the greater part of another building next to the church which was to be called the 'Holy Family Social Centre' and where help for such groups would be provided in cooperation with the city authorities and, Fr Mario very much hoped, with the Orthodox Church. The church would also now have its main entrance opening onto one of the city's busy streets and thus be more accessible.

Behind all this charitable work Fr Mario saw the need for sisters who would be dedicated to contemplative prayer. He dreamt of forming a tiny Carmelite community, or 'Carmel', composed of only two or three sisters, who, according to their community's rule of life, would be confined to 'the enclosure', that is to their house and garden, and would devote themselves to praying for the unity of the church, east and west, and for Russia, remembering the common Christian martyrs of the last century. In 2001 he found a partially-built house on the outskirts of the city, ideal as a Carmelite enclosure, which his parish bought in the autumn. At the time he had wanted to speak about his ideas to the Orthodox bishop, Metropolitan Nikolai, but he had died suddenly in June 2001. His successor, Archbishop Evgeni, was not easy to meet as he was also

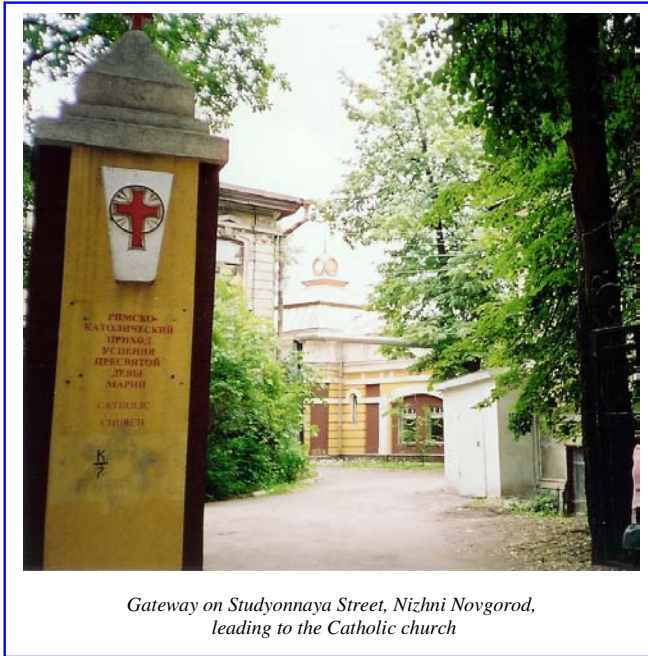
Bishop of Tambov and did not reside in Nizhni Novgorod. Only in early 2003, after Archbishop Evgeni's death, was a new bishop of Nizhni Novgorod consecrated – Bishop Georgi.

In May 2003 two Carmelite nuns, Sister Mary-Joseph from Scotland, based in Lithuania, and a Lithuanian sister, Sister Dina-Maria, visited Nizhni Novgorod and were enthusiastic about creating the 'Carmel' as envisaged by Fr Mario. They were able to meet Bishop Georgi, talking to him for half-an-hour (relations with the bishop, said Fr Mario, seemed to be warm at that point). Thereafter in 2003 the bishop was fully taken up with the celebrations at Diveevo for the centenary of St Seraphim's canonization, making it impossible for Fr Mario to talk to him about the 'Carmel'. Then at the beginning of the following year a bombshell struck: on 5 February 2004 a local newspaper, *Nizhegorodskaya Pravda*, published an article signed by the Nizhni Novgorod Writers' Union attacking the idea of founding a 'women's monastery' which the article described as 'an outpost and future centre of Catholicism on the banks of the Volga. This must not be allowed [...] We must not permit an historical injustice! We must defend the Russian Orthodox Church!' How could two sisters living isolated from the outside world, in a Carmelite 'enclosure', possibly be a threatening Catholic 'outpost', Fr Mario protested? He could not understand such an attitude.



The former Roman Catholic church in Nizhni Novgorod, with the shape of the apse still visible

On the same day as a top-level meeting between the Roman Catholic Cardinal Walter Kasper and Patriarch Alexi, 22 February 2004 (Forgiveness Sunday in the Orthodox calendar) leading to an improvement in Catholic-Orthodox relations, Fr Mario was received at last by Bishop Georgi. During a lengthy conversation Fr Mario was able to tell the bishop about the history of the Catholics in Nizhni Novgorod and explained his hopes of bringing two Carmelite nuns to form a



Gateway on Studyonnaya Street, Nizhni Novgorod, leading to the Catholic church

‘Carmel’ on the edge of the city. Despite this meeting, however, a month later, to Fr Mario’s great disappointment, Bishop Georgi told some journalists that in his view Catholics in Nizhni Novgorod needed no more than their existing church, adding: ‘it is difficult to say how the situation will develop in the future as regards the Carmelites.’

Why this hostility? Catholics are baffled when their activity is interpreted as aggression by the ROC. After all, in Western Europe Catholics are only too happy to offer any of their unused church buildings to the Orthodox and welcome their activity on western soil. Why does the ROC not welcome them on Russian soil? They do not understand that the ROC still lives in a pre-1906 dream world and hankers after an age when it was the established church, when Russian society was officially monolithic – that is Orthodox. The ROC does not accept that Russia is now as secular as any European country – a religious market place where many denominations and religions vie for adherents.

The ROC could happily co-exist with other religions so long as they keep to their own territory, and indeed with Catholics so long as they only look after traditionally Catholic ethnic groups, leaving the ROC sole right to all other souls on Russian territory. In response to this hostility, Catholic leaders in Russia behave like a minority Christian church in a Muslim country: they keep a low profile, bow before Russian secular and church officialdom, refusing to discuss problems which arise from the close alliance between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian state.

There are of course some age-old grievances against the Catholic Church, which still fester and remain unresolved. In an interview on 8 November 2007 with the Polish news agency, *Katolicka agencja informacyjna (KAI)*, Metropolitan Kirill pointed to two issues: the behaviour of the Uniates in Western Ukraine when their Church was legalised after the fall of communism, and the missionary activity of Catholics in Russia. Deacon Andrei Kurayev in his chapter entitled ‘What should be our attitude towards Catholics?’ in his book *What Makes the Orthodox Tick?* (Moscow 2006, pp.152-187) argues that the Catholic Church should publicly confess to having

unfairly treated the ROC in Western Ukraine. Furthermore, he attacks any attempt by Catholics in Russia to spread their faith: he considers that once a baby has been baptised into the Orthodox Church, even if that person in adult life has no belief and does not practice their faith, they are still – almost genetically – Orthodox and their development will be harmed if either Catholic or Protestant teaching influences them. So any missionary work is interpreted as proselytism and condemned. In Kurayev’s view, Catholics and Orthodox really got on better when there was an Iron Curtain dividing them, whereas when it fell the ensuing direct contact rekindled historical resentments.

Despite such hawkish views, there are grounds for hope that Catholic-Orthodox relations in Russia could improve. Most theologians would say that theologically the two sides are in agreement (‘though some still point to the *Filioque* clause in the Creed as a bone of contention); Metropolitan Kirill in his

November 2007 interview with *KAI* claimed that there was a thaw in Catholic-Orthodox relations in Russia; and Patriarch Alexi on 15 January 2008, in an interview with the Italian journal *30 Giorni*, emphasised that there was common ground between the two Churches which could be the starting point for constructive talks. Then the Pope in January invited Patriarch Alexi to visit Rome at the start of the Jubilee Year of St Paul which begins in June this year, and Metropolitan Kirill in an interview with *Der Spiegel* (published in *Bulletin of the Representation of the ROC to the European Institutions* No 135, 16 January 2008) stated that a meeting between Patriarch Alexi and the Pope 'is certainly possible' (though only after certain 'problems' have been ironed out).

By February this year Cardinal Kasper was speaking about a 'real breakthrough' in Catholic-Orthodox relations in an interview published in the *Sunday Visitor* (www.confessions.ru/news) insisting that the Catholic Church in Russia was not involved in any missionary work. This claim of a breakthrough was, however, immediately rejected by Bishop Ilarion Alfeev of Vienna and Austria, the ROC representative to European international organisations (www.religare.ru/article50915, 20 February 2008) who argued that Rome still aimed to impose its authority over the Orthodox as was the case with the Uniates, whereas what was needed was a 'strategic partnership'. By April it would seem that a breakthrough at a high level was finally achieved: on 16 April a

prime-time 30-minute broadcast about the Pope, in which at the end the Pope spoke directly to his viewers, was put out on Russian television to coincide with his birthday. According to Paul Goble in *Window on Eurasia* (17 April) this broadcast and its reported positive reception by the Russian viewing public 'makes it likely' that the Pope will be invited to visit Russia. That indeed would be a breakthrough.

However, would a meeting between Pope Benedict and Patriarch Alexi change relations between Orthodox bishops and Catholic clergy at the local level? Would it change Orthodox attitudes? Would Fr Mario's pastoral care of anyone in need, never mind their ethnic background, in Nizhni Novgorod be welcomed by Bishop Georgi? We must wait and see. Until now the Catholic Church has seemed a threat: unlike Protestant churches, in Orthodox eyes, the Catholic Church is a 'real' church, its sacraments and priestly orders are recognised by the Orthodox Church; and it is large and powerful in contrast to Protestant congregations, which to the Orthodox are small and transitory. It will not be easy to heal past wounds and turn Orthodox hostility into affection. As Metropolitan Kirill rightly said in his January *Der Spiegel* interview, feelings are what count: 'It doesn't matter how many documents we sign. Unless we have the feeling that we love each other, that we are one family, and that each member needs the other, it [unity] will not materialise.' It will take more than a meeting between Pope and Patriarch to change hearts and minds in Russia.



19th century stables converted into the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Nizhni Novgorod

AGM

Keston Institute

**Saturday 1st November
2008**

**To be held in the Great Chamber
The Charterhouse
Charterhouse Square
London EC1M 6AN**

- 11.00 a.m. Eucharist in Charterhouse Chapel**
- 11.45 a.m. Welcome by the Master**
- 12.00 noon Annual General Meeting**
- 12.45 p.m. Lunch**
- 2.00 pm. Address by Archbishop Malkhaz Songulashvili**
- 3.00 pm. Address by Edward Lucas**
- 4.00 pm. Tea**

***Nearest underground station:
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Keston Institute

PO Box 752, Oxford OX1 9QF

Tel: 01865 792929

admin@keston.org.uk

www.keston.org.uk

