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End of Friday prayers at a mosque in Samarkand

Becoming a Muslim in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

by Johan Rasanayagam

Ilkhom-aka is a 60-year-old retired knife maker living in the village of Qorasuv, near the city of Andijan in Uzbekistan's portion of the Fergana Valley. He became a blacksmith in the Soviet era collective farm at the age of 16, and after military service worked as a knife maker in a nearby town, producing for private sale in the bazaar. At the age of 40 he began performing the five daily prayers, and now regularly attends the main mosque in the village for the Friday mid-day prayers. It is a fairly common pattern in the village for men to start observing religious prescriptions more actively at around the age of 40 when they take a leading role in representing their households at ritual events. He described himself as being a Muslim before this, although he did not observe religious obligations such as abstaining from alcohol or pork, did not perform the daily prayers, and only attended the mosque at major festivals. He blames his former lack of religious observance on work commitments and the anti-religious atmosphere during the Soviet period.

Ilkhom-aka has developed his own particular understanding of Islam and what it means to be a Muslim through involvement in his community, through fulfilling his obligations as head of his household, attending communal prayers at the mosque, and through his everyday experience in which illness has played an important part. His daughter suffered from epilepsy from the age of 12 and died in 1991. He recounted his ten-year search for treatment before her death during which he had taken her to medical doctors as well as to a number of different healers in the Fergana Valley. He himself had been ill during this time suffering from a 'fallen heart'. This is what might be called a 'culture-bound syndrome'. It is brought on by a sudden shock or fright or simply through unwary contact with malevolent *jin*. Typical symptoms are a

A healer who works with otakhon spirits in Qorasuv

lack of energy, strength and motivation, a pervasive tiredness when the sufferer just wants to remain lying down at home, and it can lead to more serious illness and hospitalisation. Biomedicine, however, is typically unable to address the problem and once the condition is diagnosed, often after hospital treatment has proved ineffective, the sufferer seeks the aid of healers who work with the help of spirits, or someone able to recite verses from the Qur'an. They might also visit the tomb of a saint to recite the Qur'an there and wash themselves in water from an associated sacred spring. A fallen heart fits into that category of illness and treatments collectively referred to as *eskicha* (the old ways) or *musulmanchilik* (Muslimness or Muslim ways), which are outside the sphere of biomedical intervention.

Whilst in hospital for this condition Ilkhom-aka had a dream in which he saw the house of a *bakhshi*, a healer who works with spirits, of whom he had no previous knowledge. He sought it out for his daughter and they slaughtered a sheep. He himself was put into a 15-day period of fasting and isolation (*chilla*) for his own condition. One night during the *chilla* he had a dream in which he vomited bile from his stomach, and in the morning felt much better. He continued to visit this *bakhshi* periodically for healing. After his daughter died, he once more became ill with a pain in his side and visited the *bakhshi*, who put him into a *chilla* for three days. On the evening after completing it he performed the ritual ablutions and the evening prayers at home, and then lay down to sleep. He described how a black man and woman appeared while he was still awake and read the Qur'an over him and then left. They were followed by a man and a woman, one dressed as a doctor in a white coat the other as a nurse, who came in a white cloud. They performed an operation on his side, and the next morning he felt better. These were the spirits sent by the *bakhshi*.

Ilkhom-aka's encounters with spirits are constituted within and contribute to his ideas about a good Muslim life, which are also shaped through his life in his immediate community and through discussions on what constitutes genuine Islam. He sees himself as a good Muslim, regularly performing the five daily prayers and attending communal prayers at the mosque. A large part of what might be called his circle of 'significant others' is composed of religiously observant men with whom he comes into contact at the mosque or at the ritual events in which he represents his household. Imams during Friday sermons regularly condemn the activities of *bakhshilar* and those who consort with *jin*, and exhort people not to turn to them for healing or prophesy. Although the existence of *jin* is not questioned, this mosque-based 'orthodoxy' emphasises that healing comes from God directly and not through the intervention of spirit intermediaries, and that a person's fate is only for God to know. Thus, Ilkhom-aka's attitude to his healing experience is ambivalent. The visions he has experienced in dreams and his encounters with spirits have persuaded him of the reality of *jin* and the efficacy of treatment by those who control them, but he also attempts to maintain a certain moral distance. He was initially embarrassed about admitting to me that he visited the *bakhshi*, and talked about how she 'binds *jin* and harmful things', displaying an awareness that the activities of the *bakhshi* were illegitimate. However, he stressed that it all depended on a person's intentions. He emphasised that he had actually refused to become a healer himself and stressed that he only undertook the *chilla* for personal healing, and not to gain access to, and control over, the *jin*. This is a line he has drawn himself which allows him to take advantage of his healing treatments while continuing to remain a good Muslim as understood in his mosque circle.

Inside the Friday mosque in Qorasuv

The reasoning through which Ilkhom-aka develops his understanding of Muslim selfhood is shaped by the history of Soviet rule and the efforts of the post-independence government to control and regulate religious, particularly Islamic, practice. The Communist Party was engaged in a project of socialist modernity: in Central Asia in the early years of Soviet rule this took the form of a civilising mission, aimed at remaking the Central Asian person. Central Asian populations were to be liberated from the bonds of superstition and tradition, and instilled with rational, empirical reason and a collectivist consciousness committed to building socialism. Islam was expected to disappear naturally. State policy on religion alternated between brutal repression and relative tolerance, and largely cut off Central Asians from Muslims outside the Soviet Union. Only a tiny minority had access to formal education in Islamic theology and philosophy, while the vast majority were unable to attend regularly the few mosques officially allowed to operate.

By the latter part of the Soviet era most of those who described themselves as Muslim in Central Asia did not, like Ilkhom-aka, observe even the most basic prescriptions of Islam. This has led many observers to remark that by the time of independence in 1991 Islam in Uzbekistan had been reduced to an element of household life-cycle celebrations and to superstition, with little genuine spiritual or theological content. Central Asian Muslims were declared by some to be 'secular', and Islam to be a cultural marker rather than a genuine religious commitment. However, this characterisation emerges from a particular understanding of religion as a distinct sphere defined by belief, separate from the secular sphere of explicitly human creative work within a material world. If, however, we adopt the perspective of morality rather than belief, then such distinctions disappear. Ilkhom-aka's understanding of moral selfhood emerges from his experience and interaction with fellow villagers, from the sermons of the formally trained imam at his mosque, as well as from spirit beings in the course of illness and its treatment. His moral self is understood as Muslim because he participates in a tradition of ritual practice, cosmology and history, understood as Muslim, which makes his experience intelligible to himself and others. Ilkhom-aka develops a Muslim self through participation in shared rituals such as commemorations of the Prophet Muhammad's birth, recitations of the Qur'an for the souls of the dead, through communal prayer at the mosque, and through his recourse to healers who work with spirits. Although individuals might interpret what is actually taking place on these occasions in diverse ways – and even condemn some practices as un-Islamic – this is nevertheless mutually intelligible within the context of a shared tradition.

During the Gorbachev era of glasnost in the late 1980s restrictions on religious expression were relaxed and Muslims in Central Asia began to explore more freely the trends and ideas within Islam which had long been circulating in the wider Muslim world. In the first few years of independence, as the post-Soviet government embraced Islam as part of its national ideology to replace communism, interest in Islam exploded. Thousands of mosques were built throughout the region, and a network of state sponsored Islamic educational institutions was established. Not only was the open practice of Islam now possible, but those who were interested could study the core sacred texts and their interpretation relatively easily. Scripturally based interpretations of Islam, which condemned as un-Islamic much of the local practice of Muslims such as the resort to healers who worked with spirits, became more widely circulated as men began to attend Friday prayers at mosques, and preachers and their sermons became a regular feature at communal ritual occasions.

Women in Qorasuv gather for a mavlud, the commemoration of the Prophet's birth

However, by the mid-1990s the government of Uzbekistan began to view Islam independent of its control as a serious threat to its authoritarian rule. The government promotes its own construction of Islam as the only legitimate form of expression. In this construction Islam is presented as an element within a specifically Central Asian cultural and spiritual heritage. As part of this, regional historical figures such as prominent medieval scientists and philosophers and the leaders of Sufi sects are extolled as spiritual forebears,

and their tombs transformed into lavish mausoleums with state funding. In contrast, 'foreign' strands of Islam are condemned as alien to the Central Asian mentality, as politically motivated and extremist. No expression independent of the state's interpretation of the Hanafi school of Islam, promoted by the quasi-state Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, is tolerated, and those suspected of espousing other interpretations are labelled as 'Wahhabi' and subject to arrest. Fear and vulnerability surround religious practice which does not fall into the category of established 'tradition'; that which is unusual or unfamiliar is liable to be labelled Wahhabism. During my research it was not uncommon to hear about cases where even converts to Protestant Evangelical forms of Christianity were labelled as Wahhabi. These groups were 'non-traditional' in two senses. Firstly, in contrast to Russian Orthodoxy or Catholicism, which have an established presence in the region, they are recent arrivals and many congregations are not officially registered. Secondly, they contravene the established understanding that Central Asians are Muslim while Slavs or European populations are Christian.

These post-independence developments in the state's policy on religion have also influenced how Ilkhom-aka is able to come to his own particular understanding of Muslim selfhood. Textually based interpretations of Islam are spreading and increasing awareness that some local practices are un-Islamic. Healers who work with spirits are responding to this. While most people in Ilkhom-aka's village referred to such healers as *bakhshi*, all the healers I encountered rejected this characterisation. *Bakhshi*, they asserted, worked with *jin* and are only motivated by base, pecuniary gain. In contrast, their own spirits were not *jin* but *azizlar* (saints) or *otakhonlar* (literally ancestors) sent from God. Some saw themselves as engaged on a mission to bring their communities back to Islam after decades of neglect during Soviet rule, and their spirits, they declared, appeared in recent years for just this purpose. While most imams condemned their practice as un-Islamic, a large part of the healers' own understanding of what it is to be a Muslim is developed in interaction with the spirits.

The government's ruthless suppression of independent Islamic interpretation and practice, and the atmosphere of vulnerability that this has engendered, has limited the extent to which an individual can openly espouse any position on Islam. Islam must remain within officially sanctioned contexts such as an officially appointed imam preaching in a registered Friday mosque. In neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, where there is greater religious freedom, study groups and travelling preachers (*davatchi*) who call Muslims to a scripturally based 'correct' practice of Islam, have become widespread. This is impossible in Uzbekistan where such groups and preachers would be regarded with intense suspicion by the state authorities. Thus criticism of Ilkhom-aka's recourse to healers who work with spirits and other similar practice, while it exists and Ilkhom-aka takes it into account, is much more muted than in other Muslim contexts. The only public voices permitted to define correct Islam are the pronouncements of a clearly self-interested government and the relatively muted teaching of state appointed imams who, while they might not agree completely with the construction of Islam within the state national ideology, are obliged to support government policies.

Muslims in Uzbekistan, like Muslims everywhere, are coming to their own understanding of Islam and what it means to be a Muslim. They do this through moral reasoning, which does not only take the form of self-conscious reflection on alternative discourses or interpretations, but also develops within ongoing experience. One of the factors which makes this process distinctive in Uzbekistan is the way the state defines what constitutes legitimate religious practice, or indeed how it defines the religious sphere. Islam is subsumed within the category of tradition as part of a local historically developed spiritual heritage – the 'golden heritage' in the government's words. To remain secure, Muslims, in relation to the state authorities at least, must present their practice as part of this heritage.

Mausoleum & mosque complex of Imom Bukhoriy (d.870) – compiler of Hadith of the Prophet – lavishly rebuilt by the state

Snow White and the Three Prayers

by John Arnold

On a sunny afternoon in May 1974 I was standing next to Michael Ramsey, watching him sign a visitors' book +Michael Cantuar and then write in capital letters CHRIST IS RISEN. We had spent the day in Weimar, the city of Goethe and Schiller, of Mozart and Liszt; we were at the heart of Germany, 'Land der Dichter und Denker', and in the heartland of the Reformation. But we had left the city of the plain and come up an escarpment into the beech forest or Buchenwald, which had given the place a name of omen. We passed through the gates of the concentration camp with their sinister message 'Jedem das Seine' – to each his own – and heard a sound like the buzzing of bees, magnified a thousand times. We looked over the edge of the hill and saw Russian tanks exercising there. We also experienced a sudden chill, such as I have felt only at Babi Yar, the ravine near Kiev where the Ukrainian Jews were slaughtered. Sometimes evil is tangible. We had come in a short space of time from paradise to paradise lost.

Archbishop Michael Ramsey

There was not much to see, but that only gave more scope to the historical imagination. However, we had to concentrate on the present, for this was potentially the most sensitive moment in the Archbishop's visit to the GDR, accompanied as we were by representatives of both church and state and of the state-controlled media. The very existence of the GDR had only recently been recognised by our own government; the continued existence of the church within that state was precarious; the art of manipulating the memories of death and of suffering for political advantage in the bitter rivalry with the Federal Republic was being perfected. Every word, every gesture, every syllable counted as contemporary Pharisees and Sadducees put questions to the holy man, seeking to entrap him in his answers.

We went into the cell of Paul Schneider, the Lutheran pastor who had sung hymns and preached sermons for his fellow prisoners; and we were shown the whipping block where he had been beaten to death before them for his pains. A word was expected from the Archbishop within a culture which was now threefold a culture of the word – German, Protestant, Marxist-Leninist – where every occasion called forth weighty utterances, sacred and secular. The Archbishop held one of his typical silences and then he prayed, commending the souls of martyred Jews, Christians and socialists alike to the eternal mercy of God, yearning for an end to hatred in the Kingdom of peace and love. This was the second of three occasions during a fraught itinerary on which the Archbishop turned what needed to be said away from immediate concerns into prayer to our Father in heaven. Bishop Schönherr of East Berlin and Brandenburg, the *primus inter pares* of the East German bishops, was later to call it 'the visit of the three prayers'.

Michael Ramsey was first and primarily a man of prayer, secondly a man who could express the essence of the Gospel in short memorable phrases, thirdly someone whose ready perception, political *nous* and speed of thought belied his massive presence, his snow-white hair and his physical clumsiness.

Background

The situation of the church in East Germany during the years following the Second World War differed in several respects from that of the churches in other communist-dominated lands.

Firstly, it was the only place, apart from little Latvia and Estonia then incorporated into the Soviet Union, where the majority of Christians were Protestant, and where the folk church assumed the right and duty to care for the ordering of society and for the people, if necessary by speaking up on their behalf. The Orthodox option of simply living in the liturgy was not available; nor was the strength and self-confidence vouchsafed to the Roman Catholic hierarchies of Poland, and to a lesser extent of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, by belonging to a great international communion. The East Germans had perforce to take their stand on their historic confessions of faith, including now the Barmen Declaration of 1935, and on the word of God, read, heard and preached. All their leaders had been formed in the Confessing Church under the leadership,

example and teaching of Martin Niemöller and especially of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. All were acutely aware of the churches' share of responsibility for the disaster of the Third Reich. A small but brave minority of Christians had been imprisoned then, together with members of the communist and socialist parties.

So, secondly, there were some common interests and, at least to begin with, some mutual respect between the leaders of church and state in the Soviet Occupation Zone in process of becoming the GDR. However, at the level of theology on the one hand and of ideology on the other there was never any community of interest, no hint of the kind of syncretism between Christianity and Nazism which had marred the record of the so-called German Christians in the Third Reich. Eventually both sides settled into a kind of trench warfare between an exceptionally well-educated and articulate form of Christianity on the one hand, and an exceptionally rigid and ruthless form of Marxist-Leninism on the other, the Socialist Unity Party of the GDR avowedly attempting within a decade to achieve what had taken the Soviet Union more than half a century. After all Marx had intended his manifesto to be implemented not in backward, agrarian Russia but among the advanced industrialised proletariats of England, the Ruhr and Saxony, where it had come home to roost in its Stalinist form, and where in Leipzig and Dresden in the autumn of 1989 it was to suffer its most crushing, if bloodless, defeat.

Thirdly, in a society notable for the enforcement of the most rigid conformity, the church became the only public corporation not to be directly controlled by the state or run on Marxist-Leninist lines. It thus became willy-nilly a sign of contradiction and a living falsification of the totalitarian claims of ideology. So long as the church remained, no one could believe unreservedly in the absolutist pretensions of Marxist-Leninism. Eventually, the church was to provide the space, both actual and metaphorical, for the discussion of public issues such as war and peace, pacifism, social justice and ecology, and for the formation of a whole people in the techniques of passive resistance and the practice of democracy, which triumphed quietly in the autumn of 1989.

But by a strange irony the 1970s were characterised by adjustment on both sides to the delay of the *parousia* and the adoption of a deferred eschatology. The state, which as in the Soviet Union soon became accustomed to the indefinite postponement of the withering away of the state, realised that it had also to come to terms with the postponement *sine die* of the withering away of religion. The German Marxists by contrast were not prepared to let the dialectical process run its course. As soon as the Soviet occupying power ceased to exercise a moderating influence on religious policy in the early 1950s, Walter Ulbricht decided to put his shoulder to the wheel of history and inaugurated a period of overt persecution, focussed particularly on the youth work of the church. That phase did not last long but it left deep scars and bitter memories. Pressure on young people became a permanent feature of life in East Germany, exacerbated from 1955 by the introduction of virtually compulsory '*Jugendweihe*' as a secular alternative or at least supplement to confirmation. By and large the Party was prepared to leave the so-called unproductive sections of society – little children, the old and the retired – to the church. It soon handed over the mentally ill, for whom its economy had no use and its materialist anthropology no place. The diaconal institutions of German Protestantism alone fulfilled the highest humanitarian hopes of socialism. Meanwhile, pressure was exerted in school and university, in the armed forces and in the work-place, to such an extent that it was not uncommon for people to be looking forward with longing to old age and retirement, to a quieter life and the possibility of emigration to the West.

Some also looked back, if not to the Third Reich, then to a dimly remembered Wilhelminian era of peace and prosperity: but far more were looking sideways at the democratic institutions and booming economy of West Germany, where, more often than not, members of their family, friends, lovers and former neighbours lived. They expected that the Soviet Occupation Zone would be a temporary expedient, to be followed by a peace treaty and a united Germany. That *parousia*, too, was to be delayed until 1990; but in the 1970s it seemed to most observers that the newly emergent GDR would be at least a semi-permanent feature of the European scene. It was partly in order to release its 17 million citizens from the limbo of virtual statelessness that the United Kingdom and other western countries gave *de jure* recognition to the GDR in 1974 and thus, incidentally, made possible the Archbishop's visit.

Still, the overwhelming majority of East Germans appeared to be living in internal exile with their bodies in the east and their hearts and minds in the west. They were cut off by the most effective frontier ever devised,

running from the outskirts of Lübeck to the western-most borders of Bohemia, since August 1961 encircling Berlin and cutting it in two, running down the middle of streets and even houses, in one case separating a church from its own churchyard. About 90 per cent of the population could receive West German television. To the claustrophobia of national incarceration was added the schizophrenia of days spent in socialist factories and collective farms followed by evenings slumped before the television set, entering in by a magic window both to the comparative but not untainted realism of western newscasting and also to the fantasy worlds of *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, dubbed into actors' German and thus doubly incongruous. It was not a healthy situation; but at least East German citizens were exceptionally well informed with a synoptic view of every contemporary issue provided by propagandists on both sides of the wall.

The state compelled its citizens to remain, when many would rather have fled. The church provided them with support and a rationale for doing so, by reference to Jeremiah's letter to the exiles: 'Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.' (Jeremiah 29:7). It also provided a theological critique of contemporary history and an understanding of the operation of God's judgement in the overthrow of the nation and the division of the land. In 1971 a Synod, meeting in Fürstenwalde, defined its position as a 'Church in Socialism' that is to say neither a church *of* socialism nor a church *against* socialism, nor even a church *alongside* socialism. It was and remained to the end, a church *in* socialism, constantly seeking to understand in word and deed just what that meant and thus contributing something to our understanding of the relationship between church and state and the respective claims of Caesar and of God. With hindsight, this formulation can be criticised both for its ambiguity and openness to misunderstanding, and also for its assumption that the East German polity was indeed socialist. But it is easy to say that now and on the western side of the Elbe and the North Sea.

Until 1969 the church had been nominally part of a single federal Protestant Church in Germany; but it was no longer able to function as such and in that year a separate Federation of Protestant Churches in the GDR was formed, with a clause in its constitution maintaining its special fellowship with the church in West Germany. In 1972 West Berlin was separated from Berlin-Brandenburg and effectively incorporated into the West German church. Hope of a united church was, thus, also deferred. From then on there was an East German Christian Protestant Church in an East German atheist socialist republic

Three things saved the church from isolation. The first was that the state desperately needed hard currency, so it was prepared to turn a blind eye to the huge subsidies, amounting to more than 30 per cent of total income, provided by the affluent West German church. The second was that the embryo state also desperately needed friends, isolated as it was, shunned and unrecognised by the West, despised and unloved among Soviet satellite states, which had all suffered as a result of German aggression and cruelty in the Second World War. The church was one of its few means of contact with a wider world; and, though 'cribbed, cabined and confined', churchmen enjoyed certain limited privileges with regard to foreign travel and participation in international conferences, not least because they were the only people who could be trusted to return. Thirdly, what the Vatican was for the Roman Catholic Church in central and eastern Europe, the ecumenical movement was for East German Protestantism, which played a special role and enjoyed special attention in the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

The Visit

Particularly significant were relations with the British churches – western but not West German, in lands on the same parallels of latitude at the same stage of industrialisation and indeed of secularisation, facing similar problems in mission and evangelism and, a great blessing, comparatively poor. The British Council of Churches took a special interest in East Germany through its East West Relations Advisory Committee of which I had the honour to be chairman. A substantial delegation had gone to East Germany in 1969. Early in 1974 we had completed the book *Discretion and Valour*, written by Trevor Beeson on the basis of research and analysis by a group of experts, and offered to the public as the first reliable survey – between apocalyptic horror stories of unremitting persecution and the equally incredible bland assurances of official publications – of the churches in the USSR and Eastern Europe. The foreword contained the sentence 'We do not accept that the only authentic Christianity is underground'; and the chapter on the GDR went a long way towards substantiating that claim.

In the event it became clear that what would help the East German Church most at that juncture would be a personal visit by the Archbishop of Canterbury. In view of the delicate international situation and the danger of misrepresentation the visit had been carefully prepared. At first the authorities of the GDR, refused to have anything to do with it and they clearly wished to downplay its significance. Shortly before the appointed time, however, they became aware of the position of an Archbishop of Canterbury in the Establishment, over-estimated his significance as *'der zweite Mann im Staat'* and made an abortive attempt to turn it into a state visit, even offering accommodation in the lavishly appointed Schloss set aside for official visitors. We were not going to walk into that elephant trap, but insisted that this was a church-to-church visit and that we had already agreed to accept the hospitality of the Hospiz, or church-run hotel in the Albrechtstrasse. However, the necessary courtesies would be observed, official visits would be paid and meetings arranged, notably with Herr Willi Stoph, the President of the State Council and in effect Head of State.

Berlin

When we returned to our hotel late on the first evening we were met by a minor disaster. The antiquated plumbing had given out in the archiepiscopal bathroom, which was so dramatically flooded that the water had had to be turned off at the mains. The staff, who had so desperately wanted everything to go right, were distracted in a flurry of inefficiency and obsequiousness. The Archbishop was not at all put out. He sat down with the rest of us on comfortable sofas in the foyer and suggested that we all have a nice cup of tea. To the accompaniment of mysterious noises off we waited, and waited. Eventually an embarrassed manager appeared with a bottle of the best wine and a tray of glasses. 'There was', he said, 'no water. Would wine do instead?' The Archbishop's eyebrows went up and down; his shoulders heaved; 'Yes', he said, 'yes. It's happened before, it's happened before. At Cana in Galilee, Cana in Galilee', thus defusing a potentially dangerous moment with mirth and merriment, and knowledge of the scriptures.

We paid a courtesy call on Cardinal Bengsch, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in East Germany and, through skilful diplomatic work by the Vatican, still of the whole of Berlin. The visit was not a success; indeed we felt that we had walked through the door of the residence into the pre-ecumenical era. Roman Catholics were historically a small minority in that part of Germany, though ironically their numbers had increased after the war through immigration from the East. The Cardinal's aim was two-fold: to keep open lines of communication with the Vatican and to preserve his flock. He was not interested in the Church of England, which was not surprising; but nor was he interested in the German Protestant churches, which shared his situation, or, even more surprisingly, in Polish or Czech Catholicism, national animosity prevailing over ecclesial fellowship. He was proud to have voted against '*Lumen Gentium'* and '*Gaudium et spes'* at the Second Vatican Council, and had no intention of transmitting the ethos of the Council or even implementing its decrees beyond the bounds of duty. He let us make our own way into the bleak and unwelcoming Cathedral of St Hedwig, where we said our prayers at the tomb of Bernhard Lichtenberg, the saintly Dean who was martyred in a concentration camp.

The Catholic Church kept a low profile; it protected and retained its people; it played no part in public life but let the majority Protestant Church make the running and take the knocks. The contrast, not so much with Protestantism as with Polish Catholicism, could scarcely be greater. And who could say that the policy was wrong rather than merely different? The Protestant Church in 1989 poured its life into the peaceful transformation of society and saved the nation from civil strife, perhaps even saved Europe from war; but it was grievously weakened in the process and it seems to have lost its character as a folk church in what are now some of the most secularised areas of Europe. Just at the end some Catholic clergy, notably in Dresden, and many Catholic lay people joined forces with the Protestants in the gallant attempt to reform the state, which both contributed to its eventual overthrow and also ensured that the revolution, when it came, was bloodless. And disproportionately large numbers of the new leaders, members of parliament and of local authorities, mayors, head teachers and other pillars of society came precisely from that Catholic laity, which later demanded the kind of changes in the church which they had experienced in the state, '*Wir sind die Kirche* – we are the church' replacing as a slogan '*Wir sind das Volk* – we are the people'.

A formal dinner was organised at the residence of the British Ambassador, who played host to the Archbishop's party and to guests from church and state, including Hans Seigewasser, Secretary of State for Religious Affairs, and Gerald Götting, Deputy Head of State and Chairman of the Christian Democratic Union. The evening game, for such it turned out to be,

was played strictly according to British rules, even though it was an away match for us. The East Germans were well schooled in Soviet etiquette. They had brought long speeches with them in their pockets and were prepared for frequent toasts to peace and friendship. There was no opportunity for any of these things. Instead, after the ladies had withdrawn, the port circulated and more concentrated and focussed conversation ensued. Here the Archbishop was in his element. The ready wit and mellifluous rhetoric, which had characterised the young president of the Cambridge Union, came to the fore. If, in theology and spirituality, he sometimes gave the impression of being rather conservative, in politics and public affairs he was a liberal through and through. With the utmost courtesy but with persistence he pressed the statesmen on civil and human rights. They sought refuge in flattery and half-remembered quotations from the laborious speeches languishing in their back pockets. Herr Götting remarked what an honour it was for them that the Archbishop should visit the GDR. 'Yes, yes,' he replied, 'I am an old man and wherever I go, people say nice things to me. But they don't do what I tell them. For example in South Africa.' Only Michael Ramsey could have drawn that comparison and, as it were, hit the target by implication and with a calculated *faux pas*.

Leipzig

The following day was a Sunday and we set out for Leipzig. Evening service was in St Thomas' Church where Bach had been cantor, and where the organ he played was still in use. Ramsey preached to a packed church on the text 'as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing' (2 Cor 6:10). At the recessional the little group of Anglican clergy peeled off from the procession and moved to the tomb of Bach. Flowers were hastily produced for the Archbishop to lay, and he prayed the first of the three prayers which characterised and typified the visit. He thanked God for the musical gifts of Johann Sebastian Bach, given to the whole world for the praise and glory of God, gifts which must be shared freely and across the walls of division and of national frontiers. In a few words, without a speech or lecture, he had taken both a timeless topic and a contemporary concern and offered them to God in prayer.

Eisenach

Next day we journeyed to Weimar and to Buchenwald, the scene of the second prayer, and thence to Eisenach where Bach was born, Pachelbel had been organist and Luther had been a choirboy, first to the headquarters of the Church of Thüringen on the Pflugensberg and then to the Wartburg, home to the Minnesänger or troubadours of the Middle Ages, the setting for Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser,* the home of St Elizabeth of Hungary, the headquarters of the *Burschenschaften* or student societies which in the early 19th century had striven for freedom, unity and democracy. Above all, it was the place to which Martin Luther, kidnapped on his way home from his lonely stand against church and Empire in Worms, was taken and where he made the first translation of the Bible into German from Hebrew and Greek. We went into his room and stood by his desk. What could we say? The Archbishop lifted up his voice and prayed: 'Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning; grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them that by patience and comfort of thy holy word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.' That was the third prayer, not extempore prayer this time but common prayer.

We moved then from the sublime to the ridiculous, from a voluntary pilgrimage to a holy place to a compulsory visit to a collective farm at Berlstedt. The chronic shortage of foreign currency meant that tropical fruit was a rarity and a great luxury in the GDR. In the workers' canteen however a lavish spread had been prepared for us. The fruits of socialist agriculture, introduced to us a '*Thüringer Spezialitäten'*, contained large quantities of highly polished oranges and bananas. Here indeed was an economic miracle, and for a while the phrase '*Thüringer Spezialitäten'* came to serve us in place of the more common 'Potemkin villages' as a description of vain and hollow pretensions

Erfurt

Erfurt is the see-city of a Roman Catholic bishopric, the only city in East Germany with a substantial Roman Catholic population. It also has a comparatively strong Protestant presence and, at the time of our visit, was notable for the depth and reality of the ecumenical engagement between well-matched partners with Probst Heino Falcke taking the lead on the Protestant side.

As Archbishop Ramsey advanced towards the Catholic Cathedral, flanked by two Protestant Bishops, Bishop Aufderbeck came forward to greet him with a speech in sonorous Latin and to lead him into the service, notable for the size and enthusiasm of the congregation.

There was a wholeness about this occasion which had been lacking in the bi-lateral Anglican-Protestant and Anglican-Catholic encounters so far. At the end spontaneous applause broke out in the Cathedral and it spread into the streets and squares of the city, contrasting strongly with the usual sullen enforced crowd participation in visits by dignitaries from other communist states. The warmth and affection of the people for their own bishop combined with their trust in and co-operation with their Protestant partners to provide the setting in the local church for the ecumenical conversations in which we engaged next day. Over one hundred Protestant and Catholic students gave the Archbishop a rapturous reception and listened spellbound to his exposition of the state of play and future prospects of the ecumenical movement. This was followed by a more informal but more intense discussion with members of the faculties, broken off so that we might be whisked away in a motorcade for which all traffic in the city was brought to a halt and taken to the airport, where the luxuriously appointed Presidential plane was waiting to take us to Berlin.

Berlin again

There another motorcade took us to the new headquarters of the State Council and into the presence of the Head of State, Herr Stoph (formally responsible for the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961), and other officials. In him Michael Ramsey was face to face with '*real existierender Sozialismus'*. Never mind the theory, this was the incarnation of Stalinist socialism as actually practised in the 1960s and 1970s.

Herr Stoph had much to say, the Archbishop little; but he continued to press his questions about cultural exchange and the need for people to meet. Herr Stoph said expected things about the need to bring to an end the Cold War. 'Yes', said the Archbishop in one of his sudden unexpected moments of inspiration and in a memorable phrase, 'Yes. But there is no point in replacing a cold war with a cold peace. We need a warm peace, in which people meet each other and get to know each other.' He paused, and then something remarkable happened. The oblique and fleeting reference to freedom of movement must have touched a chord and a neuralgic point of conscience. Herr Stoph started speaking unscripted about the building of the Wall, and the reasons which had made it necessary. He spoke and spoke; he couldn't stop speaking. The Archbishop sat opposite him, silent, immobile, with his white hair like the snow on a dormant volcano. Still the President went on, for 20 or maybe 30 minutes. His aides and associates were showing visible signs of embarrassment. Eventually he stopped. Everyone was expecting some diplomatic, emollient, even pastoral word from the Archbishop. But he said nothing. This was not just a negative silence, an absence of words. It was a positive silence, an actual act or deed, like the silence of Christ before Pilate. He was doing something which the world could not understand but which those of us who were priests and pastors could. He had just been hearing a confession; but that confession had consisted entirely of self-justification. And because there was no contrition, no sorrow for sin, no intention of amendment of life, the Archbishop was doing one of the most difficult things a priest ever has to do, namely withholding absolution. It was an extraordinary moment in which time stood still. It was like being with Ambrose and Theodosius, or at any one of those turning points in history when spiritual power has confronted worldly power across a table, face to face. Somehow the silence was broken, the atmosphere changed and we returned to the level of discussion and of diplomacy. But no one who was present during that eloquent silence will ever forget it, echoing as it did the cry of Moses before Pharaoh, 'Let my people go'.

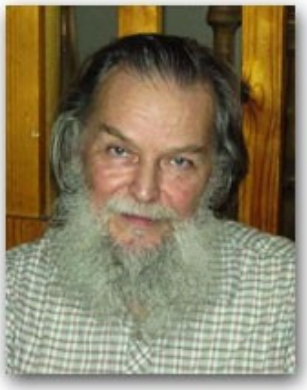
Envoi

Soon it was our turn to cross over into West Berlin – so easy for us with our British passports and visas, so nearly impossible for 17 million citizens of the GDR. As an exceptional concession the drivers were allowed to take us through Checkpoint Charlie to the West Berlin Church Headquarters in the Jebensstrasse behind the main railway station. They were excited about the prospect of breaking a taboo, confident that they knew the way. Alas, they drove straight into the unlit and uncharted no mans' land, which had once been the heart of a great metropolis. Oberkirchenrat Walter Pabst, the senior church functionary who was accompanying us, got out and asked a nearby pedestrian, '*Sprechen Sie deutsch?*' – 'Do you speak German?' We wept. After all the highs and lows, the sublime moments and the frustrations of those unforgettable days, it was this little tragi-comic, Chaplinesque, pathetic moment of farce, which disclosed the enormity, the hubris, the wickedness of enforced separation. No wonder that the Epistle to the Ephesians, so beloved by Michael Ramsey and the cornerstone of his ecclesiology, describes our salvation in terms of the breaking down of a wall of separation (Eph 2:14).

A Modern Prophet
'What for a cat is fun, is death for a mouse'

by Xenia Dennen

Like a contemporary prophet Isaiah and with the precision of a well-trained lawyer, Fr Pavel Adelheim has analysed and dismantled the mask covering the face of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) under the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate (MP). 'Shame on you! you who make unjust laws and publish burdensome decrees, depriving the poor of justice, robbing the weakest of my people of their rights, despoiling the widow and plundering the orphan,' cried Isaiah (chapter 10:1-2) as he exposed the misdemeanours of Israel. So today Fr Pavel Adelheim, through his writing and through describing his own experience at the hands of his Church (for background see *Keston Newsletter* No 6, 2008, pp.17-20) has revealed the face behind the mask – not the face of a kind, caring father, but the face of an unfeeling disciplinarian. Christian love today is often absent from the Church, he writes; instead, clergy and laity, like defenceless mice, are at the mercy of their bishop who has total power over his diocese. To the words of Professor Vladislav Tsypin who claims that 'To emphasise rights […] is out of place in the Church where love reigns,' Fr Pavel replies: 'Why pretend? One should admit honestly that Christian love has not become the norm in church life. There is no point playing at love. What for a cat is fun, is death for a mouse.' ('The Alternative: Employment Contract or Serfdom', *Vestnik RKhD*, No.193, 1-2008, p.93)



Fr Pavel Adelheim

As a founder of Keston Institute in the 1960s, I followed closely the fate of Christian denominations in the USSR until the change in Communist Party policy towards religion in 1988, reading many hundreds of samizdat documents and studying the lives of Christians who, I believed, were some of the great witnesses of Christian faith in the 20th century. Those Christians who were part of the Soviet dissident movement (which began with the Sinyavsky-Daniel trial in 1966), who resisted the *status quo* and were prepared to suffer imprisonment, who campaigned for a change in the law and stood up to a political system which was inhuman, criminal and only interested in its own aggrandisement, these people were my heroes, and still are. How sad it was, therefore, to read Boris Kolymagin's article 'The Religious Dissident of the Stalin Prize' (website *Portal-credo.ru* 29 December 2008) in which he stated with regret that the word 'religious dissident' today has acquired a derogatory connotation among certain Orthodox circles, and that some confessors and defenders of the Church are no longer seen as Orthodox.

Fr Pavel belongs to the heroic band of dissidents, while at the same time firmly remaining a faithful son of the ROC. After a childhood partly spent in orphanages, partly with his mother in exile after his father was shot, his spiritual life was nurtured by Fr Sevastyan Fomin (the latter, in his turn, had been nurtured by one of the last *startsy* of Optino) and later by Archbishop Ermogen Golubev, whose long period of service in Soviet Central Asia (he built Tashkent Cathedral in 1957) led Fr Pavel to serve as a priest in Kagan, Uzbekistan. There he, like his mentor Archbishop Ermogen, also started building a church. For this he was arrested in 1969 and spent 1970-72 in a labour camp. He emerged physically damaged, having lost his right leg in an accident deliberately engineered by the camp authorities, but totally fearless after enduring so many years of adversity.

What in his Church does Fr Pavel criticise? To start with, its current governance. This, he argues, is tending towards greater and greater centralisation which infringes the principles laid down at the 1917-18 Local Council. In his book *Dogmas on the Church in the Canons and in Practice* (2nd edition, Pskov, 2003), in his 3 December 2005 lecture 'The Local Council of 1917' (*Portal-credo.ru* 11 December 2008) and in his article 'The Principles of the ROC MP's Current Structure and Possible Ways of Improving Them' (*Portal-credo.ru* 1 & 5 September 2008) he analyses the ROC's Statutes and points out that the latest version adopted in 2000 has taken power away from the Church as a whole – from the laity and clergy – away from its

representative institution, the Local Council. The 2000 Statutes give legislative and judicial power to the Council of Bishops, and executive power to the Patriarch and Holy Synod. All these powers should be vested in the Local Council, he argues, whereas in actual fact the latter now only deals with canon law and matters of faith, and only meets to elect a Patriarch, as we saw in January. All power is in the hands of the bishops. Were the decisions of the 1917 Local Council observed, these princes of the church would be elected by the clergy and laity of each diocese, and this would help create relationships, in Fr Pavel's view, based on Christian love rather than on fear and subservience.

As well as criticising the 2000 Statutes, Fr Pavel condemns the structure of ecclesiastical courts which he considers supports an oppressive administrative system. In his 'Address to the Council of Bishops' dated 22 June 2008 (*Portal-credo.ru* 23 June 2008) he asks the bishops not to confirm the 'Law on Ecclesiastical Courts' which contradicts the juridical principles established by Local Councils as well as international legal norms, the Russian Constitution and Federal law: 'Principles of injustice destroy the legal foundations of court procedure, revealing a tendency in the courts, not to establish the truth, but to convict the defendant.' His criticism is devastating and based on his own personal experience at the hands of the ecclesiastical court in his own diocese: he points out that in the current system there is no presumption of innocence, no right to a defence lawyer, no right of appeal, cases are dealt with behind closed doors in the absence of the defendant, the indictment is not stated, and there is no independent judge (in fact it is the bishop who is in total charge as both judge and prosecutor). Most serious is the absence of any appeal court to crown the structure.

The structure of church governance, Fr Pavel points out, is crucial because in its present form it undermines Christian unity which can only be built on love and freedom – not on fear and subservience. In an interview published by *Portal-credo.ru* on 16 June 2008 he explains that without love and freedom church unity turns into dictatorship, and the Church's members are treated as slaves. Whereas during the communist period relations between clergy and bishops were usually simple and trusting, now, in his assessment, bishops have become government functionaries using force like the Soviet authorities once did. The ROC has become an administrative system rather than a living organism inspired by the Holy Spirit. In the place of love, the Church is being built on foundations of obedience and discipline, of fear and compulsion. In his letter dated 20 June 2008 to the bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, now united with the Moscow Patriarchate (*Portal-credo.ru* 24 June 2008) he diagnoses the Church's main tragedy as its loss of *sobornost* [conciliarity] which has been emptied of its dogmatic content and turned into a purely geographical concept about jurisdiction.

Church-state relations, in Fr Pavel's view, are unhealthy because they are still influenced by the communist past; they are sick from the infection of the ROC's 1927 Declaration of allegiance to the Soviet state made by Patriarch Sergi which, he considers, contradicts the very nature of the Church: 'It is time to free the Church from its communist handcuffs […] The Declaration embodies spiritual Stalinism, a sickness which has long infected the country and the Church. A sickness does not need to be "improved". It must be cured […]' ('The Principles of the ROC MP's Current Structure and Possible Ways of Improving Them' *Portal-credo.ru* 5 September 2008, Part II, point 12). Although the 1927 Declaration was made over 80 years ago, this capitulation of the Church to the state, the harmonising of the Church's objectives with those of the state, is a present reality. Fr Pavel's sympathies lie with all those who refused to compromise, with the bishops imprisoned on the Solovetsky Islands who issued an Epistle condemning collaboration with the state, and he thinks the ROC should have followed the policy of a 1920 Decree issued by the Patriarchate which instructed the dioceses to run their affairs independently of the centre. A thought-provoking term to describe current church-state relations is introduced into this discussion by Mikhail Sitnikov in his article (*Portal-credo.ru* 25 February 2008) reporting on Fr Pavel's dismissal as the priest-in-charge of the

1968: Fr Pavel as a young priest in Kagan, Uzbekistan, before his arrest

Church of the Myrrh-Bearing Women in Pskov by his bishop, Archbishop, and later Metropolitan, Evsevi of Pskov and Velikie Luki, on 22 February 2008. He uses the term 'sovereign Orthodoxy' to describe Metropolitan Evsevi's authoritarian type of Episcopal rule, a neat parallel with the term 'sovereign democracy' used by those in power to describe the current Russian political system. Is not Metropolitan Evsevi's authoritarianism an ecclesiastical form of 'vertical power' reflecting the Putin-Medvedev polity?

Archbishop Evsevi of Pskov & Velikie Luki (left) *being promoted to Metropolitan by Patriarch Alexi on 25 February 2008, just three days after the former had issued an Edict dismissing Fr Pavel*

Owing to the current structure of the ROC, Fr Pavel's writings often discuss the role of the bishops. Three texts are relevant here: his lecture delivered on 18 August 2007 at the St Filaret Institute's conference in Moscow and published by *Portal-credo.ru* on 3 September 2007, an interview dated 16 June 2008 published by *Portal-credo.ru*, and his article 'The Principles of the ROC MP's Current Structure and Possible Ways of Improving Them' (*Portal-credo.ru* 1 & 5 September 2008).

In the first of these texts, Fr Pavel examines the role of a bishop in the early church. He was a servant 'in the image of Christ', sent to take care of the Christian flock – 'Feed my sheep'. Fifty years ago, Fr Pavel writes, a bishop was a true pastor who was willing to lay down his life for his people, to endure camp and exile (this, I think, was true of some, but by no means of all), but today the bishop's position has changed in principle; he has become untouchable, all power is focussed on him through the ROC's Statutes, and this power is based on force and only limited by the boundaries of a diocese. A bishop is a creature like any other Christian, argues Fr Pavel, and although given ritual sanctity through his consecration, he has to make this holiness a reality in his ordinary life through moral effort, prayer and all the spiritual disciplines. Holiness only comes from the Holy Spirit, and bishops should not be put on pedestals and treated as sacred.

In his 16 June 2008 interview he stresses that love must be at the core of a bishop's ministry; a bishop should not use a rod of iron to impose unity, as unity can only be achieved through love, based on freedom, and not on compulsion. In the third text Fr Pavel examines the bishop's status in the Church: the bishop has privatised his power, forgetting the source of his authority, 'Forgetting the limits placed on Episcopal power, the bishop associates himself with God. He lays claim to God's glory and becomes an idol'. The bishop does not own his diocese, Fr Pavel reminds his readers; he is responsible and answerable to God; and the Orthodox believers in his diocese do not *belong* to him – they belong only to Christ.

Owing to the oppressive treatment Fr Pavel received from his bishop, much in his writing is concerned with the position of the clergy. In 'The Alternative: Employment Contract or Serfdom' (*Vestnik RKhD* No.193, 1-2008, pp.77-93) he states that the power of a human being over another must be limited by law. However, in the case of the clergy there is no such limit in relation to their bishop. Clergy, he argues, are without rights under the 2000 Statutes, and can be compared to the serfs in Russia before the emancipation of 1861: 'A system has been legalised in the dioceses of the ROC whereby a priest is enslaved to his diocesan bishop'. A priest has no right to labour and to rest, he has no right to freedom of movement, he is subject to ecclesiastical courts which act outside the Federal law, meting out punishment rather than justice, and he has no contract like other citizens of the Russian Federation. All depends on the goodness or otherwise of the bishop; there are no institutional forms of protection; and in Fr Pavel's case, unfortunately, the bishop harboured a personal dislike for him and waged a vendetta against him: 'Metropolitan Evsevi preaches the absolutism of Episcopal power, the dominance of the bishop over the Church, and a geographical interpretation of *sobornost*; he needs his clergy to be servile.' (*Ezhednevny zhurnal,* 4 June 2008).

But the clergy are not the whole church; they are only there to organise it, points out Fr Pavel, and it should be the laity who take responsibility and make decisions. His views on the role of the laity are most interesting. In his book *Dogmas on the Church in the Canons and in Practice*, chapter 11, he emphasises the

importance of the people of God, the importance of their ministries within the Body of Christ. In his interview published by *Portal-credo.ru* on 16 June 2008, Fr Pavel states that the laity, according to the 2000 Statutes, are defined as objects, like church furniture, not subjects like living icons. Their concerns are ignored and their potential is wasted. They only have duties, but no rights:

> 'The Statutes of the ROC MP only refer to "parishioners". These are "persons who must go to confession, receive communion, observe the canons and instructions, care for the clergy and church building". Parishioners have duties. The Statutes do not confer on them rights. […] they have lost their status as subjects and have become church objects, on a level with lecterns, votive candle stands and other such church furniture. They are no longer honoured as an extension of the iconostasis, that is as living icons which in a church are censed: *"You saw a brother – you saw God"*. Their role has been reduced to contributing their expected "mite". Parishioners have found themselves excluded from church life.'

From his own experience, even the institution elected by members of a parish, the parish council, can be bypassed by a bishop's minions. In Fr Pavel's case an Area Dean, Fr I. Mukhanov, and Fr Sergi Ivanov (appointed to run Fr Pavel's parish, the Church of the Myrrh-Bearing Women) called a secret parish meeting and illegally appointed a new council. Furthermore, the finances of the parish, which should be managed by the parish treasurer and chairman, were hijacked by the new priest-in-charge, Fr Sergi Ivanov.

In relation to the power of bishops, Fr Pavel examines the meaning now expressed by the words 'obedience' and 'blessing'. In his 18 August 2007 lecture 'Orthodox *Sobornost* and Social Solidarity' he emphasises individual free will, which must not be manipulated through compulsion; people should not be treated as slaves. Unfortunately, he notes in his article 'The Principles of the ROC MP's Current Structure and Possible Ways of Improving Them' (Part II, point 9), obedience as a means to an end – the attainment of Christian love – has become an end in itself, and thus it has been distorted and turned into a means for degrading human beings and a method of control. Obedience should issue from filial love based on trust. Instead the whole chain of command within the ROC has been corrupted and its members, clergy and laity, are expected to behave like soldiers in an army, who stand to attention and carry out military commands, without opening their mouths. In *Dogmas on the Church in the Canons and in Practice* (chapter 15) Fr Pavel explores the current meaning of 'blessing': it has lost its mystical meaning and has acquired a formal function; it gives permission or issues an instruction. It has become an adjunct of discipline which, as in the case of obedience, has confused means with ends – discipline has become an end in itself.

Fr Pavel's home in Pskov

A primary goal of the Church should be the care of those in society around it, especially of the suffering. In Fr Pavel's own ministry, the care and defence of those rejected by society has been central, as has the education of the young. He ministered to the children in his local psychiatric hospital, and organised a home for handicapped children in his parish of the Apostle Matthew in Piskovichi. His bishop decided to remove him from his work in the hospital and then removed him from Piskovichi. When it came to the education of children, his work was again disrupted and destroyed by his bishop. The school attached to his Church of the Myrrh-Bearing Women, which was highly respected in the Pskov oblast, was disrupted at the beginning of this academic year when Metropolitan Evsevi managed to remove the headmaster following his dismissal of Fr Pavel as priest-in-charge of the church earlier in the year (Edict dated 22 February 2008, text in *Keston Newsletter* No 6, 2008, p.17). Tragically it would seem that Fr Pavel's bishop waged a personal vendetta against him (there were suspicions that a car accident in 2003 had been deliberately engineered, although no one was convicted at the time). His book, *Dogmas on the Church in the Canons and in Practice*, first published in 2002, described by Metropolitan Evsevi as the work of the Devil, appears to be partly to blame for the bishop's attitude, but his

systematic persecution of Fr Pavel seems to have verged on the pathological.

In Fr Pavel's interview published in *Kifa* No 16, December 2007 (*Portal-credo.ru* 11 January 2008) he remarks sadly on the fact that those Christians who suffered under Lenin and Stalin are revered, but that those who were persecuted during the 1960s (and particularly during Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign of 1959-64) and those who fought for religious freedom in the 1970s and 1980s are disliked for having struggled against the regime. Only the dead martyrs are honoured. What about the living martyrs, he asks? I think Fr Pavel must be counted among their number. Martyrs are witnesses to the truth and Fr Pavel is such a witness: 'We must witness without thinking about the consequences. Our task is to witness; it is God who wins the victory' (interview *Portal-credo.ru* 8 April 2008). He has been martyred, and this has not happened because a Godless government is in power, but because of his own Church. Now he has retired. No longer can Metropolitan Evsevi torment him.

Much of what he criticises in the ROC is fundamental, and thus, not surprisingly, his criticism is unacceptable to the leadership. And can a prophet expect to be welcome in his own country? Unfortunately not.

Fr Pavel's living martyrdom will, however, in time be honoured when the history of the ROC in the 20th and 21st centuries comes to be written, and his understanding of suffering as a means of sanctification will continue to be the quiet song of victory in those parts of the universal Church which remain faithful to the teachings of their Founder:

'Persecution is necessary for a Christian if he is to reach the Heavenly Kingdom. The Church blossoms and grows stronger through persecution' (Fr Pavel's Easter letter to Metropolitan Evsevi, *Portal-credo.ru* 29 April 2008).

Home News

Michael Bourdeaux writes:

I retired as director on my 65th birthday, just ten years ago, and now Keston is about to celebrate its first 40 years. At the breaching of the Berlin Wall many people said to me, 'How do you feel now that Keston's work is over?' To which I would reply: 'This isn't even the *beginning* of the end; it's the end of the beginning.' Twenty years later I can confidently say, 'Keston's work is ongoing; we guard the key documents on the religious history of Eastern Europe in the second half of the 20th century'. Also, the work of our Chairman, Xenia Dennen, and our Moscow Encyclopaedia team, seven volumes on every manifestation of faith, no matter how minor, is not likely soon to be surpassed. Although he has completed his *magnum opus*, *Religious Life in Russia Today*, after 12 years of work, Sergei Filatov is now engaged on permanent updating and, with Xenia, has already started a new programme of visiting the distant regions – now, of course, with vast experience behind the team. Roman Lunkin, another member of Sergei's team, was recently quoted, with his Keston affiliation, in the *Washington Post*, when he gave an interview on the relations between the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church.

Keston AGM

Saturday 7th November 2009

The Great Chamber
The Charterhouse
Charterhouse Square
London EC1M 6AN

12.00 noon	Annual General Meeting
12.45 p.m.	Lunch
2.00 p.m.	Address by Canon John Arnold
3.00 p.m.	Address by Canon Paul Oestreicher
4.00 p.m.	Tea

Final volume of the Encyclopaedia

My own work has been more interesting than ever recently. At the end of last year Patriarch Alexi II died, soon followed by the election of his successor, Patriarch Kirill, who in 1999 entertained me in his Episcopal residence in Smolensk. Obituaries, profiles and radio interviews have now followed in quick succession. Then in February Metropolitan Nikitas, of the Greek Orthodox Church in America, invited me to give three lectures at the Patriarch Athenagoras Theological Institute, part of the campus of the University of California at Berkeley. In March the former Prime Minister of Estonia, Mart Laar, invited me to Budapest to speak at the founding conference of a political group (mostly MEPs) aiming to raise the profile of the 'other' holocaust, persecution under communist rule, which receives scant public attention these days compared with what school children learn about Hitler and the Nazis. I was asked to choose a less well-known topic for my presentation. I spoke on Khrushchev's persecution of religion (l959-64) – and discovered that, even in such élite company, knowledge was scant. Nothing could more readily illustrate that Keston's work is perhaps more important today than ever before.

Moscow Book Launch

(Left to right) *Xenia Dennen, Sergei Filatov, Roman Lunkin, Olga Fadina, Anatoli Pchelintsev and Boris Knorre at the Moscow book launch*

The final volume of Keston's Encyclopaedia *Religious Life in Russia Today* was presented to the press and the academic world at the Slavic Centre for Law and Justice in Moscow on 14 January 2009. The Centre's Director, Anatoli Pchelintsev, opened the proceedings by praising the work of the Encyclopaedia team, stressing the exceptional value of their fieldwork, and then presented Keston's Chairman with an honorary doctorate 'for an outstanding contribution to the establishing of civil society and the defence of freedom of conscience and religion'. About 40 people were present, including the religious correspondent of *Izvestia* who published an

article about the Encyclopaedia on the following day. Olga Fadina, the publisher, expressed her delight at seeing her dream come true, adding that she hoped the Encyclopaedia would reach people in the Russian provinces. Professor Shaburov (Comparative Religion Department of the Russian State Humanities University), Professor Alexei Malashenko (Moscow Carnegie Centre), Bishop Künzel (Lutheran Church), Diane McKelvey (First Secretary, British Embassy), correspondents from *Blagovest* and *Protestant*, the editor of *Ezhednevnyi zhurnal*, Alexander Ignatenko (President of the Institute of Religion and Politics), Evgeni Rashkovsky (head of the religious literature section of the Library of Foreign Literature) and Professor Anatoli Krasikov (Director of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Society, Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences) were among those present.

Honorary Doctorate presented to Xenia Dennen

Xenia Dennen chaired the meeting, starting with a brief speech, and handed over to Sergei Filatov, head of the Encyclopaedia team. Roman Lunkin then spoke followed by the publisher, Olga Fadina. Professor Anatoli Krasikov praised the Encyclopaedia in fulsome terms, after which the meeting was opened to questions and discussion. Evgeni Rashkovsky described the Encyclopaedia as synchronised history where you could see Russia's spiritual history in action. At the end Xenia asked Sergei Filatov's 8-year-old daughter, Marfa, to speak, whereupon in a loud voice she announced: 'Ladies and Gentlemen, we invite you now to partake of our "fourchette" which has been specially prepared for you!' (Sergei had rehearsed her before the proceedings began, and she performed her part beautifully.) The 'fourchette', or buffet, had been assembled by Sergei and Roman – they did the shopping in the morning – and others from the team laid everything out on plates. There was wine, soft drinks, smoked salmon, good Russian '*pirogi*' (pies) and more – all gobbled up by the end of the evening.

Fieldtrip to Vladimir

In January 2009 Xenia Dennen joined Sergei Filatov and Roman Lunkin on a fieldtrip to Vladimir, 200 km east of Moscow. Keston's Council in July 2008 had decided to support the on-going research of the Encyclopaedia team as the trustees felt that this work was unique and should continue to be an important focus of Keston's activity. A number of sections within the Encyclopaedia needed to be up-dated for a second edition, and so fieldtrips during 2009 were planned to Vladimir, Vologda and in June to Siberia.


Trinity Cathedral in Vladimir

(Left to right) *Roman Lunkin, Xenia Dennen & Sergei Filatov in front of the 12th century Church of St Dmitri in Vladimir*

In Vladimir Roman interviewed Protestant leaders while Xenia (who both took notes and acted as the photographer) and Sergei talked to Orthodox and Roman Catholics. There had been a congregation of Baptists in Vladimir since 1911, and in 1967 they had been officially registered by the Soviet authorities. Since perestroika the congregation had grown to about 200 members, and included a number of students. They were now active at the local teacher training college where they held English language classes and ran a sports club, as well as focussing on work with children and in prisons. Roman also talked to the leaders of various Charismatic groups – the 'Emmanuel' church, the Association 'Global Strategy', the Calvary Chapel church, the 'Light of Life' church, the 'Vine' church – which were all involved in evangelism.

Sergei talks to Archimandrite Innokenti

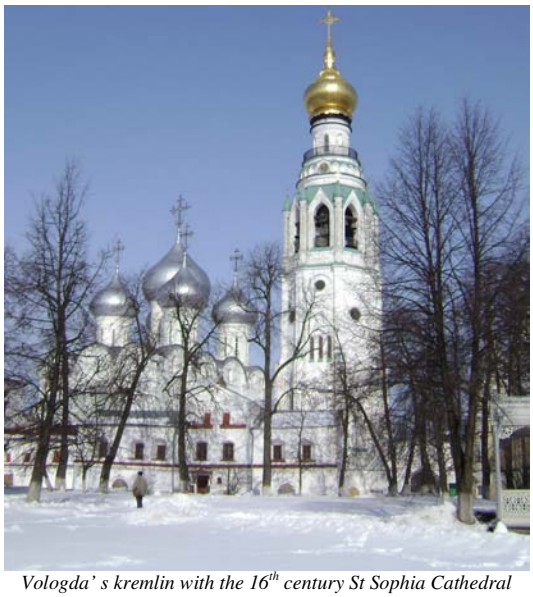
The local Orthodox bishop's (Archbishop Evlogi) right-hand man, Archimandrite Innokenti Yakovlev, a former architect and professional artist, now a monk, proved a mine of information on the diocese and described his bishop as a man of prayer. Before perestroika there had only been 50 parishes in the diocese – now there were 280. In nearby Suzdal a rival Orthodox jurisdiction, the Autonomous Orthodox Church headed by Metropolitan Valentin, had its headquarters: after some initial difficulty an interview was organised and the Encyclopaedia material on that denomination was updated. The internationally-recognised icon painter, Fr Andrei Davydov, whom Xenia had met ten years earlier during her first Encyclopaedia fieldtrip in 1999 to Pskov, had moved away from the oppressive regime imposed by Metropolitan Evsevi (described by Fr Pavel Adelheim, see article pp.11-15) to Suzdal: Xenia was able to visit his studio and was given a warm welcome. He now looked after two churches, the Church of St Nicholas, which was gradually being restored and where Fr Andrei had painted some frescoes, and a small, warm 'winter' Church of the Nativity which also contained his 'Sophia' studio, used during Soviet times by restoration specialists.

Fr Andrei Davydov shows Xenia round his studio

Catholic Church of the Virgin Mary-Queen of Heaven in Vladimir

Sergei Filatov talks to Fr Sergei Zuyev

The local Roman Catholic priest, Fr Sergei Zuyev, who earned a living as a professional musician since there were no church funds available to support him, gave us a long interview on our last day. He was Russian – unusual as most Catholic clergy in Russia are Polish (in the case of Vologda the priest was Slovak) and thus he understood Russian culture well and the Russian Orthodox Church. 'I am part of Russian culture,' he said, and with a laugh related how someone had told him that 'a Russian cannot be a Catholic'. In fact Catholic-Orthodox relations in Vladimir were a model of cordiality; in Fr Sergei's words, 'we belong to the western tradition but are one church – we complement one another; we do not contradict each other.'



Vologda' s kremlin with the 16th century St Sophia Cathedral built by Ivan the Terrible

Fieldtrip to Vologda

The team travelled by night train 500 km north of Moscow to Vologda on 17 March, and the next morning managed to fit in some sightseeing – they visited Vologda's magnificent kremlin – on their way to interview Nadezhda Doinikova, the local government official in charge of religion. She told them that there were 106 Orthodox parishes in the whole of the oblast and 13 working Orthodox churches in Vologda itself, many of which had been restored thanks to local government funding (125 million roubles had been donated). Her policy was to promote peaceful coexistence between denominations, she said, and the rule of law. Protestant groups were able to rent premises and many were extremely active; she did not approve, however, of a Charismatic group which had 'broken the law' by evangelising on the street.

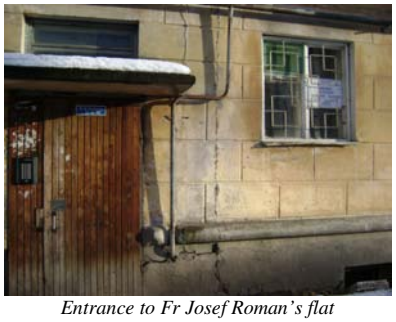
Inside the kremlin

Nadezhda Doinikova recommended that the team talk to Fr Alexei Mokievsky, one of the most active Orthodox priests in the diocese, so the next day Sergei and Xenia took a taxi out to Kirillov, where Fr Alexei agreed to meet them in a small building outside the walls of the famous Kirillo-Belozersky

Entrance to Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery

Sergei talks to Fr Alexei Mokievsky

Monastery. (The latter stood on the edge of a frozen lake and contained a museum with an exceptional collection of icons. A small community of four monks was now also in residence.) Fr Alexei was not only the spiritual director of the Goritsky Convent, but with his wife organised a programme called 'For Spiritual and Moral Health' which involved a network of different groups – some for children, others for teachers or doctors, a group which organised pilgrimages, an organisation for offenders and drug addicts, a club called 'The Young Family', a youth centre called 'Alpha'. The Goritsky Convent also played a part in this network: it tried to help society's rejects and worked with drug addicts and alcoholics (the nuns ran a farm, tilled the soil, kept chickens and cows and bees).



Entrance to Fr Josef Roman's flat

Room used as Catholic Church in Vologda

Vologda's Roman Catholic priest, Fr Josef Roman from Slovakia, was not as fortunate as Fr Sergei Zuyev in Vladimir: he had no church and made do with a somewhat shabby room in a depressed-looking Soviet block. During communist days he had been part of an underground Catholic community in Czechoslovakia which smuggled bibles into the Soviet Union. He now had about 30 parishioners but had given up trying to get back the Catholic church across the road from his flat, which had been turned into a restaurant in the 1980s. His relations with the Orthodox bishop were 'mutually respectful' but the latter had refused to receive him: 'each of us works in his own garden,' he added.

Notice reads: Parish of the Assumption of the Mother of God

Sergei interviews Fr Josef Roman

Roman Lunkin meanwhile had caught a bus to Cherepovets (over two hours from Vologda) where he talked to Fr Georgi Trubitsyn who ran a very successful Russian Orthodox Sunday school. It was founded in 1998 and functioned every day of the week with 300 children attending. Fr Georgi's Church of the Nativity had been restored with the help of the Governor who wanted to make reparation for his NKVD father. The latter, as an active member of the Komsomol, had helped tear it down many years before. Later he talked to Pastor Sergei Golubev, leader of the Potter's House, a Charismatic group (an import from America with 20 churches in Russia) in Vologda which had 400 members and was working with drug addicts. This was the group which had displeased Nadezhda Doinikova for evangelising on the street. Somewhat exotic was his meeting with a local pagan 'high priest', Viktor Novikov, a graphic artist dressed 'à la Russe' in traditional Russian peasant clothes, who that morning, being the equinox, had been out in a boat on Vologda's river worshipping the sunrise.

Russia's New Patriarch

by Michael Bourdeaux

Patriarch Kirill of Moscow & All Russia

'Here in Smolensk we make the best bread in Russia.' So said Metropolitan Kirill to me at his dinner table in November 1999. And indeed his lively conversation about the selection of grain and the milling process held my attention over our meal, not least because he told me that his diocese had financial control over this local industry. These words have come back strongly to me after his election as 'Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia', for his critics at home have been resurrecting the story of how he became immensely rich through being involved in the import, avoiding taxes, of eight billion of cigarettes in the 1990s. More recently and more legitimately, it is said that he has been much involved in the car and other industries, and is now the richest man in the Church.

The new Patriarch is – and has been for a considerable time – the most powerful man in the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). His election as Patriarch is no surprise, though that has not prevented considerable lobbying and a contested election (as reported in *The Times* 28 January 2009). It seems as though Patriarch Kirill was even powerful enough to block the website, *Portal-credo.ru,* perhaps the only source of independent comment on church affairs in Russia, after articles critical of him had appeared on it. During the days leading up to the election it closed down and Alexander Soldatov, its editor, reported that a hacker broke in and destroyed its data-base.

I was in Smolensk – for the second time in two months – nearly ten years ago at the invitation of Metropolitan Kirill, its diocesan bishop. The BBC was planning the first in what was to become a series of broadcasts from the ROC over the next few years. For the first, Kirill insisted that we should go to his diocese to make a recording marking the millennium. My producer, the Revd Stephen Shipley, and I were soon convinced that the choice was an excellent one. We saw the Church in its strongest aspect, rebuilding its life after 70 years of persecution. Kirill insisted that I should give an autobiographical lecture in the new diocesan seminary – the first and only time I have done so – and we also visited the immensely impressive music school for training female church singers and conductors. There was an openness among all the local church leaders we met, a desire for contact after years of isolation due to communist anti-religious policies.

Whatever the other current criticisms of the new Patriarch (for his authoritarianism and anti-Catholic stance, for example) he is reckoned in Russia to have been a highly successful bishop in his diocese (which included the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad) and to have made strong contacts with the intelligentsia. Everything we saw in Smolensk supports this. But how did such a strong man find himself in this provincial city, four hours west by train from Moscow, just short of the border with Belarus? The story also helps explain Kirill's rise to the office of Patriarch.

Nepotism explains his early rise. He was a protégé and relative of the formidable Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad, who dominated Russian church affairs in the 1960s and 1970s. But he was also strong and a competent theologian, which persuaded Nikodim to appoint him as Rector of the Leningrad Theological Academy at the age of only 28 (younger than some of his students). His high-profile activities in attempting to reform theological education and bring it into the 20th century led to his falling foul of the communist authorities. Leaning heavily on the weak Patriarch Pimen, they secured his removal to Smolensk in 1984, out of harm's way, as they thought, even though he received a bishopric in return.

Patriarch Kirill blessing a congregation with holy water

How wrong they were! It was in Smolensk that Kirill honed his skills. Not only did he become head of the Department of Foreign Relations, a post he held for 20 years until now; he also transformed the internal government of the Church.

Back in 1961, at the outset of a particularly serious outbreak of religious persecution under Nikita Khrushchev, a new regulation (*ustav*) had been foisted on the Church, removing the parish priest from executive power in his own parish and clearing the way to the massive closure of churches. Now, before Mikhail Gorbachev began to facilitate church reform in the mid-1980s, Kirill began to draft a new *ustav*. This massive document – 34 detailed pages – came to the fore in 1988 at the Council (*sobor*) marking the millennium of the conversion of Russia. He presented his document in a masterful way. It was accepted, though subsequently critics have pointed out that it contains loopholes for potential manipulation by the church leadership. His rise was now assured in the liberal climate by then prevailing. He would further prepare himself for an international role by, for example, spending a few weeks at Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham in order to improve his English.

The question being asked in the Vatican, Poland and elsewhere is: will this Patriarch invite the Pope to Moscow? He seems to have had early sympathy with the Catholic Church, and I perceived a certain openness in his Smolensk seminary, for example. This, however, changed when the Vatican created four fully-fledged dioceses in Russia and Kirill strongly criticised this. The Vatican, though, seems hopeful that relations will improve now.

Keston Institute's Encyclopaedia *Religious Life in Russia Today*, the final volume of which was launched in Moscow last January, designates him as a 'popular and colourful figure… who has regular meetings with the scientific and artistic intelligentsia of Smolensk' and is brilliant in the field of education. He supports a 'powerful Russian State' and it will be interesting to observe his developing relations with President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin, who have similar views.

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Patriarch Kirill

Old and New Methodists in Vologda

by Xenia Dennen

The Revd Vera Agapova's house, containing Vologda's Methodist Church

Methodism reached Vologda from America. In 1994 members of the United Methodist Southwest Texas Conference arrived in the city and two years later a Methodist church was registered. When Keston's Encyclopaedia team (myself, Roman Lunkin and Sergei Filatov) arrived at the door of this new Methodist church, we were not confronted with what I would have expected to find in England. This was no ordinary church. Because it was not possible to buy land and build a church, Vologda's Methodist minister, the Revd Vera Agapova, had bought a small house, 43 Proletarskaya Street, which was registered as her private property, and had turned half of it into a church. She lived in the other half. Immediately behind her house the elegant curvaceous outline of a Russian Orthodox church imprinted a traditional image on the skyline in contrast to what was a new element on Russia's religious landscape.

Vera Agapova met us on the doorstep, a homely shawl draped over her shoulders, and led us into a well-ordered room, most of which was set aside for the church, with a small area behind some pillars where there was a table and chairs and facilities for making tea. There we sat and heard her story. She had been a businesswoman and had lost her husband in 1997 when he was killed in a car crash. It was he who had found his way into the small Methodist group formed by the Americans in 1994, and Vera had followed. After his death, the group encouraged her to join the Methodist seminary in Moscow where she trained for the ministry and was ordained in 1998. She had been profoundly moved, she told us, by all the prayer and support which had poured forth from those attending the Methodist Conference in Moscow, led by Bishop Rüdiger Minor (originally from East Germany), the head of the Russian United Methodist Church.

Now her congregation consisted of about 30 members. There was a Sunday school attended by 12-15 children, and summer camps were organised for them and children from state homes by Vera and her helpers. Foreign languages at the local technical college were taught by some Americans who kept in close touch with her congregation, and helped maintain contact with the US from where funding came to support her ministry. Members of Vera's congregation had visited the US and had seen 'varied aspects' of church life there: 'As members of a non-traditional religion, it is good to feel that you're not alone,' she said. Groups of American doctors who were Christians had attended four conferences in Vologda, which Vera had helped to organise. She knew many of Vologda's doctors who agreed to have the American visitors to stay. Even the Orthodox bishop had been prepared to receive the visitors, she told us.

Vologda's Methodist Church

'Working relations begin with friendship,' she said. Although she had established good relations with the Baptists and with the Catholic priest, some more conservative Evangelical Christian groups could not relate to her as a woman minister because of their views on women's ministry. She wanted her church to remain theologically liberal and part of Europe, she said, and had been attracted to the Methodist Church because of its non-judgemental attitude and its love. In her view, people should remain free and never face compulsion – this had been her experience among the Methodists. Her theology was sacramental, she wore vestments when officiating, read Russian Orthodox theological books and liked the writings of Fr Alexander Men. She respected Russian culture, for in her view 'you must not rubbish the place where you live'. She clearly could happily coexist with the Russian Orthodox Church – in her words 'we have to live together' – and she particularly liked its renewed interest in biblical studies. Nevertheless, she and her American visitors had on occasion been shocked by Orthodox behaviour: once they had arrived in an Orthodox church where a funeral was being held, and had been greeted in a loud voice by the parish priest who, she said, paid absolutely no attention to the solemn event taking place just behind him. Also, on another occasion a visiting group of American teenagers from a Methodist Sunday school had been invited to sit down at tables laden with vodka, all generously provided by an Orthodox parish.

The Revd Vera Agapova

The Methodists' relations with the local authorities were excellent and her congregation worked with local agencies involved in helping single mothers and foster children. 'Faith must be visible through action; we must show that we are "normal" people,' Vera explained, and proudly added that they were now called 'normal sectarians'! She believed that slow, careful work would gradually enable Methodism to gain respect and become established: 'We must not advertise ourselves; nothing can happen all at once in the current Russian situation.' She spoke with a hint of envy, however, about churches where many generations had been baptised, married and buried, and longed for the day when her church would become rooted in Russia and enmeshed with the lives of future generations.

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