Keston Newsletter

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The bells outside the Znamensky Church in the village of Dubrovitsy (see p.13)

Ringing the Changes
Keston at Forty (1969-2009)

by Michael Bourdeaux

So – Keston has existed for 40 years – over half my life – and half of that time (exactly 20 years) I've been living in Oxford. It's almost unbelievable to reflect that the Berlin Wall came down just after I came to St Edmund Hall, Oxford, with a visiting fellowship: my temporary absence from Keston College seemed to inaugurate the sensational collapse of communism. Those were heady days, though I'm often brought up short when I meet students from Eastern Europe, from whose memory those days have vanished like a wraith. I wonder to what extent the West – or Russia! – will celebrate this 20th anniversary.

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Unlike the world at large, we at Keston never believed communism would be permanent. Sir John Lawrence, co-founder with me of Keston (the others were Professor Leonard Schapiro and Professor Peter Reddaway) used to say that 'communism will collapse like a house of cards – and I shall live to see it!' How right he was – he even inaugurated the new millennium, when his obituary filled the first slot in *The Times* on 1 January 2000. The

other three of us, too, disbelieved the myth created by the Kremlin that here was the harbinger of a new world order.

But I'm jumping ahead. My own views on Soviet communism were forged not by reading or propaganda, but by the experience of living in Moscow on a student exchange – the first one ever for a whole academic year – in 1959-1960. I came to see, through meeting ordinary people, that the death of Stalin six years earlier had not inaugurated a golden age for the Russian people. I gradually came to see that persecution of religion lay at the heart of the system and that Nikita Khrushchev had begun systematically to remove the new green shoots of religious liberty. The Christian world was beguiled, for example, by the fact that the Russian Orthodox Church was accepted into membership of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1961. My view – that this act on the world stage masked savage persecution at home – was not popular in Christian circles. Many church leaders thought that this belief – expressed in my first book, *Opium of the People* (1965) – did not merit serious discussion. I was categorised as an 'anti-communist', who may even have been harming the persecuted by publicising the desperation of their plight.

John, Leonard and Peter thought otherwise. Xenia Dennen, too, worked with Keston before it existed, as it were, helping me in my home to document the persecution, so we were in the tiny circle of people who saw through Soviet propaganda and shared the frustration that there was no recognised – or funded – place where serious work on the subject could be done. These were the days before Amnesty International, before any co-ordinated Christian work on behalf of the suffering church. Not a single university, neither in the USA nor in Western Europe, was studying the subject. Then in January 1969 the great Bishop Fulton Sheen, of Rochester, NY, invited me and my young family to spend a semester at his Roman Catholic seminary, lecturing on the persecuted church. This was truly a turning point, though I returned to London in May with no job and no income.

Economic necessity sharpened our minds and before the end of the year the first meeting of the Council of the 'Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism' took place, already registered as an educational charity. The name marked our determination to avoid any accusation of being a propagandistic organisation – no mention of Russia or of persecution and the emphasis on *study*. It was far from ideal, but we never came up with a better one until the great day when the work expanded beyond my home, and the Diocese of Rochester (England this time!) offered us at a reasonable price the opportunity of buying the redundant school in the rural village of Keston in the London Borough of Bromley. So from 1973 the name 'Keston College' came to symbolise reliable information on religion in the communist world. We were a 'college' in the old sense of a 'collegium' of scholars who came together for study.

Although there was so much to do in making the building first habitable and then suitable for a study centre, this move provided tremendous impetus. People who cared about the truth – when news of renewed acts of persecution reached us weekly, sometimes daily – found their way there. In my mind's eye I can see John Simpson of BBC TV standing outside the door, with a lovely view of the trees of Keston Common in the background, interviewing staff about someone's imprisonment.

The 1970s were years of expansion on a scale we never expected. Because we were constantly short of money salaries were way below what the world or any university would offer. We never received any institutional grants, but money came in from private individuals (12,000 on the mailing list at one time) and from specialised Christian missions, which were beginning to look for systematic ways of helping the persecuted church. The great Norbertine priest, Fr Werenfried von Straaten, founder of Aid to the Church in Need, said that Keston's research was essential in defining the mission field and backed his words with financial support. Requests came in to expand our work to include the other communist countries – Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania and many others – in our researches. In our News Service and *Religion in Communist Lands* we constantly noted that religious revival was taking place in the very teeth of persecution. We tried systematically to cover Islam, Buddhism and Judaism, as well as Christianity.

By the beginning of the 1980s there would often be as many as 30 people working in the building. We needed them to cope with the flood of *samizdat,* unpublished documents which reached us from all corners of the Soviet empire. We found, for instance, that the writings of the unregistered Baptists in the Soviet Union or the Lithuanian Catholics gave

us a complete and accurate picture of the position of their church. The number of 'Keston Books' eventually reached 31. There were nearly a hundred people who were on our staff, full or part-time, at some period during the years up to 1989. We established the credibility of some of the great names: Fr Gleb Yakunin, Fr Pavel Adelheim, Anatoli Levitin, Aida Skripnikova, Nijole Sadunaite, Fr Gheorghe Calçiu and countless others. When, ultimately, the church history of the second half of the 20th century comes to be written, Keston's archive will reveal the full story to the world.

Much of our energy was expended in waging a constant struggle to make the truth heard, despite the growing use which the BBC and print journalists made of our work. Opposition from the 'Left' was a persistent factor. The British Council of Churches had an 'East-West Relations Advisory Committee'; Sir John Lawrence was a founder member and I joined in 1965. We were always in a state of creative tension with many who seemed too ready to listen to the Soviet line, but systematically contributed until the dissolution of the group in 1989. The WCC, by contrast, could never countenance Keston as a possible adviser and was unduly influenced by communist propaganda throughout the period. In 1985, finally, I broke my diplomatic silence and in a public lecture stated that the WCC had lost its credibility in the biased picture of human rights which it presented.

There were many great days – for example, the award of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion in 1984, which I correctly claimed was a recognition of the work of the whole staff, not just myself. We advised politicians as different as President Carter (over the release of Georgi Vins), David Owen and Margaret Thatcher. Keston first charted the release of prisoners such as Irina Ratushinskaya in 1987. We were almost the first in the world to proclaim that Gorbachev was 'for real' and the Soviet Union could never revert to its former ways. Readers who would like a more systematic account of what we did must await publication of my memoirs.

Then came communism's debacle. By adapting to the new world, Keston survived. Many organisations born in the Cold War did not: the Great-Britain-USSR Association, the School of Slavonic and East European Studies as an independent body of London University, for example. We moved to Oxford, had to lose most of our staff, acquired a building but had no money to maintain it. Despite our hopes to the contrary, the University did not incorporate our work into any part of its programme. However, undaunted, we retained the integrity of our work. Preserving the extensive archive, a veritable tool of history, was the essential and we eventually found a home for it at Baylor University, Waco, Texas, with which we had had links since the 1970s. Our friends there are conserving and re-cataloguing it; the most important parts of it are beginning to be available online.

We have always supported our Moscow team financially, led by the great authority on Russian religion, Sergei Filatov. Earlier this year there was a press conference in Moscow presenting the seventh and final volume of Keston's Encyclopaedia, *Religion in Russia Today*. This massive work of some 3,000 pages is the result of 14 years of field work in which some of us from the UK have participated. It is a monument to scholarship which, in its field, may never be surpassed. Even now, with virtually no resources, Xenia Dennen produces this modest publication, the *Keston Newsletter,* from which you can regularly read about our continuing activities. The residue in our bank account from the eventual sale of our building in Oxford is sufficient for us to be able to give modest grants for researchers to visit Baylor and work in our archives, or for any other related cause which Keston's Council decides to support.

We have rung the changes. Our bells (to keep the campanological metaphor) inaugurated a third millennium very different, perhaps, from what we once thought it would be, but with an axis – USA-UK-Russia – which holds immense promise for the permanent study of religion under a system which once pledged itself to eradicate it.

Michael lecturing in November 2007 at the opening of the new Keston Center at Baylor

The Caucasus Emirate and the Movement of Military Jamaats

by Mikhail Roshchin

The central mosque in Grozny, Chechnya's capital

The second Chechen war, which began in early October 1999, was linked to Islam from the outset. It was immediately preceded by the jihad of radical Muslims in the Daghestan mountains during August and September 1999. Furthermore, although during the first years of the war the leadership of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (CRI) – the unrecognised secessionist government of Chechnya proclaimed on 6 September 1991 (Ichkeria = 'nine lands' in Chechen, denoting the nine Chechen clans) – was secular, its activities quite quickly began to take on Muslim overtones. The decisions of CRI's State Defence Committee on 22 July 2002 strengthened the link with Islam when Shamil Basaev was appointed commander of all military operations, and when Abdulkhalim Saidullaev, head of Argun's jamaat[1] and advisor on religious questions to CRI's president Aslan Maskhadov, was appointed vice-president of CRI.

[1] A jamaat is a Muslim group devoted to the study of Islam and to mutual support. However, in the North Caucasus this term came to mean a Muslim terrorist group.

Military operations under Shamil Basaev (killed during the night of 9-10 July 2006 in unexplained circumstances, either by Russian special forces or through careless handling of explosives) took on a clearly terrorist character from early summer 2002. His name was associated with the hostage taking in Moscow's 'Nord-Ost' theatre at the end of October 2002, with the seizure of the school in Beslan at the beginning of September 2004, and with the less known but no less tragic explosions on two passenger planes which took off from Domodedovo airport (Moscow) during the night of 24-25 August 2004. By nature he was not a radical Muslim fanatic, but, for tactical reasons, he decided after 9/11 (2001) to link up with the international radical Muslim community, which had become the main source of finance for his military operations.

Aslan Maskhadov was the last, partially illusory, symbol from 2002-2005 of a secular CRI. By then he in effect no longer controlled the Chechen opposition, whose central command had been taken over by Muslim radicals. His death on 8 March 2005 in

Tolstoy-yurt, as a result of Russian Federal forces' special operations, led to an increase in the Islamicisation and radicalisation of the Chechen opposition. He was succeeded by Abdulkhalim Saidullaev as president of CRI, who during his short period in office focused mainly on spiritual and educational matters and was more a moral authority than an active politician in the eyes of the opposition. The Chechen population thought of him as a young sheikh, and at that time there was much discussion about the idea of creating an Emirate, a theocratic state, and appointing Saidullaev as the Emir. Whether Saidullaev would have agreed to this or not we shall never know as on 17 June 2006 he was killed during special operations. The next president was Dokka Umarov: he was also killed less than a month after the death of his predecessor.

By the summer of 2006 the opposition movement in the North Caucasus, with its centre of operations in Chechnya, had been decimated with most of its field commanders killed, apart from the few who managed to escape abroad. Now it was the turn of the next generation: new young people who were attracted to radical Muslim fundamentalism, known in the North Caucasus as 'Wahhabism', began to join its ranks. The now rejuvenated movement received significant support from military jamaats, which began to be formed in Chechnya's neighbouring North Caucasus Muslim republics, and helped strengthen the movement's Chechen centre. These were composed of radical Muslims who, although few in number, were strictly disciplined and well organised.

The militarised jamaats were part of a phenomenon known as 'political Islam', whose most visible and striking ideologist in 2000 was Yasin Rasulov, a graduate of the Daghestan State University. In Rasulov's opinion, 'the invasion of Daghestan territory by the "Islamic Army of the Caucasus" [the jihad of August-September 1999. *MR*] with the aim of establishing sharia and destroying the sharia enclave of Kadar's zone [the 'Wahhabi' communities in the villages of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi in Daghestan. *MR*] as well as today's punitive actions by the authorities against the supporters of "Wahhabism", are the continuation of the historical tradition of opposition to the Russian authorities and of armed Muslim opposition in the North Caucasus. The cooperation of loyal official clergy with the authorities and with the Ministry of the Interior, appears logical and normal within the framework of this tradition which the new Russia maintains.' (Yasin Rasulov: *A Mirror of Caucasian Destiny*, draft. http://www.chernovik.net/article.php?paper_id=35&article_mode). Yasin Rasulov was killed on 10 April 2006 in Makhachkala (capital of Daghestan) during one of the regular operations of the local MVD. His ideas, however, were widely adopted by his supporters in the North Caucasus.

Dokka Umarov (centre) *Emir of the Caucasus Emirate with bodyguards*

The creation of a Caucasus Emirate was an idea taken up by one of Rasulov's supporters, CRI's president Dokka Umarov, who realised that to convert the CRI into an Emirate would help revive and increase the size of the opposition, and spread military action into the territory of Chechnya's neighbouring republics. So in October 2007 he resigned as president and appointed himself 'the Emir (commander-in-chief) of the fighters of the Caucasus, and of the leaders of the Jihad' and also 'the sole legal power over all territories where there are mujahedin,' (http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1200657.html.) that is, he proclaimed himself to be the Emir of a new Caucasus Emirate which was to include Daghestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Stavropol krai and Krasnodar krai, North Ossetia-Alania, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkesia. All these areas started to call themselves *vilaiyats*[2]: for example Chechnya took the name of *vilaiyat* Nokhchicho (Chechnya = Nokhchicho in Chechen). In the opinion of an author on the separatist website Chechenpress 'the sole aim of the latest speeches of Abu-Yasman [the name given to Dokka Umarov by his supporters. *MR*] is to create slogans which can be understood by all Caucasus partisans, whatever their ethnic

[2] The term *vilaiyat* = province in Arabic, and is widely used in Muslim countries.

identity, thus uniting them and building up a jihad movement in the North Caucasus so that Umarov himself and any successor will be accepted as the movement's natural leader.' (http://www.chechenpress.info/events/2008/01/14/02.shtml.)

How far does the Caucasus Emirate reflect reality, and to what extent is it a virtual project actively propagandised by radical Muslim websites, such as the Caucasus Centre's website (http://www.kavkazcenter.com/)?

It is clear that the strongest base of the Emirate is, as before, in Chechnya, despite the evident achievements of the pro-Russian regime of Ramzan Kadyrov during recent years. A number of villages in the mountainous regions of Chechnya are as before under the control of the Chechen opposition which today has acquired a clearly expressed 'Wahhabi' character. Its mujahedin have sometimes managed to establish control over the roads into these areas for short periods, and have captured members of Kadyrov's administration and law enforcement agencies, while the official heads of the village administrations have had to go into hiding (mostly in Grozny, Chechnya's capital).

In the North Caucasus republics of Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkesia and North Ossetia-Alania, the military jamaats of the Emirate do not appear to be very active, but they nevertheless exist. In Daghestan, too, the Emirate is not so active militarily. However, here the ideas of 'Wahhabism' are far more widely spread among the population, particularly among the young. Owing to the high level of religiosity and the strength of Sufi traditions among the population, Daghestan has what can be confidently judged to be a smouldering religious war, which in time could grow into a civil war. On 25 May 2009 in Makhachkala, Akhmed Tagaev, who in practice heads the Spiritual Directorate of Daghestan's Muslims and who has actively worked against Islamic fundamentalism in the republic, was killed. On 5 June Daghestan's Minister of the Interior, Adilgirei Magomedtagirov, who fought for over ten years against the Daghestan mujahedin and survived a number of assassination attempts, was shot by a sniper.

The military activities of the Caucasus Emirate have been mostly visible recently in Ingushetia where, thanks to its good roads, the density of the population and the small size of its territory, the mujahedin have carried out diversionary operations and have then melted away into the local population. The commander of the Caucasus front of the Emirate (Dokka Umarov's deputy) is currently the Ingushetian Akhmad Evloev, more commonly known under his nickname 'Magas', who has announced: 'today all the jamaats of Ingushetia, except for a few small groups with whom we are currently in negotiations, have joined the Ingushetia Sector of the Caucasus front.' (http://www.chechentimes.net/content/view/1560/34/)

In May and June 2009 it was in Ingushetia that the most intense conflicts between the mujahedin and the MVD forces of Ingushetia and Chechnya took place. These came to a head on 22 June when in the early morning a suicide bomber crashed his car stuffed with explosives into the motorcade of Ingushetia's president, Yunus-beka Evkurov, who was seriously wounded while some of his bodyguards were killed.

The movement of military jamaats within the Caucasus Emirate is clearly a significant phenomenon. It fits logically into the general structure of the international network of radical Muslims, and must be seen as a long-term factor in the destabilisation of a crucial part of the Russian Federation.

Akhmad Evloev, commonly known as 'Magas'

The Russian Orthodox Church
Its Glory and its Shame

by Paul Oestreicher

The following text is a lecture, delivered in Cambridge on 25 November 2008, in honour of the late Fr Sergei Hackel.

Sergei Hackel was a close and cherished friend, a fount of knowledge and wisdom, a fellow priest of warm humanity and of searching honesty, an Orthodox Christian whose liberality of mind and heart broke down many walls of partition. When Sergei came into a meeting, usually late and breathless, the atmosphere lightened in expectation of his kindly yet penetrating wit. It was never meant to hurt, but Sergei did not shy away from uncomfortable truths. He was far too human for me to paint him with a halo.

Fr Sergei Hackel

When I began to reflect on what he would want me to say, I came to the conclusion that he would want me to share with you some of my own experience, over a life-time, of Russian Orthodoxy which both nourished his soul and caused him deep pain, about the Church which he revered and with which he struggled. My personal and subjective understanding of Russia and its Church owes a great deal to Sergei. At times he enabled me to see things through his eyes, but that in no way entitles me to presume to speak posthumously for him. So, I alone am responsible for this lecture in honour of Sergei Hackel and of what he stood for. Yet I hope my reflections will reflect his spirit, for kindred spirits we were and, beyond the grave, we remain.

Some of you will have to evaluate as insiders what I, an outsider, have observed and have decided – with considerable trepidation – to share with you. To my regret and shame, I do not even speak Russian, knowing well that language is a spiritual key that unlocks sanctuary doors. What I want to share is experiential and episodic, pictures on a small canvass. If a bigger picture emerges, it will be a bonus. What follows is all about a love affair.

At the back of the stage there are two large canvases: one is Tolstoy, the other Dostoevsky. Everything is played out against them. I read their work, though not exhaustively, before I was 20, and at 23 I left my New Zealand hometown of Dunedin to continue my study of political philosophy in the capital, Wellington.

Parents exchanged children. Tanya, the daughter of the pastor of the Russian community in New Zealand, Archpriest Alexei Godayev, was moving to Dunedin to study medicine. She was welcomed by my parents and I by hers. Tanya would live in an exiled German Quaker home; I in a Russian Orthodox one. This was, for me, a kind of total immersion in a new culture and spirituality. A sign of how deeply this has stayed with me is that this morning, when making the sign of the cross at prayer, as I have done ever since, I did it the Orthodox way. It is much more than a piece of personal ceremonial. It is an unspoken prayer for Russia and the Russian Church. And also this morning, as on every morning if I can get it, the first food I ate was kasha.

I had already decided to train eventually for the Anglican priesthood but, for a time, I was part of the Russian parish in Wellington. The church was the largest room in a modest timber bungalow. It was simple, but beautiful. There was none of the splendour I was later to encounter in Russian cathedrals but, from day one, the liturgy became part of me. In no time I was recruited to serve, and to this day I owe my skill with incense and my love of it to Fr Alexei's tuition. It was there that I learnt my sense of the numinous that, in a different way, also became a reality in the silence of a Quaker meeting. Fr Alexei was, perforce in New Zealand, part of the Church in Exile, his archbishop in Sydney. But his heart was with the Moscow Patriarchate. He had in no way broken emotionally from the Church in Russia. No doubt he was untypical of the exiled

church, but he was as open intellectually and ecumenically as I much later found Sergei Hackel to be. Part of him was still in the village of his childhood.

He had, as a young chemist in post-World War II Austria, married a German wife who had become, in her piety, more Orthodox than the Orthodox, a deeply religious, almost forbidding mother figure, who ruled the home as an Orthodox matriarch. Fr Alexei, whose weekday job was as a lactic chemist with the New Zealand Milk Board, was secure and relaxed in his faith. I was reminded of him when I read the story of Metropolitan Anthony walking out of vespers in the middle of Holy Week to go shopping. Fr Alexei's wife, like many a holy babushka, would have looked daggers at that. Fr Alexei read avidly and widely in Russian, English and German: the Eastern Fathers, the thinkers of the Russian intellectual emigration in Paris and in America. He introduced me particularly to Nicholas Berdyaev. *The Origin of Russian Communism* became a seminal work in my studies. Beyond all that his reading and thinking was wide and heterodox. Other religions were not heresy to him but there to be learned from.

I began to appreciate something of the strengths of a mode of spirituality that does not depend on theological formalism, and a priesthood that does not know the meaning of systematic theology. Fr Alexei would burst into my room and share some nugget of wisdom he had discovered. It did not need to correlate with anything else. Much later, however, I began to see the dangers too of a Church reliant for its life on timeless tradition and a wonderful mystical liturgy, with few other firm anchors. For the wisest, that's more than enough, and for the holiest, the *startsy*, love suffices anyway. But for the rest? I was to get to know that rest in Soviet times, sometimes too well. When a host of young bishops have no theological and intellectual grounding, as is now the case in the post-communist era, little wonder that things are as they are.

Fr Alexei ended his days at the New Zealand seaside, a very old widower, still open to new ideas, still with shining eyes, supporting and living with a young religious artist, not an icon painter, but much influenced by Russian mysticism. His daughter Tanya worked for years as a GP in one of the poorest parts of London and then returned to New Zealand as a naturopathic doctor and healer, something of a prophetess in an ecological spirit-filled garden.

As a result of my year in a Russian home, I was not quite unprepared for many encounters with Russia and its Christians when, in 1964, I was invited to be the first secretary to the British Council of Churches' Advisory Committee for East-West Relations. A Quaker political thinker, Richard Ullmann, who had initiated the Committee, had suddenly died. I was asked to step into his shoes. His pamphlet *The Dilemmas of a Reconciler* was, at least initially, to be my guidebook. The Committee was made up of experts on the communist-ruled countries of Europe. I began to see my parish as beginning in East Berlin and stretching to Vladivostok. A Quaker Trust financed the Committee and my job. Russian expertise was on hand in the persons of Sir John Lawrence, Michael Bourdeaux, and Sergei Hackel. John Arnold was in the chair.

The Cold War was at its height. How do I sum up the dilemma of that period? It was to hold the balance between a commitment to peace when the threat of war was real, and at the same time to be an advocate of the persecuted and voiceless. To get that absolutely right was almost impossible. Keston College, bravely led by Michael Bourdeaux in the face of much ecumenical criticism – my own often included – knew clearly where it stood, on the side of the persecuted. Encouraged by Canon David Paton, the Church of England's key foreign policy advisor and a China expert, my head told me that the mutual demonising of East and West was the primary thing to be opposed. From the outset I believed in what much later came to be called Ostpolitik. I believed that maximum engagement with the communist East was the long-term recipe for the peaceful defeat of a tyranny that no longer, in my view, deserved to be called Socialism. Any thought of its violent defeat could only spell total disaster. My dictum was: peaceful change through rapprochement, both by state and church.

It was Sergei who helped me to activate that dictum in relation to the Russian Orthodox Church. That is how our friendship began. But one of the implications, agreeing to be the British member of the Executive Committee of the Prague Christian Peace Conference – whose policy was framed by the Russian Orthodox Church, which in turn was in the hands of the Kremlin (here I somewhat oversimplify) – this role sat uneasily with my simultaneous membership of the Council of British Amnesty of which, in the 1970s, I became chairman. My heart was more with Amnesty than my head, and incidentally

therefore also with the work of Keston College – even if I did not say so very loudly. The dilemma between ecclesiastical diplomacy and human rights advocacy was constant, and never fully resolved before the Cold War ended. Both approaches were essential. The Helsinki accords ultimately made them more consonant.

My Russian counterpart was none other than the formidable Metropolitan of Leningrad, Nikodim, the Moscow Patriarchate's foreign minister. He was, among many other things, in a position to dictate the Christian Peace Conference's policy. It would be impossible to say that he and I were friends, but we were sparring partners who respected each other. I was, in official terms, a very young Anglican priest, albeit with an official title. He was almost equally young, but an Archbishop and more. It sometimes felt to me like David and Goliath. At least it helped a little that when in Russia on official business, I never took off my priestly white summer cassock. At the All-Christian Peace Assembly in Prague in 1964, Nikodim and I clashed head to head. I led a delegation of some 20 representatives of the British churches, not delegates but influential individuals. A predictable resolution – written no doubt by the ever-present behind-the-scenes state agents – was proposed by Nikodim. It condemned the ideological anti-communism of the West, in other words the demonisation of the East by the West. After consultation with my colleagues I went to the microphone and said that the British delegation could only support the resolution if, in a second paragraph, it equally condemned the communist demonisation of the West. Participants from other western countries, including a significant American group of distinguished academics like Professor Charles West from Princeton, agreed with me. The Soviet-imposed pattern of unanimity in decision-making was shattered by my intervention.

There was deep disquiet. What would happen? Nikodim went to the podium and to general amazement announced: 'I apologise for the resolution and withdraw it'. I knew immediately what that might cost him and went to the podium and embraced him, to the standing applause of the 800 or so people present. At subsequent meetings I knew that such opposition at the right moment was what the best of the Russian and other East European Christians secretly hoped for. We could say what they could not. In some senses this was undiplomatic. It was the role I chose to play in the East. In the West my critique was of western Cold War policies, but that did not appease Fr Paul Sokolovsky, the Patriarchate's 'man in Prague' and his KGB masters. He told the KGB I was probably an agent of western intelligence. No doubt he believed it, seeing me as the same kind of plant that he was.

In the West I was an active and leading figure in a peace movement that was often a thorn in the side of the NATO establishment. But in the East, as I knew only too well, the word 'peace' had become an empty political slogan of state propaganda. The West had its politically equivalent slogan: 'freedom'. Many Christians did not see through the hollowness of both slogans. Even so, both the affirmation of 'peace' in the East and of 'freedom' in the West was not totally hypocritical. Nevertheless, when a half truth is presented as the whole truth, it becomes a lie.

Pavel Sokolovsky visited England in 1967 and was invited to appear in Manchester on BBC television together with Professor Milan Opocensky, a highly intelligent and astute Czech Christian who later became General Secretary of the World Reformed Alliance in Geneva. On a long foggy night I shared a taxi ride back to London with the two of them, with a punctured tyre on the way. With much time to talk, I finally lost my patience with this Russian priest, and perhaps unwisely Professor Opocensky took my side. 'How could you tell such lies to the British public about the Church in Russia? At least admit to us you did it under orders.' Perhaps that wasn't fair. Sergei Hackel in his reflective way would have kept his peace. Fr Sokolovsky, together with his East German counterpart, Gerhard Bassarack, saw to it that I got my come-uppance.

Early in 1968 Dr Jaroslav Ondra, the weak but thoroughly decent General Secretary of the Christian Peace Conference, arrived at my London office. 'Paul,' he said, 'Nikodim has made plain to me that if I fail to persuade you to resign from the leadership of the Christian Peace Conference, I will lose my job.' So, for his sake, I resigned. Perhaps they really did think they had got rid of an MI6 agent. Sadly, when the Soviets invaded Prague in August of that year, Slavek Ondra was fired anyway. This time I could not help him. The honourable, if sometimes naïve, founder and father of the Peace Conference, Professor Josef Hromadka, died heartbroken at the end of the dream of 'socialism with a human face'. Pavel Sokolovsky died too, when a Soviet plane

bringing him back to Prague, crashed at the airport, killing all on board.

Somewhat surprisingly, I was, for a while, still given visas to the Soviet Union. I was, even more surprisingly, asked to lead a delegation of young British trade unionists invited by the Komsomol, the Young Communist League. In Kalinin, half way between Leningrad and Moscow I went in search of a church. People were very vague, but pointed in the direction where, at the edge of town, there was said to be one. So I walked and walked; it was mid-summer and light until late; and finally I found it. I knocked on a door nearby to ask for the priest and a woman opened the door who was his friend and spoke good German. She took me to his house and interpreted as we talked deep into the night. He shared with me the experience of many years in the Gulag without a trace of bitterness. His joy at meeting me I can hardly describe. This I realised once again was the Russia that lives from the certainty that Christ is Risen. When finally I rose to go, when we had prayed together, he went to a cupboard and took out a priest's cross. 'It was with me through my imprisonment. I want you to have it and to wear it.' 'I can't take your cross,' I said. 'Please do,' he countered, 'I'm an archpriest now and have a finer one.' I took it, treasured it, but never wore it. When a priest friend of mine was imprisoned in South Africa, I sent it to him. To me this was the ecumene of the martyrs, the true witnesses, who already inhabit the Kingdom where national and confessional borders do not exist. My friend David in post-apartheid South Africa still wears that Russian cross, now as an Anglican bishop.

On every visit to Moscow I had the addresses of people at the edge, and of the wives of prisoners. If only I had been able to pay more such visits. They enriched me in Russia as they did in South Africa. They could not be kept secret. I knew that one day such a visit would, perforce, be my last until the system was no more. Sir John Lawrence (and only he) believed that that would happen within his lifetime. It did, just. Not very long before his death, I helped to host Metropolitan Nikodim in London. A strange rapport was still there. We knew each other well enough for him to chide me on a hot day, without giving offence, for rolling up my sleeves: not cultured for a priest. At the same time he once said: 'I hope you're wise enough not to take everything I say as Gospel.' When I took Nikodim and his party through customs, I carried a very heavy suitcase for him. Asked what the suitcase contained, with a wide grin he joked, 'It is full of caviar and vodka.' The customs official liked the joke and waved us through. This time, it was the truth. Only Archpriest Vitaly Borovoi, Nikodim's deputy, would use humour even more boldly to convey the truth. At an ecumenical meeting in Sweden I well remember these words in his address: 'We have full freedom of religion in Russia and one day in God's good time we will even enjoy it.'

Metropolitan Nikodim, on a visit to Rome, died suddenly in the arms of the Pope of only a few weeks, John Paul I. I was sad for the Russian Church and with hindsight am now even sadder. A real ecumenist, he had written his doctorate on the life of Pope John XXIII. I had little doubt of Nikodim's deep Orthodox piety, and of the genuineness of his ecumenical understanding and commitment. Very few of his colleagues shared it, though that only became evident much later. Most used the ecumenical movement when it was an asset and discarded it when they felt it was no longer needed. I had, in my own ministry, always seen the often criticised uncritical embrace of the Russian Church, with all its flaws, by the ecumenical movement, as an important way of opening Russian Orthodox hearts and minds to non-Orthodox Christendom in the days beyond communist rule. That hope has been sadly disappointed.

Bishop Robert Runcie was invited to represent the Archbishop of Canterbury at Metropolitan Nikodim's funeral. Bob Runcie (we were good friends) wanted me to accompany him. Now the Soviet establishment's disapproval of me became a reality – I was refused a visa. Robert Runcie informed the Soviet Ambassador that if I could not go he would not go either, and the Church of England would not be represented. That worked. We went, and it became my most memorable visit to Russia. The seven hour-long burial of an evidently deeply loved pastor was extraordinary. The deep piety of many thousands of weeping Christians was unforgettable. In a remarkable speech, Cardinal Suenens, who brought the body back to Russia, assured the faithful that their shepherd had neither been murdered nor converted to Catholicism. Robert Runcie and I had been given an interpreter, Ivan Potapov, or rather a translator, not very well versed in spoken English. The professionals were not free to respond to a sudden death, which was not in the plan. Ivan Potapov was a translator of English language theology for the professors of the Leningrad Theological

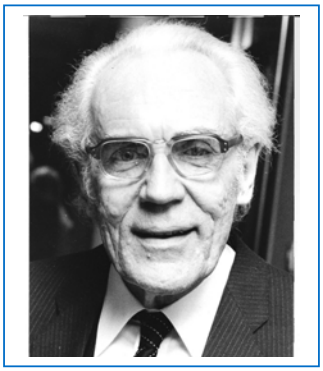
Academy. He volunteered that he had never been permitted to meet western visitors. He was attentive, kind, and rather uncertain. His Orthodox piety was very evident. The day after the funeral he took us to the airport. The Bishop was flying home via Moscow. I was flying home two hours later via Berlin. When the Bishop had left, Ivan asked me to buy him a meal in the more expensive restaurant for western visitors. A good idea, I thought, to buy him the best in hard currency. The restaurant was almost empty. He headed for the furthest corner. 'Will you help me?' he said. 'I have to write a report on the Bishop and you for the authorities. I have never done such a thing and don't know what to write.' I wondered, is this some kind of trap? 'Sorry,' I said, 'I really can't write your report for the Soviet security system.' 'But you haven't said or done anything worth reporting,' he said. 'Just write all you can remember, I replied, and added the question: 'What were you told about us?' 'Nothing very special about the Bishop, but I was to watch you very carefully as you were not to be trusted.' 'I'll tell you, Ivan, why they don't trust me. I'm the Chairman in England of an organisation that works to set political prisoners free. It's called Amnesty International.' At that he looked at me as though I was an apparition. 'Is that possible? Amnesty International and you!' 'Have you heard of it?' I asked. It was my turn to be surprised. 'Heard of it? If it was not for Amnesty, I would still be in prison.' At Leningrad University where he was studying English six students had staged a demonstration in 1968 against the invasion of Czechoslovakia. They were given heavy sentences and thanks to an Amnesty campaign, they were released early. Now Ivan was under something close to house arrest in a village outside Leningrad, and permitted to bring his translations to the Academy every two weeks. Because of Nikodim's untimely death he had been instructed to translate for the Bishop and me – and then to report. It was a meeting neither of us could ever forget.

Soon after Fr Sergei's death his relatives in Russia, secular unreligious Russians, organised a memorial meeting in St Petersburg at which I was the only religious voice. My wife and I had time for museums, for Bach's Christmas Oratorio, and also for glorious liturgy which somehow did not ring true. I knew what Metropolitan Anthony felt on his visits to Russia, faced with such grand, gilded theatrical liturgies, when he longed for holy simplicity. My feeling that Jesus would walk in and walk out again was made stronger by the expensive luxury cars with darkened glass, drivers waiting, engines running: the new Tsarism, Putin's Russia, yesterday's KGB with a capitalist face. Church and State once more in unholy alliance. My prayer and dream was that the Russian Orthodox Church would have been chastened and renewed after years of suffering. Instead, together with the even more imperial Church in Exile, the public face of Russian Orthodoxy is of the Church in 1905 or 1917, its face turned inwards, its distrust of western churches undiminished and, as if nothing had changed since the days of the Tsar's court, with nationalist fervour blessing the weapons that killed women and children in Chechnya. To my friend Sergei, that chauvinist throwback was intensely painful. He had joined and promoted the Orthodox Peace Fellowship, founded by Jim Forest, American peacemaker and devout convert to Orthodoxy; realities that were worlds apart. Even sadder is the fact that the Russian Orthodox Church's anti-Judaism has remained largely unaffected by the horrors of Babi Yar and of the Shoah. To many, even of those who knew Sergei well, he did not feel free to reveal his own Jewish antecedents. Given the daring liberality of his views, he was left feeling that to reveal his Jewish background as well would compound his problems, perhaps even be his undoing in his Church, even in Britain. I cannot help but say, in that context, that the name of Bloom – Blum – on a shop front in Fr Sergei's birthplace Berlin would, in 1938, have led to broken glass. Suffice it to say that Metropolitan Anthony Bloom never denied and never confirmed his own Jewish roots. Although I have no proof, I think that Fr Alexander Men would still be alive today had he not been born a Jew.

The glory and the shame of the Russian Orthodox Church: I could tell a similar tale of my own or of any other church. The English story would have to be told in shades of grey, in the colours of mediocrity. In the Russian story, there are fewer shades: both the light and the darkness stand out starkly. My friend Sergei is among the many sinners and saints who have helped me to see this and have thereby enriched my life. In the words of St John's Gospel – and I am certain this is true of Holy Russia: 'the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.'

In Memoriam
Bishop Albrecht Schönherr

Albrecht Schönherr was one of the outstanding German Protestant Church figures of the 20th century, who outfaced Nazism and for 12 years led the church under East German communism. His death on 9 March in Potsdam at the age of 97 also takes from the scene the last of the surviving pastors, whom the theologian and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, prepared for ordination in the anti-Nazi Confessing Church.



Albrecht Schönherr was born in 1911 in Katscher (present-day Polish Kiertrz) in Silesia. Theological studies took him from Tübingen to Berlin, where in 1932 he found himself in the circle of students around the young lecturer Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was already challenging the rising tide of nationalism invading the church. Hitler's coming to power in 1933 wrought havoc among Protestants, many of whom hailed the Nazi revolution as completing the work of Martin Luther and opening the way for a truly 'German church for the Germans'.

Those who like Martin Niemöller and Bonhoeffer resisted this way formed the Confessing Church in 1934. It was quickly to prove costly, not only for those who were already pastors, but for students aspiring to ordination. Many who opted for the Confessing Church lost all the privileges of a university education, and in some cases were literally put out of the officially recognised seminaries onto the street. Schönherr chose this way, and in the summer of 1935 found himself once more with Bonhoeffer in the first group of ordinands admitted to his illegal seminary at Finkenwalde, a remote village on the Baltic coast. This proved a strenuous experience, not only because of the primitive conditions but more especially the rigour of Bonhoeffer's teaching – his lectures included what were later published as his famous book *The Cost of Discipleship* – and the almost monastic pattern of prayer, meditation and mutual confession that Bonhoeffer imposed. At the same time there was much conviviality, swimming, football, sunbathing and music-making. Schönherr was later to say that it was here that he saw for the first time the meaning of a 'sound life' and learnt a spiritual discipline from which he drew so much that sustained him in the dark times that followed.

The Gestapo closed Finkenwalde in 1937. By then Schönherr was serving as pastor in Greifswald and Brüssow in eastern Germany. In 1940 like so many pastors he was drafted into the army (a convenient way, the Nazis hoped, of disposing of many of them) but survived to become a British prisoner of war, and afterwards resumed his ministry in what by then was the Eastern Zone and founded his own seminary. After a succession of appointments of steadily increasing responsibility, in 1967 he was appointed bishop of the Church of Berlin-Brandenburg where he remained until his retirement in 1981. His highest position, however, came with the added responsibility of being President of the Conference of Church Leadership of Protestant Churches in East Germany, a post he held from 1969 till his retirement.

To be head of a church under an atheist communist regime may be judged to be offered one of the most poisoned of all chalices. Unlike the Nazis who employed their own brand of pseudo-religion in a blatant bid to take over Protestantism, the Marxist-Leninist regime of East Germany preferred to leave the church intact, but within strictly prescribed boundaries, and without any challenge permitted to the ruling ideology. The gospel might be preached from pulpits, but only Marxism was public truth, and while Christian charitable work could continue it was the state which knew what was best for the people's needs from cradle to grave. Could such a situation be accepted without accusations of acquiescing in state tyranny, or even fellow-travelling communism? Schönherr had once heard Bonhoeffer warning against imagining that a movement could be broken from inside: 'If you board the wrong train it is no use running along the corridor in the opposite direction.' But if the regime was opposed outright, would not this play into the hands of those ideologues wanting an excuse to drive the church still further off the scene? The

dilemma was acute throughout the Cold War period, and required a church leadership with the wisdom of serpents and the innocence of doves.

In 1978 Schönherr had a notable meeting with the then head of the East German state, Erich Honeker, at which certain clear and positive guidelines on the role of religion in society were laid out, rights of the churches agreed and some major concessions granted by the state (in broadcasting and prison chaplaincies for example). Schönherr remained adamant that the church could not identify itself with any one party or ideology, but that did not mean a withdrawal from the public sphere and secular responsibility. He liked the term 'a church *within* socialism' to describe his church's situation, its responsibility and its freedom under the gospel. 'Critical solidarity' is also how many pastors defined their attitude to their state during these years. It was a way laden with ambiguities, and after the downfall of communism in 1989 there emerged unpleasant stories of infiltration of the church by state agents and informers. But perhaps the surest tribute to Schönherr's 12 years of leadership of the church under communism is that when change – *die Wende* – began to stir in 1989, it was to the churches that so many East Germans flocked to debate their future and to insist on peaceful transformation. Spaces for democratic change had been preserved. In 2002 the award to him by the German government of the Federal Cross for Distinguished Service, together with other public honours and honorary degrees in Germany and elsewhere, was testimony to his standing.

Schönherr was a tall, quietly spoken man who carried himself with a modest yet cheerful dignity. He was always glad to talk to people interested in his mentor Bonhoeffer, and manifested in himself something of that 'sound life' he had learnt at Finkenwalde. For instance at an international Bonhoeffer conference at Hirschluch in East Germany in 1984, with deep reverence he conducted daily prayers according to Bonhoeffer's Finkenwalde pattern – and during an afternoon boat trip generously plied us foreign guests with schnapps and coffee. In his long retirement he travelled and lectured widely. Even during the communist period he had taken opportunities to relate to the wider world, as when in November 1972 he visited Britain and in a poignant gesture was invited to stand alongside the Queen Mother at the Act of Remembrance at the Cenotaph.

In 1936 he married Hilde Enterlein, who had been another of Bonhoeffer's Berlin students, Bonhoeffer himself conducting the ceremony. She died in 1962. The following year he married Annemarie Schmidt, who survives him as do the six children of his first marriage, his 20 grandchildren and 33 great-grandchildren.

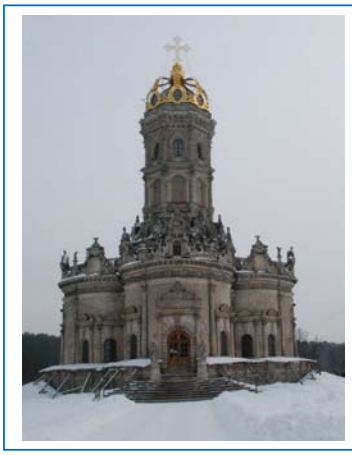
Whenever, today, we walk through the Brandenburg Gate with the freedom that Berlin has enjoyed now for 20 years, we can recall with gratitude Albrecht Schönherr and those like him who, even in those days of oppression, faithfully walked on its eastern side and already lived in that freedom given by the Word of God in the power of the Spirit.

Keith Clements

The Znamensky Church in Dubrovitsy

by Mikhail Roshchin

In the village of Dubrovitsy, four kilometres from Podolsk outside Moscow, a small architectural gem of a church with a remarkable history, the Znamensky Church, (http://www.dubrovitsy-hram.ru/) is the focus for the ministry of a young Russian Orthodox priest, Fr Andrei Gritsyshin, who, with his wife and five sons, has brought life to a place which was once a complete ruin. Before his ordination he studied at the Moscow Technical University of Radio Technology Electronics and Automation, but later decided to change his life radically and in 2003 completed his training for the priesthood at the Moscow Seminary.

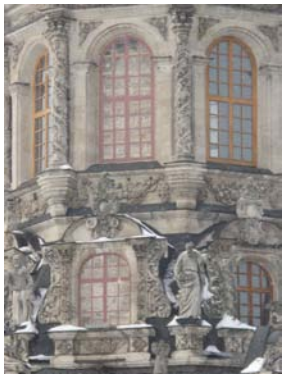


The Znamensky Church is dedicated to the Icon of the Sign (znamenie = sign) inspired by the prophecy in Isaiah 7:10-14 'I will give you a sign. It is this: the maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son whom she will call Emmanuel, which means

Fr Andrei Gritsyshin with his wife & five sons

"God-with-us".' This icon portrays Mary, the mother of Jesus, with Christ, the Sign, within her. The church was built at the end of the 17th century by Prince Boris Golitsyn, an important political figure who was Peter the Great's tutor. In 1689 he supported his former pupil during the latter's struggle for power with the Tsarevna Sofia, and many at the time believed that it was thanks to Golitsyn that Peter became tsar. Nevertheless, Golitsyn soon fell from favour owing to aristocratic intrigues and was banished until the spring of 1690 when Peter unexpectedly recalled him to Moscow and rewarded him with the title of boyar. This dramatic change of fortune led Golitsyn to build the remarkable Znamensky Church between 1690-1697. According to a 19th century book about the church by A.F. Veltman, curator of the Armoury in the Moscow Kremlin, published in 1850 'the Tsar (Peter the Great) appointed Tessin as architect to oversee the building work […] his name is recorded on the plans for the church in Dubrovitsy preserved in the palace archive.'

A contemporary description has survived of a visit to Dubrovitsy in 1699 written by the Johan Korb, secretary at the Austrian Embassy to Russia: 'His Excellency the Ambassador wished to show Prince Golitsyn how great a regard he had towards him, and set off to visit his estate at sunrise. The estate is called Dubrovitsy. It is about 30 versts from the capital, or six German miles. The remarkable and consistently fertile fields made our journey most pleasant and easy. We reached the palace in time for lunch. The Prince himself awaited us and showed us the countryside from the top of the bell tower of the church which has been sumptuously built at the Prince's expense. The church has the shape of a crown and is decorated on the outside with many stone sculptures made by Italian craftsmen. At the end of a sumptuous lunch we engaged in pleasant conversation in a summerhouse, built in the most beautiful of gardens. Our conversation lasted until evening…'

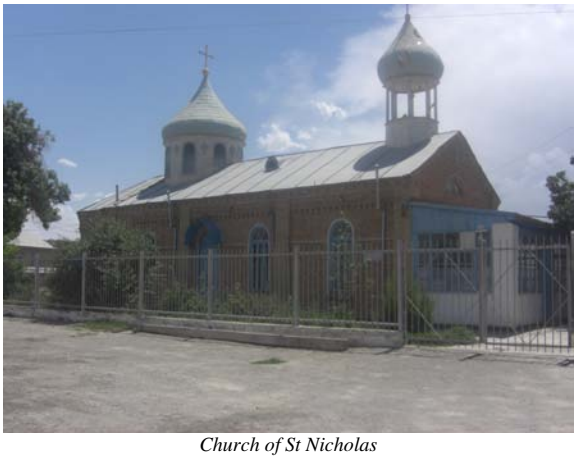


Although by the end of 1697 the church was already complete, there were problems over its consecration: many people were shocked that an Orthodox church should look like a Catholic one. Permission from the church authorities was required, but this was refused: despite Prince Golitsyn's influential position, the Patriarch, who was highly conservative and an uncompromising opponent of western Catholic innovations, would not agree. Only after his death in 1700 and Peter the Great's church reforms was this eventually possible. The Patriarchate was abolished and a new post of Patriarchal *locum tenens* instituted to which Metropolitan Stefan (Yavorsky) of Ryazan was appointed. Metropolitan Stefan had received a European education and had studied at the Kiev Theological Academy (where he also later taught) through which Catholic influence reached Russia. He and Prince Golitsyn agreed on religious matters and he was not shocked by the prince's architectural whims

and foreign tastes. The consecration finally took place, with Metropolitan Stefan presiding, on 24 February 1704 when Peter the Great, who gave to the church many of its rich furnishings, accompanied by the Tsarevich and Grand Duke Alexei Petrovich, was able to be present. Until then he had been preoccupied with attacking Swedish fortifications in 1702-1703, then with founding St Petersburg, his northern capital, and building the Peter and Paul fortress. The celebrations in Dubrovitsy in honour of the church's consecration lasted seven days.

After the 1917 Revolution Prince Golitsyn's estate was destroyed and in the early 1930s the church was closed: the structure and the decorated interior started to deteriorate; the foundations began to subside after the bell tower was blown up in 1932; and in 1947 the church was turned into a store, while Prince Golitsyn's palace became home to the All-Union Animal Husbandry Research Institute. From a state of total ruin this remarkable church was restored during the early days of perestroika, and on 14 October 1990 the liturgy was celebrated once more within its walls. Now Fr Andrei Gritsyshin is bringing young families into the church, with a thriving Sunday school for 50 children and their parents, and life has returned to a once desolate country church.

The Church of St Nicholas in Kagan



Church of St Nicholas

The Revd Janet Ridgway, a longstanding member of Keston, is in charge of the Anglican parish of Tring, St Alban's Diocese, which has for many years had a strong link with the work of Fr Pavel Adelheim in Pskov. In previous issues of the Keston Newsletter *(No 6, pp.17-20 & No 9, pp.11-15) we have published material on the current difficulties, past history and theological convictions of Fr Pavel, so readers will be familiar with many aspects of his life. He was arrested in 1969 for building the Church of St Nicholas in Kagan, Uzbekistan, and spent 1970-1972 in a Soviet labour camp where an accident, deliberately engineered, left him without his right leg. During his many years of ministry in Pskov, parishioners from Tring regularly visited him, taking out, for example, a minibus to help with his work with mentally disabled teenagers. Janet Ridgway was a regular visitor. Now she has travelled to see the church he built in Uzbekistan, and has written the following to the editor:*

I have just returned from Uzbekistan – I found the article in the last *Keston Newsletter* (*Becoming a Muslim in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan*) fascinating; I read it before I travelled to the country. I visited Samarkand, Khiva, Bokhara and Tashkent. I enjoyed my stay immensely. I also had the opportunity to travel by public transport from Bokhara to Kagan and to visit Fr Pavel's church, St Nicholas. I found it so moving. The iconostasis he had brought from the destroyed church of the Transfiguration in Moscow – there it was today still in perfect condition. I met the priest Fr Sergei, a young man with a young family. We spoke of Fr Pavel's legacy to that church and the community. Kagan has seen the departure of many Russians, who were sent to Uzbekistan, since the demise of the Soviet Union and Uzbekistan's independence. It was a remarkable visit for me, and I met some lovely people in the bus who chatted to me – it was a very special afternoon; one I will not forget.

Fr Sergei

Home News

Michael Elmer, an old friend of Keston, has been trying to arrange for a blue plaque to be placed on the building next to Keston Common where the Institute was housed for many years. The proposal, submitted to Bromley Council, is now on a shortlist. The Bishop of Rochester kindly agreed to write in support as well as the Very Rev John Arnold, a former Dean of Rochester, who will be one of our speakers at the AGM on 7 November.

In June the Council welcomed Christopher Marsh, Director of the Keston Center at Baylor, and congratulated him on his appointment as a full professor. He reported that the Keston Center was applying for a grant for a study of Pentecostalism in Russia, Ukraine, and perhaps other countries, in particular Armenia and Latvia. This study would draw on the mass of relevant material in the archive. The digital archive, he reported, had been updated and increased, and the Center was considering how to put the Lithuanian memorandum on to its website. By next year, all the journals would have been bound; 93% of all material was out of the boxes and on to the shelves. The renovation of the existing physical space was complete, and additional accommodation had been acquired. The university library now had a cataloguer who was a graduate in Russian, and this had greatly facilitated the process of cataloguing Russian-language material. The Center was still acquiring books and would be happy to receive suggestions from Keston in the UK on further purchases. The objectives for 2009-2010 were to complete the cataloguing of the books, to complete the binding of all journals, to empty the warehouse, and to begin processing all the remaining material, as well as to increase the use of the collection.

Following the Council of Management's decision to fund a second updated edition of the Encyclopaedia, starting with the publication in 2011 of the first volume, the Chairman in June joined the team on a fieldtrip to Russia's Far East, to Blagoveshchensk, Chita and Ulan-Ude (see pp.17-28). Finances permitting, the team hope to visit Kostroma, Ivanovo, Daghestan, Arkhangelsk, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Ufa in 2010-2011.

Last year the Council of Management appointed a web designer to redesign Keston's website. Those who have accessed our site will have found that it is now much more attractive and user-friendly, although more work still remains to be done.

Michael Bourdeaux writes:

I have been associated with the Templeton Foundation since 1984, the year I received the Prize for Progress in Religion, but I have not been involved to any extent in their policy-making. Nor has the Foundation been notable for work either in the field of religious liberty or of Russian-related endeavours. This changed in April when I was invited to Istanbul for a 'planning' conference, the invitees being informed that the Foundation wished to allocate substantial support for a new enterprise to support religious freedom.

The choice of city indicated that Islam would be high on the agenda, and indeed the second of the two days was devoted to this. There was a session on Russia on the first day, but, disappointingly, it coincided with a lecture on China, which drew more interest. Although I was not invited to speak, I had a better opportunity: extensive private conversations with the organisers. I emphasised the importance of giving attention to Russia, particularly since religious liberty there has been curtailed following the law of 1997 and Vladimir Putin's policies while he was president. I pointed out that Keston's Encyclopaedia, now complete, contained extensive information about Islam. We now await a response to my written suggestions after the conference. Keston, I believe, could make a major contribution to this programme.

When I arrived back from my lecture visit to the University of California at Berkeley in February, there was a surprise in my post: an invitation to cross the Atlantic yet again (the third time in six months) and go to Wittenberg University, Springfield, Ohio, in May to receive the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. I had never been there before, but Jerry Pankhurst, to whom eternal thanks – he has been a friend of Keston almost since day one – was my sponsor. It was a delightful experience – the first time I had received an honorary degree. They were insistent that I should bring a 'companion'. Lorna was unable to make the trip, but my younger daughter Lara-Clare had the pleasure of a very short break from her studies in Manchester to cross the Atlantic for the first time. Wittenberg University is, of course, Lutheran and I was invested with a red cap (as well as a colourful hood) which I hope to wear from time to time – perhaps at the AGM on 7 November!

Russia's Far East
Extracts from my Diary

by Xenia Dennen

In June this year the Encyclopaedia team, myself, Sergei Filatov and Roman Lunkin, set off from Moscow for what was for me the most exciting journey of my life, to the Far East of Russia on the Chinese border. The first lap of our journey was a flight to Blagoveshchensk in the Amur oblast, 8000 km from Moscow.

We arrived at 8 a.m. in Blagoveshchensk on 15 June, and took a taxi to the Amur Hotel, a Stalinist building which had once been a Molokan prayer-house, I later learned. All the notices in the hotel were in Chinese as well as Russian. It was a boiling hot day, and after a few hours rest, we set off through the city, walking along beside the Amur River with China on the other side, while locals sunbathed beneath parasols on a sandy shore. Young lads were skate-boarding on the steps of Lenin's statue in the main square while others practised acrobatics on bicycles. Some large bunches of depressing red plastic flowers were laid out at Lenin's feet, and seemed as dead as is the Lenin cult. I was impressed by a statue of General Nikolai Muravev, the first governor of the Amur region who signed the Treaty of Aigun in 1858 and thereby established the Russo-Chinese border along the Amur River. He had an elegant wreath of real white carnations laid at his feet as he gazed across the river at China. Further along the riverbank we admired a triumphal arch, built originally to honour a visit by the future Nicholas II in 1891, which was restored in 2005, with an icon of him as tsar now adorning the top. As we began to interview local people we discovered that there was a Russian Far East mentality: the proximity of China, the temporary nature of the population with many settling for short periods to help build the Baikal-Amur railway, the focus on the economy rather than on culture, the all-pervasiveness of the military and the large prison population, all contributed to this frontier mentality. China, just across the river, was an ever-present reality, visible to all.

Former Catholic church

(left to right) *Roman Lunkin, Xenia Dennen & Sergei Filatov in front of the triumphal arch erected in honour of the future Nicholas II*

Our first task was to get an appointment with Archbishop Gavriil (Steblyuchenko) Bishop of Blagoveshchensk and Tyndinsk (appointed in 1993 and made Archbishop in 2003), whose name I remembered from conversations with Sir John Lawrence. John used to bemoan the arrival of Gavriil as Abbot of the Pskov Monastery of the Caves (1975-1988) as he ruined through his tyrannical and brutal behaviour what was then one of the few remaining holy places in the Soviet Union. Sergei rang the diocesan administration but was told that information on the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) could only be given out with Patriarch Kirill's permission. We hoped that after the bishop had been consulted we might receive a telephone call with an appointment, but none came, so we 'shook the dust from our feet', moved down river and cast again – we rang the Catholics and immediately landed an appointment with Brother Waldemar Kalinowski.

The original 19th century Roman Catholic church, closed before the Second World War, was appropriated by the Orthodox diocese and was to have been returned to the Catholics after the latter had helped fund the restoration

of the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of the Annunciation. Nothing of the sort happened. Archbishop Gavriil held on to his acquisition and also now used the building next-door for his diocesan administration. The new Catholic church building (named the Church of the Transfiguration), which Sergei and I saw as we emerged from our taxi, was a humble prefab, with a large western cross planted by the entrance. Brother Waldemar Kalinowski, a Pole from near Warsaw, welcomed us and sat us down in the parish kitchen.

Brother Waldemar

Russia was a difficult country, he said: 'You must be able to listen to people, to work with people individually. Many priests come to Russia and then find that they cannot cope.' In the whole of the Amur oblast there were only two Catholic parishes, the other being in Svobodnyi with 30-40 members. Many Catholics had left and moved to Moscow, St Petersburg, Poland or Germany so the congregation in Blagoveshchensk now consisted mostly of newcomers: half of them were young and actively involved in the parish. At Easter and Christmas about 80-100 attended services, but on normal Sundays the numbers were much lower. Brother Waldemar and Fr Harold Menezes, the priest-in-charge, had wanted a Chinese priest on their staff in order to develop contacts among the Chinese population, but the local administration had opposed such an idea, calling it a 'provocative matter'; nor did the Catholics have any contact with the indigenous minority peoples, the Evenki and Eveny, for which, in Brother Waldemar's opinion, you would need ethnographic training and knowledge of this local culture. As for the Orthodox, they had 'no relations' with them. When the Orthodox refused to return the Catholic church, the matter was taken up by the media who came out on the Catholic side, and ever since, according to Brother Waldemar, the Orthodox had kept their heads down and had left the Catholics in peace. Only 10% of the population, he thought, were observant Christians, of which very few were real Orthodox believers; there were probably more Protestants than Orthodox, in his view.

Church of the Transfiguration

Pastor Andrei Zaitsev

All three of us interviewed a Baptist pastor, Andrei Zaitsev, who turned out to be, in my eyes, a Chechen war hero, a former military doctor who had survived the war, despite being wounded. He was in charge of a new Baptist prayer house, which was still under construction, where both his congregation, the Church of 'Renewal', and the Pentecostal 'Good News' church held services. In addition we discovered that a Chinese evangelical group met there – a white board in the main meeting room was covered with Chinese writing! (These were Chinese traders who with their pastor could not meet legally in China.)

New Baptist prayer house

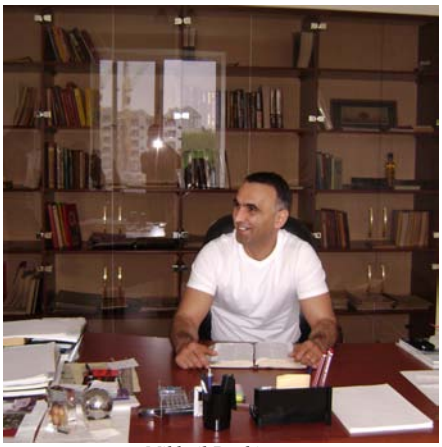
The first congregation of Baptists was founded in the Amur region in 1889 and grew from groups of Molokans who had been exiled to the area before the Revolution. During the Soviet period Baptists had been exiled to the villages of Tambovka and Tolstovka and to the town of Svobodnyi. Pastor Zaitsev's 'Renewal' church had grown from the original Baptist congregation and was more socially involved and open to modern culture. It consisted, he told us, mostly of students and people with higher education – 120 in all, with sometimes 200 at meetings. Women were

allowed to wear trousers and did not have to cover their heads as in more conservative congregations. He regretted that the Baptists had no theological college in the Far East as, consequently, there was much ignorance among Baptist pastors, who usually had a job and no time to study. However, the South Korean Methodists and Presbyterians had done much to remedy the situation, paying for many, including him, to study and train in South Korea.

His congregation worked with down-and-outs, with alcoholics and drug addicts, and ran meetings in local cafés and restaurants. They had good relations with the local administration and were allowed to work in children's homes, to run summer camps and to build, with American money, playgrounds for schools. It was only the Federal authorities which placed restrictions on them and stopped them working in schools and local villages: 'They restrict us: they want to create an Orthodox-Muslim state and support propaganda on the television news against the non-Orthodox.' The Orthodox 'ignore us' and think Baptists are 'wild animals'. He felt part of Russian culture and advised new pastors to read Tolstoy and Dostoevsky: 'I am not a Protestant; I am a Russian Christian. People like me are Russians who have read the Bible but remain part of our culture… we are Russian Christians of a non-Orthodox kind.' The greatest threat facing those like him was the close collaboration of the ROC with the Russian State: 'There are good prospects for Protestants; our young people will take responsible positions in society. But if there is political repression, then of course such possibilities will be crushed.'

At 1 p.m. we were due to interview Bishop Mikhail Darbinyan, head of the charismatic New Generation church. We were shown into

Sergei & Roman talk to Mikhail Darbinyan (second right)



Mikhail Darbinyan

a new building, surrounded by warehouses and opposite a search and rescue base, not far from the River Zei, a tributary of the Amur River. Stretching out to our left was a large hall which could hold a thousand people. Lunch was waiting for us upstairs where we sat with Misha (as Bishop Mikhail Darbinyan liked to be called), his administrator, and Alexei Morshchinin a former drug addict. Misha was brought up in Grodno, Belorus (from his surname I guessed that he was Armenian) and aged 23, with a Pentecostal girlfriend and after seeing the film *Jesus Christ*, was converted. He was educated in Riga and served his church in Latvia from 1993-1999 when he moved to Blagoveshchensk where a New Generation church had been registered in 1993 (at the entrance to the meeting hall was a large notice with photographs, including a large one of Misha by the title '15 Years of Success'). Currently weekday services were attended by 500-600, and on Sundays by 700 regulars. He claimed that all New Generation members were patriots: 'Patriotism means service; we are concerned for those in need; our first task is to save people.' He preached not just personal salvation but also the reform of society and argued that, unlike Pentecostals and Charismatics (he called himself and his followers 'Christians' and did not wish to be identified with any particular denomination) who were too inward-looking, his people were involved in politics, had their own deputy in the city administration, wanted to reform society – not revolutionise it (indeed he criticised those Protestants who were involved in the Orange Revolution) – and improve the economy and agriculture. Misha, however, had little time for democracy, calling it 'demonocracy'; he preferred a theocratic monarchy, and admired above all King David 'who listened to the voice of God'.

Mikhail Darbinyan in New Generation's DVD studio

In the Amur oblast there were now another seven New Generation churches as well as smaller groups in a number of villages. Churches had also been founded, he said, in Buryatia, Chukotka, Khabarovsk, Yakutia, Khakassia, and Chita while in Harbin (in China) they had a New Generation group of students and distributed Misha's sermons translated into Chinese. 'Our church is unique: it includes people of all ages, from all social groups; we have people with higher education, local bureaucrats, many businessmen.' His church members did not feel they were second-class citizens and were not branded 'US invaders' by either the local authorities or the Orthodox diocese. Unlike western Russia where Russian Orthodoxy was closely enmeshed with politics, in the Russian Far East the situation was quite different; here, Misha, explained, people respected Protestant pastors, Orthodoxy was a minority faith, and his group were able to influence local affairs. New Generation could even hold meetings by the statue of General Muravev on the bank of the Amur River with the support of the city authorities and under local police protection. Misha also believed in using the secular media to get his message out – 'to help introduce Christian values as the foundation of society' in his words: we were shown a DVD

New Generation's hall for a thousand people

production centre within their complex where a number of technical experts were busy. The resulting DVDs were then widely distributed and shown on television; New Generation even had its own television programme called 'New Generation Presents'! I was shown DVDs of their shows, involving their own singers and dancers, which had greatly impressed the Blagoveshchensk public. 'Surely these young people must be from Moscow or St Petersburg,' had been the reaction of many who then were dumbfounded to learn that all the performers were locals.

Sergei decided we should fly to Chita as to travel by train would take too long, three days, and might be dangerous because of the many prisons in the area. I found Blagoveshchensk airport rather primitive, and before I was allowed through security, a local policeman sent me to see an MVD officer as I had no registration stamp in my passport. Luckily the hotel receipt which Sergei gave me was enough: the MVD officer understood that my

Chita

registration had gone through to the FSB on computer and that registration stamps were now *passés*, so I soon found myself standing in a fenced-off area on the tarmac waiting for our small turboprop plane to take us off on our three-hour flight to Chita, nearly 2000 km west of Blagoveshchensk and about 700 km east of Lake Baikal. We flew over miles of hilly terrain covered in trees, until eventually a vast plain, the wild steppe, opened up below. There was Chita in the middle.

The area east of Lake Baikal began to be colonised by the Russians in the mid 17th century; the indigenous population were Buryats – Buddhists who were not forcibly Christianised by the Russian colonisers – and the peoples of the Far East and Far North, the Evenki and Eveny. Many Old Believers

escaped there to avoid persecution, and later Lutherans and Catholics arrived to set up factories, followed by Baptists in the early 20th century. Chita, the main city, became a crossroads and today is a free trade zone: through it runs the Trans-Siberian railway and southwards the railway and road direct to Harbin in China. All current investment seems to be coming in from China, the many building sites I saw with Chinese workmen are funded from China and, with only one extremely expensive Chinese restaurant rather than the usual myriad smaller ones, we felt the mafia were in charge. Since Sergei had been in Chita ten years before, the city had been much improved with many new buildings, posh shops, casinos and tourist agencies. Then the central square had been open ground with dust swirling as the wind swept in from the steppe; now it was partly park and partly paved.

Sergei is welcomed at Chita's Catholic children's centre

Ten years before a German Lutheran congregation had existed, but the address we had turned out to be a hotel. From there we continued our search taking a taxi to an address out in the suburbs, to a flat where an elderly woman opened the door. It transpired that her son-in-law was a Lutheran but away at his dacha. Sergei managed to talk to him over the telephone and was assured that he would ring us once he got back to Chita.

The son-in-law turned out to be a former English teacher, Alexandr Andreev, who had been born into an Old Believer family, but as an adult and without a church to attend he had listened to the 'Lutheran Hour' on the radio, had sent off for some Lutheran literature and had been given the address of a Lutheran group in Novosibirsk and of a pastor in Buryatia. In 1996 he joined the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church, was confirmed in 1997, entered the Lutheran Novosibirsk seminary but disagreed with its high-church ways and was eventually expelled. Back in Chita he formed a Lutheran group with Pavel Malinov, and with support from Finnish and American Lutheran missionaries the group developed until Alexandr and Pavel fell out: Pavel started baptising and celebrating the Eucharist, said Alexandr, without authorisation, and behaving as though he was ordained. Alexandr decided to break away, whereupon the local Probst for Siberia, Julia Saasi, appointed him as a Lutheran catechist. Now Alexandr ran a small group at his dacha, while Pavel with his high-church congregation of 60 held his services in a building belonging to the Roman Catholics.

That evening at 8 p.m. after a downpour we visited the Catholic church of SS Peter and Paul, far out on the edge of town, which ran a day centre for children from deprived backgrounds. A charming Polish nun, a member of the Order of the Servants of the Virgin Mary (specialising in work with families) who had worked at the centre for nine years, showed us round followed by three young girls from problem families who clearly did not want to go home. Four nuns, she said, with the help of many volunteers, ran the day centre for about 30 children from deprived backgrounds: all the children were taught to clean up after themselves, and the place looked pristine. At first they had survived in what was just a wooden building where in winter it was freezing; now, miraculously, she said, they had brick buildings with heating. Behind was a vegetable garden and at the entrance to the complex a large modern church, difficult to heat in winter, where about 40 gathered on Sundays. The city social services worked closely with the Catholics and encouraged the sisters to visit women prisoners and handicapped children in local state homes.

Church of SS Peter & Paul

Bishop Evstafii of Chita & Zabaikal with Xenia & Sergei

Soon after we arrived in Chita Sergei spoke on the telephone with a charming young woman, Natalya Khaliulina, press secretary of the Orthodox diocesan administration, who had been most friendly and promised to get us an interview with Bishop Evstafii of Chita and Zabaikal. True to her word, she made an appointment for 22 June at 10 a.m. When we arrived at her office Natalya first settled us down with a cup of tea. We were able to ply her with questions. There were 58 churches in the Chita oblast, she told us, seven priests in the city and 37 for the whole diocese which included Buryatia with its 62 churches. A theological school had just opened on 27 May in rooms above her office and had eight students. The Religious Studies department at the Chita State University remained much as it had been during Soviet times, she said, totally secular, but her former teacher, the formidable Lyudmila Kamedina, whom Sergei had heard about ten years earlier, continued to exert an extraordinary influence on Orthodox cultural life. As Sergei's ears pricked up at the mention of her name, Natalya, realising that we were interested in meeting Lyudmila, offered to ring her and pay for her to take a taxi over to the office. Within minutes she had joined us, and what a splendid character she was, bursting with energy and enthusiasm! She had become a Christian, she said, in the 1990s having learned about Orthodoxy through Russian literature, and now passed on the faith through her teaching.

After this conversation, Natalya Khaliulina took us out into the blazing sunshine and across the road to the bishop's residence. Bishop Evstafii sat us down at a table with him at the head, whereupon I asked him how the diocese had been revived after the fall of Communism. Life had begun again, he said, just 15 years ago, but the church was still 'in its infancy' after so many years when God was forgotten and 'godlessness was so intense'. Nothing had been left, the wooden churches had disappeared, the few stone churches were destroyed; in 1936 Chita's Kazan Cathedral had been blown up. By 1994 there was just one church in the Chita oblast and one in Ulan-Ude. The church was now being resurrected, he said, 'and a sign of that is the building of churches'. There were now 120 churches in the diocese (more than half of them in Buryatia) and three monasteries; but the monastic tradition had to be relearned, the few monks had to focus on physical work, learn obedience and find their 'daily bread' by fishing and growing their own food. Local people in his area, east of Lake Baikal, were 'bears in dens', in his opinion, many were former labour camp inmates, exiles or soldiers – it was a tough area, with an extremely harsh climate – and much work still needed to be done. Many of his clergy had no theological education, although now some were studying in the Khabarovsk, Novosibirsk, Tobolsk and Moscow seminaries. He hoped to introduce a textbook by Lyudmila Kamedina, *Foundations of Orthodox Culture*, into schools. I remembered hearing from his press secretary about a ship-modelling club for children run by the Orthodox Church: when I mentioned this and observed that Chita was rather far from the sea, his eyes lit up and with delight he told me that it had been started up by an expert who happened to live in Chita, and had been encouraged by him as it helped children 'take the first steps in the right direction'. The club

Lyudmila Kamedina

Natalya Khaliulina

Roman & Xenia in front of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Resurrection (formerly the Catholic church in Chita) next to the diocesan administration

had recently come second in a competition in Blagoveshchensk, he said proudly.

From Chita we travelled ten hours by the Trans-Siberian railway to Ulan-Ude, capital of the Buryat Republic, nearly 600 km away. At Chita station I noticed a shop selling icons and a sign in Russian and Chinese instructing me not to spit. The train was already there, so we clambered across the railway line (quite a usual thing to do in Russia) and found our carriage. As we trundled along I had many unforgettable hours gazing at the Siberian countryside. At first it rained, but then the sun emerged, lighting up the colours of the forests and making the many rivers and small lakes shine beguilingly. The hills reminded me of the low, undulating Cheviots in the land of my childhood. Often there were long swathes of brown, dead trees, signs of past forest fires. Small villages clung to the edge of the railway line – I could see no roads cutting through the forests – but there was much new wood in the cottages and surrounding fencing, a sign of continuing life. How the inhabitants lived puzzled me: only occasionally did I see a cow, a goat or a horse; perhaps they relied on fishing and hunting for food and the wood trade for income. Villages seemed to have electricity and water, but no gas, and very often I spied a satellite dish so there was contact with the outside world. Occasionally we stopped by a platform in a small settlement; at one I saw children playing ball and a young lad showing off his dancing prowess, down on his haunches kicking out his legs.

It was 2 a.m., Ulan-Ude time, when we drew into the station. Our hotel was conveniently in the centre of town, and well-equipped – I could wash my hair at last – hurray, the shower worked! After a few hours sleep we met for breakfast and then set off to explore. The main square had the largest head of Lenin that I had ever seen planted on a plinth in the centre, but around were some fine 19th century buildings and a New Arbat rather like the one in Moscow, but on a smaller scale, with the Cathedral of the Odigitria Mother of God at the end.

Initially shamanism was the religion of the Buryats until the early 17th century, but by the time the area east of Lake Baikal was colonised by the Russians, Buddhism was well established, having spread northwards from China which retained control through the chief lama in the capital of Mongolia until 1727. In 1741 Catherine the Great recognised Buddhism as an official religion within the Russian Empire, but insisted that Buryatia break its ties with Mongolia, thus putting a stop to Chinese influence. By 1764 a new religious hierarchy with a Buryat chief lama had been organised. During the Soviet period – in the 1930s – Buddhism was totally destroyed, and although legalised again by Stalin in 1948 with the creation of a Central Buddhist Spiritual Administration (CBSA), many Buddhist leaders continued to be arrested (for example Bidiya Dandaron whose fate Keston publicised in 1973), holy places destroyed, and only one datsan was permitted to remain open. The revival of Buddhism began in 1990. One lama in particular, Damba Ayusheev, tried to centralise all Buddhist communities and datsans under his control. He disapproved of Tibetan Buddhism, was critical of the Buryat Republic's government, and courted the Federal authorities in the hope that he would become the national leader of, for the most part, the eastern Buryats who had

Lenin's head dominating Ulan-Ude's central square

Ivolginsky Datsan

not been contaminated by shamanism and Christianity as had those in the western part of the Republic.

When Sergei last led a fieldtrip to Buryatia ten years before, he found a number of strands which were independent of Ayusheev. In 1998 Lama Nimazhap Ilich Ilyukhinov, who was pro-western, pro-Tibetan Buddhism, and not a Buryat nationalist, broke away from Ayusheev's organisation forming a new Spiritual Administration of Russia's Buddhists (SARB) to which non-Buryat, i.e. Russian Buddhist groups were happy to belong. In 1999 another lama, a western Buryat named Fyodor Sergeevich Samaev (known as Danzan Khaibzun Samaev) broke away and formed another strand, a central organisation called 'Maidar': he had been educated at Leningrad University, had received Buddhist teaching in Ulan-Bator and India, was a close friend of the Dalai Lama, and had been head of the datsan in St Petersburg from 1990-1997. He was intellectually close to the west and advocated a blending of Buddhism and shamanism. Another interesting independent strand was a religious community of woman Buddhists under Darima Tsyngueva formed in the early 1990s. What had happened to these independent groups, we wondered? On this fieldtrip we tried to discover the answer.

Lama Nimazhap Ilich Ilyukhinov

Sergei and I took a taxi to an address we had for Lama Nimazhap Ilich Ilyukhinov: this was a sports complex where he used to rent a room. Next-door there was now a datsan within which we discovered a queue of people patiently sitting and waiting to see him; we joined the queue of both Russians and Buryats – for two hours! We were eventually admitted at about 10 p.m. into a small room where Lama Nimazhap sat behind a desk with a silver jug, peacock feathers, a bottle of vodka, and bell before him. He was friendly and sat us down on the other side of his desk, whereupon I asked him about his early life. He had been an ordinary child in Soviet society, had joined the pioneers but read a lot and started to compare reality with official propaganda. His parents were not married so he was regarded as fatherless and brought up in a state home, although he clearly had a lot of contact with his father who was a secret lama. His father taught him Tibetan, had the gift of healing, people would come to be taught by him secretly at night, and he remembered often seeing his father meditating in the lotus position. At six years old, in 1969, he became interested in a new centre in Mongolia for training lamas and remembered how his uncle once said to him 'Your father did something which was worthwhile; you must continue his work'. Thereafter in 1981 he entered the Ivolginsky Datsan where the following year out of 20 young men he was selected to train as a monk, was taught how to dress and how to meditate. 'When I passed the posts by the entrance, I left behind the USSR and a sense of blessedness filled me,' he said. He could foretell the future, he claimed, and as soon as he began thinking about another lama the two would meet. From the number of people waiting to see him, we guessed that he was also regarded as a healer, and approached for astrological and health consultations. In 1990 he was made head of the St Petersburg datsan but recalled to Ulan-Ude in 1992 as a leader within CBSA. In 1997 he decided to build his own datsan: it had taken many years but here it now was. Both Russians and Buryats were hungry for Buddhist teaching, he said, and wanted to find their identity through Buddhism so he badly needed a good Buddhist

teacher, and had built a flat for such a person. Many young Tibetan monks had come to Buryatia but had 'acclimatised', he complained, that is they had become interested in material things and had got married. So none of these would do. Genuine Buddhist practice was observed seriously by many elderly Buryat women, he said, who knew more than many lamas and were having a considerable influence, while in general, he added, 'Buddhism is well developed on the surface but the people have not developed inwardly.'

By now it was 11.30 p.m. and pitch dark; how on earth would we find our way back to the hotel? But fear not! The lama pulled out a mobile, ordered a taxi, and saw us off with a wave and beaming smile.

The next day we had an appointment with the Association of Lay Buddhists of Buryatia, a community of women, whose founder and chairman was Darima Tsyngueva. At their datsan we found the lady in charge, Zorigma Budaeva, who took us to her small office and told us about her community's history. The idea of a women's community came originally from the Dalai Lama during his visit to Russia in 1991, she said, and led to the group's foundation the next year. All the members continued to earn their living (Zorigma, for example, was a speech therapist) and practiced a blend of Buryat-Mongol Buddhism (she had studied in Ulan-Bator) which has its own

Datsan of the Association of Lay Buddhists

particular characteristics, she said, and Tibetan Buddhism. According to her 'the Dalai Lama reflects something elevated; if he visited Russia he would sanctify our land; many people want him to come here.' Her community had made contact via the internet with a western organisation, the Daughters of Buddha, whose European methods Zorigma clearly liked very much. The rituals taught by the community helped to resolve human problems, she said, but when someone came to

Interior of women's datsan

her for advice and felt a conflict between Christian and Buddhist practice, she advised them to pray to particular Christian saints and sometimes sent them to the Roman Catholic church – 'Buddhists can pray in churches'. 'Interfaith relations in Buryatia are uniquely tolerant,' she explained, and added, 'our life is full of contradictions and Buddhism has to adapt to modern life'. As a citizen she supported the secular authorities as they were necessary for social order – she was horrified by the chaos and 'spiritual collapse' of the early 1990s – but as a Buddhist she said 'I think the government should think about our spiritual needs'.

Xenia & Zorigma

Our next port of call was an unlikely location for a datsan, the Buryatia Hotel within which a large room had been converted into a Buddhist centre run by the Association of Buryatia's Buddhists. Rigzen Lama came to talk to us; he looked no more than 30, I thought. His grandfather had handed on to him the Buddhist faith, he said, after he had been part of the Soviet system – he had been a pioneer and member of the Komsomol. He had gone through a long period of 'cleansing' from his Soviet 'inner dirt', he explained, adding 'to acquire knowledge is a long process'. His current teacher, he said, was a Tibetan lama who had dedicated his life to Buryatia and had founded a monastery there. The Dalai Lama, by escaping China's clutches had 'saved Buddhism' he believed, and he supported Tibet's liberation struggle: it needed political institutions and was vulnerable because it was isolated. Although he said 'we are not interested in politics – life is very short', he admitted that he had been inspired by

Rigzen Lama

democracy in the US, where he had spent some time, and felt that President Obama 'gives us hope'! 'Russia needs to have choice, alternatives,' he added. The majority of Buddhists in Buryatia adhered to 'a dark faith', he said; they were ignorant and simply observed rituals. The main central Buddhist organisation, CBSA, led by Ayusheev did not teach that you had to go through a long process of cleansing: 'they think that you can change to a Buddhist way of life quickly'. He also criticised Ayusheev's organisation for supporting Buryat national festivals, for its focus on externals – the building of datsans – its rejection of the Dalai Lama and its close association with the Russian government. Ayusheev's organisation wanted to create an overarching Buddhist organisation which would unite Kalmyks, Buryats and Buddhists from Tuva, while Rigzen Lama believed that each nation should preserve its own separate identity and gradually become integrated through a 'gradual, natural, democratic' process from below. I was struck by his smiling face, which expressed a genuine inner peace, and his words 'we need to learn how to be joyful'.

Sergei had heard from an expert in Moscow that the 'Maidar' Buddhist organisation no longer existed following the death in 2005 of its founder, Danzan Khaibzun Samaev (b.1954). Nevertheless, we decided to take a taxi into the countryside where Sergei knew from ten years ago that a 'Maidar' centre had existed. So there we found ourselves, climbing up a hillside along a dirt track, surrounded by undulating forest clad Buryat mountains, miles from anywhere. At the top of the hill we saw two yurt-shaped buildings, a cottage with a pitched roof, and a structure to which many different coloured scraps of material were attached. Out of one yurt shape emerged a sleepy 15-year-old lad, out of the other an old woman with long unkempt grey hair. We got into conversation and discovered that the 15-year-old's uncle was an active member of 'Maidar'. Within minutes the young lad had rung him on his mobile and arranged for us to meet. So down the hill we went, with the young lad as our guide. We managed eventually to catch a minibus back into Ulan-Ude, and as we bumped along towards the city I talked to the young boy and discovered that his grandfather had studied singing with Shalyapin in St Petersburg, that he loved Italian opera himself, had read Harry Potter and Tolkien! He led us to a Scientific Archival Centre, a large new shed full of shelves piled high with journals and newspapers, which was part of the local Academy of Sciences, where his uncle, Munko Mitkinov, worked as a bibliographer and the latter's mother, Baizhima Mitkinova, as an archivist.

'Maidar' centre on hilltop

Datsan in Buryatia Hotel

Sergei approaches yurt-shaped building at 'Maidar' centre

The 'Maidar' movement was by no means dead, said Munko and Baizhima: Samaev's teaching was still observed by them and others – 'we will continue to live as our teacher taught us,' they said, adding that their teacher had just 'gone away' (they did not refer to him as dead). An ecological educational centre called 'Arigun' (= pure) had been set up by 'Maidar' members, as well as the Samaev Regional Social Fund. Samaev's oldest and best pupil, Dashi Lama, had been chosen as their new leader, but in addition a further nine lamas belonged to their movement. Samaev had been close to the Dalai Lama whom, they said, 'we regard with great respect'. They worshipped nature, had a deep concern for ecology and respected shamanist rituals. Each year they held a conference in a central city building, which was funded by the local government, and then published the conference papers. Clearly this was no primitive movement. Rather, here were a lot of educated people who were taking their religion very seriously.

That evening we met a bevy of shamans – not exactly what I had expected, as they were wearing just ordinary shirts and trousers with mobiles going off at frequent intervals. Their chief sat at the head of the table in a splendid wooden chair with a carved eagle and other creatures adorning its high back. We sat in what was a small wooden hut on a hillside overlooking Ulan-Ude, the headquarters of the Religious Organisation of Tengeri Shamans (tengeri = gods of sun, moon and mother earth) to which 67 shamans belonged and which was represented on the Council for Cooperation with Religious Organisations. Altogether there were four separate organisations and 3000 shamans in Buryatia, we were told. Ancient forms of Buryat shamanism (which differed from that of Yakutia and Khakasia) were being resurrected; 'we are returning to our ancient roots,' they said. During the Soviet period their beliefs had been preserved in Mongolia and it was from there that they had been able to rediscover their brand of shamanism. The sky seemed to be their main god with a large hierarchy beneath it; but they did not dabble in the nether world, black magic; they only aimed 'to do good', to heal the psychologically sick and deal with natural catastrophes: 'Today demands the resurrection of these ancient rituals as many current illnesses are incurable. We can influence the elements, we could put out the fires in California, in Chita, in Krasnoyarsk, we can deal with global warming, tornadoes, floods. We worship the gods which the West has forgotten. If the West does not recognise these gods, then these problems will continue… How many people will die if shamanism is not accepted.' Despite the grimness of their warnings, they were a most friendly lot, though, of course, what they were like when dressed in their shaman robes and in a trance, I know not – endowed with special powers and no doubt not at all cosy.

Interviewing the shamans

(left to right) *Baizhima Mitkinova, Xenia, Munko Mitkinov &Sergei*

Entrance to the headquarters of the Tengeri shamans

On our last day in Ulan-Ude the weather turned extremely cold. We took a taxi out to the Ivolginsky Datsan, a large complex of buildings and the main centre of CBSA, the official Buddhist organisation under Ayusheev. It was a great tourist attraction with a mass of trinket stores near the entrance. I noticed a newly married couple, the bride in a long white dress and veil, arriving in the pouring rain for what might have been a ritual even after, possibly, being married in a church or registry office. They walked round the whole complex, the bridesmaid in her high heels desperately trying to keep the white dress from trailing through the mud, as the group turned every prayer wheel and completed the course. As we were leaving I saw two stout peasant-type Russian women in headscarves, like pilgrims at a Russian Orthodox monastery, arriving to pay their respects. From there we came back to Ulan-Ude and drove up to the top of Bare Mountain where a brand new datsan had been built: inside it was uncluttered, spacious, with six monks praying, one of whom was clearly European, and many people sitting quietly at the side. This was where the Tibetan teacher, Eshe Lodoi Rinpoche, whom the members of 'Maidar' revered, was based. The atmosphere was still, focused, a centre for a more serious spirituality than had seemed the Ivolginsky Datsan.

By now we had come to the end of our fieldtrip. Soon it would be time to set off on the long journey back to Moscow, but before, on our final evening, we celebrated in what had become our favourite restaurant full of Ulan-Ude's lively *jeunesse dorée*. Here we could eat a local delicacy, a fish called *omul,* only found, I believe, in Lake Baikal. I clicked away with my camera; two Buryat girls at a nearby table turned round and smiled.

In our favourite restaurant on our final evening

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