Keston Newsletter

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A Focused View: Wawel Royal Castle, Kraków

Recalling the Struggle Twenty Years On

by Jonathan Luxmoore

When Eastern Europe's Christians commemorated the collapse of communist rule last autumn, they had much to be proud of. In countries previously under one-party rule, democracy is now firmly rooted, along with stable institutions and free-market economies which have brought growth and opportunity for many. With the Iron Curtain now a distant memory, furthermore, the region's churches could celebrate, too. 'There are still plenty of problems and nothing is finally resolved – but we are at least a lot more aware of the issues and challenges we face', explained Krzysztof Zanussi, a Polish member of the Vatican's Papal Council for Culture. 'We still yearn for the unity and togetherness we experienced during that great moment of transformation two decades ago. But in today's civic society, people have far greater possibilities to take responsibility for their lives and gain satisfaction and fulfilment. This is an indisputable achievement.' As a leading Roman Catholic film director, Zanussi thinks dramatic, iconic images from autumn 1989 have dominated memories, obscuring the fact that the changes in Eastern and Central Europe happened in stages over a much longer period. The collapse of communist rule, he argues, could be traced to systemic fault-lines present from the very beginning, including inherent economic flaws and a false view of mankind.

Sure enough, when attempts are made to retrace the sequence of events, most ac-

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counts highlight a complex interaction of economic stagnation, ideological meltdown, Western pressure, nationalist revolt and imperial overstretch. They also point to a fractious combination of reform from above and rebellion from below, and to a chain of intended and unintended consequences which quickly spiralled into a full-scale transformation.

Berlin Wall

Yet even today, the picture is unclear, and can be painted and presented in a variety of ways. Newly released archive material confirms that Moscow had come to view its East European satellites as a ruinous liability, whose crushing economic cost was no longer offset by security benefits. It suggests Soviet rulers lacked the will and capacity to formulate a coherent strategy, and chose, when the crunch came, to let events run their course, rather than seeking to re-impose the Brezhnev Doctrine of limited sovereignty which had justified military interventions in the past. Yet the evidence suggests governments both East and West were also sceptical about the possibilities of far-reaching, lasting change, and caught out by the speed of events in Eastern Europe. Trotsky's definition of revolution as 'the forcible entry of the masses into the realm of rulership over their own destiny' was played out in Eastern Europe, this time against the communist vision which was supposed to inspire them.

Each nation in the region can credibly claim to have led the way in 1989. For Poles, the way was prepared by government-opposition Round Table talks and semi-democratic elections on 4 June, which took place on the day pro-democracy Chinese demonstrators were massacred in Beijing's Tienanmen Square, an outrage which hung like a menacing cloud for the rest of the year over Eastern Europe. For Hungarians, it was the symbolic cutting of border fences with Austria in May, and the opening of the Iron Curtain to East German refugees during the summer. For Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians, it was the human chain of clasped hands which stretched between the three capitals in August. For Czechs, Slovaks and Romanians, it was the sudden, dramatic uprisings – one entirely peaceful, the other partly violent – which erupted in November and December. For East Germans, it was the televised opening of the Berlin Wall on 9 November, which graphically and visually captured the revolutionary moment in simple, comprehensible images.

Whichever version is accepted, Christians had faced heavy restrictions, and in some cases open persecution, under communism. This quickly crumbled away during these crucial months. Places of worship were re-dedicated, bishops and ministers appointed, religious orders revived and newspapers re-launched, while parish life began to return to normal, helped by local populations eager to re-explore the long-closed world of religion and faith.

Some Christians had to wait longer. The Baltic states, Russia and Ukraine still belonged to the Soviet Union, and could only count on religious freedom when they became independent in 1991. For the Yugoslav republics of Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, meanwhile, communism gave way to a bloody Balkan war which dragged on till 1995. Elsewhere in Eastern and Central Europe, tough struggles lay ahead. Throughout the 1990s, the churches had to campaign to assert their rights and freedoms, and to ensure the emerging post-communist legal and constitutional order reflected Christian principles.

Today, in the ten former communist states now part of NATO and the European Union, democracy and human rights are secure, and the churches' mission protected, helped by Western-style constitutions and treaty commitments with the Vatican, which enjoys full diplomatic ties with every post-communist state. If religious freedom is no longer an East-West issue, however, attitudes to church and faith still vary widely, while

disputes continue over their role and place in society. In predominantly Orthodox Romania and Bulgaria, minority Protestants and Catholics still complain of discrimination and injustice, while in the Czech Republic no settlement has been reached on the churches' legal position.

In Lithuania, where Christians won universal praise for defending national identity and human rights under communist rule, the Roman Catholic Church now faces a severe shortage of priests, with only a handful ordained annually from its three surviving seminaries. Although Roman Catholics still make up 79% of Lithuania's population of 3.7 million, according to a 2001 census, only 15% practise their faith. Church leaders have criticised government failures to ensure the right to religious education in the ex-Soviet Baltic republic, and have urged it to do more to discourage high divorce, corruption and emigration rates. 'Our church played its clearest role in Soviet times when it attracted people far from the faith', the Jesuit Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius of Kaunas, a veteran of Soviet labour camps, who heads Lithuania's Bishops Conference, told the Catholic Information Agency in neighbouring Poland. 'Since independence, the situation has changed. Priests have withdrawn from political life at the request of their bishops. But some have gone too far, abandoning work for the social good. Although Lithuanian priests still have a strong link with the nation, we don't feel it in this pluralistic society.'

Even in staunchly Catholic Poland, Roman Catholics still face problems, and periodically come under attack by politicians seeking to curb or undermine their church's influence. Although long-running disputes over abortion, religious education and other issues are now largely settled, ex-communist politicians from the opposition Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) have gained third place in voter-intention surveys on a pledge to 'de-clericalise the state' by barring clergy from state ceremonies and withdrawing the church's budget allocations. The anti-church programme is the latest by the SLD, which has also threatened to act against clergy business activities and tax exemptions, and to scrap Poland's 1993 concordat with the Vatican if returned to power.

Although at least nine-tenths of Poland's 38 million inhabitants still call themselves Roman Catholics, admissions to the church's 84 seminaries have plummeted by 30% in the past three years, while recruitment to female religious orders has almost halved, falling 15% last year alone. Though still high by Western standards, church attendance is also on the decline, dropping 4% in 2008, according to the church's Statistics Institute. Some Poles blame recent controversies, which have intensified since the April 2005 death of Pope John Paul II, who was revered throughout the region.

The country's Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Lutheran churches have had to tackle persistent claims that they were heavily infiltrated by the communist secret police, allegations which culminated in the shock January 2007 resignation of Stanislaw Wielgus, on the day of his installation as Catholic Archbishop of Warsaw. Last winter, the Polish government's Anti-Corruption Office launched an investigation after reports that parishes and religious orders had made millions of dollars reselling land awarded to them at knock-down prices in compensation for communist-era confiscations. Poland's Bishops Conference insists the negative publicity is far outweighed by their church's positive contributions. Any religious decline, they argue, reflects demographic changes and mass migration, as well as social and cultural pressures which are an inevitable by-product of Westernisation.

In neighbouring Slovakia, the rights of the Roman Catholic Church, comprising 69% of the population of 5.4 million in a 2001 census, were codified under a Vatican Concordat in 2000, which was followed up by further accords regulating the church's finances and confirming its right to teach religion in state schools and operate army, police and prison chaplaincies. However, disputes have periodically flared over aspects of Catholic teaching. In February 2006, Slovakia's centre-right government collapsed when its premier, Mikulas Dziurinda, shelved a further agreement, which would have allowed

doctors and judges to opt out of abortions and divorce cases, after opponents warned it would violate women's rights and infringe European Union norms. Relations have been tenser, however, with the present Social Democrat-led coalition, headed by premier Robert Fico, which has insisted on a secularising programme. In December 2007, the 23-member Bishops Conference protested planned cuts in religious education and warned in a pastoral letter that a government project for sex education in schools would force 'a permissive and individualistic ethos on Slovak society'. In summer 2009, the bishops condemned calls for state funding of IVF treatment, and protested plans by the UN Population Fund to open a new regional office in Bratislava.

Slovakia's churches have faced challenges in extending pastoral care to the large Roma, or Gypsy, population, as well as over provisions for ethnic Hungarians, who make up a tenth of the population. In January 2009, the Roman Catholic bishops rejected a petition calling for a special Hungarian diocese, insisting the move would disrupt parish life and fuel Hungarian separatism in the country, which was called 'Upper Hungary' and ruled from Budapest until 1918.

In Croatia, the predominant Roman Catholic Church clashed frequently over social and educational issues with the centre-left president, Stjepan Mesic, who stood down in December 2009 after almost a decade as head of state. Last May, the Bishops Conference urged voters to back election candidates who 'clearly represent values and attitudes imbued with Christian doctrine and testimony'. In July, it warned that an Artificial Fertilisation Act drafted by the government of Jadranka Kosor, Croatia's first woman premier, risked infringing Catholic teaching and 'violating human dignity'.

The bishops have defended the allocation of state budget funds to their church, which officially makes up 88% of Croatia's 4.4 million inhabitants, noting that a 'large percentage' are used for charitable purposes. However, President Mesic sparked fresh controversy in August 2009 by calling for Christian crosses to be banned from state institutions and public buildings to reflect Croatia's status as a 'secular state'. Although Church leaders declined to react directly, a candidate for the country's December presidential election, Miroslav Tudjman, the son of Croatia's first post-communist head of state, condemned Mesic's demand as an 'attack on the Catholic Church and religious feelings of Croats', and vowed to continue allowing religious and historical symbols in state and military offices. The director of the Roman Catholic weekly *Glas Koncila*, Nedjeljko Pintaric, insisted the cross was 'a symbol of civilisation', and should be defended as an 'integral part of the national identity' of Croatia, which is negotiating membership of NATO and the European Union.

Fr Laszlo Lukacs, a veteran Hungarian commentator, thinks churches in much of Eastern Europe are still suffering the effects of rules and regulations hurriedly introduced two decades ago. He too remembers the surprise which greeted the events of 1989, as liberal reformers often ran ahead of the churches themselves in their demands for the restoration of religious rights. Yet the very suddenness also posed problems. Hungary's own 1990 Law on Religious Freedom was hurriedly drafted by the last communist government, and allowed any sect or cult with at least a hundred members to register as churches with full legal rights. Having had 17 registered denominations under communist rule, the country now has over 700.

Meanwhile, another law was rapidly enacted on church properties confiscated under communist rule, transferring responsibility from the state to local authorities. Although well-intentioned, this made it much harder in practice for church leaders to reclaim them. Under a 1997 treaty with the Vatican, the Hungarian government agreed to return buildings to the Roman Catholic Church up to a value of GBP 350 million, while making index-linked compensation payments for other former assets. But this process will not be completed until 2011 and many fiscal problems remain unresolved.

Although the same treaty promised the Catholic Church's 200 schools and col-

leges the same subsidies as their state counterparts, this has been vigorously opposed by liberal and ex-communist parliamentarians, who have accused the predominant church of seeking to reimpose a 'Catholic cultural monopoly'.

In 2003, Hungary's Roman Catholic and Protestant leaders successfully appealed to the Constitutional Court against another law making state subsidies to religious communities dependent on how many citizens covenanted taxes to them. In 2005, they were forced to appeal for constitutional arbitration again, this time against planned education cuts which would have forced many church schools to close. Although state schools are required by law to allocate time and premises for religious classes, this has involved a 'daily struggle', Fr Lukacs told *Keston Newsletter*. In this and in other areas, the churches' work is still being contested. 'Things would have been quite different if democratically elected MPs had been given longer to consider these crucial provisions', said this Piarist Order priest, who acted as spokesman for Hungary's Bishops Conference and has also edited the country's Roman Catholic *Vigilia* journal for over two decades. 'But we didn't, in retrospect, make any serious preparations – the 40 years of communism were too long for us to have retained any kind of hope. Today, we're in much the same position as the countries of Western Europe. The social and economic changes have been so deep that it's difficult to place the churches in the new situation.'

Not surprisingly, some East Europeans think the churches have had trouble coping with their responsibilities. Hopes of a mass religious revival were high in the first years after communist rule, but faded as consumer lifestyles and materialistic outlooks diluted popular enthusiasm. Having overwhelmingly supported their countries' accession to the European Union, local priests and ministers have had to face the consequences of Westernisation. Krzysztof Zanussi, the Polish film director, thinks resistance to Christian pro-life values, even in his own country, is stronger now than under communism, when anti-church policies were implemented by hostile regimes but found little popular support. To make matters worse, he thinks church leaders have been divided and uncertain in their response. 'We've been used to having strong spiritual leaders, and we don't seem to have maintained the high standards we set ourselves when times were hard', Zanussi told *Keston Newsletter*. 'Religious decline doesn't have to be the inevitable price of freedom and modernisation – people are still strongly Christian in their thinking here. But we seem to have become more frivolous as we've become wealthier and more secure.'

Fr Artur Stopka, a leading Roman Catholic writer, agrees that the social capital gained by churches under communist rule is diminishing, as trust and confidence dwindle. He nevertheless thinks secularisation can create opportunities as well as dangers. 'Serious jolts are being felt in the hearts and minds of Polish Catholics, as the gap grows ever wider between confessing to "being a Catholic" and observing the truths proclaimed by the Catholic Church in daily life', the 50-year-old priest wrote on Poland's Catholic *Wiara.pl* website. 'Jolts like these can have positive effects, by causing what is dead, redundant and rotten to drop away and uncover what is healthy, vigorous and strong. But they can also cause destruction, ruin and disaster. Their results depend not only on their force, but also on how well we prepare for them and behave while they are underway.'

In Hungary, Fr Lukacs agrees. When a definitive history is written of the 40 years of communist rule, he points out, its impact on church and faith may well turn out to have been less devastating than that of the years of freedom which followed. But these are normal challenges, for which the churches can draw on the wisdom and expertise of Christians in other democratic, pluralistic countries. 'The mixed fortunes of the churches have been something of a sideshow compared to the great overall political and social changes which have been occurring here', the Hungarian priest told *Keston Newsletter*. 'What we know for certain now is that the churches' future depends heavily on the broader situation. We are still waiting to see where it will all lead.'

Keston Members Recollect

Patriarch's Attempt to bring *Church Times* to Heel

by Bernard Palmer

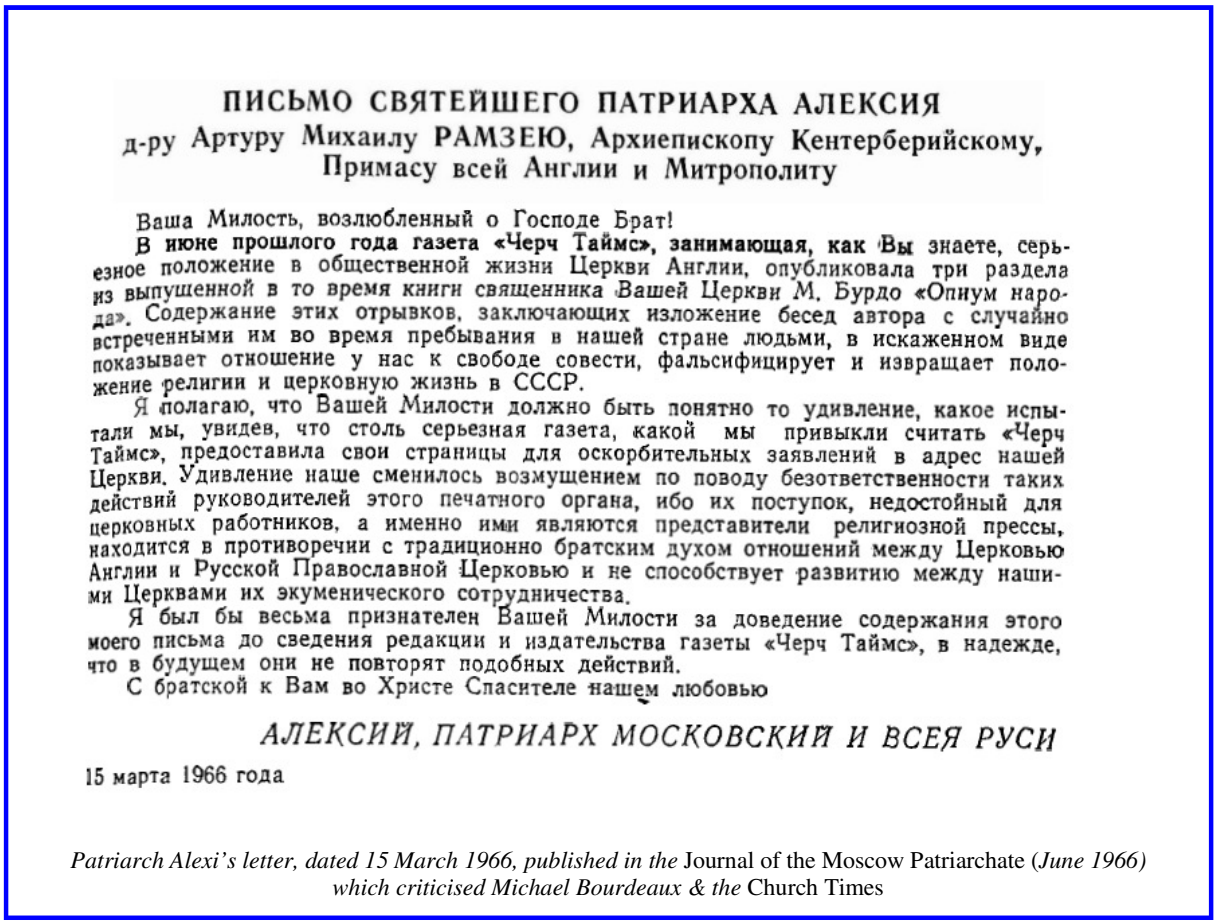
It is well over 40 years since I first made the acquaintance of Michael Bourdeaux – and discovered that he was causing offence to the authorities of both Church and State in Soviet Russia. My discovery endeared Michael to me as a rebel with a cause, and was the foundation of a personal friendship between us which has lasted ever since.

The occasion for Michael's offence to those in authority in Russia was his first book, *Opium of the People*, extracts from which were published in the *Church Times* in June 1965. I had not then succeeded to the paper's editorial chair. But I styled myself 'editor-in-chief' and, as such, collaborated closely with the then editor, Roger Roberts, in important editorial matters. The opposition to the extracts was voiced by no less a figure than Patriarch Alexi of Moscow and All Russia; but he waited nine months before taking action in the matter – no doubt prodded by the government minister responsible for religious issues in the USSR.

Patriarch Alexi of Moscow & All Russia

Significantly, His Holiness took the matter up not with the editor of the *Church Times* (or even with its editor-in-chief!) but with the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, whom he doubtless supposed would call the paper to task on his behalf. He complained to the Primate about 'offensive remarks' in published extracts and asked him to bring those responsible to heel. He claimed that Michael's book gave a distorted impression of the religious situation in the Soviet Union (this was of course long before the days of *glasnost* and the eventual collapse of communism). 'Our surprise became concern', he told Dr Ramsey, 'at the irresponsibility of such actions on behalf of the directors of the journal.' Such behaviour, in his opinion, was unworthy of those whose duty it was to serve the Church, and it did not help forward ecumenical co-operation. 'I should be grateful to Your Grace', the Patriarch ended, 'if you would inform the editor and publishers of the *Church Times* of the contents of my letter in the hope that they will not repeat such an action in the future.'

Alas for the Patriarch's hopes! The letter was sent on from Lambeth to the paper's offices in Portugal Street, but without any primatial backing for his suggestion that the paper should amend its naughty ways. No doubt the Archbishop explained to the Patriarch that Britain was not Russia as far as control of the Press was concerned. For his part Roberts wrote to the Patriarch to explain that the extracts from the Bourdeaux book had been published in good faith as the first-hand impressions of an intelligent observer, and that the paper had nothing but goodwill towards the Church in Russia. He ended by inviting His Holiness to contribute a 1500-word article on the present-day life of that Church. Perhaps not surprisingly, the



ПИСЬМО СВЯТЕЙШЕГО ПАТРИАРХА АЛЕКСИЯ
д-ру Артуру Михаилу РАМЗЕЮ, Архиепископу Кентерберийскому, Примасу всей Англии и Митрополиту

Ваша Милость, возлюбленный о Господе Брат!

В июне прошлого года газета «Черч Таймс», занимающая, как Вы знаете, серьезное положение в общественной жизни Церкви Англии, опубликовала три раздела из выпущенной в то время книги священника Вашей Церкви М. Бурдо «Опиум народа». Содержание этих отрывков, заключающих изложение бесед автора с случайно встреченными им во время пребывания в нашей стране людьми, в искаженном виде показывает отношение у нас к свободе совести, фальсифицирует и извращает положение религии и церковную жизнь в СССР.

Я полагаю, что Вашей Милости должно быть понятно то удивление, какое испытали мы, увидев, что столь серьезная газета, какой мы привыкли считать «Черч Таймс», предоставила свои страницы для оскорбительных заявлений в адрес нашей Церкви. Удивление наше сменилось возмущением по поводу безответственности таких действий руководителей этого печатного органа, ибо их поступок, недостойный для церковных работников, а именно ими являются представители религиозной прессы, находится в противоречии с традиционно братским духом отношений между Церковью Англии и Русской Православной Церковью и не способствует развитию между нашими Церквами их экуменического сотрудничества.

Я был бы весьма признателен Вашей Милости за доведение содержания этого моего письма до сведения редакции и издательства газеты «Черч Таймс», в надежде, что в будущем они не повторят подобных действий.

С братской к Вам во Христе Спасителе нашем любовью

АЛЕКСИЙ, ПАТРИАРХ МОСКОВСКИЙ И ВСЕЯ РУСИ

15 марта 1966 года

Patriarch Alexi's letter, dated 15 March 1966, published in the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate (*June 1966*) *which criticised Michael Bourdeaux & the* Church Times

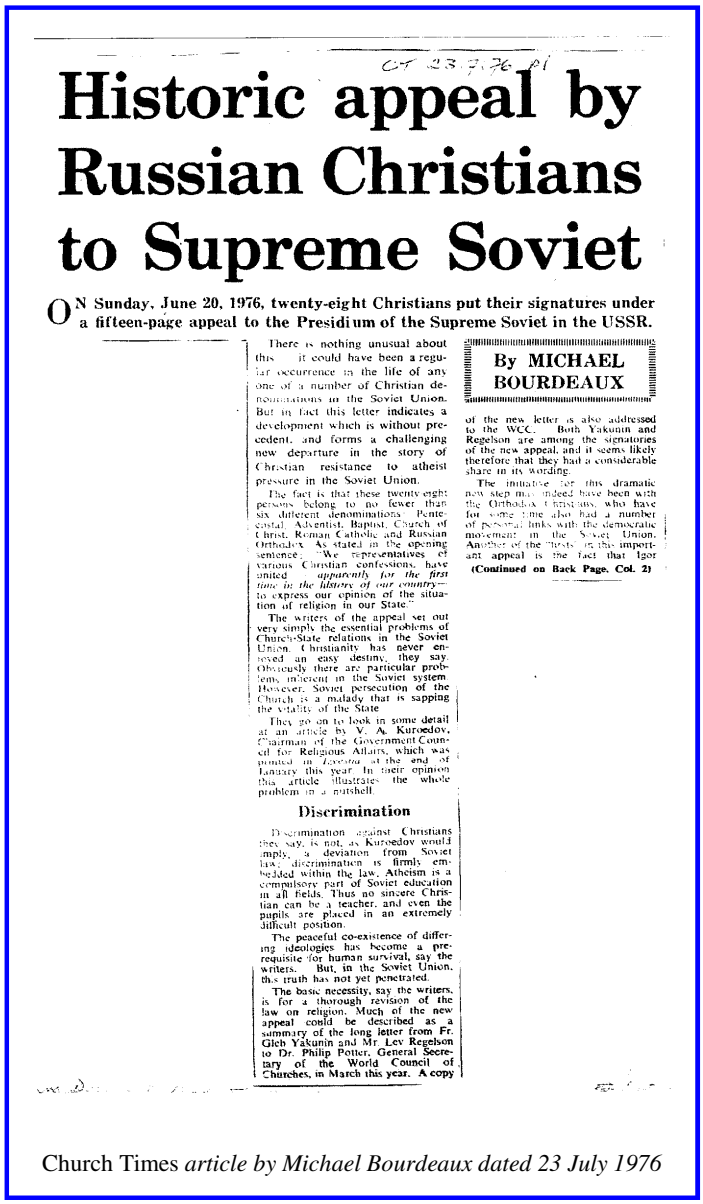
Patriarch declined the invitation.

The full text of his letter to Archbishop Ramsey was published in the June 1966 issue of the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* – a year after the allegedly offensive extracts had appeared in the *Church Times*. Michael Bourdeaux used the letter as a peg for another *Church Times* article (2 September 1966) on the state of religion in the USSR in the course of which he wrote: 'It suggests to me that there has been a slow grinding of the wheels of State, with pressure eventually being applied to the Church at the highest level to react against a criticism which the secular authorities had found uncomfortable.'

It has seemed to me worthwhile going into this episode in some detail not only because it was responsible for the start of a warm friendship between Michael and myself, but also because it revealed to me that here was a man who was not afraid to speak his mind and who should therefore be encouraged to write more in the columns of the *Church Times*. I succeeded Roger Roberts as editor in September 1968 and from then on published many Bourdeaux articles in the paper. Moreover, I deliberately increased the coverage we gave to religious affairs in the Soviet Union. Hardly a week went by without something of significance appearing in our columns, and throughout the 1970s and 1980s I would publish up to half-a-dozen major features each year by Michael himself plus his regular signed book reviews.

The subjects of his articles ranged from the faith of Alexander Solzhenitsyn to the significance of such figures as Yuri Titov, Georgi Vins and the poet Irina Ratushinskaya and the plight of the churches in other Communist countries. And of course the paper carried numerous references to Keston College and its invaluable work in publicising the interaction of religion and Communism – not to mention its periodical financial crises. I particularly cherish the memory of the visit I paid to Lambeth Palace in March 1987 to hear Irina Ratushinskaya give a recital of her poetry and to be introduced to her by Michael afterwards.

In those days I lived at Sevenoaks in Kent, not all that far from Keston, so was



Historic appeal by Russian Christians to Supreme Soviet

ON Sunday, June 20, 1976, twenty-eight Christians put their signatures under a fifteen-page appeal to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet in the USSR.

By MICHAEL BOURDEAUX

There is nothing unusual about this . . . it could have been a regular occurrence in the life of any one of a number of Christian denominations in the Soviet Union. But in fact this letter indicates a development which is without precedent, and forms a challenging new departure in the story of Christian resistance to atheist pressure in the Soviet Union.

The fact is that these twenty-eight persons belong to no fewer than six different denominations: Pentecostal, Adventist, Baptist, Church of Christ, Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox. As stated in the opening sentence, "We representatives of various Christian confessions, have united . . . *apparently for the first time in the history of our country*—to express our opinion of the situation of religion in our State."

The writers of the appeal set out very simply the essential problems of Church-State relations in the Soviet Union. Christianity has never enjoyed an easy destiny, they say. Obviously there are particular problems inherent in the Soviet system. However, Soviet persecution of the Church is a malady that is sapping the vitality of the State.

They go on to look in some detail at an article by V. A. Kuroedov, Chairman of the Government Council for Religious Affairs, which was printed in *Izvestia* at the end of January this year. In their opinion this article illustrates the whole problem in a nutshell.

Discrimination

Discrimination against Christians they say, is not, as Kuroedov would imply, a deviation from Soviet law; discrimination is firmly embedded within the law. Atheism is a compulsory part of Soviet education in all fields. Thus no sincere Christian can be a teacher, and even the pupils are placed in an extremely difficult position.

The peaceful co-existence of differing ideologies has become a prerequisite for human survival, say the writers. But, in the Soviet Union, this truth has not yet penetrated.

The basic necessity, say the writers, is for a thorough revision of the law on religion. Much of the new appeal could be described as a summary of the long letter from Fr. Gleb Yakunin and Mr. Lev Regelson to Dr. Philip Potter, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, in March this year. A copy of the new letter is also addressed to the WCC. Both Yakunin and Regelson are among the signatories of the new appeal, and it seems likely therefore that they had a considerable share in its wording.

The initiative for this dramatic new step must indeed have been with the Orthodox Christians, who have for some time also had a number of personal links with the democratic movement in the Soviet Union. Another of the "firsts" in this important appeal is the fact that Igor

(Continued on Back Page, Col. 2)

Church Times *article by Michael Bourdeaux dated 23 July 1976*

able from time to time to visit Michael there and to entertain him in return at my Sevenoaks home. From the beginning of our friendship I found myself invariably on the same wavelength as Michael, which made for a harmonious relationship. It also made it easier for him to suggest articles to me and for me to accept them – which didn't always happen with my contributors. And of course we would go to town on special occasions, such as his winning the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion in 1984. It was a particular pleasure to me when Michel was awarded a Lambeth DD in 1996 by Archbishop Carey – and an indirect tribute to his contributions to the *Church Times*.

Michael never hesitated to pour out his heart to me on personal matters. I can still remember a lunch I gave him in London shortly after the death of his first wife Gillian from cancer and his telling me about her treatment in hospital during the final stages of her illness. I had met Gillian occasionally and liked her a lot, but was overjoyed when Michael found fresh happiness with his second wife Lorna. In 1989 my late wife Jane and I retired to Charminster in Dorset and were able to entertain Michael, Lorna and their two young children on their trips from Iffley to visit Michael's aged parents in Cornwall – Charminster provided a good excuse for a break in the long journey. Sadly the deaths of both parents within eight days of each other in August 1999 (they were both 91 and had been married for 66 years) removed the excuse for regular Bourdeaux trips through Dorset. So it was a real treat for me to be invited with Jane to a reunion of Bourdeaux family and friends in Iffley Church Hall in March 1999 to mark Michael's 'retirement' (he called it his 'liberation') from his full-time work for Keston.

Following my own retirement he wrote much less for the *Church Times* than he had done during my editorship. It was a particular disappointment to him to have been dropped from the panel of regular reviewers by my successor, John Whale. He wrote to me in September 1991: 'This was a part of my ministry which, as you know, I very specially valued. Don't forget that you and the *Church Times* played a sterling role, especially in the '60s and '70s, when hardly anyone wanted to listen.'

During the past year (2009) Michael has been celebrating a number of significant anniversaries: his 75th birthday, the 30th anniversary of his marriage to Lorna, and the 50th anniversary of the beginning of his vital student year in Moscow. I wish him well for the future and for whatever significant new work he decides to undertake. I cannot believe that he will ever be idle!

My Life and Russia

by Howard Kent

I learned of Keston in the 1970s after being involved with Russia all my life. I approved strongly of what Keston was doing, and still do with undiminished enthusiasm. I would like to pay tribute to Michael Bourdeaux and Xenia Dennen and all their colleagues, past and present.

Both branches of my family became, or were, immersed in the life of the Russian Empire. My mother, Despo, was from a prosperous Odessa Greek bourgeois merchant family, and lived a comfortable life until her mid-twenties when the Bolshevik army stormed and captured Odessa, forcing her and her family (with thousands of others) to flee. They were evacuated in April 1919 to Constantinople – then still the capital of the Ottoman Empire. She, her parents, and brothers and sisters had experienced life in the Russian Empire over many years. Abandoning all to save their lives, caused the sudden impoverishment of this family, an impoverishment continued and completed when the revolutionary Turkish republic of Mustapha Kemal confiscated all Greek property in the former Ottoman Empire from 1922. Thus in a couple of years a once affluent middle-class family, by a double catastrophe, became paupers, and remained so.

My father Harry ('Garry') was born in 1888, and some years later this high-principled Cockney family from central London were flung into total destitution and became full proletarians – hardly able to survive, to afford to eat on their scanty wages. Out of this desperate situation (during the Edwardian 'high summer') – poverty more extreme than any described by Dickens, my father often told me – my father's high intelligence, extreme courage, good health and inexorable determination gradually lifted them; as he worked, first in the Post Office as a sworn messenger, then as a ledger clerk at J.B. Ellison's, the great Philadelphia woollen wholesalers of Golden Square. His notable services to the firm's book-keeping, including much unpaid overtime, which he volunteered, devoted to revising and correcting the other clerks' figures (he had outstanding arithmetical ability) raised him by the age of 25 to the headship of its counting-house.

In 1913 he was offered a position in Odessa. He accepted and travelled there in September via the Hook of Holland, Berlin and Warsaw. Thereafter he was continuously in Russia until 1918, and eventually was forced by Bolshevik expansion to leave Batum in Transcaucasia in 1920 – hoping to return.[(1)] My parents were married in Galaţi, Romania, in early 1921, and I was born in 1928. During this period my father's business ability solidly established the firm (now called Pendle & Rivett) and its business in Bucharest and some of the main cities of Romania. He became prosperous, and fully retained his love for Russia and the Russians. But he was by no means duped by Soviet propaganda: he had seen the bloody massacre of their opponents – for example the railway police all along the line from Petrograd to Rostov-on-Don – by the rabble of murderous revolutionaries who had invaded his train. When young he had been a proletarian, but his Russian experiences showed him how far Bolshevism was from providing a recipe for paradise on earth for the world's proletariat; and how the vaunted 'Soviet man' was not a being to be emulated.

Owing to the Soviet Union's long frontier with the Kingdom of Romania, there was constant fear of Bolshevism during the years that independent Romania existed 'between the Wars'. My father and mother in Galaţi and Bucharest retained all their Russian culture, and Russian – not English or Greek – was the language they spoke to each other. We had a library of Russian books, and my father constantly bought more Russian literature and books on Russia; and he subscribed to the Russian newspaper *Russkaya Mysl* published in Paris. So Russia and its fate

greatly preoccupied me all through my childhood. When we left Romania for England in 1937 I was 8½. I was sent to an English school: my background was completely different from that of nearly all my school mates, but I was too young at that stage to realise what a gulf this placed between their minds and mine.

Winston Churchill and his coalition government in June 1941 inevitably chose to become Stalin's ally in the common struggle against Hitler's Germany; with time, however, I became less and less convinced that Stalin's Soviet Union was a loyal ally of ours. I was thus not taken in by the Soviet-cum-Churchill government propaganda about this when I entered London University's School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) in October 1946; and I had realised that Churchill – whether he was previously a dupe or not – was no longer taken in on the evidence of his Fulton 'Iron Curtain' speech.[2]

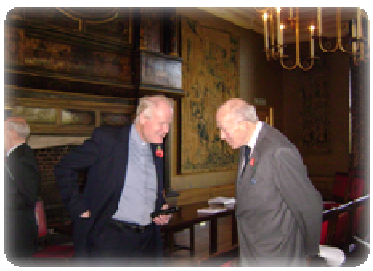
My father had persuaded me to take a Russian degree course at SSEES. This institution's dominating pro-Soviet complexion in 1946 and later added to my sense that we should carefully watch what Stalin's agents did all over the world, and in our own country too. I chose my friends, not so much among the ordinary students, as among the British officers who were there under the very sensible plan of General Montgomery who advocated that officers should learn Russian as, in his view, Soviet Russia was a real threat. This view I shared, and got on very well with these colleagues, such as Major Roland Marshall, who (I later learned) had spoken up about SSEES's very Red complexion in public. I noticed that when I volunteered to work in the Soviet Union to help restore the country after the terrible ravages of war, my application was refused by the Soviet authorities, doubtless on a report about me from their people in SSEES. So I suppose my name was put into Soviet secret police records – and perhaps, it is still there.

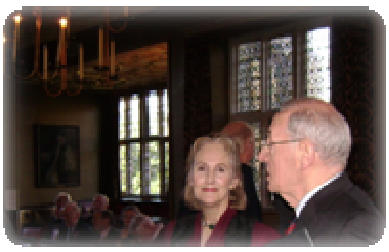
[1] For the past 40 years I have worked (while being a full-time resident master at a boarding school for much of the time) on a readable chronological account of my father's experiences in Russia. During his lifetime up to 1980 he often spoke to me about this period of his life – and I believe his recollections were accurate and precise; but he was not a diarist. The completed manuscript is in the hands of a London literary agent.

[2] This speech entitled 'Sinews of Peace' was presented by Churchill at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri on 5 March 1946.

AGM 2009: Keston members meet at the Charterhouse in London





Speakers at the AGM

A Tree Falls in Siberia

by John Arnold

The Very Revd John Arnold addressing Keston members

The phrase 'if a tree falls in Siberia' goes back to Bishop George Berkeley (1685-1753). He claimed that 'to be is to be perceived' and that even if a tree fell unperceived in Siberia, it still existed and, indeed, fell, because it was continuously perceived by God.

Ever since I first went to the then Soviet Occupation Zone of East Germany in 1956, until the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, I worked closely with Christians 'behind the iron curtain', as we used to say. We in the West knew something of their sufferings, and we also knew that there was far more that we did not know. 'If a tree falls in Siberia' became part of my prayers. It assured me that when human beings fell in Siberia, as they did in their thousands, perhaps even millions, they and their sufferings were known to God. Eventually the victims found voices in the writings of Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn. Those voices resonate with the passion narratives of the Gospels, which is not surprising, given the formative role of the Bible in Russian literature and of the Christian faith in Russian life. Nothing illustrates better Solzhenitsyn's unique combination of tradition and originality in his writing than his famous *Prayer*:

How easy it is for me to live with You, Lord!
How easy it is for me to believe in You!
When my mind is distraught
and my reason fails,
when the cleverest do not see further
than this evening and do not know
what must be done tomorrow –
You grant me the clear confidence
that You exist and that You will take care
that not all the ways of goodness are stopped.

At the height of earthly fame I gaze
with wonder at that path
through hopelessness –
to this point, from which even I have been able to convey
to others some reflection of the light which comes from You.

And You will enable me to go on doing
as much as needs to be done.
And in so far as I do not manage it –
that means that You have allotted the task
to others.

Here he talks with God as with a friend. Such talk is unlike the dull sloganising of official Soviet literature. It is also unlike much conventional religious language; but it has the directness, crudity and disconcerting alternation between self-consciousness and self-forgetfulness of some of the Psalms. Its hallmark is authenticity.

Solzhenitsyn uses living and lively language as an instrument for getting at the truth about himself and about the world. The author is thus both subject and object of a searching, probing vision, sustained by a passionate concern to understand the inner meaning of his own personal and social experience and clarified by the renunciation of despair, self-pity and false modesty. This true humility is characteristic of his heroes and heroines, all of whom are defeated, powerless and crippled by social, political and physical weakness, but ennobled by those qualities which in the Bible are ascribed to 'the poor'.

The refusal to opt for comfortable words and the short cuts of superficial optimism leads Solzhenitsyn through the experience and remembrance of anguish to that 'clear confidence' which enables him not just to stand his ground, but also to love life – ordinary, everyday life – and to celebrate it as no other contemporary writer. 'I absolutely do not understand why *Cancer Ward* is accused of being anti-humanitarian', he said to the Secretariat of the Writers' Union, 27 September 1967. 'On the contrary (in my novel) life conquers death, and the past is overcome by the future.'

Solzhenitsyn writes of resurrection with authority. He was born on 11 December 1918 – that is to say, after the Revolution. Unlike Pasternak, who was formed before 1917, Solzhenitsyn is 'Soviet Man', with as good a claim as any to have shared a typical fate. His father died a few months before his birth, and he was brought up by his mother through the hardships of the '20s and '30s, which are described in *Dr Zhivago.* In 1941 he graduated in physics and mathematics from Moscow University. He volunteered for the army and served a year in the ranks, was commissioned in the artillery, and was twice decorated for bravery. Like many of his own characters, he fought right through the war in Russia, enduring unimaginable hardship, only to fall victim in 1945 not to the enemy, but to the charge of questioning in a private letter the strategical genius of Stalin – '*Usaty*', 'the man with the moustache', as he called him.

He spent eight years in detention in a variety of camps – a general camp in the north, a construction camp, an institute for imprisoned scientists and a special political camp in Siberia, followed by exile 'in perpetuity'. He had survived the war. Now he survived the camps, only to face death a third time from inoperable cancer – and he survived again. He was released from exile after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the 20th Party Congress in 1956. A triple survivor, like Dostoyevsky a century earlier, he too came back from the *House of the Dead* to warn his brethren.

The central experience of his life, to which reference is made in all his major work before *August 1914*, is the period of detention; this is the central panel of a triptych: in the centre, Prison and Exile with the figures of Stalin and Beria; on the left War, with Hitler; on the right, Cancer, embodying Impersonal Evil. War, Prison, Exile and Cancer – these are the four plagues of Solzhenitsyn's Apocalypse; Hitler, Stalin, Beria and Impersonal Evil are the Horsemen (Revelation 6: 1-7). The novels, which deal with this complex of experience, are the three best known and most widely available. They are closely related to each and to the author's life.

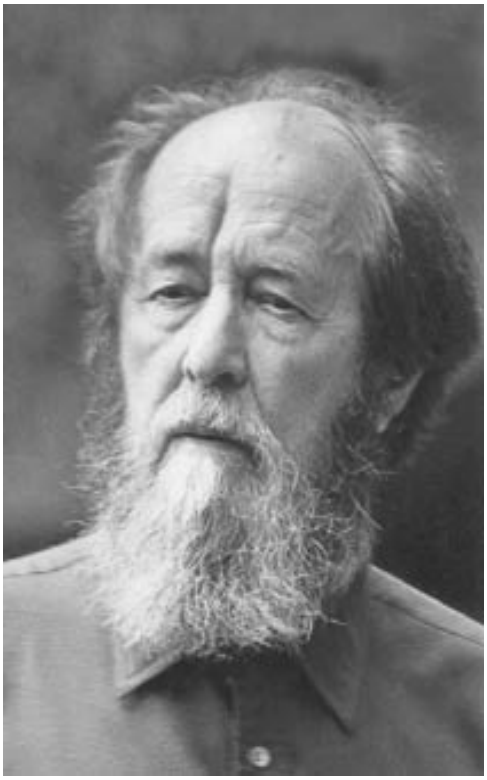
The First Circle

The most ambitious is also the least harrowing. *The First Circle* was written painstakingly over a period of ten years, 1955-1964. In it Solzhenitsyn draws upon his experience of the years 1945-1949, from his arrest and incarceration until his transfer in a meat van to Karaganda in Kazakhstan.

The novel, for all its great length, covers only three days. It is set in Mavrino, a special institute where prisoners who are

also scientists are put to work inventing gadgets for the security forces. They have all come, like Solzhenitsyn, via the common camps for political and criminal prisoners north of the Arctic Circle and from construction camps in the Moscow region. A variety of experiences there is given in flash-backs. This is typical of Solzhenitsyn's method, whereby he combines exceptional unity of time, theme and place (the last more or less guaranteed by a prison setting), with the disclosure of broad vistas of experience through the unlocking of memories.

Character after character is presented to us – sometimes one has the impression of reading a *Decameron*, or *Canterbury Tales*, as each man's story is interpolated. These are they who have come through great tribulation; all live with that particular past, knowing that it may well be their future too; and some of them are indeed transferred at the end, as Solzhenitsyn was, to a special camp for 'politicals', that is, a stricter regime than for criminals.



Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008)

All are victims of ludicrous denunciations and imaginary crimes such as intent to commit treason, failure to inform, escaping from German POW camps, slandering the security forces (*sic*), or simply possession of a flat or a wife coveted by a treacherous neighbour. They are victims of secret laws and abstract concepts such as the infamous Section 58 of the Penal Code. They are guilty only of existing; and punished because they are innocent. In this world turned upside down, where virtue is punished and vice rewarded, the Marquis de Sade's fantasies have come true.

Providentially Solzhenitsyn, who has had Dostoyevsky's experience of prison and exile, has Tolstoy's literary gifts – the ability to observe and represent the surface details, the minutiae of routine, the setting of characters in society, the relationship between man and milieu. When he departs from what he has himself seen and observed, he nods. The description of Stalin as an old man is moving and credible, because Solzhenitsyn knows old men. He is not at his best when he tries to take us inside the mind of Stalin, for Stalin is for him what Napoleon was for Tolstoy – the incarnation of everything he disapproved of.

In *The First Circle* he conveys the comedy of evil but not to the same extent the tragedy or the mystery. His Stalin is comparable with Adolf Hinkel in *The Great Dictator*, rather than with Stavrogin in *The Devils* or with *Macbeth*. It is great imaginative writers like Dostoyevsky and Shakespeare who can recreate from introspection the truth that is stranger than either fiction or history.

Yet simply to suggest these comparisons is only one step lower than the highest praise. Solzhenitsyn, like them, is a tragic-comedian with a broad human sense of fun and of the ludicrous, set within the pitilessly clear-eyed quest for truth. In the West it is widely believed that Solzhenitsyn is primarily a protagonist of individual freedom, but this is to mistake a secondary effect for the main thrust. His overriding concern is for the truth, and for the truth in its full Biblical range of meaning.

Truth for him is not just factual accuracy, although that remains important. It means also trustworthiness, reliability and straightforwardness. Such is the truth, which makes free (John 8:32). Because he is writing in and about a society which is both given to the cult of the

idols of the market–place and also requires an exceptional degree of conformity and imposes exceptional constraints, the discovery of truth necessarily discloses the extent to which men are not free. Warders and *apparatchiki* are, if anything, less free than prisoners and patients. All are victims, but not all are innocent victims. Some are more guilty than others.

One of the most notable characteristics of Solzhenitsyn's novels is a strong element of judgment together with a high doctrine of human responsibility. They are not value-free. They are vertebrate works of art in which the backbone is an implied and accepted scale of moral values, none of which is a novelty. Solzhenitsyn is a conventional moralist – and thus a comedian like Molière – in the sense that he reaffirms those things which people at all times and in all places have generally agreed to be right. False witness gets the shortest shrift at his hands, but coveting, idolatry and adultery are also reckoned to militate against truth and freedom. If it is a shock for some of Solzhenitsyn's Soviet colleagues to be told that 'there are depths to which a writer will not sink', it must also be a shock for many of his Western literary contemporaries to see so strong a case made out for chastity and fidelity in *The First Circle*. In both cases the shock is a shock of recognition; we have been here before in the company of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky.

In contrast to the façades, the emptiness, the practised deceit and moral bankruptcy of the authorities, the prisoners come to the truth by rediscovering conscience as a human faculty. Their ordeal is a purgatory which leads them to the attainment of a fundamental moral vision, the knowledge of good and evil. As one of them, Nerzhin, says, 'Formerly I had no idea what good and evil were, and whatever was allowed seemed fine to me. . . . But the longer I sink into this inhumanly cruel world, the more I respond to those who . . . speak to my conscience'. For this kind of prisoner social and physical descent is moral and spiritual ascent. He is stripped to his essential self – a pure, purged self with nothing and no needs beyond the need to live. His poverty is great riches, his weakness the source of immense strength. Another prisoner, Bobynin, says to Abakumov 'You made a mistake there, chief. You have taken everything away from me. A man from whom you have taken everything is no longer in your power. He is free all over again.'

So it can be said of those who are shipped off as meat to Karaganda that 'there was peace in their hearts. . . they were filled with the fearlessness of those who have lost everything – the fearlessness which is not easy to acquire, but which endures'. It was in prison that the Apostle Paul found the classic phrase for this experience, 'The peace of God which passes all understanding' (Philippians 4: 7). Solzhenitsyn's prisoners, remembering an earlier conversation about Dante's 'Inferno', wave goodbye to Mavrino with the words 'That's not hell. Mavrino is the best, the highest, the *First Circle*. It is almost paradise.'

Cancer Ward

On his release from prison camp in February 1953, Solzhenitsyn was condemned to exile 'in perpetuity' – not just '*zhiznennaya ssylka*', exile for life, which had been the extreme penalty in Tsarist Russia, but '*navechno*', 'eternally', as Kostoglotov (the semi-autobiographical hero of the novel) keeps repeating. He settled in Kosh-Terek in southern Kazakhstan (the Uzh-Terek of the book), fell ill with cancer, and in 1955 travelled to Tashkent for treatment. This is exactly the time and place of the novel, set in a hospital in Uzbekistan on the eve of de-Stalinization.

Solzhenitsyn excels in depicting the routine of a closed institution, the rituals of treatment, the effects of pain and of the proximity of death. Cancer, a greater leveller than socialism, has brought a cross-section of stratified Soviet society together in one room. In the *Cancer Ward* (as in Chekhov's *Ward 6*) there is scope and opportunity for great Russian conversations on literature, on ethics, on socialism and on the meaning of life.

There is need, too; and the patients take up Tolstoy's insistent question 'What do men live by?' Some of them agree with

his answer – Love. This is not a political or ideological answer, but a religious one.

Solzhenitsyn on his return to Russia in 1994

Beyond the conversations and the analyses, there is something more, to which we can only give the name 'celebration'. *Cancer Ward* is a celebration of life – life in the face of death, life from the dead. It is for this reason that so much of the novel is taken up with Kostoglotov's problem about his treatment. The x-rays and hormones, which are to cure his stomach cancer may affect his virility, and the question arises 'Isn't the price too high?'

This question vexes the minds of those who contemplate the cost of revolution. In conversation with the stricken Party member Rusanov, Kostoglotov says 'There is nothing on earth for which I would pay **any** price'; and Solzhenitsyn's view appears to be that the means chosen in Stalinism kill those very qualities of truth, compassion, trust and care for neighbour without which the end of communism cannot be realized. Sologdin in *The First Circle* had said, 'Remember this: the higher the end the higher the means must also be! Unworthy means destroy the end itself'; and a hundred years earlier, Ivan Karamazov, wrestling with his own despair, had argued that it is wrong to buy universal harmony at the price of even one suffering child. Solzhenitsyn takes this classical argument against God and uses it against Stalin.

Eventually Kostoglotov chooses life, risking both the argument and also part of himself in order to save 'the main thing', reckoning that it is better to enter into life lame than to perish (Mark 9: 45). At the end of the novel he is released from hospital, which has been the place of his wrestling with death, doubt and despair. Like Jacob at Peniel (Genesis 32: 30f), he passes on limping into the city, where he experiences everything – food, drink, the sight of animals, the feel of human beings, as on 'the first day of Creation'. He delights in an apricot tree in bloom; eats shashlik and ice cream; goes to the zoo and admires the Nilgai antelope. Then in the evening he boards a train and sets out for 'eternal exile', laid out as if dead on the luggage rack. He ends up with nothing but a tiny extra bit of life, but as this is lived in freedom, it has the quality of eternity; it is a token and foretaste of life eternal.

The whole novel leads up to this one day in the life of Kostoglotov. It is an Old Testament day, shot through with the great themes of Creation, Fall (there is 'an evil man' even in the Zoological Garden), Judgment and Hope. It can be read as the prolegomenon to *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, in which a thousand years – the sum of the prison sentences – is distilled into one yesterday, and that yesterday is a carpenter's calvary.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

In the late 1950s Solzhenitsyn put aside *The First Circle* for a while to write his masterpiece – a novella less than one fifth the size of the novels. Published in 1962 as the first truthful account of life in the camps, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was not only a political sensation, breaking a taboo, but also a literary landmark, for he achieves here a rare and perfect unity of form and content.

The story is neither pure fiction, nor even the fictionalised autobiography of *The First Circle* and *Cancer Ward*. We are

made scarcely aware of the narrator and totally unaware of the author, as everything is experienced and expressed by one simple 'little man', Shukhov. The tale is told in his own words – but in the third person singular (he), not the first person singular (I). For this is how Shukhov experiences his own existence in the camp – as a subjected object and as an objectified subject.

This device gives Solzhenitsyn the distance, the standing back from the picture, which is so important in coming to terms with painful, humiliating and embittering experience. The emotion is recollected, intensely recollected, but in tranquillity. As Shukhov says of one of the other characters, 'he continued his story without self-pity, as if he were talking about somebody else'. This is the quality which gives to Solzhenitsyn's anonymous victims their Homeric character.

Shukhov finished up his gruel without making any effort to see who was sitting around him […]. All the same, he noticed that when the man directly opposite him vacated his place, a tall, old man – U-81 – sat himself down […].

Shukhov had been told that this old man had spent countless years in camps and prisons, and had never benefited from a single amnesty, and that whenever one ten year sentence ran out, then they slapped another one on him immediately. Now Shukhov examined him closely. Among all those men in the camp with bent backs, his back stood out as straight as a board, and it seemed as if he had put something on the bench beneath him to lift himself up […]. The old man's eyes didn't dart around to see what was going on in the mess-hall, but were fixed above Shukhov's head at some invisible spot of his own. He ate the thin gruel with a worn wooden spoon at his own pace, but he didn't bend his head towards the spoon – but carried the spoon all the way to his mouth […]. His face was quite drained of life, but did not look weak or unhealthy – rather, looked dark and as if hewn out of stone. And from his hands, which were big and cracked and blackened, you could see that not much soft work had come his way in all those years. But it was clear that the one thing he wasn't going to do was give in: he wasn't going to put his bread, like everybody else, straight down on the filthy table – but on a piece of cloth which had obviously been washed many times.

In this vignette Solzhenitsyn (artist rather than propagandist) draws an individual human being out of darkness for a moment and then lets him slip back into obscurity. He sets him before the eyes of Ivan Denisovich and thus of the reader as a man who remains human in, and in spite of, his environment. U-81 has been tested, but through his testing he has preserved certain characteristics.

First, he is upright. In spite of everything he is not bent like a beast of the field; he retains this essential element of being made in the image of God.

Secondly, 'the old man's eyes didn't dart around to see what was going on in the mess-hall, but were fixed above Shukhov's head at some invisible spot of his own'. He is different, in that he lifts up his eyes and sees 'as one seeing the invisible' (Hebrews 11: 17).

Thirdly, we should note the way he eats. He does not bend his head to the spoon, but he carries the spoon all the way to his mouth. That is to say, he eats as though he were giving himself Holy Communion according to the rites of the Orthodox Church.

And last, the symbol par excellence of endurance and difference is that instead of putting the bread straight down on the table, he takes out a little square of carefully washed cloth and places the bread upon it. I ask, who habitually takes bread and places it on a little square of cloth?

We do not know – and I do not think it matters – whether Solzhenitsyn means to say in his allusive way that U-81 is a priest or bishop. He may well be. We know that many such have spent long periods in the camps. U-81 may be a layman. But whatever his canonical status, U-81 is a **man** in the image of God, formed by a long liturgical tradition, surviving and reflecting as in a mirror the glory of a suffering servant. When I first read this page of *One Day in*

the Life of Ivan Denisovich I thought of the collect for the Transfiguration, 'Grant unto us thy servants, that in faith beholding the light of thy countenance, we may be strengthened to bear the cross and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory'. The transformation of human suffering in the light of faith in Christ is a common factor in the works of Solzhenitsyn. He is not just life-affirming; his work is truly Eucharistic, for in it 'life conquers death, and the past is overcome by the future'.

Solzhenitsyn was able to exhume an old, and comparatively rare, uniquely Russian literary form – the s*kaz*, or tale in which everything is seen through one pair of eyes and spoken by one pair of lips exclusively in the language of the milieu. Shukhov is a semi-literate carpenter, average man, not capable of discussing or even of understanding the moral and political implications of his situation. Like a sheep before its shearers he is a dumb beast – patiently suffering, but surviving and vindicated – in his own style, which is a marvellous mixture of Russian colloquialisms, prisoners' slang, Soviet jargon and old soldiers' idioms and obscenities – crude, racy and alive – in contrast to the dull repetitiousness of official literature.

It is the very absence of intellectualisation, rationalisation, indignation and explanation which gives *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* something of the dead-pan, take-it-or-leave-it plasticity of the passion narrative in the Gospels, which are also written in a common non-literary language. It, too, allows and invites, but does not compel, response. A work of art like this is the polar opposite of argument, persuasion and propaganda; and it will outlive them all, because it shares in the given-ness of creation itself as well as in the suffering inherent in creativity.

Solzhenitsyn is not the first author to take 'one day' as the subject of a book. Tolstoy had done this in his early essay in naturalism, *Twenty-four hours*; and James Joyce in *Ulysses* unfolds the famous 'Bloomsday'. But Solzhenitsyn invests it with unique significance. The day is important as such, both because it is a measurable fraction of prison sentences which are described in terms of the passage of time – five years, ten years, twenty-five years – and also because time is precious. Shukhov apprehends it as a gift, indistinguishable from the gift of life itself. For him in Karaganda, as for Kostoglotov in Tashkent, a day is no mere unit of chronological time. It is also time charged with eternity. This day, in a week in which 'the authorities have taken away Sunday again', is a holy day.

But how? Who hallows it? Not the authorities. Nothing indicates their cosmic impiety more than their pretension to control time. 'No clocks ticked here' (one of those marvellous details which become symbols through the transformation of the obvious into the significant): 'No clocks ticked here; the prisoners were not permitted to carry watches; the authorities told the time for them'. Nor is the sanctification of time a function of the hero. Shukhov is average man, with a conventional Russian Orthodox background. He believes a bit, but not too much; and there are elements of superstition in his folk religion. We may smile at his simple belief, that God breaks up the moon monthly to replace fallen stars, but you need to be more credulous than that, Solzhenitsyn implies, to believe that Stalin invented radar and penicillin or that Bukharin was an enemy of the people. Shukhov stands between the official atheists on the one hand, and his mate, the pious Baptist Alyosha, on the other.

With Alyosha (who is clearly named after Dostoyevsky's Alyosha Karamazov), Solzhenitsyn broke another taboo. This is the first wholly sympathetic account of a believer in Soviet literature, and it is drawn from life.

Alyosha takes upon himself the sacerdotal task of seeing to it that time is hallowed; and that the day in the life of Ivan Denisovich is given a structure. He reads his hidden Bible aloud morning and evening. We, with Shukhov, overhear him and participate – at a certain distance and with the slightly irritated sense of gratitude of villagers, hearing church bells calling to Morning and Evening Prayer.

In the morning, Shukhov hears 'But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker. Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear his name' (1 Peter 4: 15-16). Solzhenitsyn is too great an artist, and he has too high a regard for the unglossed word of God, to add any comment.

Within the limits of this novella, which include, remember, the limits of the hero's intellect and imagination, there is no place for the far-ranging metaphysical explorations into faith and doubt in which Dostoyevsky excels – just a little conventional barrack-room banter. In the evening Shukhov teases Aloysha about prayer; his own petitions come back marked 'rejected', and prayer didn't get Alyosha a lighter sentence (he had got his 25 years in fact for attending a prayer meeting in the Caucasus).

'But we didn't pray for that, Ivan Denisovich!' Alyosha persisted, and with the Gospels in his hands, he moved closer to Shukhov, right up to his face. 'Of all earthly and transitory things our Lord commanded that we should pray only for our daily bread…'

'Our bread ration, you mean?' asked Shukhov. Alyosha went on exhorting more with his eyes than with his words, and he laid his hand on Shukhov's…

'Why do you want freedom?' asked Alyosha. 'If you were free, the remnants of your faith would be overgrown with thorns! You should rejoice that you are in prison! Here you have time to think about your soul! Paul the Apostle said: "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus..."' (Acts 21: 13)

Here we have all the strength as well as the limitations of a deeply interiorised pietism, which neither Shukhov nor Solzhenitsyn shares. They do not share it; they love life and freedom too much; but they do not despise it either. Indeed, the echoes of St Paul's 'I am ready to die' have been heard in an open letter by Solzhenitsyn to the Fourth Soviet Writers' Congress dated 16 May 1967, and we know from his other writings and his famous prayer that he is a deeply religious man, believing, and venerating the tradition of belief as a repository of obvious values in a topsy-turvy world. It seems that his dormant or latent Russian Orthodox faith was revivified in the camps by his encounter with Protestantism, with Baptists like Alyosha and with Baltic Lutherans, of whom he always writes with the utmost respect for their probity and piety.

Alyosha and Shukhov are interrupted by a shout: 'Recount!' Again, another roll call in the freezing cold; and so to bed, and to that miraculously understated final paragraph, where all the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 22-23) is contained within pathetically narrow horizons, limited vocabulary and restricted sensibility. It is treasure in earthen vessels, a triumph of disciplined creativity and the summit of the 20th novel:

He hid his head in the thin, unwashed blanket, and… went off to sleep, completely content. Fate had been kind to him in many ways that day: he hadn't been put in the cells, the gang had not been sent to the Socialist Community Centre, he'd fiddled himself an extra bowl of porridge for dinner,… he'd been happy building that wall… And he hadn't fallen ill…

The day had gone by without a single cloud – almost a happy day.
There were three thousand, six hundred and fifty three days like that in his sentence, from reveille to lights out.
The three extra days were because of the leap years…

Annual General Meeting 2010

Saturday 6 November at 12 noon

The Charterhouse
Charterhouse Square
London EC1

Pilgrimage in the Soviet Period
Report on Recent Research in the Keston Archive

by Stella Rock

Dr Stella Rock (left) *speaks at the AGM about her research in the Keston archive*

Thanks to a scholarship from the Keston Institute, I was able to visit the Baylor University J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies and work in the Keston Center for Religion, Politics and Society from 4-17 October 2009.

This visit forms part of a project exploring the interplay of history, piety and politics at work in the creation and recreation of pilgrimage traditions in post-Soviet Russia, which has been partly funded by the British Academy. My research is currently focused on the astonishing flourishing of the *krestnyi khod* or 'procession of the cross' as a form of pilgrimage. In particular I have focused on the Velikoretsky procession [Velikoretsky—adjective formed from Velikaya reka = the Great River. *Ed.*], which venerates an icon of St Nicholas, and which in the past 16 years has seen participant numbers rise a hundredfold.

This procession, which travels 150km from Kirov (Vyatka) to the village of Velikoretskoe and back, is perceived by pilgrims as an unbroken 600 year-old tradition despite Soviet-era repressions. In the Keston archive I was looking for evidence of other processions and pilgrimage sites repressed in the Soviet period, to compare with my Velikoretsky case study.

The popular perception of religion during the Soviet period suggests that pilgrimage was banned, and the Soviet authorities did indeed make efforts to prevent people from publicly venerating shrines, especially in the 1920s and again under Khrushchev. In 1919-1920 a campaign against relics – the saints' bones and other personal items venerated by Russian Orthodox Christians – led to the destruction or removal of many of these holy objects to museums. In 1924 religious processions and assemblies were banned, and group pilgrimages were made illegal in 1929.

The fact that these measures were unsuccessful in stopping pilgrimage is reflected in the 1958 resolution of the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee 'On measures for stopping pilgrimages to so-called "holy sites"'. This secular decree was backed up by a letter from the

Velikoretsky procession: pilgrims gathering at the wooden chapel built on the bank of the Velikaya River where a local man saw an icon of St Nicholas surrounded by light near a holy spring. This icon became a source of healing .

Patriarchate to all dioceses asking them to educate local believers on the 'impermissibility of pilgrimage to so-called "holy sites" not venerated by the church'[1] which in practice often meant holy springs.

Despite only working through about half of the relevant research files during my two week stay, I found a lot of useful and exciting material. The archive holds a wonderful biography of a Samara-region priest covering the period 1908-1926, which offers a window into the life of believers in revolutionary Russia. One chapter of *Iz zhizni odnogo sviashchennika* (*From the life of one priest*) describes the family's almost week-long pilgrimage to venerate a newly discovered miracle-working icon during the stormy summer of 1917. Lynne Viola has observed the many miracles, apparitions and cases of the miraculous renewal of icons in the 1920s, in response to which peasants 'often organised pilgrimages to the villages where the renewed icons were found'[2], and this finding supports the suggestion that there is a great flourishing of what Lotman and Uspensky call 'semiotic behaviour' in times of social upheaval and transition.[3]

16th century icon of St Nicholas is carried at the head of the Velikoretsky procession

A glimpse of pilgrimage in the 1930s was offered by *Pravedniki nashego vremeni: Katakomby XX veka*, the memoirs of Vera Vasilevskaya, the aunt of Fr Alexander Men. The memoirs were written 'many years ago', and describe the

Servers bearing banners lead the Velkoretsky procession

guidance of Fr Seraphim, who was Vera's spiritual advisor from 1935 until his death in 1942. Vera is baptised into the Catacomb Church in 1936 and sometime afterwards, probably in 1939 or 1940, she travels to Sarov on the recommendation of Fr Seraphim. In Diveevo she stays with a woman who has been raised in the Diveevo convent orphanage, who tells her all about the convent churches, graves and canal of St Seraphim (the convent was closed in 1927). In a wonderfully evocative passage she recounts how it seems to her that Diveevo lives two lives simultaneously: on the surface, the 'anthill' of Soviet life carries on, but in the depths the monastic life continues to glimmer, just as holy springs ('a living symbol of God's unquenchable mercy') continue to rise to the surface despite having been assiduously filled in with earth and rubble.

Vera stays in Diveevo for ten days before someone is found who can guide her through the forests to St Seraphim's Sarov shrine. Eventually she is escorted there by one of Diveevo's former nuns, the elderly Matryona Fyodorovna. Vera describes the monastery as appearing as it never has in pictures, and most of the churches are locked, although in one large cathedral the door is half open, revealing a cow within. They then walk to the spring, taking crockery to collect holy water in and the akathist of St Seraphim. On the way she is told that in memory of St Seraphim, hunters still will not kill bears in the Sarov woods, and the nearer they get to the spring, the more people they meet. These secret pilgrims stop at the place where St Seraphim prayed for many days and nights on a stone, and search the grass for fragments of this holy stone (which had been smashed into little bits in an effort to prevent veneration). The wells have also been destroyed, but the spring still flows. The nun then leads Vera deeper into the forest, to show her the cave in which St Seraphim lived as a hermit. As they are about to enter the cave to collect earth as a souvenir, a boy of 16 or 17 comes out and asks if they have come from Moscow. When Vera answers that she has, he asks 'has Moscow not forgotten St Seraphim?'

The text is extraordinary testimony of the fact that Moscow had not forgotten St Seraphim, and – together with many other materials in the Keston archive – also testifies to the resilience of those who wanted to continue venerating the saints. Vera had intended to stay in Diveevo until the 1 August Feast of St Seraphim, but the local authorities begin to take an interest in her, so to save her hosts trouble she leaves earlier. She displays, like those she meets during her pilgrimage, remarkable bravery and resourcefulness.

Material in the Keston archive about the suppression of monasteries such as the Pochaev Lavra has been well-used by

Velikoretsky procession

Jane Ellis, Dmitry Pospievlovsky and others, but is still able to cast fresh light on the continuing desire of believers to make pilgrimages and on the distances people travelled to visit shrines. The Keston collection also includes a fair amount of published material on the suppression of the Velikoretsky procession and the closure of Velikoretskoe church in 1960,[4] mostly generated by Boris Talantov, a Kirov believer who was arrested in 1969 and imprisoned for three years, dying in a prison hospital in January 1971.[5] Of particular interest is one anonymous unpublished report from 1980, and a published report from 1981, both of which suggest that the substantial number of pilgrims still attempting to make the journey from Kirov to Velikoretskoe in time for the 6 June feast was substantial. The 1980 report claims a thousand pilgrims, and the report from 1981 (published in the journal *Posev*) records that:

> 'According to a message from Kirov, this year on 3 June there was again a pilgrimage to the Velikaya River… Along the roads to the village of Velikoretskoe drove police patrol cars, persuading pilgrims to turn back. People, singing prayers, continued on their way. (There were groups of 200 people and groups of 15). In Velikoretskoe detachments of police, KGB employees, and the leadership of atheist work in the *oblast* were waiting for them. There were soldiers in the village. From the miracle-working spring…to the river ran barbed wire with a sign that said that here is a prohibited zone and military exercises are in progress. Pilgrims were told that if someone went into the zone they would be shot at. The blockade of the village continued for several days. Inhabitants of the Chudinovo village (where pilgrims usually go because there is the only functioning church in the *okrug*) were forbidden to take pilgrims across the river, and a large fine was imposed for any doing so. Pilgrims weren't sold bread.'[6]

By 1986 it seems that only a handful of people were still making the journey. The Communist Party committee in the Lenin district of the Kirov *oblast* made a list of pilgrims who made it to the Velikaya River that year: only eight, all women and residents of Kirov[7] (list in *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii Kirovskoi oblasti*). The first full procession, along the 'traditional route', was permitted in 1992, and around 300 people participated. By 2005 it was attracting around 3,000 pilgrims annually.[8] In 2008 an estimated 30,000 participated – and while this rise is quite astonishing, it is worth remembering that in 1915 around 50,000 pilgrims made it to the banks of the river.[9] We may not have seen the peak of post-Soviet pilgrimage yet.

(1) Tatyana A. Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev years,* ed. & trans. Edward E. Roslof (Armonk, N.Y.; London: M.E. Sharpe, 2002) p.155

(2) Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) pp.53-4.

(3) Yu. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspensky, 'On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture', *New Literary History* IX (Winter, 1978), pp. 211-2.

(4) Manuscript reply of believers to an article in *Kirovskaya Pravda* 7 September 1960 'Otvet veruyushchikh na stat'iu "Kirovskoi Pravdy" za 7 sentyabr 1960g. Komu zhe eto vygodno?' Signed by Anis'ya Eliseevna Lumpova; Aleksandra Semenovna Lagunova; Ekaterina Ivanovna Ovechkina (all of Kirov, 9 October 1960, sent 31 October). Located in SU/Ort 6/13 (USSR/Orth. C./35; AS 702).

(5) Michael Bourdeaux, with contributions by Kathleen Matchett and Cornelia Gerstenmaier, *Religious minorities in the Soviet Union*: *a report prepared for the Minority Rights Group* (London : Minority Rights Group, 1973).

(6) *Posev* no.11, November 1981, pp.3-4

(7) Galina Nagornichnykh, 'Shli lyudi na velikuyu', *Vyatsky eparkhial'nyi vestnik (VEV)* 5 (259), May 2009, p.13

(8) *VEV* 6 (122) 2000; Naletova, Inna, 'Pilgrimages as Kenotic Communities beyond the Walls of the Church', in Chris Hann and Herman Goltz, eds, *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspectives*. Columbia University Press, 2008, pp. 203-226

(9) *VEV* 6 (50) 1994, citing a 1915 report from the state archives.

Through a Photographer's Lens

Orthodoxy in Siberia

by Mikhail Roshchin

Parishioner of the Church of the Archangel Michael in Novosibirsk plunging into the freezing water of the River Ob, during the Feast of the Epiphany. Photograph © Vladimir Osintsev

The life of the Russian Orthodox Church in contemporary Russia is portrayed not only in purely religious publications. I discovered the work of the Novosibirsk photographer, Vladimir Osintsev, on a photographers' website *http://www.photosight.ru/users/33517/* after which I began to correspond with him. He told me that he was born in 1958 and had been involved in photography since the 4th class of primary school. In recent years he has acquired his own studio and has become a professional photographer, enjoying most of all reportage work. He is an Orthodox believer and regularly sends greetings cards on Russian Orthodox feasts and other important dates to other Christian photographers through *www.photosight.ru*.

One of the most striking sights he has seen in his life were the baptismal immersions of last year; these form part of

Photograph © Vladimir Osintsev: celebrating the Epiphany

Clergy from the Church of the Archangel Michael in their cassocks plunge in. Photograph © Vladimir Osintsev

the Russian Orthodox Church's celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany, a feast which recalls the baptism of Christ by John the Baptist in the River Jordan (Matt 3:13-37, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22). The word 'Epiphany' expresses the understanding that at Christ's baptism His Triune nature was most clearly revealed: when heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove; and there came a voice from heaven 'Thou art my Son, my Be-

Even babies are immersed as a queue of others from the Church of the Archangel Michael await their turn. Photograph © Vladimir Osintsev

loved'. The Feast of the Epiphany is celebrated in Russia on 6 January according to the Julian calendar, and on 19 January according to the Gregorian calendar, more widely used in Russia.

During the evening service the day before the feast, and on the feast itself, the great Blessing of the Waters takes place, both in church, on rivers, ponds and by wells. In earlier forms of the Russian language, the Blessing of the Waters was called the Baptism of the Waters: water blessed at Epiphany has from ancient times been considered particularly holy; it is carefully kept during the year, used to bless objects, and is considered to have healing properties; it is given to those who for various reasons have not been able to receive communion. It is traditional in Russia at Epiphany to bathe in the cold blessed waters, which are believed to strengthen the whole of a person's organism for the year and to protect from infections.

Last year Vladimir Osintsev celebrated the Epiphany with the parishioners of the Novosibirsk Church of the Archangel Michael. Here is how he himself described to me what took place: 'After the service in church the parishioners and all those who wished to, led by their clergy, walked in a *krestnyi khod* (procession of the cross) to the River Ob. After the Blessing of the Waters the clergy plunged into the water through a hole made in the ice, followed by a few hundred others. The temperature of the air was -15. Both old and young plunged in, and even babies were immersed.' Vladimir was able to take some remarkable photographs which Keston now publishes with kind permission.

A monk named Platon taking final vows at a monastery dedicated to All the Saints of Siberia in Cherepanovo (Novosibirsk oblast). *Photograph © Vladimir Osintsev*

Reviews

Memoirs of a Survivor: The Golitsyn Family in Stalin's Russia. By Sergei Golitsyn. Translated by Nicholas Witter. Introduction by Dominic Lieven Reportage Press, 26 Richmond Way, London W12

Non-Russian speakers have had to wait 20 years for Sergei Golitsyn's autobiography to appear in English. When *samizdat* came to be officially published in Mikhail Gorbachev's Soviet Union this manuscript had already lain unpublished for 30 years. The author prepared it for publication in 1990, but died just before it was printed. In Russia it achieved great popularity at a time when the edifice of Lenin and Stalin was seemingly in the process of destruction.

Born in 1909, Golitsyn became a criminal at the age of eight: he was from the upper aristocracy, related to the doomed royal family of Nicholas II, so the Revolution of 1917 condemned him instantaneously. A deeply humble, honest, religious man, he fought for his whole life to extricate himself from these origins – not by denouncing anyone, but by trying to make a contribution to the new society.

In this he was doomed to failure, though he did eventually become a minor surveyor on some of Stalin's grandiose projects. His real ambition was to write, but he could never become a published author while the old system persisted. Nevertheless, he did use his considerable literary gifts to record the death of the old Russia in prose which occasionally attains the heights of lyricism. This is not a book of prison-camp horrors. Compared to Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* it may at first glance seem mild. However, Golitsyn had to be mentally tough to survive at all. He suffered only one short period of imprisonment, though many interrogations, and was fortunate to live to the age of 80. He observed the systematic destruction of the old Russia and what he saw caused him daily suffering. He never betrayed others and emerged with his integrity untarnished. Golitsyn's rich tapestry is free of self-pity, never resorting to denunciations of the political system which had confiscated his heritage. The description of his transition from privileged childhood to persecution is a masterpiece of autobiographical writing. He was one of the last to cling openly to his religious faith before all the churches and monasteries were closed before the Second World War. This is not a formal history of the death of the Russian Orthodox Church: in some ways it is more valuable than that, an eyewitness of its death-throes.

Golitsyn is a master of the set piece. Among many notable pages of description, none is more poignant than his account of his visit to the far north of Russia where he saw the Monastery of St Cyril of the White Lake after the monks had been expelled, but before the ravages of time and Soviet desecration had taken their toll on this magnificent lakeside complex (pp. 291-3):

As in other places, the monks who had been driven out of the monastery had found lodgings in local houses. Devout widows received the most ascetic monks into their homes where they lived in secrecy in any little space offered them, never going out. The ordinary monks became gardeners, carpenters, shoemakers or woodcutters, but they no longer wore their dark cassocks as in Nesterov's paintings, but pale cotton cloaks and dusty shoes. One could see them pacing slowly along, heads bowed, whispering their prayers. At that time the authorities had not yet started to send them into exile, or arrest them for vagrancy… At Belozersk, the oldest town in the north of Russia, we were astonished by the number of churches, all dating back to the 17th century and later. They towered up over a mixture of wooden and stone houses. The bell-towers raised their lofty classical steeples high into the sky… Most beautiful of all was the lake, 40 versts wide, on which fishing boats under white sails furrowed the glassy water.

The White Lake frozen in winter

This scene was soon to disappear forever, but, as Keston supporters who visited the monastery with me on a waterways cruise in the high summer of 1994 will remember, restoration of the main churches was taking place. Last year, in mid-winter, Xenia Dennen went there with our Encyclopaedia team and saw that much progress had been made. The spirit of Sergei Golitsyn inspires many of the younger generation.

One learns new facts, too. It is not generally known that church weddings persisted in Moscow until 1929, when Golitsyn was able to stand as a 'No.1 groom' [best man] for the last time. This volume stops short at the outbreak of the 'Great Patriotic War' (1941). Perhaps somewhere, unpublished, there is a sequel? However, the appearance of the Russian original was a literary – and political and religious – event in Russia. Its belated publication in London is worth the wait, for, barring a few idiosyncrasies, it is well translated and has become a work of Russian literature in its own right.

Michael Bourdeaux

Poetry, Providence and Patriotism. Polish Messianism in Dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer. By Joel Burnell. Pickwick Publications 2009 (Princeton Theological Monograph Series 123). Xxvi, 294 pp. ISBN 13: 978-1-60608-042-9.

It is a commonplace that Poland in the 1980s led the way to the emancipation of Eastern Europe from Soviet communist rule. In the struggle which found expression is such movements as Solidarity led by Lech Walęsa, Polish national self-consciousness proved indomitable thanks largely to the strength of its Roman Catholic tradition and, not least, the inspiring leadership and advocacy of human rights by its greatest son, Pope John Paul II. So much is true, but there is much more to be said about the historical background to this 20th century saga, and the spiritual and intellectual ferments within it. Joel Burnell, who teaches doctrine and ethics at the Evangelical School of Theology in Wroclaw, takes us on a fascinating journey into the shaping of the post-1945 Polish mind as it grappled with totalitarianism and the possibilities for change. In fact it is a two-way journey: first of all back in time to the origins and development of the 'messianic' Polish national consciousness from the end of the 18th century, owing much to the 'patriotic priest' Jan Pawel Woronicz (1754-1829) and the poet Adam Miciewicz (1798-1855); second, a walk along that most fateful borderland between Poland and its western neighbour, but given fresh significance by examining the Polish reception of Germany's most famous 20th century theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Burnell looks carefully at the Christian-Romantic stream of Polish national 'messianism' founded by Woronicz and Miciewicz, and the ambiguity of its long-term development: was it to be a liberal, inclusivist and outward-looking understanding of the nation or a narrowing, exclusivist chauvinism armed with religion ('To be Polish is to be Catholic') and with ugly anti-Semitic features? Under Soviet communism, what room was there for the former type to develop, or what was there to prevent a reaction to the latter type once the communist yoke was removed? In communist Poland, crucial to the eventual development of a political movement which could be an alternative to the Soviet-imposed system, was

Joel Burnell

the need for dialogue between Christians (overwhelmingly of course, but not completely Roman Catholic) and the reformist, left-of-centre intellectuals. Finding common ground was not easy, as there were suspicions on both sides. Catholics expected secular or humanist thinkers to be *ipso facto* anti-Church or anti-clerical, while the secular intellectuals in turn were apt to assume that theologians attended only to narrowly religious concerns and safeguarding the interests of the Church. Had these entrenched positions been maintained there would have been little chance of a common humane language developing which enabled Poland to develop a civil society, pluralist but with a widely shared respect for human rights, and encouraging citizens to active social responsibility.

Here is where Dietrich Bonhoeffer comes into the story of Polish intellectual life from the 1970s onwards – perhaps surprisingly in view of his being both German and Lutheran! (Note, though, that Bonhoeffer was actually born in Wroclaw in 1906, at that time the German 'Breslau'). Burnell impressively documents how important Bonhoeffer's writings, especially his *Ethics* with their emphasis on the freedom of the responsible person in society, were for both the secular and theological Polish thinkers of the 1970s and 1980s. The role of the scholar Anna Morawska, associated with the Catholic journal *Więź*, was especially important here from 1968. But many secular intellectuals like Adam Michnik were also impressed: '... reading Bonhoeffer was essential for me because he explained how to be an anti-totalitarian Christian' he confessed. Under an officially atheist regime, Bonhoeffer's provocative ideas, written during the last year of his life in prison, on 'religionless Christianity' and 'living as if God is not given', also made both secularists and religious people question their easy assumptions about 'belief' and 'unbelief' – and to call every dogmatism to account in the name of what is truly human. Further, Bonhoeffer offered a role model not only for resistance – challenging acquiescent believers and secularists alike – but also for reconciliation in the long process of healing the wounds of the Second World War. The Church must always transcend national loyalties and boundaries. This has meant, and will continue to require, a redeemed 'messianism', strengthening the best elements in the Polish patriotic tradition and not allowing it to be perverted into self-enclosed, destructive chauvinism.

This book is to be warmly commended for its wealth of information and insights into the struggle for a truly non-communist and post-communist society, and the role to be played by belief in that struggle.

Keith Clements
Former General Secretary
Conference of European Churches

Home News

Sir Sigmund Sternberg (right) *wearing the Star of the Order of St Basil the Great, presented to him by the Papal Nuncio* (left) *in London*

Keston's Vice-President, Sir Sigmund Sternberg, was presented with the Star of the Order of St Basil the Great by the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Faustino Sainz Muñoz, on 29 January. He was honoured in this way for his untiring work promoting inter-faith dialogue. During the presentation Sir Sigmund made an impassioned plea for a day to mark the important document issued by the Second Vatican Council in 1965, *Nostra Aetate*, which condemned all discrimination on the basis of race, creed or colour and which he called a 'ringing declaration of brotherhood'. On such a day, he said, 'people of faith' would be able to 'celebrate their shared belief in God...and the values they hold in common'.

In October last year, Keston's President, Michael Bourdeaux, was presented with an Honorary Degree by the Evangelical Theological Faculty of Osijek in Croatia during a conference entitled 'Celebrating and Assessing Twenty Years of Freedom', sponsored by World Vision, at which he delivered a keynote lecture on the Church in transition in Russia. As part of the conference he was taken to see the memorial cemetery in Vukovar and wrote afterwards: '*This was one of the first places to feel the full oppression in the civil war. I've been to Auschwitz, but found Vukovar more moving—perhaps because I remember the actual events so well and because of the feeling of frustration at the time that this was something which the rest of Europe should have prevented. Some 4000 men and boys, mainly Croats, but some Bosnians, were murdered there, and even now not all the bodies have been recovered from the mass graves. Their reburial is in a memorial cemetery, beautifully kept and alive with flowers and cypress trees. On all the graves you read the words, "Died... 1991", sometimes whole families together. I shall never forget it. Looking across the Danube to Serbia one sees a peaceful scene now. Let us pray that it remains so for all time*.' It should also be remembered that Vukovar was the scene of atrocities committed against the Jews during the Second World War by the ruling Pavelic regime in Croatia, installed by the Nazis after the fall of Yugoslavia in 1941. The tragic history of the Jewish communities in Croatia has yet to be told: there are literally no survivors.

The Chairman, Xenia Dennen, and Michael Bourdeaux visited the Keston Center for Religion Politics and Society at Baylor University on 16-17 February and attended the Center's Board meeting. Professor Christopher Marsh, the Center's Director, had acquired an additional large room on the Baylor campus which would be used to house the Keston archive, leaving the Youens Library (next to the Bourdeaux room in the Keston Center) for books and some samizdat files. The electronic catalogue in Excel being compiled by the Center's archivist, Larisa Seago, was progressing, following Keston's original filing system. A vast amount of conservation work had already been completed with all sorted documents now placed in acid-free folders. Lauren Tapley, one of the Keston Center's doctoral students, who was working on a study of the Russian Baptist Aida Skripnikova, was able to read Russian and was helping the archivist. New digitising technology, similar to that in the Library of Congress, had been acquired by Baylor's main library. It functioned 24 hours a day and the Keston Center was able to use the equipment for 3-4 hours four days a week. Priority was given to digitising material which was fragile and beginning to disintegrate. Items were also digitised in response to the requests of researchers, and already many additional documents were ready to be put on the Center's website. Michael and Xenia were shown a mammoth digitising machine, 10 ft x 4 ft, which could scan large maps and had been useful for scanning the long strips of material containing the transcript of Aida Skripnikova's trial. In addition the library's digitising centre had a machine which could scan books two pages a second. Bobby Basaldu, a doctoral student, was doing sterling work helping digitise all the issues of a samizdat journal produced by Alexander Ogorodnikov, which was currently being removed from libraries in Russia and destroyed. The copies held by the Keston Center were therefore probably the only ones still in existence; in the near future they should become available to the world at large on the Keston Center's website.

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