# Keston Newsletter

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*Cathedral of St Sophia in Kiev, Ukraine*

## Ukraine and a Trinity of Churches

**by Patrick Rosebery**

Nikolai Gavriliev was balanced on wooden scaffolding, painting The Annunciation. Nikolai is an artist from Lviv in Western Ukraine who learnt his skill at an icon painting school in the city. But he was not in Lviv, but hundreds of miles south-east on the Crimean coast at Oreanda near Yalta. He was in the middle of a commission to paint the interior of a new church dedicated to the Archangel Michael, overlooking the Black Sea with the rocky promontories of the Crimean mountains rising sheer behind. Nikolai and two fellow fresco painters hope to finish their work this autumn after two years. The interior of the church will be covered with scenes from the lives of Christ, his mother, St Michael and other saints, topped with representations of the evangelists and angels around a central cupola with Christ Pantocrator in the middle. The whole effect of gold, blue and dominant pale colours is of a classical Orthodox church in pastel shades, perhaps reflecting the Ukrainian Greek Catholic (or Uniate) tradition of Nikolai's native city. But this church is Russian Orthodox, under the Moscow Patriarchate.

Ukraine became an independent country in 1991 when the Soviet Union broke up; Mikhail Gorbachev was in fact holidaying at his villa on the Crimean coast when an ultimately unsuccessful coup against his reforms nonetheless led to his downfall and allowed Boris Yeltsin to take power in Moscow with the promise of democracy. The senior

*Also in this issue:*

*Lviv*

Ukrainian Communist Party apparatchiks quickly re-invented themselves and declared an independent republic. After centuries under the rule of Mongols, Lithuanians, Poles, Russians, Austrians and Germans, Ukraine was an independent country for the first time. With its capital in Kiev and extending from the borders of central Europe in the west to Russia in the east, Ukraine is larger than France with a population roughly that of the UK. While its religion is largely Orthodox Christianity – a choice originally made by Prince Vladimir of Kievan Rus in 988 having been impressed by the worship in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople – there are currently three different branches of the Orthodox Church active in the country, as well as a thriving Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) with over four million members and 4175 parishes, which is much disliked by the Moscow Patriarchate. St George's Cathedral in Lviv was traditionally seen by Ukrainian Greek Catholics as their mother church, but in 2005 the UGCC moved its headquarters to Kiev and started constructing a large new cathedral by the River Dnepr.

As with many countries in Eastern Europe there is an 'autocephalous' (i.e. independent) Ukrainian Orthodox Church founded shortly after independence in 1991. But very soon that church broke into two factions with the new Kievan Patriarchate now the more powerful – and responsible for building and restoring countless churches, including the brand new Monastery of St Mikhayil in the centre of Kiev, a confection of white and powder blue, with golden domes, on the site of an earlier monastery blown up by Stalin in 1937. Currently the Kievan Patriarchate has 4,093 parishes, whereas the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church has only 1,183. While the Kievan branch rules over much of Ukraine, the Crimea is dominated by the Moscow Patriarchate, which has opened or reopened over 350 churches and monasteries in the area, including both the church in Oreanda and the monastery at Inkerman, strategically positioned right by the railway line north from Sevastopol allowing Nicholas II and Empress Alexandra to visit it with their family before the First World War, as a small exhibition there attests. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate has far more parishes than the other two branches put together – 11,444 in January 2009.

*New Ukrainian Greek Catholic cathedral under construction in Kiev*

While the recent history of Kiev and the Crimea has been dominated by Russia and the Soviet Union, Western Ukraine is unmistakeably Mitteleuropa, reflecting its time as part of the Habsburg Empire. Lviv (Lvov to the Poles and Russians; Lemburg to the Austrians) is a well pre-

*Monastery of St Mikhayil, Kiev*

served Central European city, now well restored and a vibrant example of the 'kaffe und küchen' society which can be found from Prague to Pecs and Brno to Brasov. And it does not have the Western tourists that have begun to spoil some of its more famous cousins. Lviv lies at the edge of an area of historically shifting boundaries sometimes known as Transcarpathian Ruthenia. Over the past hundred years this small but romantic-sounding region which now lies across the borders of five countries (Ukraine, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland) has suffered the rule of as many different powers – not to mention its disappearance from the map. Most tragic however was the annihilation of the region's Jewish community (both Robert Maxwell and Andy Warhol came from the area)

which accounted for over a third of the population between the wars. Evocative though they are, the Jewish quarters of both Lviv and Kraków (across the border in Poland) can only hint at the horrors of 70 years ago.

The Jews are first recorded in what is now Ukraine in the eighth century; these Hellenistic Jews were probably the first to settle in Eastern Europe. Numbers remained small until the Treaty of Lublin in 1569 encouraged emigration from Poland. As the Jewish population increased, so did anti-semitism appear. In late 19th century Odessa, where a third of the population spoke Yiddish, there were frequent pogroms organised by the Russian state or spontaneous anti-Jewish rioting, such as after Alexander II's assassination in 1881. This was the world in which Trotsky was brought up. At this time there were more than three million Jews in Ukraine before massacres of the Ukrainian civil war in 1919 when all sides turned on the Jews and up to 200,000 were killed by the White Army, the Red Army, nationalists and anarchists. By 1939 the population had halved to around 1.5 million before the Nazis undertook their chillingly organised campaign of genocide – typically in this area by rounding up and shooting whole villages. Although since independence Jews have been allowed to worship and reoccupy their synagogues, with barely 250,000 left across the country and little active support from the state, this is likely to prove a slow rehabilitation.

*Holy Assumption Monastery, Bakhchisarai , Crimea*

The Russian influence in Crimea is not surprising. Ever since Catherine the Great put Crimea under her protection in 1772, the Russians have treasured their southern link with the sea. Not only has this allowed land-locked Muscovites to spend

*Ukrainian Greek Catholic Archbishop of Lviv blesses young pilgrims*

*St George's Ukrainian Greek Catholic Cathedral in Lviv*

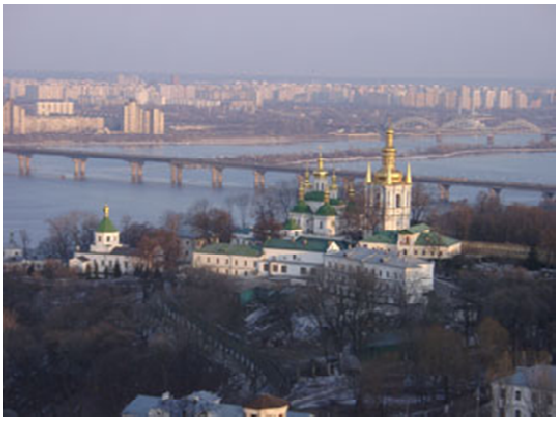
their holidays by the Black Sea (as they continue to do) but more strategically, it has given the Russian Fleet a base for operations in Southern Europe and beyond. Earlier this year, the Ukrainian government agreed a further lease of part of the Sevastopol naval base to Russia through to 2042 in exchange for a deal on gas. The strength of feeling in Ukraine was reflected in the fisticuffs during the Parliamentary debate on the issue. So Russian and Ukrainian warships now lie side by side in the picturesque harbour at Sevastopol and – as I found out – one can find an excellent lunch at the restaurant overlooking the harbour in the Russian naval zone.

Views from the restaurant stretch to hills redolent of the Crimean War where the combined troops of Britain, France, Turkey and Sardinia finally captured Sevastopol from Russia in 1856 after the bloody battles of Alma, Balaclava and Inkerman. (The war was sparked off by a dispute between Russian Orthodox and French Catholic priests over Christian sites in the Holy Land.) The attractive natural harbour at Balaclava, where Florence Nightingale tended the wounded, is now full of smart yachts (and has a former Soviet submarine base cut deep into the cliffs, now open to the public and reminiscent of a scene from a James Bond movie). The site of the Charge of the Light Brigade, where Cardigan led his 'noble six hundred' troops into unseen Russian cannon, is now a vineyard of cabernet sauvignon, but the route of the charge is still all-too-clear, and it is easy to imagine the events of 1854. Inkerman is a small town at the end of the five mile Sevastopol harbour, now best known for its monastery where, under the close eye of the abbot, a couple of burly builders were laying slabs of shiny marble and an artist from Belarus was painting an icon of St Pantaleon for the newly restored church. Just as Nikolai from Lviv, he had come a long way to practise his art, but just as Nikolai he can hope that his work will be admired by pilgrims for centuries to come.

# Keston Members Recollect

## The Very Reverend John Arnold

### The Ukrainian Waitress



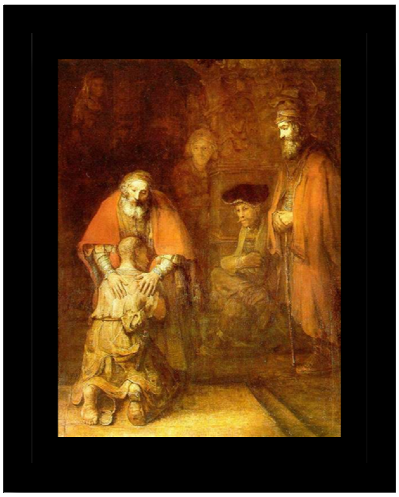
*Monastery of the Caves, Kiev, & the River Dnepr*

In May 1969 I was a member of a five-man delegation of the World Council of Churches to the Baptists of the Soviet Union. Our task was to attempt to mediate between the official church and the '*initsiativniki*', the independent, unregistered congregations. It was not easy.

We went first to Kiev, where we were entertained to a lavish lunch at an open-air restaurant overlooking the Dnepr. I was wearing a clerical collar. When a young waitress brought the *zakuski (hors d'oeuvres)*, she leaned closely over my shoulder and murmured in my ear, 'Are you a priest?' I whispered that I was. The following conversation ensued with one short whisper each per course.

Soup: **W**: Are you from the Russian Orthodox Church? **A**: The Church of England.

Fish: **W**: What sort of a church is that? **A**: It is the English equivalent of the Russian Orthodox Church. (Phew!)



*Rembrandt's Prodigal Son*

Entrée: **W**: My grandmother is a believer. (This was Sovspeak for 'I am a Christian'.) **A**: Please convey a blessing to your grandmother.

Dessert: **W**: Of course, I do not attend the liturgy. **A**: Of course not.

Coffee: **W**: When I retire I will. **A**: Bless you.

Keston members will, I think, recognise the scenario – childhood churchgoing with a stout-hearted *babushka*, education and work with enforced abstinence from any public expression of faith, early retirement (ironically enough, one of the best social provisions of Soviet society) and eventual return to the church. For decades I remembered that anonymous waitress in my prayers, trusting that she in turn would become one of those indestructible *babushki*, who kept the faith, took their grandchildren to church, outlived and outloved tyranny.

I am reminded of the Western visitor, who remarked to a young Orthodox bishop that his church was full of old women. What would happen when all the old women died? The bishop smiled through his beard and said, 'There will be more old women.'

### The Prodigal Son

Metropolitan Nikodim invited a group of ecumenists to Leningrad in February 1975 to help the Russian Orthodox Church with its preparations for the 5th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi later that year. We were lodged in the splendid Evropeiskaya Hotel. I had a suite of rooms with a shrub-sized aspidistra in the hall, a shoulder-deep bath (without a plug) and a notice, reading, 'It is forbidden to take inflammable agents into the bedroom.' However, I was outranked by Archbishop Gwilym Morgan of Wales just along the corridor. He had a small grand piano and a stuffed bear in his antechamber. The sun scarcely rose all day; and when it did, the city was bathed in its own peculiar milky-white light. In the Orthodox calendar it was already Lent and we ate seven-course meals with different fish for each course.

We had a few hours free one afternoon and I offered to take the Archbishop to the Hermitage, which I had visited before. I said that we could not possibly take in everything and suggested that we should go to see the Rembrandts in the Gallery of Western European Masters. When we got there, we were confronted with a notice, hanging

askew on the gilded door-knob, '*Na remont*' (Closed for repairs). Of course it was nothing of the sort, just the customary combination of laziness and mendacity. I approached the large but motherly looking attendant at the door. 'This venerable gentleman,' I said, pointing to the Archbishop, 'has come all the way from Wales, which is on an island in the Atlantic Ocean, to venerate the picture of the Prodigal Son by Rembrandt'; and I handed over a few small trinkets from the gift shop of Winchester Cathedral, of which I was then an Honorary Canon. The combination of a few words of Russian and small gifts worked its usual magic (see below); and the attendant took a large key from the impressive bunch at her waist, opened the door and said, 'Be back in an hour.'

We had the whole gallery – in pristine condition – to ourselves. I am not normally tearful, but I find it impossible to look at 'The Prodigal Son' without weeping. No one has ever depicted the human face with such insight into personality and character as Rembrandt; and yet, for his masterpiece, he eschews portraiture completely and instead shows only the soles of the prodigal's feet, bearing the marks of his story and of his sufferings, his pilgrimage of grace.

*Tolstoy's grave at Yasnaya Polyana*

## Some enchanted evening

In May 1986 a large delegation from the British Council of Churches visited the Soviet Union, shortly after the Chernobyl disaster. When we arrived in Moscow we were divided into three groups with different itineraries. I was in the group scheduled to visit Ukraine. Archbishop Hapgood said that in the circumstances we would rather go somewhere else. Our host, Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk, began by loyally taking the official line that there was no danger and that everything was under control. 'But,' said Archbishop Hapgood, 'we have instructions from our Foreign Office not to go to Ukraine.' 'Ah,' replied Metropolitan Filaret immediately, 'instructions from your Foreign Office.' And he produced from a back pocket an alternative itinerary, clearly put together in a hurry, around the Golden Ring. In fact, when we compared notes with the other groups, we felt that we had done rather well, precisely because the visits had not been over prepared and there was more scope for the unplanned and the impromptu.

We arrived in our mini-bus at our pre-booked hotel in Tula only to discover that the enterprising manager had re-sold our rooms to some visiting trades unionists. We pronounced the magic words, 'We are members of an international delegation' and the manager immediately realised that he would have to de-select the unfortunate trades unionists and restore our rooms to us or face serious consequences. That would take some time. I suggested that we took the opportunity to visit Yasnaya Polyana (the home of Tolstoy), which I knew to be in the vicinity and had never seen before.

It was late in the afternoon when we reached the entrance to the estate with its military style barrier and guard-room. The gatekeeper was locking up. 'What a pity!' I said, handing over some trinkets from Rochester Cathedral, of which I was then Dean. 'We are admirers of Lev Nikolaevich and we have come all the way from Britain on a pilgrimage to his grave.' She looked at us, raised the barrier and said, 'I am just going round the back of the hut, so I won't see you, will I?'

We set off down the path, past the cottage where Tolstoy's serf mistress had lived and the pond where Sonia had tried to drown herself, to the site of the old house, alas no longer there. In a land where the simplest things were impossible or at least tediously time-consuming, the impossible had taken a minute. I remembered Sir John Lawrence saying that in the Soviet Union, where it was impossible just to go into a shop and buy a piece of string, Intourist could, if necessary, lay on a bear hunt.

It was one of those summer evenings, which, as in childhood, seem to go on forever, the grass emerald green and the sky azure with that shade of blue for which the Russians have a special word, *goluboy*. We made our way to the glade where the young Tolstoy had seen the green stick and where his remains now lay after the first non-christian burial in Russia for a thousand years. A nightingale perched on a twig and began to sing. To describe the moment adequately would take the pen of Tolstoy himself.

# John C.Q. Roberts

## Director of the Great Britain-USSR Association 1974-1993 (in 1991 renamed The Britain–Russia Centre)

### A British Week in Siberia

As I look back now on those confrontational years, it seems to me that the Association's aim, to put it in a nutshell, was to identify and earn the trust of opinion-formers in the USSR, people who might be on our wavelength intellectually, or brought onto it. In 1978 there came a good example of our efforts to counter the version of British reality peddled to Soviet citizens by the state-controlled media. This was an unprecedented week of British events in a provincial city.

There was a history behind the holding of a British Week in a Soviet city. In 1966 the Great Britain-USSR Association, with British official support, had facilitated and partly financed a Soviet Cultural Week in Leeds produced by one of our counterpart organisations, the USSR-Great Britain Society. Unfortunately there had been no formal Soviet commitment for the Association to be given a reciprocal date in Russia. Thus my colleagues had failed to secure a rare opportunity to promote knowledge of Britain amongst a population starved of unslanted information about us, thanks to the blanket jamming of foreign broadcasts, the exclusion of Western newspapers and journals, other than Communist or fellow-travelling titles, and the close corralling by Intourist and others of foreign visitors to the USSR.

Following the Leeds Week Sir John Lawrence,[1] as Honorary Treasurer and later as Chairman of the Association, had taken every opportunity to press for a return event, but the Soviets had managed to play the Association along for eight years before I came on the scene. Come 1977 the Soviet side had at last conceded, but without specific commitment to a date or a place. In March the following year Sir Fitzroy Maclean[2] and I took up one of their regular invitations to go to Moscow to 'maintain the dialogue'. When our visas were delivered from the Soviet consulate I noticed that they showed not only Moscow but also Novosibirsk. It was their normal practice on such invited visits to take us to another part of their vast country, so it seemed we were to have a taste of Siberia. A few days after our arrival in Moscow we took off from Domodedovo for the four hour flight further eastwards.

It was soon clear that they might be going to offer us Novosibirsk as a venue for a British Week, 'provided the local authorities there could be persuaded', as if we would believe that any local authority would dare to refuse anything Moscow required of it. Novosibirsk is a chilly, grey place in March, but September would be the time of their 'velvet autumn', we were assured. What would count more for us was that it is a major engineering centre and that just a few kilometres from the city and inside the administrative region of Novosibirsk lies the important science city, Akademgorodok, with a highly educated and sophisticated population. We arrived late on a Saturday and the following morning were taken round the sights—a school, a war memorial, a public library, the opera house, a pioneer palace—the usual things. Fitzroy and I took photographs of each other by a sign-post over


*John Roberts stands by a sign-post - left to Tomsk, right to Omsk*

the river. To the left Tomsk; to the right Omsk. Strictly speaking, as there was a bridge, this was a forbidden act.

The readers of the *Keston Newsletter* do not need me to tell them that travelling in search of Russia it pays, as in Britain, to go into the churches. In the Soviet Union much of the story was one of destruction and degradation. However, where religious life had managed to survive oppression and atheist propaganda its intensity was unmistakable. Towards the beginning of our tour of Novosibirsk that rainy Sunday morning I mentioned to our hosts that I would like to call at a working church, if only for a few minutes. It was nearing lunchtime when I spotted the sudden crowd through the steamed up car window and beyond them a church. A few moments later the car stopped and we were outside our hotel and invited to go straight into lunch.

I made an excuse and walked the short distance back to the church. The service was over but there was a general atmosphere of bustle. I went up to

one of the groups of people standing around chatting, was made welcome and taken to meet the priest, Fr Dmitri. I explained that there was a possibility of my being back in Novosibirsk in the late summer if it should be decided to go ahead with a British Week in their city. He invited me to come to his church again if that were to happen. I thanked him and hurried back to the hotel to rejoin the others.

We returned to Moscow for a few more days' discussions and then left for London. Our hosts promised we would be given an early final decision, so we immediately set about pre-planning a programme. The go-ahead for September 1978 eventually came in the second half of April. This gave us little time to get our show on the road, which was doubtless the Soviet intention. The inevitable slow-down during the summer holiday period had to be reckoned with, along with the logistics of shipping materials from Britain to the middle of Siberia. As it turned out, we managed to put on a wide variety of events, including classical concerts by distinguished British musicians, an 'Any Questions' session, exhibitions, lectures, an English-speaking contest for schoolchildren, the first prize being a visit to Britain (which the winner was never allowed to make), film shows and even a parade with Russian girls showing the latest in British fashion. Party officials attended the rehearsal of that, and vetoed the beautiful local models showing the elegant dresses braless as befitted their design.

*Siberian children learning about the Royal family*

One of the lectures was given, in Russian, by a specialist on the natural history of Siberia, John Massey Stewart. In it he traced the long history of Britons in Siberia, such as navigators, botanists, geologists and artists. For some reason this topic had raised local suspicions and in correspondence nearly ruled out. Perhaps it was as an insurance that in the locally printed programme (on which we had not been consulted) the lecture was absurdly entitled 'Three Centuries of Anglo-Soviet (sic) Contacts on Siberian Soil'.

Massey Stewart's other contribution was to mastermind a special Siberia supplement of *The Times* to coincide with our event. We brought out from London a large quantity of copies of the supplement to give out at the exhibition centre. This had not been mentioned in the original discussions, so strong resistance to its being handed out had to be overcome. We had spent years pressing for this event and then battled for months about every detail of our plans. By contrast, a couple of weeks before our opening we learned that Robert Maxwell would be bringing to Novosibirsk an exhibition of Pergamon Press publications and that this would be regarded by the Soviet side as part of *our* programme.

At our opening press conference a local journalist asked the British Ambassador to explain why our press carried only negative reporting on the USSR. Sir Curtis Keeble[3] gave a bland diplomatic reply about countries with differing social systems, and consequently with different roles for the media. Amongst those on the platform with us was Roland Smith, the Cultural Attaché from the Embassy in Moscow, whom I had come to know and respect when he was at the Foreign Office in the Soviet and East European Department.[4]

Smith asked if he might be permitted to expand on his chief's answer. First, he referred to the fact that *The Times*, to mark this important occasion, had brought out a special supplement, designed mainly to acquaint readers in Britain and elsewhere with the great potential of present-day Siberia. Yet the local authority in Novosibirsk had wanted to prevent this being offered to visitors to our exhibition. Second, bearing in mind that mainstream British newspapers and magazines were not on sale in the USSR, Smith wondered on what basis the correspondent of the Novosibirsk evening paper was able to form a judgement.

Knowing that it would be difficult, without causing diplomatic offence, for the Soviet side to object, I had proposed that we should include in our exhibitions at Novosibirsk a photographic display about the work and role of the British Royal family. This idea had its origins in a report I had passed on to the Palace a year earlier. A small group of British students of Russian had arrived in Moscow to attend a short language course. At a meeting with Soviet students of English attending the same institute they had been invited to speak for five minutes on any topic they liked. One British student had chosen to speak about the Royal family and this had proved to be the star turn. It led to all present, Soviet and British, singing God Save The Queen. Her private secretary wrote to say how interested Her Majesty had been to hear of this occurrence, almost subversive for its time.

As the British monarchy was a subject hardly ever treated in the Soviet media, keen interest was shown in this probable 'first' at Novosibirsk. No less excitement was aroused each time we showed

the documentary film of the Silver Jubilee celebrations held the previous year, with its scenes of cheering crowds outside Buckingham Palace, street parties and beacons lit across the country, all astonishing revelations for ordinary Soviet citizens.

We had considered asking Earl Mountbatten to be the guest of honour in Novosibirsk to open the British Week, but David Owen, then Foreign Secretary, had said he would be unable to advise the Palace favourably. Perhaps he had wind of Mountbatten's wish to call en route at Ekaterinburg, then known as Sverdlovsk, in order to pay his respects to the memory of his relations, the Russian royal family, who had been murdered there, as later he himself would be, by political extremists.

*John Roberts* (centre) *hoisting the Union Jack outside the Exhibition Centre in Novosibirsk*

I had flown out to Novosibirsk with the advance party at the beginning of September. The VIP's were to arrive on a Sunday and the opening ceremony and reception would be on the Monday morning. I remembered Fr Dmitri's invitation to call at his church and took the bus there during the Sunday midday break. The scene was like a Breughel painting. Hundreds of parishioners were working with bare hands, shovels and barrows, extending the church by burrowing out a crypt.

The priest welcomed me and led me into the baptistry alongside the church. It was packed with parents and god-parents bringing their babies to be christened. In answer to his question I told the priest that our opening was to be on the following day and explained where it was all taking place. I mentioned that we had by agreement sent out in advance a large quantity of information posters. However, there was no sign of any of them having been put on display in the streets of the city, which is why he was unaware of the impending event. I said that we would of course be happy for his parishioners to visit our exhibitions. Entrance was free and open to all.

The day after the formal opening Fitzroy Maclean and I were summoned to the City Soviet. We were led to the office of the vice-chairman, F.F. Glushkov, who proceeded to protest at my having aired a complaint at the church about the posters and at my 'calling on the parishioners' to visit the exhibition centre. I had had an earlier argument with this man. I had refused his suggestion of putting the USSR flag on the centre flag-post, with the Union Jack and the flag of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic on the lower posts each side.

I replied that this was a distortion of my conversation with the priest. Glushkov then took up a handwritten document and proceeded to read the complaint allegedly written by (and doubtless drafted for) the unfortunate Fr Dmitri. It repeated in every detail what Glushkov had just said. I was beginning to wonder whether Maclean was going to intervene in my defence. He did not, so I decided to go over to the attack.

'It is true – I said – that I spoke to the priest about our British Week and that out of courtesy I said we would welcome any of his parishioners who cared to visit us. That much – I continued – you will know from your informers. But they could not tell you everything. The priest and I walked alone to the church gate onto the street. As I was taking my leave, I asked whether he would like to attend our formal opening and reception. He gladly accepted and I gave him one of the special invitation cards. What your informers may have omitted to tell you was that he indeed came to our opening. He was in his ordinary clothes and probably unrecognised by your people. What is more – I said – Fr Dmitri made a special point before he left of searching me out in the crowd to express his thanks and great interest in all he had seen. So I cannot believe that this letter was written by him or, if so, voluntarily.' Suggesting that we put the whole thing down to a misunderstanding and that we get back to our proper functions at the exhibition centre, I rose to leave. Nothing more was said. Nor have I been back in Novosibirsk to see how Fr Dmitri and his church are doing.

The Foreign Office regarded our British Week as a considerable success and one which could mark the end of a barren period in bilateral relations. They were wrong. Not many months later Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, and not long after that came the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

*This article is based on material taken from John Roberts's memoir* Speak Clearly into the Chandelier: Cultural Politics between Britain and Russia 1973-2000 *(Curzon, 2000). The author served as a Trustee, The Keston Institute, until 2007.*

[1] A founder and first Chairman of Keston Institute.

[2] President of the Association.

[3] Sir Curtis Keeble GCMG on retirement became Chairman of The Great Britain-USSR Association.

[4] Roland H. Smith CMG, Ambassador to Ukraine 1999 - 2002, Trustee, The Keston Institute, since 2002.

# Women of the Russian Catacombs
## Monastics, Mothers and Martyrs
## Part I

**by Prioress Evfrosinia (Molchanova) and Sister Tatiana (Spektor)**

Russian woman are widely credited with keeping the Orthodox faith alive throughout the Soviet era, and nowhere was this more true than within the Russian catacomb movement, popularly known as the True Orthodox Church (hereafter TOC). Women played an especially significant role in preserving the movement from deteriorating into a sect, and perhaps even from extinction, a real danger in the 1970s-80s. We would like to take a closer look at the lives and experiences of these extraordinary women from the 1970s-80s, the final years of the TOC's isolation from the outside world.

The Russian Orthodox catacomb church regained an ecclesiastical structure and a canonical status in the early 1980s through the efforts of the TOC clergy who managed to establish contact with the administrative body—the Synod—of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA). But it was the women of the catacombs who preserved the spirit and teachings of this movement until that much needed assistance arrived and began to bear fruit. Before the 1980s, the lack of clergy and of formal religious education and the gradual decline of religious fervour over the years led to a rapid spread of sectarian tendencies and other aberrations. TOC women responded to this challenge with enthusiasm, hard work and a deep spirituality. They organised, managed and supported clandestine monasteries and parish communities, they served as intermediaries between the TOC clergy and their flock, and, while providing the daily necessities for their families—no small feat in Soviet times—managed to give their children a profoundly religious upbringing. These women preserved the true spirit of catacomb Orthodoxy in the face of social hostility and state repression.

*Two secret nuns: Sister Klavdia & Sister Elizaveta*

*What is the TOC?*

The 'True Orthodox Church' is the term most frequently used to designate that part of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) which went underground in the late 1920s, so as to preserve its integrity, once the Communist government began to demand not only the political, but the spiritual submission of the Church. The term was coined to distinguish this Church from the church organization which emerged in the Soviet Union as the result of just such a submission in July 1927, when Metropolitan Sergi (Stragorodsky), the deputy of the patriarchal *locum tenens*, signed a Declaration of loyalty to the Soviet government.

For the vast majority of the faithful, the most controversial and sensitive part of this Declaration were the words with which Metropolitan Sergi urged all Russian Orthodox believers, including 'the most fervent adherents of Orthodoxy,' to 'claim the Soviet Union as our civil motherland' and to 'remember our duty to be citizens of the Union "not from fear, but according to conscience" as the Apostle has taught us (Rom 13:5)' (translation from **Fletcher** 65: 29-30—see **Works Cited** at the end of this article. The number after the author denotes the year of publication, followed by a page reference. *Ed*). These words led the Soviet government to legalise Metropolitan Sergi's Synod, but the majority, and especially the most fervent of the Orthodox hierarchy, clergy, and laity refused to recognise his authority or to accept his Declaration. This immediately led to a new wave of repression: many were killed or tortured to death, many were imprisoned or exiled, while those who survived went into hiding, into the catacombs. Persecution of the TOC continued throughout the Soviet period (**Gustavson** 60: 64; **Alexeev & Stavrou** 76: 22-23; **Regelson** 77: 417-28; **Andreev** 82: 17-18; **Moss** 91: 239-40).

*Decline*

In 1964 Canon Michael Bourdeaux began to publicise in the West the Soviet state's persecution of religious believers. Information about religious

prisoners—including TOC prisoners—flooded the Western media. In the 1970s three TOC cases in particular were brought to the West's attention: those of TOC monks Gennady (Sekach) and Mikhail (Ershov), and the case of ten or eleven TOC women incarcerated in a labour camp in Mordovia. Amnesty International, *Die Glaube in der Zweiten Welt,* Keston College, *Les Catacombes, Possev, La Pensée Russe, Orthodox Word, Reuters,* and *Le Figaro*—these are just some of the organizations and periodicals which repeatedly published information on the fate of these True Orthodox Christians, persecuted for their underground religious activities. Copies of these articles in English, French, German, and Russian have been carefully preserved in the TOC folders of the Keston archive, and form the background for this study of the part played by women in the TOC movement.

Ironically, the existence of the Orthodox catacombs in the USSR became known to a larger Western audience at just about the time when this movement had reached its lowest ebb. By the 1970s the TOC was declining steadily, and many feared that it would turn into a sect or perhaps even disappear completely (**Klibanov** 60: 96-97; **Shumilo** & **Shumilo** 04: 19). There was a substantial decrease in the number of TOC faithful, and especially of clergy, while the spread of sectarian tendencies—resulting from the lack of clergy and the near impossibility of providing any religious education—was a sign of spiritual decline (**Demianov** 77: 56, **Pospielovsky** 84: 373; **Shumilo** & **Shumilo** 04: 20).

Fewer clergy meant more and more 'priestless' communities, in which laymen often led services and administered the sacraments (**Fletcher** 71: 282). By the 1970s, some of the TOC communities reduced their religious practices to a bare minimum—to 'prayer and fasting' as prescribed by scripture. People died without the sacraments of confession and Holy Communion, and children were not baptised (**Shumilo** & **Shumilo** 04: 19). Many TOC groups were drawn to sectarian practices of an eschatological nature, similar to those which first appeared in the mid-1940s-60s: they renounced marriage, refused to hold identity papers and to vote in elections (so-called 'passportless' groups), rejected military service, refused to receive pensions or join youth organizations—in general, they rejected any officially sanctioned organized activity and anything which specifically served to support the Soviet economy (**Nikolskaia** 61: 170; **Lane** 78: 87).

The increasing prevalence of these sectarian tendencies in the 1970s was directly related to the general spiritual decline which stemmed from the lack of religious education and spiritual formation coupled with a natural and inevitable lessening of religious fervour over a long period of time. In the 1960s, threatened with the possible loss of parental rights, many families were afraid to bring up their children according to strict Orthodox tradition. Without any serious spiritual formation, many TOC faithful began to lose their earlier Orthodox Christian ecclesiological sensibility; external or secondary matters, such as passports or elections, became more and more important. No longer able to deal with abstract concepts, believers focused on more tangible things which symbolised their religious struggle; in some circles this eventually led to aberrations, to sectarianism.

*Monastics*

By the 1970s the lack of clergy in the underground Orthodox movement was so acute that it became necessary to posit a question that had first troubled the Russian catacombs in the 1930s:

> Should the bishops all be destroyed, should the line of apostolic succession be severed, and the priesthood die out, should there be no sacrament, no absolution available in life—what would Russian Orthodoxy be? (**Fletcher** 65: 96)

The TOC responded not only by relying more and more on purely sectarian 'priestless' practices, but also by developing an increasingly independent, semi-autocephalous form of religious life. This form, involving the sacraments and divine services and the participation of both laity and clergy, first appeared in the 1930s, and remained prevalent in the TOC throughout its history until the early 1990s, when it was at last able to conduct services openly.

These independent groups developed an institution of 'links' or 'mediators' who took upon themselves certain priestly duties and responsibilities which, strictly speaking, do not have to be performed by an ordained clergyman, and fulfilled a mediating function between the clergy and their flock. For example, a priest would celebrate the Eucharist secretly, and a layperson would pick up the Holy Gifts from him and deliver them to the faithful. Or a layperson would collect written confessions and bring them to a priest who would grant absolution '*in absentia*'. Or a layperson would perform an abbreviated baptism, and a priest would read additional prayers and perform the sacrament of Chrismation at a later date (**Klibanov** 60: 95; **Fletcher** 71: 185). Communities developed such practices in order to protect their priests—many of whom spent years in hiding—from arrest and imprisonment. *Matushki*

(little mothers) or 'women, many of them secretly nuns, were widely utilised to augment the inadequate number of active priests' by True Orthodox communities (**Fletcher** 71: 184, referring to **Andreev** 61: 10-11) and acted as 'links'. They took upon themselves many duties which in normal circumstances would have always been performed by men, if not by a priest.

Anna Denisova was born in the 1970s into a TOC family in the Tambov oblast. In her memoirs (held in the Lesna archive, Monastery of the Lesna Icon, France) she gives many vivid details of this independent semi-priestless religious existence in which *matushki* played an important part:

> In an average catacomb family, children would normally be born and raised in the Orthodox tradition, regardless of the lack of clergy. When there was a True Orthodox priest available, access to him was quite limited – he would see only one person at a time and only at night. So, although both my husband and I had been baptised by a priest, our siblings were not – they were immersed in Holy Water by the *matushki* and were Chrismated only later – when an opportunity presented itself. Some of them were taken to Fr Nikita (Lekhan) in Kharkov, others to Fr Kirill.
>
> Reaching Fr Kirill was especially difficult, even though he lived in Michurinsk where we also lived. He lived in such a strange building, with no windows, unlike any other and not at all familiar, not even like a warehouse. So, while living in the same city, we almost never saw our priest, and passed on our confessions through the *matushki*. For prayers we gathered at someone's house, where Mother would take us late in the evening, once it was already dark. She would not allow me to wear my favorite red coat – too bright, the police could notice and stop us, and instead of prayer we would face an interrogation.

Fr Dimitri Dudko and Dimitri Pospielovsky, writers belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate, have commented on the role played by women religious in TOC communities during the 1970s-80s:

> When I looked at them [the catacombs] more closely, I discovered disorder […] they have almost no priests, and nuns take on priestly duties … (**Dudko** 79: 38)
>
> The role of priests among the IPKh [TOC], according to the Soviet sources, has lately been performed more and more often by elderly women, nuns known as 'blackies' (*chernichki*) (**Pospielovsky** 84: 373).

These secret nuns greatly contributed to the religious life of their communities: they organised services in private homes, linked a clandestine priest with his flock, recruited new members, gave instruction to recent converts, provided for the everyday needs of their priests, collected donations for the destitute (especially for prisoners of conscience and their families), and looked after TOC orphans and the elderly.

Mother Ioanna (Litvinenko) entered the Orthodox Monastery of the Lesna Icon (France) in 1992 after having worked in a Ukrainian hospital as a pediatric nurse, while at the same time belonging to a clandestine monastic community. She was tonsured a *rassaphore* nun, the first step in Orthodox monasticism, in her youth by the True Orthodox Hieromonk Nazari (Koniukhov), formerly of the Kiev Monastery of the Caves, who had been ordained in 1930 in Leningrad's Cathedral of the Resurrection (more commonly known as the 'Saviour on the Blood'), a bastion of the 'Josephite' branch of the TOC, and served as a TOC priest in Ukraine until his death in 1975. Fr Nazari spent many years in enforced seclusion—either in state prisons and labour camps, or hiding from the police. When not in prison he travelled throughout Ukraine as a wandering carpenter and served as a secret priest:

> Ever since the Revolution there has been the phenomenon of the wandering priest, going from place to place with a pack on his back, christening, confirming, marrying, absolving, celebrating the mysteries where and when required (**Attwater** 61: 67; see also **Nikolskaia** 61: 179-80; **Fedorenko** 65: 214; **Fletcher** 71: 203; **Pospielovsky** 84: 376).

In 1953, the now ailing Fr Nazari built a tiny hut in a small village near Kharkov, where he organised an underground skete comprised of a few elderly nuns, and began to celebrate the liturgy every day. Catacomb Orthodox Christians came to him from all over the Soviet Union throughout the 1950s-70s for spiritual guidance.

Mother Ioanna assisted Fr Nazari and helped the elderly sisters, providing them with food, clothing and medicine. After her shift at the hospital, she gardened, cooked, did the laundry, and tended the sisters with their various physical ailments. She was also responsible for putting up pilgrims who travelled long distances to see Fr Nazari, meeting them at the station and telling them how to reach the skete discreetly so as not to betray the little

community to the other villagers. The liturgy was celebrated at night: the worshippers received communion at around 4 a.m., so that any visitors could leave before dawn. After the liturgy, Mother Ioanna fed the pilgrims, showed them the way back to the station, and then went on to the hospital to start her day as a nurse (see the memoirs of Mother Ioanna, partially published on www.monasterelesna.org)

Fr Nazari's skete was typical of 'the basic organizational unit of the True Orthodox Church' with the difference that normally such units were 'headed by a nun' (**Mitrokhin** 61: 156; **Fletcher** 71: 184; **Pospielovsky** 84: 373). Monastic communities like this proved to be the most enduring means of preserving True Orthodoxy throughout the entire history of the Russian catacombs, from the 1920s through to the 1990s, and survived the severest persecution, including the Khrushchev anti-religious campaign in the 1960s.

One of the folders containing documents on the TOC in the Keston archive includes a manuscript dated 20 April 1970. This document entitled 'What is the True Orthodox Church in Contemporary Russia?' refers to the illegal activities of the True Orthodox in the 1960s and describes the persistent attempts of the Soviet state to destroy TOC monasteries and convents which kept reappearing in the same places in various areas of the Soviet Union: in central Russia, Siberia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and the Crimea. These secret monastic communities were able to survive the repeated attacks of the regime no doubt because of the strength and dedication of their members and leaders.

*Mothers*

The extraordinary tenacity displayed by the entire TOC organization was largely due to the integrity and devotion of the *matushki*—TOC women, whether the wives of clergy, or women who had taken formal vows, or women who simply lived deeply devout lives.

*Valentina Fomina*

These *matushki* fulfilled an important role in the religious education of TOC children. This became increasingly evident during the most severe anti-religious campaigns, when a mother could be arrested and her children left entirely alone, whereupon a TOC nun would usually rush to such a deserted home to take care of the orphans. The six orphans of the Manannikov family (Anna

*Catacomb Nun Iova with her children*

Denisova's maiden name) were raised by TOC *matushki* while her grandmother served nine years in a labour camp for visiting the TOC faithful in prison. Her grandfather was executed on the central square of Michurinsk for refusing to betray the names of those who had attended prayers in his home.

Such was the fate of almost every TOC family. However, we know of one exception, Valentina Fomina, born in Bogoyavlenskoe, a village in the Tambov oblast. She and three of her siblings were raised by their grandmother Thekla, after the arrest of their mother Anna in 1951. Anna was sentenced to ten years strict regime in a labour camp for organising religious services in her home, and returned from prison with a new name and a new identity—she had taken monastic vows and was now Nun Iova.

Once their mother returned, the family started a business which was typical of the TOC—that of making and selling articles for religious worship. This made earning a living possible without contributing to the Soviet economy, but it was illegal and a punishable criminal offence (Art. 162, Part 2, RSFSR Criminal Code) as was made clear by

the case of Nun Valeria (Makeeva), well publicised by Keston in 1979-86. She was arrested twice for making monastic belts embroidered with the words of Psalm 90 (Psalm 91 according to the most common Western usage) and selling them for between 50 kopeks to a rouble each. After her first arrest she was in prison for five months and then spent a dreadful seven months in a special psychiatric hospital. After her second arrest, once imprisoned, she begged not to be sent again to a special psychiatric institution, 'which she knew would mean either certain death or complete mutilation' (*KNS* Nos. 68, 73, 81, and 84; **Bourdeaux** & **Rowe** 80: 38-39) but to no avail: 'Despite publicity and protest in Western countries, Sister Valeria had been interned in the Kazan hospital […] Treatment and conditions are far more severe, even brutal, in the special psychiatric hospitals, which are controlled by the Ministry of Internal Affairs' (**Ellis** 86: 146).

Regardless of the danger, Nun Iova and her children engaged in the illegal production of Orthodox icons, which involved applying some colour to black and white images and decorating them with aluminium foil, either 'silver' or 'gold'. They framed these decorated icons and travelled throughout the Tambov oblast with their illegal goods, trying to sell them to villagers. Once by mistake they entered an official Soviet building and asked whether anyone was interested in buying icons; suddenly, they noticed an enormous portrait of Lenin on the wall and ran away in fear. On their way home, they discussed the astonishment of the Soviet officials in that room: '*What?* What icons?'

Valentina was 13 when she undertook her first independent 'business trip'. She was paralysed with fear the whole way, but prayed fervently and came home safe and sound with a profit in her pocket—one rouble and 50 kopeks. From then on she traded in this way and after her marriage to Vasili Fomin provided for her family by knitting

*Vasili Fomin*

*Ivan & Sergei Fomin*

woollen hats at night and selling them at a flea market in the mornings. She and Vasili had met when they were both of a mature age: Vasili had already served two prison sentences—three and five years—for refusing to serve in the Soviet Army, while Valentina had been working for 15 years. When her children were born she dedicated herself to bringing them up according to strict Orthodox tradition. Her daughter-in-law, Nonna Fomina, relates (in a manuscript from the Lesna archive):

> In this family of five children, my husband Sergei is the eldest. The younger children are Ivan, Victor, Alexander, and Marina. During their childhood the daily family routine included morning and evening prayers and the reading Saints' Lives before going to sleep. On Sundays, they would either join the TOC faithful at someone's house for a 'lay' service or would pray at home.

Up until the 1960s True Orthodox Christians did not allow their children to attend official Soviet schools beyond class four, explaining that 'beginning in class five they teach godlessness' (**Mitrokhin** 61: 158). But during the Khrushchev anti-religious campaign, a new form of repression against many Christian families was applied—parental rights were withdrawn by a court if there was any suspicion that a child was being given a religious education in the home or attending church services (Art. 447, Para. 6, March 1966, RSFSR Criminal Code). Children would be forcibly removed from their parents and placed in militantly atheistic boarding schools, while the parents were arrested and imprisoned (**Fletcher** 71: 260-61; **Simon** 74: 211). This new policy forced a substantial majority of TOC faithful to be more flexible about the official Soviet educational system. The Fomin children, for example, attended Soviet schools in the early 1980s. But their lot was by no means easy. Although the

*Bishop Lazar* (third left) *with Catacomb nun, Sister Smaragda on his right*

state had at least temporarily reduced the pressure on believers, many Soviet citizens felt duty bound to fill this void and voluntarily informed upon or persecuted believers. School teachers were often the most enthusiastic anti-religious activists. Nonna Fomina records:

> Sergei Fomin enjoyed his first year in school very much. He loved his teacher from the very start—she was so kind. When she asked the children to take out their pens, Sergei realised that he hadn't brought one. He was so ashamed that he began to cry, hiding under his desk. The teacher gave him a pen, which made him love her even more. From that first day Sergei become a good example for everybody in his class. Always well prepared, he excelled in every subject—from reading to maths.
>
> On the last day of his first school year there was an awards ceremony for the children. Sergei, an excellent student, expected an honour certificate, but his name was not called. He waited until the very end of the ceremony and ran over to his teacher: 'Have you forgotten about me?' 'No, I haven't,'—was her response—'You're not one of the best, Sergei, because of your grade for behaviour, which is only a "three".' 'Why? What have I done?' 'You don't belong to the Young October League!'
>
> This was true—the Fomin brothers had not participated in the Young October League initiation ceremony. The school official summoned them for an explanation. 'Why didn't you come?' 'We don't want to join the League.' 'Why? Are you against the Soviet government?' 'No, we are not against the government. We are believers.' 'Your parents won't let you join the League? Do they force you to pray? Do they beat you?' 'No, nobody forces us…'

Later, the same teacher tried to intimidate Sergei and Ivan in class, but she failed to win the support of their classmates, and the Fomin brothers were left in peace. Subsequently, two years later, a new tactic was used against their younger brother Victor. The class one teacher forcibly pinned an October star to his shirt whereupon he took it off and put it on his desk. She repeated the ceremony all over again. He refused. She insisted again and again. Finally, the child went home nearly hysterical. His mother, although rather reserved by nature, could not allow anyone to hurt her children so immediately went to the school and calmly asked the teacher, 'Is membership of the Young October League voluntary?' There was no response, and after that Victor was left alone, just as his older brothers had been.

A new difficulty arose over the baptismal crosses that the Fomin brothers wore around their necks. 'Throughout the 70's there were heated debates in the Soviet press concerning the practice of wearing one's baptismal cross around the neck' and the most dedicated Soviet citizens went so far as to recommend in their letters to the media that 'force must be exerted to stop the practice of wearing crosses' (**Konstantinow** 84: 107). Such force was used against Sergei and Ivan Fomin, as well as against Anna Denisova in the 1980s. Nonna Fomina recounts:

> Sergei never removed the cross that had been hung around his neck on the day of his baptism. Usually he kept it inside his shirt, but it was noticed and remarked upon sometimes. The Fomin brothers still remember their teachers' fury on those rare occasions when they would catch sight of a cross rather than a Young Pioneer tie around their necks. Their expressions would take on an animal-like fury. Enraged, the teachers barked and growled: 'Remove it!' The response was always, 'No.'
>
> On one occasion a physical education teacher invited Valentina to school and, in front of her, tore Sergei's cross from his neck. The chain snapped, and the cross fell to the floor. Sergei picked up the cross and held it in his hand, looking at his

> mother in horror. But his mother took all this very calmly, and began to explain to the teacher that such actions were inappropriate, they were blasphemous, and no one should ever be permitted to act in such a manner ever again. That was the last time any of the teachers bothered the Fomin brothers about their crosses.

The Fomin brothers lived in a rural area, where people were more tolerant towards believers, and it was difficult for the teachers to win the support of other pupils or their parents in their 'struggle against sectarianism'. It was very different in urban schools, as Anna Denisova recalls:

> In Soviet times it was not common to wear a cross, and the teachers ridiculed us, the children from religious families, and our classmates would follow suit. Our parents taught us to stand up firmly for our faith, and under no circumstances were we to remove our crosses and start wearing the star with Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's picture on it.
>
> I will never forget the day when I was summoned by the head teacher for questioning: 'Why didn't you come for the Young October League initiation ceremony?' There were three other teachers present, as well as a member of the parents' committee. They put enormous pressure on a seven-year old child, alone up against five furious adults.
>
> After this torture at the head teacher's office, a still more awful torment followed—I was turned over to my classmates. Right in front of the teaching staff, the other pupils rushed at me, trying to tear off my cross and pin on a star. They tore at my clothes, ripped out my hair, they kicked me—30 against one. The older children in my family had gone through this before me, so I knew what to expect, and I was prepared. I grew up strong and independent; the teachers particularly enjoyed mocking me. They even competed when making fun of me to see who could hurt me the most.
>
> They called us 'nuns' and 'Baptists'. To be friends with us was completely unacceptable—the whole school would hear of it and would make fun of those who tried. Besides, the parents didn't let their children talk to us or socialise with us. Everybody knew that we didn't vote in elections; that was considered the same as being 'enemies of the people'. For seven years there was an inscription on one of the walls of the school building: 'Anna Manannikova [Anna Denisova's maiden-name. *Ed*] is an enemy of the people!'

Unlike Valentina Fomina, the mother of the Manannikov children did not go to school to protect them, but taught them at home, encouraging them, in Anna Denisova's words, to keep their 'eyes wide open and to look all around, to feel when danger was near, and to learn to discern even the thoughts of the enemies of God, who were our enemies as well'.

True Orthodox believers greatly valued the *matushki* for all they contributed to their individual spiritual lives and to church life. Many of the children raised within the TOC looked upon them as role models, as ideals whom they aspired to emulate. Anna Denisova as a young girl clearly wanted to be like them:

> The school held Young Pioneer and Young October League meetings on the 23 February and 8 March holidays, and all the children had to wear their smarter, or dress uniforms, with a white apron. Our mama never dressed us in the smarter uniforms on those days. Besides, it was Great Lent. Anyway, I came to school wearing a black apron and stood out like a sore thumb. When the class began all the children sat down, and the teacher said, 'everyone not wearing a dress uniform come to the front of the class.' She started interrogating me, and then, right in front of the kids, went on to call me names. '*Monashka*—little nun', she kept calling me, and she let the children do it too. I was standing at the front of the class. 'Children, go ahead and shove this little nun out, back into her nunnery,' she

*Members of the Catacomb Church in the city of Saratov on the Volga*

teased. But the Lord granted me such strength of will and steadfastness, so I didn't cry, but answered back loud and clear: 'I'm not a nun, but it would be great if I could become one someday; and you don't have to shove me into a monastery—maybe the day will come when I'll go myself. But for now I have to be here…'

The women of the TOC, both nuns and mothers, did their utmost to preserve the catacomb movement, especially during the most difficult period of decline, before a new bishop could be consecrated for the TOC by ROCA's Synod in 1982. A still greater contribution to preserving this religious movement was made by the True Orthodox martyrs—the religious prisoners who were tortured and killed by the Soviet regime in labour camps, prisons, and special psychiatric institutions. According to Tertullian, 'The more you mow us down, the more we grow; the seed is the blood of Christians' (quoted in **Bourdeaux** 83:13). The lives and struggles of True Orthodox women incarcerated in a Soviet labour camp in Mordovia in the 1970s are described in Part 2 of this article (to be published in *Keston Newsletter* No 14. *Ed*).

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# Marc Chagall's Vitebsk

**by Mikhail Roshchin**

By chance in December 2008 I discovered some interesting photographs on the Internet taken by Vladimir Bazan, a photographer and journalist from Vitebsk (Belarus). I wrote to him and learnt that by then he had moved to Paris which I visit from time to time. So we met and I heard about his sad history. He had edited Vitebsk's one and only independent newspaper, *Vitebsk Courier*, from 1989-2008, but had come under strong pressure from the Belorussian authorities and had been forced to abandon everything and flee the country. In early 2009 he was granted political asylum in Paris.

*Detail from statue of Chagall in Vitebsk by V.A. Shishanov (2006) Photograph © Vladimir Bazan*

Sitting on a bench on the bank of the Seine we looked through some of his photographs, some of which had won prizes both in Belarus and in the former Soviet Union. We also looked at old issues of *Vitebsk Courier* and I noticed that one was devoted to the artist Marc Chagall (1887-1985), Vitebsk's most famous citizen. From Vladimir I learned that today Vitebsk has a Marc Chagall Museum which is run by Meret Meyer, Chagall's granddaughter.

Chagall was born on 6 July 1887. His parents were Jews living in Liozno, a small town 40 km west of Vitebsk, which is much revered by Hasidic Jews as the birthplace of Rabbi Schneur Zalman Borukhovich, the founder and first Rebbe of Chabad, a branch of Hasidic Judaism. Chagall went to school in Vitebsk, and it was in Vitebsk that he met his future wife, Bella Rosenfeld, from a family of prosperous jewellers. In 1906 he joined the art school of Yuri Pen (1854-1937), a prominent member of the Jewish artistic renaissance in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century, but after a few months moved from Vitebsk to St Petersburg where for two years he studied drawing in a class run by the Society for the Promotion of the Arts. His teacher was Nikolai Rerikh (1874-1947), the artist, traveller and religious thinker who still has a large following today in Russia (his many disciples belong to what is known as the Rerikh Movement). In 1914 Chagall returned to Vitebsk and on 25 July 1915 married Bella. Two months later he left for Petersburg where he got a job with the Military Industrial Committee and in 1916 joined the Jewish Society for the Promotion of the Arts. In 1917 he and his family returned to Vitebsk where he was appointed Commissar for the Arts of the Vitebsk *guberniа* after the Revolution. In 1920 he moved to Moscow where he worked as a stage designer for the Jew-

*In Vitebsk's synagogue. Photograph © Vladimir Bazan*

ish Chamber Theatre, but three years later left the Soviet Union for good.

His connection with the Jewish world of Vitebsk, however, was never broken. He later wrote: 'If I was not a Jew, as I understand this, I would not be an artist or would be quite a different sort of artist'. In fact he had a religious upbringing and started his education in a Jewish primary school. He became interested in the Torah, and as a result biblical themes became an important element in his work. From his first teacher, Yuri Pen, he learnt what it meant to be a national painter who could find inspiration through the particular images of his environment; many of Chagall's artistic themes derive from visualising Yiddish sayings and portraying images from Jewish folklore.

*Lamp with Jewish fiddler, one of Chagall's favourite subjects*
*Photograph © Vladimir Bazan*

*Lovers above the Town (1914-1918)*

Chagall has been firmly defined in art history as 'a creator of myths': the myth of Vitebsk is seen as deeply embedded in his art. However, Lyudmila Khmelnitskaya, a Chagall expert, thinks differently: 'Chagall painted nature and only nature. The architectural landscape painting, "Lovers above the Town", is a clear example of this.' His accurate portrayal of the view from the window of his house, with Vitebsk in the background, could well help those who might wish to rebuild the town as it was before the War! In his autobiography, Chagall wrote: 'My studio was in the courtyard. A deep dark blue light filled the room from the one window. It came from far; from a hill on which stood a church. I painted this little hill with its church more than once in my pictures, and always did this with such pleasure.'

*The Gates of the Jewish Cemetery (1917)*

In the early 20th century Jews formed about 52% of Vitebsk's population, but an enormous number perished during the Second World War, and those who survived and their descendants have nearly all left Belarus. Just one Orthodox Jewish synagogue is functioning today in Vitebsk; the Society for Lovers of Jewish Culture is active; and there are nine other Jewish social organisations and a congregation of liberal Jews. The memory of Marc Chagall and the Vitebsk of his day lives on in the artist's home town – it may even be going through a renaissance.

*The Dark Blue House (1917)*

# Speakers at the 2010 AGM

## Walking a Tightrope
## Peace and Justice in Christian Cold War Diplomacy

**by Paul Oestreicher**

I count it a privilege – for many reasons – to be invited to give this lecture. It gives me the opportunity to reflect publicly for the first time on a problem, both theological and political, that has preoccupied me – and sometimes almost torn me apart – for much of my professional life. What follows then, is both intensely personal but also, I believe, of universal relevance. In one sentence: how is it possible to square a life-long commitment to peacemaking on the one hand and to fighting injustice on the other? Perhaps more graphic than walking a tightrope, the title I have given this lecture, is the image of riding two horses, each galloping off in a different direction. As it happens I love horse riding but like that, it hurts.

*Canon Paul Oestreicher speaks to Keston members*

The psalmist looks forward to an age 'when peace and justice will kiss each other'. That symbolises the ultimate achievement of the perfect *shalom* that is not yet. To try to bring it nearer is what Christianity, as I understand it, is meant to be all about. Jesus simply described this as 'the Kingdom of God', not yet, but already present in every act of love. Where love is, God is. That is beautifully told in one of Tolstoy's *23 Tales*.

From the mid 20th century, justice has quite properly, in secular terms, been equated with the achievement of what is due to each one of us as a human being: our rights. That is a new language but not a new idea. From that flows our obligation to work for the achievement of these rights by all people. Rights and obligations are therefore the reverse side of the same coin: in Christian language, 'love one another as I have loved you'. If anyone is deprived of a right, everyone is the poorer.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights represents an ethical advance in global civilisation. Its codification in law, which has been happening in stages, is a codification of love. The Christian churches – like other religious institutions – have been slow in embracing the language and practice of human rights. Universal rights do not sit well with claims to a monopoly of truth by any religion and the authority that this implies. The discredited secular ideologies – quasi religions – of right and left of the 20th century are in many respects carbon copies of Mosque, Synagogue and Church. Woe to the monopolists of truth and power. I thank God, therefore, for the corrective influence of the Enlightenment, provided that does not in itself elevate our moral reasoning to a new form of infallibility.

The Cold War which at any moment might have turned into an inferno that would have caused unbelievable devastation – and more than once almost did – was a classic example of titanic structures masquerading as harbingers of truth, promising salvation and at the same time threatening total devastation. The Communist titan which had, in my view, always stood on slightly shakier legs than its Capitalist enemy (our world now) collapsed like a paper tiger to almost universal astonishment. Almost. Our revered friend and mentor Sir John Lawrence did see, as few did, the hollow reality behind Moscow's monolithic façade. In the end the only people who still believed in the power of the Stalinist dictatorship, which had betrayed its socialist ideals, were its enemies. That astute double agent Oleg Gordievsky, while still playing the role of diplomat, said to me over lunch, it now seems an age ago: 'Do you know the difference between the Russians and the Americans?' 'Tell me Oleg,' I said. 'The Americans believe their own propaganda.' They still do, in ignorance of the rotting foundations of global capitalism, falsely called the free world.

Both sides trampled on the human rights of which I have spoken, trampled in different ways and sometimes not so different. We still do. The Wikileaks of last week are simply the latest episode in our complicity.

As a servant of the Ecumenical Movement, an imperfect 20th century attempt to represent a major part of the world Church, I came to see the real enemy as the Cold War itself, the mutual demonization that threatened to destroy us all, with truth, as in all war, being the first victim. How could I ride the horse of peace which was a precondition of our survival (and which is not just incidentally a biblical imperative) on the one hand and the horse of freedom (another biblical imperative) on the other. In both cases the language was embarrassing. Peace had become *the* Stalinist slogan, its true meaning profoundly distorted. To be a campaigner for peace was in consequence to live with the stigma of being a Stalinist fellow traveller. Yet how could I champion freedom, its true meaning just as distorted in the West, without being thought a covert agent of the CIA. I have been accused of both, depending on where and how I engaged in the struggle. I chose to ride both horses. Was it a mistake not to be single-minded?

On my first visit to Communist-ruled East Germany in 1955 for which, as a young idealistic Christian Socialist, I entertained some sympathy, I was taught a rude lesson. I was arrested by the NKVD (later called KGB) as a suspected spy, and interrogated. I owe my survival to a Soviet officer who, instead of sending me to Siberia, expelled me back to the West. 'Why expel me,' I asked, 'when you know I'm not a spy?' 'Because, if you have deceived me and I let you stay, I will not survive.' My fear had been brief. His, in this war of the titans, was permanent. That was an important lesson. I learnt to pray for him and his like – everywhere. The pawns. I was to meet his counterpart, in a comparable situation, in apartheid South Africa from which I was similarly expelled. But the worst tends not to happen when you have some influential friends – on both sides. So, I've never been tortured. I never disappeared.

Given my personal history as a refugee child from Hitler, I felt I just had to be in on Amnesty International, right from its start in 1961. I could square that, I thought, with my role as a Church diplomat. It seemed the most natural thing in the world, not least because Amnesty was deeply disliked by all oppressors, everywhere. Did that help me in practice? Did it help me in Prague when I was arrested and expelled and able to say that I supported the socialist opposition to the military dictatorships in Chile and Argentina? Did it help me in South Africa to be able to prove my solidarity with persecuted anti-communists in Russia? Of course not. It is interesting to reflect that none of those I was able to help in Czechoslovakia or East Germany, whether in or out of prison, were Christians. In Russia, as it happened, they were. It made no difference. When pleading with Walter Ulbricht, the GDR's Communist boss, to release an imprisoned trade unionist, he said to me: 'What business is he of yours? He is no Christian.' 'He is a human being,' I replied.

To be neutral in the Cold War, to stand between the fronts, was a lonely place. It was a kind of vocation that grew out of my understanding of political integrity. It brought with it, as a defence mechanism, a self-righteousness, much to be fought.

There is more to the story. The two horses were not equally balanced. It was necessary to ask: what now matters most in terms of human survival? That meant that I felt impelled to give precedence to support for any and every genuine move to keep the world at peace, to rid it of the risk of a nuclear holocaust which for millions would have ended the right to life itself. From the beginning of my NGO career, precedence needed to be given, I felt, to every grass roots movement that stood out against the demonization of 'the enemy' with all its militaristic implications. That was also a Gospel imperative. Loving enemies was, for me, never a purely spiritual matter. It had practical consequences. In military language this came to be called 'common security'. I am safer when my enemy is safer and not afraid of me. And it precariously worked. It also, in the West, came to be called *Ostpolitik*, Willy Brandt's 'change through rapprochement', a concept that was heartily disliked by cold warriors on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

In an ecclesiastical context that meant for me a willingness, uneasy as it was, in 1964 to join the Kremlin supported Christian Peace Conference's Executive Committee, but from within it to argue against its vilification of the West. At least once in a plenary session I succeeded in getting Metropolitan Nikodim to withdraw a one-sided anti-capitalist motion. That must have cost him something. Four years later, in the midst of the ill-fated Prague Spring, I had to pay the price and was expelled from the Executive Committee at the insistence of the same Nikodim. Yet I know he was not a free man. The dialectical relationship I had with him came close to real friendship. With Bishop Runcie I went to Nikodim's funeral in Leningrad a decade later. I had been refused a visa, so my friend Bob Runcie, the Archbishop of Canterbury's representative, threatened not to go without me. Moscow backed down.

It was on that Soviet visit that I met Ivan Potapov whom Amnesty International had helped to set free after four years in prison. The sentence had been 12 years for publicly protesting at the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Ivan was a devout Orthodox believer who spent his life translating Western theology for the professors of the Leningrad Theological Academy. That meeting alone would have justified my visit. Here was a point at which justice and peace did embrace.

Often, reluctantly, I felt I had to keep the doors open to dialogue with some Christian leaders in Eastern Europe who were no better than some Nazi Christians had been in Hitler's Germany. It seemed, at the time, a price worth paying. Negotiating respectfully with Communist politicians, usually on behalf of prisoners, was far less painful than dealing with bishops who I knew turned over their critical clergy to the secret police. But whatever the label, I tried hard – not always successfully – to remain respectful of the humanity of even the worst. It is hard to hate the sin and not the sinner. I could only try.

At least, on the face of it, I was not single-minded. Insisting on justice imperilled harmony. Promoting harmony was to appear to condone oppression. There was no escape for me from walking that tightrope. What then of Keston College which all my instincts told me I wanted to support and to be part of, and yet from which, after a time, I felt impelled to distance myself. In the light of what I have said, you will understand why. That was painful, painful because of my huge admiration for the single-mindedness and passion and scholarship of Michael Bourdeaux and his colleagues at Keston.

Michael and I have somewhat comparable temperaments. We fought about church policy across the table in the East Europe committee meetings at the British Council of Churches but even when we disagreed, Michael might be surprised to hear, I sometimes secretly wished that I was Michael. (Anyway, born on Michaelmas, that should have been my name.) He had to be there, and in the ecumenical climate of the time, he stood his ground impressively. It was simply not his chosen role or even his inclination to see both sides of the question. Why should he, when he saw himself as the voice of those who have no voice. I admired him even when he made me angry. Today I eagerly grasp the chance to thank him for building up Keston despite the ecclesiastical diplomats who shook their heads, often behind his back. That was not my style. Behind Michael's back I persuaded the Archbishop of Canterbury to give him the theological doctorate he so richly deserved.

So, I have no need to apologise to Michael. I still think there were times when he was wrong. But he was right, absolutely right, in his single-minded battle for religious liberty in the Communist world. My concern on a bigger canvas, was, more complicatedly, just as great for Communists suffering at the hands of those who lay claim to be Christians. Keston's partisanship in the Cold War, however difficult from an ecumenical perspective, I simply have to acknowledge, was an inevitable consequence of its mission. Michael has no need to apologise either. With hindsight, our wrestling with each other was as inevitable as our friendship is now.

In all situations, scholarly research is a necessary back-up to committed action. Keston's research has been invaluable and was quite independent of Cold War politics. Keston is both an actor and a recorder. The archival record will stand and enrich scholarship for a long time. The fields of action have changed. Old oppressors and new are on the world scene. The need for peace and the struggle for justice – with old and new titans arising – continue to be in dialectical contention. Yesterday's Ecumenical Movement appears to be passing its shelf-life. Armed fundamentalisms with labels old and new threaten us. There remain plenty of enemies to be loved. Both the curse and the blessing of the world's religions are more than ever both a cause for penitence and a ground for hope. Open hearts and open minds in all religions and none are precious gifts to be cherished. In that complex, beautiful world, may our children learn to live compassionately and adventurously.

(Left to right) *Dr Bernard Palmer, former editor of the* Church Times, *& Canon Paul Oestreicher.* (In background) *Roland & Katherine Smith, & David Gowan*

# British Discourse on Soviet Dissent: A Brief Outline

**by Mark Hurst**

*Mark Hurst, an assistant lecturer and PhD student in the School of History at the University of Kent, presented the following overview of his current research at Keston's 2010 AGM.*

From the birth of the dissident movement in the Soviet Union in the mid 1960s to Gorbachev's policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the mid 1980s, which permanently changed the internal composition of the Soviet Union, groups based in the United Kingdom were remarkably active in supporting dissidents. These groups did more than just educate and inform the wider British public about the plight of Soviet dissidents – they substantially shaped official government policy towards the Soviet abuses and played a significant role in constructing public discourse on dissent. These groups made significant contributions not only to how Soviet dissidents were reported on and understood in the 1970s and 1980s, but also to how British society understands and relates to Soviet dissidents today. Indeed, in order to consider effectively how contemporary society deals with dissenting figures in totalitarian countries, we need to understand the historical precedent of British relations with Soviet dissenters.

*Mark Hurst speaking at Keston's AGM*

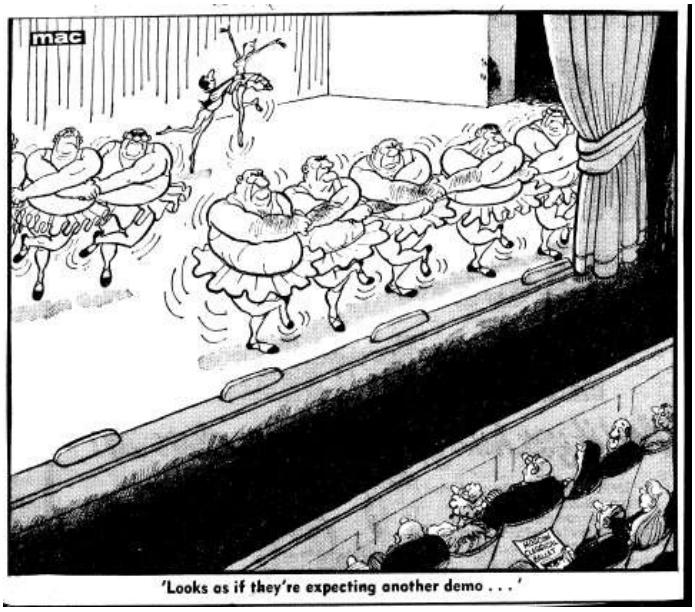
The groups formed in Britain in the later 20th century to deal with human rights abuses in the Soviet Union are numerous. One only need mention Amnesty International to highlight an internationally significant human rights group based in the UK in this period. Alongside these overarching human rights groups, it is apparent that British groups gained international reputations for their work into two main areas in the Soviet Union – psychiatric abuse and religious persecution.

The Soviet abuse of psychiatric treatment for political purposes was arguably the most horrific way in which the Soviet authorities dealt with political dissenters. In order to get around the legal implications of a public trial of a dissident, which many used as a public platform with which to discuss their political views, the Soviet authorities began to declare its political opponents as insane. Dissidents, such as Vladimir Bukovsky, Viktor Nekipelov and Leonid Plyushch amongst many others, were forcibly incarcerated in *psikhushki*[1] often on the somewhat dubious diagnosis of 'sluggish schizophrenia'. The legitimacy of this medical condition was questioned by many in the West, most notably by Professor Harold Merskey and Bronislava Shafran who noted with suspicion that this condition was 'virtually limited to the Soviet Union'[2]. Once held in these institutions, forced psychiatric treatments were common, including the use of powerful anti-psychotic drugs and Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT). These treatments mimicked those used in the West, however in the Soviet Union, drugs that limit the extent of the side effects of these treatments, including anti-Parkinsonian drugs, were regularly withheld from dissidents, leaving many to suffer from horrific muscular and psychological disorders.

The horrors of the political use of psychiatric abuse in the Soviet Union led to the formation of several groups in the UK – most notably the Working Group on the Internment of Dissenters in Mental Hospitals, a coalition of concerned people including prominent individuals such as Professor Peter Reddaway, and the Campaign Against Psychiatric Abuse (CAPA). These groups played a significant role in publicising these abuses to the world, and arguably led to both the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the World Psychiatric Association putting pressure on the Soviet authorities to cease these practices. It could be argued that these human rights groups shaped the approach of the World Psychiatric Association towards the Soviet authorities through their influence, thus illustrating the importance of their role.

The persecution of religious belief in the Soviet Union was the second area in which British human rights groups built up an international reputation in the 1970s and 1980s. The Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism, later known as Keston College and now as Keston Institute, was formed in 1969 to study the position of relig-

ion in the Soviet bloc and other Communist nations in a predominantly academic manner. Other groups took a more focused approach. The Women's Campaign for Soviet Jewry (also known as the 35s), for example, actively campaigned on behalf of *refuseniks*[3] and utilised an array of public demonstrations to get media attention for their cause. Indeed, the 35s became infamous for their demonstrations which included the positioning of a pantomime elephant outside the central London offices of the Soviet airline Aeroflot, and the pitch invasion of the football match between Zenit Leningrad and Queens Park Rangers, in which 35ers handed out leaflets about the plight of *refuseniks* to fans and bemused footballers alike. The outlandish demonstrations were designed to attract the attention of the British media, with the aim that any articles on these demonstrations not only publicise the work of the 35s, but also get media coverage for the plight of the *refuseniks*. An example of this media attention can be seen in Mac's cartoon in the *Daily Mail* on 18 May, 1984, showing a somewhat histrionic Soviet approach to the stage invasions of their cultural events[4].



'Looks as if they're expecting another demo . . . '

The Medical and Scientific Committee for Soviet Jewry followed the same cause of the 35s, but with a much more restrained approach, targeting scientists and medical professionals to offer their support through focused pressure on the Soviet authorities. This group was initially formed after the leading Jewish MP, Greville Janner, brought together an array of scientists and medical practitioners to form a group concerned with supporting *refuseniks*. It is interesting to note that this group also later became heavily involved in supporting victims of psychiatric abuse, perhaps due to the number of psychiatrists that were affiliated to it – most notably the chairman of the group, Harold Merskey, who was to play a key part in the Royal College of Psychiatrists' decision to condemn the Soviet practices.

It was notable that human rights groups involved in protesting against psychiatric abuse and religious persecution in the Soviet Union both held empirical evidence at the centre of their campaigns. None of the groups mentioned above became involved in explicitly ideological conflicts with the Soviet authorities, despite what their critics might have suggested. Indeed, the distinct lack of ideology from these campaigns, especially in the context of the politically charged Cold War, suggests that the actions of these groups were based entirely on moral grounds. At the centre of all of these groups' work was evidence that had been received from the Soviet Union, either in *samizdat*[5], personal testimony, or via telephone conversations. The collation of this information differed from group to group, with some, such as Keston, being inundated with *samizdat* material, and others, such as the 35s, having to be more proactive in gaining information through telephone conversations with *refuseniks*. Either way, both of these groups were remarkably open and frank about the material which they received, disseminating copies of their evidence to any and all interested parties. Again, the way in which this occurred varied from group to group. Keston published an array of books on the position of religion in the Soviet Union alongside its quarterly journal *Religion in Communist Lands* and the *Keston News Service*. The 35s did not publish material as such, but included information they had received in many of their public flyers, which were handed out at demonstrations and stage invasions. The Working Group on the Internment of Dissenters in Mental Hospitals also published an infrequent newsletter which outlined the most recent developments of the political abuse of psychiatry in the Soviet Union.

A second interesting point about these British groups is how international they were in scope. Keston, for example, relied on international support for its research, and it is perhaps no coincidence that its archive currently resides at Baylor University, Texas. One only has to look through back issues of both *Religion in Communist Lands* and the *Keston News Service* to see the frequency with which leading members of Keston were travelling the world trying to attain both financial and moral support for their efforts. The same can be said of the 35's, who built up an impressive array of affiliate groups that covered Canada, Australia,

*Mark Hurst in discussion with Canon Paul Oestreicher*

Brazil and the United States amongst many others. Psychiatric human rights groups also had a distinctly international element to them, with archival material of both CAPA and the 'Working Group' now located outside of Britain. This is in part due to the emigration of leading members of these groups, with Harold Merskey now based in Canada, and Peter Reddaway in the United States. This international dimension means that what should be effectively a British based research project is in fact more global in scope.

Finally, what is most striking about the groups that have been mentioned so far is the prominence of networking between key individuals involved in each of these groups. Many key figures were involved with more than one human rights group in this period, and the relationships between these groups was on the whole remarkably cordial. In the literature on the British response to Soviet dissent, it is fascinating how often names appear in different contexts. For example, Peter Reddaway's work on psychiatric abuse can also be timed with his involvement with Keston. Another example is that of Harold Merskey, whose Medical and Scientific Committee was originally formed to support Soviet *refuseniks* and came to be heavily involved in supporting victims of psychiatric abuse, bringing him into close involvement with psychiatric human rights groups. Networking was exceptionally prominent amongst these human rights groups, and was essential not only for their own progression, but for the wider development of the support for Soviet dissidents. Although the variety of different human rights groups in this period had their different agendas and methods, it could be argued that due to this plethora of personal relations between groups there was a human rights 'community' in Britain in this period, all loosely working together to assist Soviet dissidents.

Analysis of the response of British human rights groups to the Soviet persecution of dissenting opinion in the 1970s and 1980s illuminates not only the way in which the West formulated their opinions on Soviet dissidents themselves, but it also serves as a wider example of how we deal with contemporary dissent. British human rights groups played a substantial role in the construction of the discourse on Soviet dissent through their dissemination of information and the pressure which they exerted on official bodies – both in the Soviet Union and the West. The role that they played should not be ignored in the wider literature on Soviet dissent.

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[1] *Psikhushka* – Soviet prison slang for a 'Special Psychiatric Hospital', which closely resembled a prison rather than a hospital.

[2] H. Merskey and B. Shafran, 'Political Hazards in the Diagnosis of "Sluggish Schizophrenia"', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 148 (1986).

[3] *Refuseniks* – Soviet Jews who had been refused exit visas by the Soviet authorities.

[4] See S. McMurtry (Mac), 'Looks as if they're expecting another demo', *Daily Mail*, 18 May, 1984, available at http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/record/48270 (accessed 23/02/2010).

[5] *Samizdat* – literally 'self published'; refers to the body of underground literature in the Soviet Union which was printed and circulated by hand. These pieces were often smuggled out to the West.

**Keston AGM**

**Saturday 5th November 2011**

**The Great Chamber**
**The Charterhouse**
**Charterhouse Square**
**London EC1M 6AN**

# Reader's Comment

## Letter to Mikhail Roshchin from Jennifer Haward in Moscow

Thanks for your article ['Caucasus Emirate: North Caucasus Jihad', *Keston Newsletter* No 12, 2010]. I can't say I enjoyed it exactly, because it seemed pretty depressing, but I'm very glad to have read it and I found it very informative. Here are some of my thoughts.

It seems to me, as jihadism is an international phenomenon, and as many of the Caucasus leaders are educated abroad, work for peace in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan will also reflect on the conflict. Thus, this 'work for peace' needs firstly to be genuine—not a veiled expression of national self-interest—and secondly, not only to progress, but actually to achieve peace and an environment in which it is possible for people to live a full and happy life. Naturally, the behaviour of Westerners in these countries also needs to be exemplary (a condition, which, unfortunately, could often not be further from the truth).

However, the main hope of resolving the conflict in the North Caucasus lies with Russia. I don't believe that increased Russian military activity can help to bring stability to this region or ensure an end to the conflict. If it could, it would have done so already. In fact, it is worth noting that starting with Maskhadov, every leader assassinated by Moscow seems to be replaced by someone with more extremist views and less willing to compromise, or in any way work towards peace. In this way, the conflict has also become less nationalistic and more jihad-oriented, and has spread beyond Chechnya and into Ingushetia and Daghestan. It is possible that this would have happened whatever Russia's response, but I can't help feeling that the violence of Russia's military involvement in Chechnya, and the behaviour of Russian troops at various times, certainly played a significant role in creating an atmosphere of fear and bereavement in which terrorism could flourish, and succeeded in alienating many people in Chechnya and throughout the Caucasus.

Instead, Russia must either let any area that wants to break away from it hold a referendum to decide the matter once and for all, or reform itself into something people would want to belong to: with religious freedom and a police force, army, legal system and administration which are accountable and whose behaviour is beyond contempt; in effect an advert for Russian society and Russia as a country. Or both.

There also needs to be a change in Russian society's mentality. Many of my friends talk about people from Daghestan, for example, as foreigners, rejecting any right they may have to work or even education in central Russia, and showing suspicion towards any expression of religion and culture different to their own, while still being horrified at the thought that some of these people might not see themselves as Russians. Surely these points of view are contradictory, and the more we in Russia conform to them, the more we will alienate groups we should be trying to reach out to.

Christians and Christian organisations, along with other faiths represented in Russia, also need to be advertisements for their faith, distancing themselves from national principles and showing through their words and their actions that they are true to their faith in God, and are committed to creating a compassionate society.

*Jennifer Haward is 25 and lives in Moscow with her husband. She studied Russian at Glasgow University and spent her last year at the Moscow State Linguistic University where her roommates were Vietnamese, French and Koreans. During this period she worked as a part-time English-speaking babysitter for an Ingush family. Since 2007 she has been teaching English in Moscow and now works at Moscow University. In 2008 she started looking for a church and by the end of the year had started attending the Moscow Quaker Meeting. She writes: 'As my husband plans to start studying at Nottingham University in 2012 we won't be able to live in Russia for all that much longer, but I feel certain that our experiences here will influence our lives wherever we find ourselves. I'm very grateful that I've been able to meet so many different people who've allowed me to piece together my own view of the world. I've also come to appreciate some of the positive qualities of my own country in a way that only living abroad can enable, and my experience is all the richer for that.'*

# Explosion at Domodedovo

**by Mikhail Roshchin**

At 16.32 on 24 January 2011 a powerful bomb exploded in the arrival hall of Domodedovo airport south of Moscow. It killed 36 people and wounded 116. One of those killed was a famous writer and playwright, Anna Yablonskaya, from Odessa, who was only 29 and had flown to Moscow that day to receive a prize from the magazine, *Iskusstvo kino* (*The Art of Cinema*) (http://www.themoscowtimes.com/columns/article/finding-words-for-the-death-of-anna-yablonskaya/429796.html).


*At 15.24 on 24 January, Magomed Evloev is pictured entering Domodedovo airport through entrance No 2*

Moskovites and visitors were deeply shaken by the viciousness behind this bomb, and at first tried to stay indoors as much as possible. Quite quickly it became clear that it was the work of a suicide bomber, and investigations led to the North Caucasus. However, it was not at first clear which republic was involved, although there seemed to be a strong link with people from the Caucasus Emirate. These suspicions were soon confirmed. On 4 February the head of the FSB, Alexandr Bortnikov, named the suicide bomber as the 20 year-old Magomed Evloev, an accountant who had not completed his studies from the village of Ali-yurt in Ingushetia (http://lifenews.ru/news/50590). That evening the website of the Caucasus Emirate's supporters published a video in which Dokka Umarov, the Emir, was seen commissioning the future '*shahid*' (= witness, martyr) for his task of suicide bomber. The '*shahid*' in the video looks remarkably like Magomed Evloev. Then a few days later Umarov made a widely publicized video announcement in which he stated that terrorist acts committed by members of the Emirate would not cease until Russia had withdrawn from the republics of the North Caucasus (http://hunafa.com/?p=4426#more-4426).

The latest news from the North Caucasus is becoming, unfortunately, even more worrying. The area in which North Caucasus mujahedin are active is widening. On the morning of 15 February a battle between mujahedin and Federal forces took place not far from the village of Belomechetinsky, Stavropol krai, on the border of Karachaev-Cherkessia. There were losses on both sides, and during the battle the mujahedin managed to bring down a MI-28 'Night Hunter' helicopter.

The latest events show, in my view, the deep systemic crisis in Russia's federal structure, which is most acutely felt in the North Caucasus but is becoming increasingly evident in the central parts of the country. Not long ago the tensions between those living in the centre of Russia and those from the North Caucasus exploded on Moscow's Manezh Square when on 11 December 2010 there was a mass demonstration of Russian nationalists leading to serious clashes. Clearly, the integration of the different peoples living in Russia to form one nation has come up against the problem of mutual alienation and this has intensified thanks to a catalyst—namely radical Islam.

# Home News

Keston's AGM on 6 November 2010 was held, as during the previous two years, at the Charterhouse in London. Canon Paul Oestreicher and David Gowan, Ambassador in Belgrade 2003-2006 who is a member of Keston's Council, as well as Mark Hurst, a young researcher from the University of Kent, were our speakers in the afternoon. A number of guests joined the members, and some so enjoyed the day that they have now joined Keston.

The Encyclopaedia team organised a fieldtrip to Voronezh (500km south of Moscow) and Lipetsk (a two-hour drive north from Voronezh) in January this year. They were able to interview the head of the Russian Orthodox Diocesan Administration, Fr Andrei Tarasov, as well as leaders of the Lutherans, Adventists, Baptists, Pentecostals, Roman Catholics and Methodists. A particularly interesting interview was with the small and dwindling community of Fyodorovtsy of whom just over a hundred still survive. They all live in the village of Staraya Tishanka, 150km from Voronezh, and belong to the Catacomb Church. They are named after Fyodor Rybalkin, a peasant with charismatic gifts, who in 1921 started prophesying the Second Coming and acquired a large following. The Fyodorovtsy came to believe that Rybalkin was Christ returned to earth, at the Second Coming. Many of them were imprisoned, some shot and most exiled in the 1920s; during Khrushchev's fight against so-called 'parasites' in the 1960s they were persecuted again.

*Sergei Filatov & Xenia Dennen with the Fyodorovtsy in Staraya Tishanka*

In Lipetsk it proved easier to meet local leaders from Protestant congregations than Orthodox clergy or laity who all insisted that the team receive the bishop's 'blessing', that is his permission, before they would talk to them. Sergei and Xenia therefore got a taxi to take them to the Tikhon of Zadonsk Monastery (a 50-minute journey) where the bishop lived, and managed to get the required 'blessing'. Doors opened thereafter but already much time had been lost. At the monastery they were shown round by Sister Efimia on the bishop's instructions, and by chance bumped into Fr Gavriil who was in charge of religious education in the area and was happy to talk to them. Once back in Lipetsk they were able to interview the head of the Russian Orthodox 'Vozrozhdenie' (Revival) centre, Elena Sankevicha, who gave them a detailed picture of the ROC's work in the area, especially in state schools.

*Encyclopaedia Team in front of Annunciation Cathedral, Voronezh:* (left to right) *Roman Lunkin, Xenia Dennen & Sergei Filatov*

From 23-26 February Michael Bourdeaux and the Chairman, Xenia Dennen, visited Baylor University. On their first day they spent an hour with the university's President, Judge Ken Starr. Michael described how and why Keston was founded in 1969; Judge Starr was visibly moved by the story. Xenia conveyed Keston UK's gratitude for the way Baylor had saved the archive through all its conservation work, and Michael outlined his vision for the future of the Keston Center as an international focus for the study of religion under Communism. They then both put in a plea for more funding, described the on-going work of the Encyclopaedia team and explained that the archive was a 'living archive' to

which material was regularly added. Judge Starr emphasised Baylor's concern with religious freedom and seemed excited by the large body of Baptist material in the Keston archive, adding 'We need to make sure we're not hiding our candle under a bushel. We must see that the Keston Center is adequately made known. We have a wonderful communications apparatus to spread the word.' At the end of the meeting he asked Michael and Xenia to keep in touch and seemed genuinely interested in helping promote the Keston Center.

After this important meeting, Xenia and Michael visited the Center and were able to thank the archivist, Larisa Seago, for all her meticulous work. They were shown the Youens Library which has new shelving and now holds Keston's 13,000 books, and were then taken across the campus to a large room called the Annexe. This has been equipped with shelving and other forms of storage, which Keston funded last summer so that the archive could be open to researchers by the start of the academic year. The Annexe now houses Keston's many research files as well as custom-made boxes and drawers which hold newspapers, videos, slides and tapes.

On 24 February an exhibition entitled 'USSR in Retrospect' was opened at the Poage Legislative Library on the Baylor campus. The exhibition included much Soviet memorabilia, badges with the visages of Party leaders, cosmonauts and other *prominenti*, the flags of all the Soviet republics (part of a collection made in 1992 by Dr Platt and donated to the Poage Legislative Library) and panels giving the time-line for the creation of the Soviet Union and another showing its demise. A large frieze with photographs of Russian Orthodox churches and icons served as a link with a section devoted to the Keston Center which displayed examples of samizdat, a Baptist hand-written song book, a photograph of an underground Baptist printing press made from bicycle parts, an illegally-printed Lithuanian prayer book, a tiny gospel, reproductions of Soviet anti-religious posters, photographs of ruined churches and much else. A panel telling the story of how Keston was founded and another telling the story of Aida Skripnikova, imprisoned for her faith in the 1960s, flanked the display cabinets, with a large banner showing the name of the Center fixed above on the wall. An enlarged digitised image of a page from Aida's trial transcript, with a translation at the side, made a strong impression as did a power-point presentation of photographs from the archive which ran continuously.


*Keston section of 'USSR in Retrospect' exhibition at Baylor*

After their return to England Michael and Xenia received an encouraging letter from Judge Starr in which he wrote: 'We are extraordinarily grateful for the splendid work being done at the Keston Institute and the very rich collaboration between the Institute and Baylor. We are particularly thankful that the Poage Legislative Library and the Keston Center are currently featuring the "USSR in Retrospect" exhibit. This magnificent collection is wonderful and is being well received, indeed, in our community.'

(Left to right) *Judge Starr, Xenia Dennen, Senator Edwards & Michael Bourdeaux*

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