Keston Newsletter

No. 15, 2012

New Life Church holds service in former cowshed, now renovated, which the Belarusian authorities threaten to demolish

Civil and Religious Repression in Belarus

by Giles Udy

Alexander Lukashenko was elected President of Belarus in 1994. It was the first presidential election in the country's history and, in the opinion of international election monitors, the last one that could be described as reasonably fair. Within a year, assisted by a still-functioning KGB, Lukashenko began to exert his personal control over the fledgling democracy. Over the next decade he turned Belarus into a country notorious not only for the oppression of its own people but for supplying arms to rogue regimes around the world, in defiance of UN sanctions.[1] In 1996 MPs who protested against a new referendum, giving the President further powers, were clubbed by riot police. Worse was to come with the disappearance of two former ministers who had defected to the opposition. According to the testimony of an insider who fled abroad both were killed on the orders of men close to Lukashenko.

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The 2006 presidential election was marred by allegations of malpractice and police violence, whereas the run-up to the 2010 presidential election seemed to give the people of Belarus hope for more democratic freedom. At one point the country's dire economic problems and sparring with Russia appeared to be drawing Lukashenko closer to Europe. But it was not to be. Censorship, police brutality and KGB interference continued unabated throughout the campaign. The final vote, which gave the President just under 80%, was brazenly fixed. On election night, as polling stations closed, 30,000-50,000 demonstrators gathered and then marched to Independence Square in Minsk where several presidential candidates joined them to protest against the result. At a given moment police agents disguised as protesters attacked the main government building, and on this signal thousands of police entered the square and began assaulting protesters. Over 700 were arrested and imprisoned for 10-15 days. The authorities followed the election protests with a wave of further arrests. The offices and homes of dozens of activists and civil society organisations were searched, their computers and files seized. Members of opposition campaign teams and NGO leaders were rounded up and taken away. Over the following weeks the fragile infrastructure of the Belarusian democracy movement was ravaged.[2]

2010 election night demonstration

Religious Believers

The hostility of the Belarusian government towards many religious believers is only marginally less than it is towards political dissent, and increases in proportion to the extent to which those believers become engaged in social and political issues. Given the constant harassment many believers experience, it is no surprise that some have become politicised.

In 2002 a new law which significantly increased state control over religious believers and their organisations was passed. This was the *Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations*[3] which purported to guarantee religious freedom as did its infamous predecessor, the 1929 Soviet *Law on Religious Associations*. Like the Soviet Law, this new Belarusian law uses registration as its main means of control. It forbids religious groups from operating unless they are registered with the state, while simultaneously creating legal hurdles to prevent regis-

tration. It also forbids the importation or distribution of Christian literature without government approval, bans foreigners from leading religious organisations, and denies religious communities the right to establish schools to train their clergy.

No religious body is exempt from the registration process, including previously registered groups which had operated quite legally for years, such as the 1000-member Pentecostal New Life Church in Minsk (NLC). NLC, the direct successor of an underground church which operated in Soviet times, was refused re-registration in 2004 in spite of registering first in 1991 and operating successfully and legally since then. The church has since been subject to repeated attempts to destroy it, including the arrival of a bulldozer to demolish the church building and the allegation that it is occupying a cowshed unfit for human habitation—charges that video and photographic evidence show are preposterous.[5] Only the support of foreign ambassadors prevented the demolition. The standoff is now in its eighth year and the authorities appear even more determined to close the church. Most recently NLC has been charged with polluting its grounds, fined $100,000 and had its bank account frozen. Protesters continue to appeal for foreign support to save its building.

The 2002 Religion Law establishes three tiers of religious groups**:** religious *communities* (e.g. churches), religious *associations* (e.g. denominations), and *national* religious associations. *National* religious associations can be formed only when there are active religious *communities* in a majority of the country's six regions. Every religious community (church) is required to be registered by the state before it is allowed to operate. Without state registration, *any* activity by a religious community is illegal. Like the 1929 Soviet Law, a religious community cannot consist of less than 20 people over the age of 18, so all smaller groups have no status and are automatically illegal.

The legal hoops through which every church must jump often present an insurmountable barrier to registration—and even if they do achieve registration churches still have no right to hold meetings in rented buildings without prior state permission, which is often denied. They are not allowed to train clergy, invite outsiders to preach or produce their own media material. Any involvement with, or support from, NGOs or political organisations is forbidden. Registered churches do not have the right to carry out any religious activity (to preach, distribute literature, hold public worship services or do charitable work) beyond the strictly defined borders of the location where they are registered. Missionary activity is therefore illegal and church teams are fined if found doing so. It is not even permitted to invite a pastor from a nearby church to preach without permission.

Some of the benefits denied single churches are theoretically available to the next tier of religious organisation – religious *associations* (denominations) which may by constituted only by a national-level religious association. In practice the barriers in place to prevent a group of churches registering mean that these benefits are unobtainable.

Registration as a new denomination is virtually impossible, requiring a minimum of ten churches, one of which must have been active in the Republic of Belarus for no less than 20 years—i.e. since 1982, the last year of the Brezhnev era. This was a time when the Soviet Union was deeply hostile to religious belief and when there were hardly any churches functioning legally anywhere in the Belorussian SSR.

The 2002 Law thus renders the existence of many Belarusian churches and the active worship of their members illegal, in contravention of Article 18 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* which recognises a believer's 'freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance'.

Meetings in Private Homes

The 2002 Law creates significant (and deliberate) obstacles to prevent churches gathering for worship—refusing them registration until they have an address, but also refusing them permission to rent property until they are registered. Most congregations have no option but to meet illegally in private homes. The Law allows people to gather to pray privately in their homes on an occasional basis but an official church meeting held in a private house is illegal, not least because any gathering of more than three people is forbidden.

The arbitrariness and hostility of local authorities means that any gathering they uncover will be classified as a church meeting and penalised. Although many instances of harassment go unrecorded, religious rights monitors have, in recent years, recorded around one case a month of police raids on homes where services are being held, the interrogation of church members, and confiscation of Christian books, films and equipment. Not only the pastors are targeted; those who allow their homes to be used for religious gatherings are fined too.

Land Use

Even when churches have succeeded in achieving registration, obtaining permission to construct or rebuild church buildings is difficult. Local officials have been known to allow churches to pursue this expensive process, only to block it once thousands of dollars worth of congregation funds have been spent. One church had its building permit issued and then revoked three times by which time the community had invested approximately $28,000 in the project. Others who adapt private houses for worship are fined for using their land for 'wrongful purposes'.

Surveillance of Religious Believers

Revived in 2003, state ideology departments play an important role in the repression of both registered and unregistered religious activity. Ideology officers promote official state ideology at all levels of government and in all state enterprises and institutions. They also recruit informers to report on illegal religious activity. It is not untypical for groups comprising ideology officials, police and sometimes KGB officers to raid religious meetings and

to initiate prosecutions against believers. In October 2009, a Chavusy town ideology officer and four police officers raided a private house where a Full Gospel Protestant church was holding Sunday worship; they interrogated each church member and confiscated Christian materials. Interrogations may last many hours and are intended to disrupt and intimidate. In another city a state ideology officer shut down a seminar on family relationships held by a Protestant pastor in the town's Palace of Culture. Fifteen Palace of Culture employees were then sacked as a warning to all city building employees not to associate with or accommodate believers.

Recognising the impact that Christian social programmes can have on society and fearing their growing influence, the authorities target Christian social action projects. One Christian rehab ministry has been repeatedly raided, its clients taken off for interrogation (and thus frightened off) and its leader fined for using 'unsanctioned Christian techniques'.

Religious Education

The religious education of children is particularly resisted by the anti-religious authorities. In one instance local authorities and teachers sought to identify which children attended a Baptist Sunday school. The children were then threatened by their head teacher to dissuade them from attending church.

Each year, church summer camps are a particular target. A range of charges, from inadequate documentation to health and safety infringements, are adopted to disrupt or close them. One Baptist summer youth camp in the Brest region reported that different government departments conducted up to four daily checks on them. In August 2010 the pastor of a Pentecostal church in Krupki was fined for providing home-made meals in 'unsanitary conditions' to summer camp students. He refused an order to supply a list of names of the students because twice previously photographs of children who attended the summer camps were passed to their schools and used to shame the children; as a result they stopped attending the church. The organiser of another camp was fined on the grounds that by organising the camp he was acting as a church leader and had no state permit for this. A fourth camp was shut down by police (who had previously threatened to take the children to a youth detention centre) and all the camp residents were forcibly bussed back from the countryside to Minsk.

Restrictions on Foreign Religious Workers

Belarus's strict 2002 regulations on foreign religious workers were tightened still further in 2008. Legislation prohibits activity by foreign organisations which incites 'national, religious, and racial enmity' or that could 'have negative effects on the physical and mental health of the people'. This is used to suppress both human rights NGOs and Western support for Belarusian religious organisations.

Meetings and participants are frequently monitored (often videoed) by informers and security service agents and all foreigners identified. No for-

eigner is allowed to lead a religious organisation or speak at any service. They risk a reprimand or expulsion even for attending one.

The Roman Catholic Church in Belarus has particularly suffered. Numerous Belarusian Catholic priests and nuns of foreign origin (many of them Poles) have been refused permission to remain in Belarus, even though they may have been living and working in Belarus for many years. Parishioners' petitions on their behalf, such as one with over 12,000 signatures, are ignored. Many expulsions are on specious grounds, such as the case of a priest who served in a parish for over ten years but was told that he had not adequately mastered the Belarusian language to continue his ministry. Normally the use of Belarusian is discouraged by the state because it is favoured by the opposition.

Many are concerned that the Vatican might be muting its voice as it seeks to arrange its own concordat with the Belarusian government. During the 2010 election, the Catholic Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusewicz distanced himself from the protests, supported by the Belarusian Christian Democracy Party, against the demolition of the historic St Joseph Church, which the government wished to replace with a casino hotel complex. Unlike many world leaders, the Vatican made no comment on the 2010 election or the subsequent crackdown. Individual Catholic priests (some of whom said Mass on behalf of political prisoners) have voiced their disquiet at the silence of their leadership—which also ignored requests in 2012 to support a message of New Year greeting to those still in jail.

Belarusian Orthodox Church

The relationship between the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC) and non-Orthodox Belarusian believers is complex and troubled. The BOC is an exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), whose distance from its own authoritarian government is questionable. The ROC leadership and the Belarusian KGB are two of the few Soviet-era bodies which remained largely unchanged after the fall of Communism and both have documented connections with each other. Patriarch Kirill and Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk were both revealed in the early 1990s to have collaborated with the KGB; they were identified in the KGB archives under the code names of 'Mikhailov' and 'Ostrovsky' by the Russian Orthodox priest Fr Gleb Yakunin, a former gulag inmate and dissident.[6]

The 2002 Religion Law gave the BOC a privileged status above all other denominations in Belarus and was drawn up with the assistance of Metropolitan Filaret's legal adviser. Filaret's hostility towards other Christian denominations has been evident and is capable of two interpretations—theological disagreement or turf-protection. In 2000-2001 Filaret gave honorary awards for their support of the BOC to journalists who had written defamatory articles about Protestants. One was a widely publicised report which had accused Protestants of indulging in human sacrifice and blood ritual.

The Moscow Patriarchate gave its own support to the new Law when, a few months before its introduction, the then Patriarch Alexi II awarded Presi-

dent Lukashenko the prize of the Unity of Slavic Peoples for his efforts in defence of Russian Orthodoxy.

In 2003, the relationship between church and state in Belarus was further cemented by a concordat between Lukashenko and the BOC which recognised the BOC's 'influence on the formation of spiritual, cultural, and national traditions of the Belarusian people' and its sole right to call itself Orthodox (thus proscribing all other strands of Orthodoxy). The agreement also recorded their joint commitment to work against 'pseudo religious structures that present a danger to individuals and society', a clear reference not only to alternative religions but to some Protestant denominations.

There have been a number of mutually warm statements over the years between President Lukashenko and the Orthodox leadership. Patriarch Kirill's message of congratulation after the disputed December 2010 election victory particularly stands out:

> 'I warmly congratulate you on your victory in the Presidential elections of the Republic of Belarus. Occupying the highest position of state you have served your nation and its people well. The results of this recent election show the level of trust your people feel in you. It is gratifying to note that Belarus has created a church-state partnership which extends to so many different areas of life [...]'[7]

Although the letter raised some mild protest from ordinary Orthodox believers, it seems hard to resist the conclusion that the leaders of the ROC and BOC have found it beneficial to reach an accommodation with the Lukashenko government in return for ecclesiastical and other benefits.

Even within the BOC manifestations of individual faith which might lead to social or political action are frowned upon. In March 2007 a small Orthodox fellowship group meeting in an apartment in Gomel was raided by the KGB. The group had its origins in the ministry of a priest who had established a successful ministry to young people in Gomel. When Bishop (now Archbishop) Aristarkh (Stankevich) of Gomel and Zhlobin forbade the group to meet, the young people decided to continue meeting outside the church. For his leadership of this group, the priest was excommunicated for a year and then transferred, under strict discipline, to a parish in another city.

By 2007 the still-flourishing group was led by a layman, Sergei Nesterovich, and met regularly for prayer and bible study. Then came the raid. For three hours police searched the apartment, confiscated written materials, and questioned and photographed all those present. One KGB officer told the group they were being targeted because they were a 'pseudo-Christian sect' engaged in 'unsanctioned religious activity [and] in the recruitment of members'. Nesterovich was warned that if he met the group again he would be prosecuted. Gomel is not a large city and some secrets cannot remain hidden indefinitely: it was discovered that Archbishop Aristarkh had tipped off the KGB and encouraged the raid.

2007 Petition against Religion Law

By 2007 the impact of the 2002 Religion Law showed no signs of lessening. The Pentecostal New Life Church in Minsk was subject to particular harassment; since 2004 the authorities had been trying to close it. As believers rallied to New Life's support, other churches took courage to stand up to intimidation too. The Catholic congregation in Grodno, which had been consistently refused permission to build a church on land legally purchased by the diocese for that purpose ten years before, was inspired to follow New Life's example and its members went on hunger strike.

New Life pastor Goncharenko & his wife

The New Life Church's case played an important part in the politicisation of Belarusian believers, as well as becoming a focal point for growing international awareness of the persecution of Belarusian religious believers. It also coincided with the emergence of a new political party, the Belarusian Christian Democracy Party (BCD) in 2005.

Fr Alexander Shramko

With a leadership drawn from both Orthodox and Pentecostal believers the BCD launched a campaign in 2007 for the reform of the 2002 Religion Law. It drew up a petition and campaigned to gather 50,000 signatures, the number required to present an appeal to the government to amend a law. The final document was over 3000 pages long and was the largest non-party political petition in Belarusian history. The authorities made every effort to disrupt the campaign; campaigners were arrested as they collected signatures; their homes were raided, arrests made and publicity material confiscated. New Life Church took an active part in the campaign and both Pastor Goncharenko and New Life member Sergei Lukhanin, a human rights lawyer, were fined, as was BCD co-chairman Pavel Severinets. Seven members of the church were reportedly fired from their jobs on orders of the authorities. Campaigners elsewhere in the country, in one case a university-employed electrician, were also sacked for taking part in the campaign.

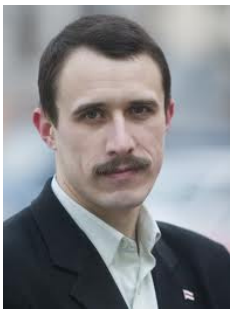
The BOC supported the government and urged their members not to sign the petition, praising the 2002 Law for facilitating 'religious peace and confessional stability in Belarus'. When an Orthodox priest, Fr Alexander Shramko, appeared at a New Life press conference opposing the 2002 Religion Law he was excommunicated. After two years of pressure and isolation Shramko was forced to repent publicly for criticising Filaret in order to be allowed to continue his ministry as a priest.

In March 2008, the Belarusian Constitutional Court rejected the petition. Parliament and the office of the President similarly dismissed it, insisting that there was no religious persecution in Belarus.

Belarusian Believers and Politics

Vital Rymasheuski

Two parties bridge the gap between politics and faith: the BCD and the more radical Malady (Youth) Front. Both have genuine, as opposed to nominal, Christian foundations and the majority of their leaders are believers, actively engaged in the political sphere as an expression of their faith. Both parties are committed to work for a free democratic Belarus for *all* Belarusian citizens, regardless of faith (or none).



Pavel Severinets

Working in close cooperation with church leaders, BCD campaigns for civil liberty and religious freedom. It is consistently refused registration and is therefore technically illegal. In the December 2010 presidential election it fronted its own candidate, Vital Rymasheuski, a devout Orthodox believer, who is thought to have achieved a respectable 5% of the vote, though the official count accorded him only a fraction of 1%. He received a suspended two year prison sentence for taking part in the campaign. Pavel Severinets, the BCD co-chairman alongside Rymasheuski, is another Orthodox believer who has suffered particular persecution over the years. For helping organise protests against the 2004 parliamentary elections, he was sentenced to three years in a labour camp. Released in May 2007, he was again in custody for three weeks in September 2007. In 2008 he was fined for his participation in the petition against the 2002 Religion Law. As campaign manager for Rymasheuski he was especially vulnerable and was detained in the wave of arrests that followed the 2010 election. He was given another three years sentence and is now in a labour camp.

In 2007 the BCD launched their 'Repentance Project' to highlight the darker side of Soviet history, which the Lukashenko government still tries to suppress, and to stir the national conscience to acknowledge the terrible crimes of the Stalin era which had taken place on Belarusian soil. That the campaign draws attention to the role of the Soviet NKVD in those events is no coincidence: campaigners point to an unbroken line of succession between the NKVD and the current Belarusian KGB.

The symbolic heart of these protests is in the killing fields of Kurapaty, just outside Minsk. Here, beneath trees planted to hide the evidence, are mass graves containing the remains of between 100,000 and 250,000 people, killed in the second half of the 1930s.

They were discovered by accident in 1988 and carefully excavated by a Belarusian archaeologist, Zianon Pazniak. The discovery of this site at the end of the Soviet era gave a huge impetus to the pro-democracy independence movement, but it has never been recognised by the Lukashenko government which insists the graves contain only 7,000-30,000 victims of Nazi shootings, a similar claim to the one made by the Soviets for many years about Katyn.[8] In 2001, when the authorities attempted to obscure part of the site by concreting over graves and building a ring road over it, there were mass demonstrations which were violently dispersed. The opposition continues to commemorate the site and hold an annual rally there. Pazniak was forced to flee abroad and now lives in the US.

Zmitser Fedaruk at RFE

In 2010, as a further part of the 'Repentance Project', Alexei Shein of the BCD produced a film documenting Soviet-era persecution of Protestant churches and pastors. The authorities have tried without success to suppress it and it is now widely available on the internet.[9]

Malady Youth Front

Taking a more radical approach to political action but with a membership that comprises about 80% committed Christians is the Malady (Youth) Front (MF). A number of current Malady members are also members of the BCD. Rymasheuski, Severinets, and former BCD co-chairman Alexei Shein are all former members, and it was from the ranks of Malady that the BCD, appealing to an older constituency, developed. Severinets was the leader of MF from 1994 to 2004.

MF members are young and often both reckless and brave; the attitude of the Belarusian authorities and police to them is consequently even more hostile. In 2007 the MF leader Zmitser Fedaruk was one of the group of opposition politicians (including Pavel Severinets) who were received by President Bush in the White House. The visit was well-publicised in opposition circles in Belarus and the authorities took revenge on members of the group when they returned home. Fedaruk arrived back from America on 9 December 2007. On 12 December he joined a peaceful demonstration to protest against the visit of President Putin to Belarus. The police arrived and beat protesters but, seeing Fedaruk, they particularly targeted him. He was set upon, beaten unconscious, and hospitalised. 'When I joined Malady Front,' Fedaruk told Radio Free Europe shortly afterwards, 'I couldn't understand how people could stand up and be strong, and not be afraid. Later, when I received this faith I understood that only God and faith can help you to be brave. In fact, the young people who come to MF are also like this.'[10] A month later, in January 2008, Fedaruk attended court to support some other Malady activists. He was once again set upon by police, thrown roughly into a car and taken

away. He was sentenced to 15 days in jail. In January 2009 Fedaruk was stopped in the street by police who took him straight to a military recruitment office to serve his national service. Although he was legally exempt from military service (both as a theological student and because of health problems) this was overruled by the courts and he was conscripted, after first being given an additional jail term for attending an illegal rally the year before.

Zmitser Dashkevich

Zmitser Dashkevich, a Pentecostal, was the Malady leader before Fedaruk. Dashkevich's pastor (of the Minsk-based charismatic Church of Jesus Christ) said of him:

'Zmitser never concealed his relationship with God and always openly expressed his view that every person had a right to self-determination, and that this right was given us by God.'

Dashkevich too has a long history of arrests and is today once again in custody. In May 2006 he returned from a visit to the US only to be arrested on charges of 'hooliganism'. On 1 November 2006 he was sentenced to 18 months in prison for 'organising and participating in an activity of an unregistered non-governmental organisation'. It was at that point, with Dashkevich in jail, that Fedaruk stepped in as Malady leader.

Eduard Lobau

In 2009 Dashkevich was abducted by unidentified men, driven out of Minsk into some woods (to make him think he was about to be shot), beaten and left there. His fiancée Nasta Palazhanka was herself a victim of a similar abduction.

As the 19 December 2010 presidential election approached, the pressure on Dashkevich grew. On 8 December police stopped him and accused him of driving with a forged licence. He was taken to the police station but the chance presence of an OSCE election observer ensured he was quickly released. The police still insisted on detaining the car to check if it was stolen. The next day, while driving with his fiancée in another car, he was stopped again and the police alleged he was driving a stolen car. It actually belonged to his fiancée's father. At 4 p.m. on the day before the election, Dashkevich and a colleague Eduard Lobau were arrested by police who had been waiting for them outside his apartment. They were beaten and then charged with 'hooliganism'—supposedly attacking passers-by with iron bars. In March 2011 both were sentenced to terms in a labour camp—Dashkevich for two years and Lobau for four years.

In autumn 2011 news surfaced about the conditions in which Dashkevich

was being held and the particularly punitive nature of his imprisonment. He had been put in a punishment cell over half a dozen times in six months and faced constant threats from violent inmates. In a note to his aunt he wrote: 'I do not feel I will survive long […] My strength is leaving me […] I feel there is no beginning and no end to this nightmare which I have been living in for these last months.'[11]

His fiancée, Nasta Palazhanka, deputy chair of MF, was arrested in the round-up after the election and imprisoned for two months. She was named one of the ten *International Women of Courage*, an annual award given by the US State Department, but could not receive her award from Secretary of State Clinton as she was banned from travelling abroad. She was arrested once again and sentenced to 12 days in prison for protesting outside Dashkevich's prison in August 2011.

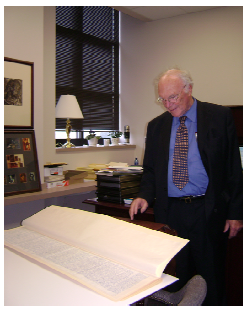
As the persecution of religious believers and democracy activists in Belarus continues, their colleagues and friends appeal to the world community to continue their support for individual prisoners of conscience such as Pavel Severinets, Zmitser Dashkevich and Eduard Lobau [*readers who wish to write to them can obtain their addresses from Keston.* Ed], and for the pastors and congregations of persecuted churches. Without such attention the safety of their imprisoned comrades and the future survival of their churches, they fear, cannot be assured.

1. E.g. Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Peru, Syria and Islamic extremist organisations in the Middle East. *Belarusian Review*, Vol. 15, No 4.
2. 'Shattering Hopes: Post-Election Crackdown in Belarus' (Human Rights Watch, N.Y. 2011) p.17; *Daily Telegraph,* 25 December, 2010.
3. http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4c2217f12.pdf
4. *Decree of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of Peoples' Commissars respecting Religious Associations, April 8 1929* Cmd. 3511 (HMSO 1930) is an English translation.
5. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oL2MsOlyCIM&feature=mfu_in_order&list=UL
6. John B. Dunlop, 'The Russian Orthodox Church as an "Empire-Saving" Institution' in Michael Bourdeaux (ed.), *The Politics of Religion in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995, p.30. Yakunin was subsequently defrocked (see *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 1994).
7. http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1347158.html
8. Katyn is 20 miles over the Russia/Belarus border. The NKVD execution of 20,000 Polish officers and civic leaders took place at a number of locations. Some of the victims are possibly buried in Kurapaty as well as in the other more well-known locations.
9. Forbidden Christ (Христос Забаронены) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6VhNIBFQMA
10. *RFE/RL Report,* 7 December, 2007.
11. http://spring96.org/en/news/46110

Memories of Persecution

by Philip Jenkins

Travelling across Europe elicits constant double-takes for someone of the baby-boom generation. Just as you are relishing the sights in a lovely city like Prague, Dresden or Budapest, you are startled to see an object or a historical marker that reminds you how very recently these places belonged to a sinister political and cultural order.



Michael Bourdeaux with 1960s Baptist trial transcript

Is it really just a quarter century ago that nations like Czechoslovakia and East Germany were part of a Soviet empire that threatened to engulf Western Europe? Once upon a time—and not long ago—there was another Europe.

Equally consigned to oblivion, at least for most Americans, is the religious story of Communist Europe, in which Christians suffered horrific persecutions. Wandering in Hungary today, you will casually see signs with names like Recsk and Kistarcsa, with no warning that in the 1950s these were the sites of lethal concentration camps in which Christian clergy and laity were murdered in the thousands.

It was at Kistarcsa, for instance, that Bishop Zoltán Meszlényi was martyred in 1951. In the Czech Republic, you might see the old uranium mining complexes of Příbram and Jáchymov without realizing how many religious enemies of the state died here in the 1950s undergoing forced labour that amounted to torture.

Through the 1960s, American Christians, especially Catholics, remained highly attuned to this situation as they followed the career of a heroic resister like Hungarian Cardinal József Mindszenty. Today, though, the persecutions seem to belong to ancient history, as remote as the time of Diocletian.

That amnesia reflects the totally changed political situation and the restoration of religious freedom: who could imagine such horrible deeds happening in such benevolently European and democratic settings? The new Hungarian constitution even vaunts the nation's Christian heritage. Yet it would be tragic if such a dreadful part of Christian history were lost to collective memory, if only because later generations have so much to learn from the various strategies that oppressed churches adopted in the face of crisis.

The need to keep these memories alive drove a heroic scholarly enterprise, one that makes it possible to re-examine those persecutions in astonishing detail. The project began when Anglican Canon Michael Bourdeaux visited Moscow in the 1950s. He en-

countered the city's surviving Orthodox churches and thereafter made it his life's work to tell the West about the Orthodox and about other religious denominations living under Communist rule.

In 1969 Bourdeaux founded Keston College in a London suburb and later moved it to Oxford. For 20 years, Keston was a centre for the academic study of religion in the Eastern bloc and the primary source to which media and political leaders could turn for accurate and up-to-date information.

Providing reliable news might not seem like an unusual role for the college, but Bourdeaux's access to sources on the ground was astonishing in the context of the closed and paranoid Soviet empire of the time. Keston played a critical role in keeping pressure on the Soviets as they made their stumbling moves toward liberalisation. In 1984, Bourdeaux won the Templeton Prize.

In later years, Keston became the victim of its own success. Although religious liberty issues remain alive in the new Russia, they are nothing like as prominent or as newsworthy as they were in the epic days of the cold war, and the college faded from the headlines. But Keston retained its staggering archive, which in 2007 found a new home at Baylor University in Texas.

Baylor's Keston Center is a massively underexplored resource, which offers rich pickings for researchers in European history or in the larger picture of modern Christianity. Besides the expected books, news clippings and printed records, Keston has complete runs of the various atheist and anti-religious magazines that the Soviets and their puppets ran to combat the influence of faith, with all the related cartoons and posters.

You could spend days just sorting through the visual materials from 1917 onward, particularly the propaganda posters presenting venomous attacks on Christians, Jews and Muslims. Contemplating the visuals alone, one can trace how confidence in socialist-scientific materialism reached its pinnacle with the Soviet space programme and declined through the miserable Brezhnev years.

And then there is the religious samizdat, the underground 'self-published' materials that Soviet believers produced through the darkest years, at risk of imprisonment or worse. Among the thousands of clandestine publications at the Keston Center are petitions, news sheets, and memoirs. One evocative item is the 1960s trial transcript of a Russian Baptist organizer, surreptitiously recorded on fragments of cloth. It's a relic of a terrifying, lost world—but not one that should ever be forgotten.

Philip Jenkins *teaches at Penn State University and is Distinguished Senior Fellow at Baylor University's Institute for Studies of Religion.*

2011 AGM Talk

Ukraine between East and West

by Roland Smith

Roland Smith (left), *British Ambassador to Ukraine 1999-2002, & his wife Katherine, talking to David Gowan, British Ambassador in Belgrade 2003-2006. Both former ambassadors are Keston Council members*

I recently went to see a play at the National Theatre which had originally been produced in 1959. In the programme was an article about 1959, saying that it was a year of transition, of change between past and future. And I am afraid that my reaction was that every year is a year of transition between the past and the future. Perhaps your reaction to my title is rather similar. It is almost impossible to open the guidebook to any country without reading that it is a crossroads, a meeting-point between different cultures. Every country lies between somewhere and somewhere else, indeed every country has something to its east and something to its west. What is so special about Ukraine?

It is a fair question. And yet there is something rather special about Ukraine. The fact is that the country is, and has always been seen as being the land in between, on the edge, on the border. That is what its name means. And I hope to show how much Ukraine has been shaped by its location between East and West, and how very appropriate its name is.

Incidentally, since I referred to the name, let me stress that since the country became independent, it has not been correct to refer to it as 'The Ukraine'—just as one should no longer refer to The Gambia, The Sudan or The Lebanon. It is an obvious sign of ignorance when people in the media use the definite article, as many still do. Of course, in Ukrainian and in Russian, there is in any case no definite article. The equivalent mistake in those languages is to say '*na Ukrainye*', which is what I was taught to say when learning Russian. Many Russians still do say '*na Ukrainye*'. But the correct thing to say, since one is speaking of an independent country, is '*v Ukrainye*'.

This linguistic confusion is just one small sign of the difficulty which many people have had in adjusting to

the fact that the country really is independent. Ukraine proclaimed its independence in August 1991, in reaction to the attempted coup against Gorbachev, so the 20th anniversary of independence has just been celebrated. But when I became ambassador in 1999—the third British ambassador to Ukraine—many people in this country asked me in all seriousness before I went out to Kiev 'Will you be reporting to the ambassador in Moscow?' I hope they would not make the same mistake nowadays, although no doubt Mr Putin would welcome an arrangement of that kind.

Ukraine's frontiers have varied a good deal during its history but within its present boundaries it is the largest country in Europe apart from Russia, with a land area of 223,090 square miles, compared to France's 212,394. The population was estimated earlier this year to be a little over 45,700,000. It peaked in 1993 at a little over 52 million, and has been declining since, currently at about 0.44% per year. It passed below the 50 million mark soon after I arrived as ambassador. The birth rate is about 10.8 per thousand, and the death rate 15.2. Ukraine is bounded in the south by the Black Sea, and in the west by the Carpathians, which are the only significant mountains in the country apart from the mountains of the Crimean peninsula. To the east and north it borders on Russia and then Belarus, while in the west it has frontiers with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova. It is divided more or less in half by the great river Dnieper, which has its source in Russia, and enters Ukraine from Belarus, flows down through Kiev and on through Cherkassy and Dnipropetrovsk before finally emptying itself in the Black Sea. Apart from Kiev and Dnipropetrovsk, the other great cities are Donetsk, Kharkiv, Odessa and Lviv, and in the Crimea Simferopol and Sevastopol. Of all of these, only Lviv is Ukrainian speaking, although Ukrainian is more widely spoken in country areas.

This leads me on to say something more about the linguistic situation. First of all, be in no doubt that Ukrainian is a language, not a dialect. Indeed it has a slightly different alphabet from Russian. It is of course quite closely related to Russian, but no more so than Portuguese to Spanish, or Dutch to German. It is the only official language in Ukraine—there have been several proposals to change that, but its position is guaranteed by the constitution, which is not easily amended. Of course for many Ukrainians, Russian is their first language, even though most Russian-speakers would still call themselves ethnic Ukrainians. People describing themselves as ethnic Russians make up less than 20% of the population. You will sometimes hear it said that the country is sharply divided between a Ukrainian-speaking west and a Russian-speaking east, sometimes even that the division is along the Dnieper—which would make it go straight through Kiev. That is not really true. Many people are comfortable in both languages—it is a common experience in Kiev to go into a shop and address the assistant in one, only to receive a reply in the other. Many Ukrainians speak a curious mixture of Russian and Ukrainian called Surzhik, which is anathema to a lin-

guistic purist, but helps to blur any division. If you go to a meeting with Ukrainians, during the official proceedings they will speak in Ukrainian, but in the coffee break, they will probably speak Russian. So overall, I would say that there is a linguistic divide, but it is not a sharp one, and you cannot draw a clear line.

Cathedral of St Sophia in Kiev

The way in which Ukraine's history is now presented in Ukraine, and how it is taught in Ukrainian schools, is a graphic example of how views of the past can be changed by what is happening in the present. Probably all of you know something about Kievan Rus, and if you were taught something about it, you were most likely taught to see it as an antecedent of modern Russia. But can one in fact equate Rus and Russia? Independence has enabled Ukraine to lay claim to its own past, and to see Kievan Rus as the ancestor of Ukraine. After all, Kiev has not gone anywhere.

It was in Kiev in 988 that the ruler Prince Volodymyr, who had come to the throne in 980, took the momentous decision that he and his people should be baptised as Orthodox Christians. If the chroniclers are to be believed, having come to the conclusion that his empire required a state religion, he in fact hesitated between various possible choices—and the options illustrate rather well the theme of Ukraine between East and West. One was Islam, but Volodymyr rejected it because of the ban on alcohol. The Chronicle quotes Volodymyr as saying: 'Drink is the joy of the Rus, and we cannot exist without that pleasure.' Fact-finding missions were also despatched to the Jews, to the Catholic Germans, and to Constantinople; and it was the reports on Orthodoxy which were the most favourable. So Kievans were sent down to the Dnieper for a mass baptism as Orthodox Christians.

Perhaps the most profound impression on the emissaries had been made by the great cathedral of St Sophia in Constantinople; and Volodymyr's son Yaroslav decided that Kiev too should have a cathedral of St Sophia. It still stands today, with marvellous mosaics and wall-paintings. But after Yaroslav, Kievan Rus disintegrated, and there followed the Mongol invasions

and many centuries in which Ukraine was ruled by others—after the Mongols, the Lithuanians, and then the Poles. From the 14th to the 17th century, most of what is now Ukraine was ruled from Kraków.

In 1648, Bogdan Khmelnitsky led an uprising, and, by winning battles against the Poles, established control of the territory from Lviv to Poltava. He is commemorated today in Kiev by a statue which stands outside St Sophia's. But this was only a fleeting moment of regained independence—Bogdan Khmelnitsky decided that he had to have an ally, and in 1654 swore an oath of allegiance to the Tsar. Ukraine became part of the Tsarist empire, and in the succeeding centuries was known as Little Russia.

In the second half of the 18th century, Russia conquered the steppes north of the Black Sea, and the Crimea. Catherine the Great's Prime Minister Potemkin brought her to see the territories which had been won, and showed her the newly created Black Sea fleet. So all this territory in the south was not historically Ukrainian, or indeed Russian. But many Russians moved there after the annexation, as did some Ukrainians. The Crimea was not in fact part of Ukraine until 1954, when it was given to the Ukrainians by Khrushchev as part of the celebration of the 300th anniversary of Bogdan Khmelnitsky's oath of allegiance. The Crimean Tartars, who had been the previous inhabitants, were expelled from the Crimea by Stalin after the Second World War for alleged collaboration with the Germans—though some began to return under Gorbachev, and many more have done so since independence.

In the 19th century there was a major process of industrialisation in eastern Ukraine. Some British industrialists played an important part in this—Donetsk was originally called Yuzovka, because it was founded by a Welshman, John Hughes, to develop the region's coal and iron resources. Hughes and his collaborators, incidentally, also founded a number of Baptist churches in the area.

During the later years of the First World War, developments in Kiev were considerably different from those in Petrograd and Moscow. After the February 1917 revolution, an independent Rada, or parliament, was established in Kiev, and a man called Hrushevsky became the first president of the new—and as it turned out short-lived—independent country. He was a historian who had written a 10-volume history of Ukraine-Rus, helping to establish the historical basis for a Ukrainian identity. There was no Bolshevik revolution in Kiev. But the independent government was soon overturned by the Red Army, and attempts to fight back relied on co-operation with the Germans. This period gives the setting for Bulgakov's play *The White Guard*. At Versailles, Ukraine failed to establish its claim to independence. West Ukraine, most of which had been part of the Austro-Hungarian empire (under which Lviv was called Lemberg) went to Poland, the rest of the country to Russia.

Under Stalin's nationalities policy, Ukraine became one of the republics

of the USSR. For a while the capital was in Kharkiv, and during this period the use of the Ukrainian language was encouraged. But in the 1930s there was a policy of russification, and also the great famine, which was caused by Stalin's policies, and which was terrible throughout the south of the USSR, but hit Ukraine especially hard. It is now described by Ukrainians as having been an act of genocide, and known as the *holodomor*.

The capital was moved back to Kiev in 1934, and of course in the Second World War, Kiev and the whole of Ukraine were occupied by German forces. After the war, western Ukraine —or according to some, eastern Poland—including Lviv, was transferred from Poland to the USSR, and united with the rest of Ukraine. Some Ukrainian partisans had fought on the German side in the war in a bid for independence—some indeed fought against both the Russians and the Germans—and some went on fighting for several years after the war. I remember once while walking in the Carpathians coming across a small memorial to partisans who had been shot by the NKVD in 1952—and this memorial had fresh flowers on it.

Against this historical background, it is not surprising that under Gorbachev, there was an upsurge in demands for Ukrainian independence. The coup against Gorbachev led immediately to a declaration of independence by Ukraine under President Kravchuk, amid a surge of enthusiasm and optimism about the future. Sadly, hope soon turned to disillusion. This was mainly because of what has happened to the economy. Of course people soon had a better life in some ways, such as freedom to travel. But in the years after independence, most people saw a decline in their standard of living, made worse by hyper-inflation. Initially, many observers in the West thought that independent Ukraine's economic prospects were good, because its fertile soil gave it every chance of re-developing its agriculture, while it also had a great deal of coal, and well-established heavy industries, including important defence industries which had much of the most advanced technology in the Soviet Union. But for several years after independence the economy contracted quite sharply, and there was huge inflation. Many people, especially pensioners, found themselves much poorer.

In the countryside there was the famous black earth, but agricultural production had been depressed for years by collectivisation, and getting rid of the collective farms proved a slow business. Because a collective farm was, legally speaking, owned by its members, each member of the collective had to have some of the land. Agreeing on who should be allocated what was not an easy process anywhere. Delimiting boundaries, and establishing ownership rights, was very complicated. Then, having split the farms up, came the question of merging some of the new small units to make them more viable. Some people, the old and retired members of collectives, were willing enough to sell, but it all took time, and there was also a good deal of corruption and cheating. Nevertheless, progress has been made. Collective farms are no

more. There are some successful large private farms, and agricultural production has increased. This year's harvest is the second largest in Ukrainian history—the largest was in 2008. However, the country is failing to realise its grain export potential because of export duties, which have the effect of keeping domestic prices lower—helping consumers, but harming farmers, and ultimately damaging the economy. And agricultural development is also being hampered by the fact that because of concerns about corruption, and about Ukrainian land being bought up by foreigners, there has been a moratorium on the sale of agricultural land ever since 2001.

The heavy industries inherited by independent Ukraine were hugely dependent on cheap energy supplies, which of course was not a problem within the artificial pricing structures of the former Soviet Union, but became a major problem once Russia was a different country.

Ukraine remains a significant steel producer, but much of the plant is ageing. Demand for the products of the defence industries plummeted after independence. I remember visiting a former missile factory in Dnipropetrovsk where once no Western diplomat would ever have been allowed, but which was desperately trying to adapt to produce trams and tractors, and hoping that it could find customers for them. Ukraine has had some modest successes in defence exports—for example it signed a $2.9 billion dollar deal with Iraq in 2009 for armoured personnel carriers, light military transport planes, and repair of helicopters. But of course total world demand for defence equipment is much lower than it was during the Cold War, and many countries in the West would not want to rely on Ukraine as a supplier.

The energy sector remains full of problems. Ukraine still gets cheap gas from Russia, about 30% below world market prices, under a deal which was struck in 2010 by President Yanukovich in return for an extension of the lease of the Sevastopol base to the Black Sea fleet—a linking of two unrelated issues which was obviously not the way a market economy should operate. But it appears that there is a threat of a new gas war between the two countries. So long as Ukraine depends on Russian gas, and is not willing to pay the world market price for it, it will always remain vulnerable to Russian pressure. Meanwhile Russia has opened a new gas pipeline to Germany under the Baltic, bypassing Ukraine, which means that it is becoming rather easier for the Russians to shut off supplies to Ukraine without totally disrupting supplies to Western Europe. At the same time the structures which operate the Russia-Ukraine gas system remain dubious and opaque, and the whole sector is notoriously corrupt.

Ukraine still has plentiful coal reserves, and some half a million miners. But the coal has become progressively more difficult to extract, because the easier seams nearer the surface have been exhausted. Consequently the coal has become more expensive to mine. Most mines are old and poorly equipped, and the industry's safety record is appalling. Eastern Ukraine, like Durham or South Wales, also has many former mining villages where

the pits have closed. I visited some of these places while I was ambassador, and they are depressing. I met someone in such a village who was trying to sell a flat for $100 and could not find a buyer. The men, unemployed, have largely sought comfort in drink. Only the women desperately try to hold things together.

Nuclear power in Ukraine is of course dogged by the legacy of Chernobyl. Obviously it was the Soviet Union which was responsible for the Chernobyl disaster, but it is Ukraine which has been left with the problem, though with some help from the West.

Economic development in Ukraine could be enormously helped by attracting more foreign investment. There has been some success in that, particularly in the food processing industry. But because the legal framework is uncertain, and corruption widespread, a number of foreign companies have suffered serious setbacks. Doing business of any kind is very difficult in a country where you are not always sure whom you can trust, and where what appears to be a watertight contract may not be upheld by the courts because the judge has been bribed. Earlier this year new anti-corruption legislation was passed, seeking to combat corruption by requiring greater transparency from public officials. But trying to combat such problems by legislation is not easy when the police and the courts, as well as the members of parliament, are widely, and often correctly, themselves perceived as corrupt. Some companies which had gone into Ukraine have pulled out again, and others, seeing this, have taken a look and decided to go elsewhere. The World Bank's Doing Business report for 2011 ranked Ukraine 145th out of 189 countries in terms of ease of doing business.

One of the main reasons why economic development has been patchy has been a lack of political coherence, combined with political as well as economic corruption. To some extent this was inevitable. When a country moves from a Communist to a capitalist system, it requires a whole new set of laws. If at the same time it has adopted democracy, those laws cannot simply be imposed overnight, but have to be adopted by proper parliamentary procedures. And if in the parliament no one party has a majority, and there is no stable coalition, which has been the case during most of Ukraine's existence as an independent state, then persuading people to vote for the new laws involves intricate political bargaining, creating an environment in which corruption can all too easily flourish.

Ukraine made its problems worse, in my view, by adopting the system of having both an elected president, with considerable powers, and an elected parliament, voted for on a different time-table to the presidential elections, and to which the government, but not the president, is responsible. The president has to nominate the prime minister, but the nomination must be accepted by the parliament. This system is not, of course, unique to Ukraine—it has operated in France for many years, and it is also now the one which prevails across Eastern Europe. It is not for me to pass judgement on all those other countries, but certainly in Ukraine it is not a system which has

served the country particularly well. Things are made worse by the fact that, as again was almost inevitable in a post-Communist society, party loyalties have not been deep-rooted. It is commonplace in Ukraine for members of parliament to change their allegiance. Of course there may be cases where this happens through genuine conviction. But there are members who move party several times within the four-year life-time of a parliament. New political parties have been created within parliament by bringing together groups of members originally elected for other parties. What makes all this even odder is that, as in Germany, while half the members of Ukraine's parliament are elected in constituencies, the other half are elected from party lists on a proportional basis—so those members have clearly been chosen not for themselves but for their party. The results of changes of allegiance can be ludicrous. Victor Yushchenko, who later became President, was nominated as Prime Minister by President Kuchma at the end of 1999, after Kuchma had won a second presidential term. Yushchenko's appointment was approved by an overwhelming majority in parliament, with 296 votes in favour and 12 against in the 450-member parliament. Yet only about 16 months later, in April 2001, he had to resign after the same parliament carried a motion of no confidence by 263 votes to 69.

The fluidity of Ukrainian party alignments is partly a consequence of the fact that few of the parties other than the Communist Party, and to some extent the Socialist Party, have any clear ideological or policy basis. Apart from those two parties, the other main contenders in the last elections, in 2007, were not really parties at all in the sense we would understand, but simply vehicles for their leaders, with vacuous names entirely appropriate for the vacuous entities which they described. There were the Party of the Regions, the Julia Tymoshenko bloc, Our Ukraine/People's Self Defence (two parties which had recently merged) and the Lytvyn Bloc.

We should recognise that democracy in Ukraine has not been a total sham. Twice since independence, an elected President who was standing again has been defeated and a new President elected—once in 1993, and again in 2010. The most blatant attempt to manipulate the electoral system, in 2004, led to the Orange Revolution, and a re-run in which Victor Yushchenko defeated Victor Yanukovich.

Sadly, the hopes of the Orange Revolution were not fulfilled, mainly because of the inability of its two main leaders, Victor Yushchenko and Julia Tymoshenko, to work together. The 2010 election was widely judged by international observers to have been free and fair, but developments since then have been very discouraging. The most worrying development of all is that Julia Tymoshenko herself, who was Yanukovych's chief rival for the presidency in 2010, was put on trial in 2011, and on 11 October sentenced to imprisonment for seven years, for alleged abuse of power when signing a gas supply and transit agreement in Russia while she was Prime Minister. This has been a bizarre episode, widely condemned in the West as an abuse of

human rights, but also condemned in Russia, where a foreign ministry statement said that the judgement appeared politically motivated, and had an anti-Russian flavour. Perhaps most bizarrely of all, President Yanukovich himself, who surely could have prevented the trial taking place if he had wanted to, was reported as saying after the sentence that it was 'a sad incident which hampers Ukraine's European integration....It wasn't the final ruling.' Mrs Tymoshenko was previously imprisoned in 2001, soon after having been dismissed as Deputy Prime Minister for Energy, for alleged forging of customs documents and smuggling of gas, but was released on the order of a judge after a few weeks.

Amid all the economic and political twists and turns, the underlying question for Ukraine and its people is always the same: does the country want to become a European democracy with a market economy and the rule of law, or would it prefer to move back closer to Russia, and accept the likely political and economic consequences? Many Ukrainians are attracted by the proposals from Russia, for example in Putin's *Izvestia* article (October 2011), for a Eurasian Economic Union. Ukraine is already, like most of the other former Soviet republics, a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States, but has so far been reluctant to join an Eastern economic grouping.

President Yanukovich has referred to 'Ukraine's European integration', meaning Ukraine's long-proclaimed aspiration to become one day a member of the European Union. Interestingly, Yanukovich, and the present Ukrainian government, continue to proclaim that vision, even though they are widely perceived as much more friendly to Russia than their predecessors, and even though by contrast the goal of NATO membership has been abandoned. Are they serious, and do they understand the potential implications? Is the objective even remotely conceivable?

Ukraine and the European Union have initialled an Association Agreement. But proceeding to the signature of this Agreement requires the approval of all member states, and this is complicated by the imprisonment of Julia Tymoshenko.

But personally, I have never understood why the European Union has persistently refused to accept Ukraine's right to aspire to membership, even though Ukraine is unquestionably a European country—unlike Turkey—and even though, despite all its shortcomings, it has a basically democratic system of government. Ukraine would obviously be a very difficult country for the European Union to absorb, but we are talking about a very long-term process. Turkey's right to eventual membership of the European Union was recognised in the 1960s, and it has not joined yet. An acceptance of Ukraine's right to eventual membership, or at least its right to hope for eventual membership, would send an important signal, and might help to give Ukraine a direction in which to steer.

Giving that sense of direction could be extremely important. For Ukraine

even to begin to become the sort of country where what we think of as normal European standards of accountability and the rule of law apply, what is required is not just particular policy changes by government, but a transformation of the whole of society. People need to change their way of doing business and their way of thinking and behaving, and they need to see an ultimate purpose for that. Probably the most important reason why reforms are so difficult to introduce successfully in Ukraine is the very high level of corruption—a continuation of the corruption which was so rife in the late Soviet period when there was a widespread collapse of moral standards. The foundation for change has to be the strengthening of individual integrity.

It is also very important for Ukrainians to learn more about how Western markets operate, what is the role of the voluntary sector in Western societies, how things can be done differently. And it is important to spread experience of how democracies function. Looking at all the issues, it is clear that a vast process of education is needed. Of course it has already begun, and something has already been achieved. It is a task of profound importance for bringing about the kind of transformation of the country which is needed.

All sorts of links between individuals and organisations in Ukraine and other countries can help. It makes a big difference that so many Ukrainians now live abroad, and so many more have travelled abroad. But much more needs to be done to develop civil society. When I was working in Ukraine, I had the opportunity of seeing many of the non-governmental bodies which first the Know-How Fund and then the Department for International Development were supporting. Some were tiny groups of people operating in just one place, and very dependent on foreign support, and not really equal to the hopes being placed in them. Others were larger, and some managed to operate across the country—such as the Committee of Ukrainian Voters, who worked hard for free and fair elections, and whose representatives, when we took them to Britain to see how we did it, were not slow to point out flaws in our electoral practices. It is very important that there should be more and more such groups. But they have an uphill task.

There is also an important contribution to be made by Ukrainian churches, and by links with them. It is extraordinary how alive the Christian faith is in Ukraine, despite all the efforts which were made by the Soviet Union to destroy it. Just up the road from the British Embassy in Kiev is a striking symbol of what has happened—the Orthodox monastery of St Michael's, originally founded in the 12th century, and later rebuilt in a Baroque style, though with many older features. In the 1930s this building was blown up to make way for a monumental complex of Stalinist palaces for the Ukrainian government. Mainly because of the Second World War, only one of the buildings in the complex was ever completed—the building which now houses the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry. The rest of the site remained empty. After Ukraine's independence, the monastery was rebuilt, and it is now

Kiev's Monastery of the Caves painted by Vasili Vereshchagin (1842-1904)

once again a functioning monastery—during Lent one year, one of the monks gave a series of lectures on Orthodoxy to the British church in Kiev. Of course faith is not primarily about buildings, and a lot of the money for the reconstruction came from the Ukrainian diaspora as a gesture of solidarity with the newly independent state. All the same, St Michael's is a powerful reminder of what Stalin failed to achieve.

Kiev's greatest monastery, the Monastery of the Caves, is an even more impressive sign of the same thing. It was entirely secularised, and turned into a museum, for much of the Soviet period. But at the time of the commemoration of the 1000th anniversary of the Christianisation of Rus, in 1988, the lower part was given back to the Orthodox Church, and today it is the headquarters of the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. Much more important, the caves themselves are thronged with believers who have come on pilgrimage. Tourists can also visit part of the complex, but instinctively talk in whispers, and in places are reduced to silence, because they sense that for many of those around them this is a very holy place. You see people who must have spent most of their lives under Communism kissing the relics with obvious deep reverence.

Churches too have been re-built, and many new Orthodox churches have been constructed in areas of towns and cities which had been developed under Communism (such as the left bank part of Kiev) and therefore had no churches.

In 2001, Pope John Paul II visited Ukraine. The visit was in some ways controversial: Roman Catholics are a small minority in Ukraine, and even including Greek Catholics, who accept the authority of the Pope while following the Orthodox rite, you are still talking about a minority. But the opposition did not come from non-Catholics in general—it came specifically from the Moscow Patriarchate, on the grounds that the Pope was visiting its canonical territory, but not at its invitation. This was an interesting objection, since the Pope had in fact been invited by the President of Ukraine. However, this opposition did not damage the visit, which was a major success, with two open air masses in Kiev and two in Lviv, in each case

one in the Latin rite and one in the Eastern rite of the Greek Catholic Church—the first and I think the only time that John Paul II ever followed this rite. About 200,000 people attended in Kiev—I was one of them—and an estimated 1½ million in Lviv.

Nor is it only the Orthodox and Catholic churches which are active. There have long been Lutherans and Baptists in Ukraine, but since independence, many new Protestant churches have arrived on the scene; and although dismissively described as 'sects' by the Moscow Patriarchate, they have had a very considerable impact, both in attracting believers and in helping to alleviate social problems. Hope Now is a charity which operates in Ukraine and some other countries. Its brand of evangelical Christianity is very different from my own tradition, but I have become a regular supporter because of its obvious impact for good. Here is what it says about itself on its website: 'Hope Now exists to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. A balance of direct evangelism with social action ensures the message of the gospel touches the hearts of young and old, poor and rich, healthy and infirm, free and imprisoned....In 2007 Hope Now divided its work in Ukraine into two quite distinct organisations. The caring ministries such as providing healthcare for children with birth abnormalities, the work in orphanages and internats and for street children and evangelism are retained under the Hope Now banner. The encompassing ministries such as Kompass Park, the Cherkassy Centre for Biblical Studies, Church planting, cycle clubs, student ministries and pre-independence homes now come under the newly formed Kompass Park Education Trust.'

To illustrate the work in a more immediate way, let me quote a story from a recent newsletter: 'At 22, I was condemned to 12 years' hard labour. I was sent to a prison camp in Cherkassy. Here, convicted believing brothers came to tell me that God is love and loves everyone. Soon I recognised a difference between the grey, lifeless, emotionless faces of the ordinary prisoners and those who called themselves "brothers in Christ".... Months later I accepted Christ as my own Saviour, and in June 2006 I was baptised.' Similar things of course happen in prisons in other countries, including the UK, and indeed they were not unknown in Soviet times, as testified by Solzhenitsyn. The important point for our present purposes is to recognise that evangelical Christianity is having a social impact in today's Ukraine.

The impact of religion on political life can be seen in some surprising ways. Not long after I arrived in Kiev, I was invited to the launch of a book of sermons by Patriarch Filaret of Kiev—the head of the Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate. I was not surprised to see the Polish ambassador there—no doubt invitations had gone to all ambassadors, and he and I were the ones who accepted. But it was more of a surprise that among those who gathered for the occasion was the then Ukrainian Foreign Minister, Boris Tarasyuk. I tried and failed to imagine the then British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, going along to the launch of a book of sermons by Archbishop George Carey. Of course Boris Tarasyuk was not interested only in Fi-

laret's exegesis of 1 Thessalonians. He wanted to mark his support for Filaret because Filaret's split with Moscow, and the establishment of a Ukrainian patriarchate, were seen by many Ukrainians as flowing naturally from the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state. Equally, the continued insistence of the Moscow Patriarchate that Ukraine is part of its canonical territory has obvious political overtones. It is not surprising that support for both the Kiev Patriarchate and for the Greek Catholic Church is strongest in the west of Ukraine, which is also the area where the Ukrainian language and support for Ukrainian independence has always been strongest, whereas support for the Moscow Patriarchate is strongest in the east of the country.

That there are these political overtones, however, does not alter the fact that in today's Ukraine, the churches are well-established independent actors supported by millions of people, and at least in the case of the Orthodox and Catholic churches with deep historical roots. This makes them quite unlike any other non-governmental organisations in the country. The existence of so many different churches in Ukraine with varying agendas also contributes to making society more pluralist. The potential is there for the churches to play a major role in the transformation of wider Ukrainian society.

The churches have the great advantage that they exist, have for the most part existed for a very long time, and are to a great extent trusted. It is also true that they are not necessarily bastions of Western liberal values. The Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, in particular, views the West with considerable suspicion. There are also extraordinary superstitions to be found—many people will tell you, for example, about the satanic significance of the number 666. Nevertheless, the churches are for the most part filled with people of integrity. They teach their followers that it is wrong to cheat and lie and steal—very simple moral principles, which if practised by everyone in the country would enormously benefit the economy. Many of them are also involved in social work, which brings new perspectives and is quite different from what happened under Communism. Moreover, they can bring together groups who can then also become involved in the wider strengthening of civil society. This happened on a very wide scale in 19th and early 20th century Britain, and it can happen, and is beginning to happen, in 21st century Ukraine.

In many ways, history and geography dealt a poor hand to Ukraine. The country had a glorious early history, but then centuries of being ruled from elsewhere. Now, after the Soviet Union's collapse, it is an internationally recognised independent entity. It has perhaps the best chance that it has ever had. There is no reason for the country to renounce any part of its rich cultural heritage, or to have bad relations with any of its neighbours. But if Ukraine could succeed in becoming a stable and liberal European democracy, and one day a member of the European Union, that would be of enormous benefit to her people, and to Europe as a whole. This may sound too Western a view, but it is certainly one which is shared by most of the best Ukrainians I know.

A Keston Member Recollects

The Very Reverend John Arnold

First Impressions

In November-December 1961 I was working as an interpreter for the World Council of Churches at its Third Assembly in New Delhi, where the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) first became a member. The delegation were so pleased to find someone, who loved their church and spoke their language, that I was invited to travel back with them to Moscow for my first visit to the Soviet Union. I sent a telegram to my parish in Sheffield and went to the bazaar, where I purchased a leopard skin hat (of which I am now ashamed, but which was then acceptable), a pair of goatskin gauntlets and a set of long woollen underwear, left over from the Raj. We flew in an old Lockheed Constellation up the Khyber Pass and over the Himalayas. The temperature in the Punjab had been a bearable 35º. The steward announced that we were approaching Moscow, where the temperature was –20º. I went to the lavatory, put on everything I had, buttoned up my cassock and scarcely took anything off for the next ten days except to sleep.

I got to know a friendly staff interpreter from the Patriarchate, named Mikhail, who was, like all educated Soviet citizens, well acquainted with the works of Walter Scott, Charles Dickens and Jack London. I said to him, 'The trouble is, you read Dickens and think that that is what England is like now.'

In the evening we went from the cold, grey and empty streets of the city into the Cathedral Church of the Epiphany, warm, colourful, bright with candles and icons, teeming with the packed bodies of the faithful, alive with both public worship and private piety. Everything was happening at once and I suddenly realised that, forbidden to have any open manifestation in Soviet society, the whole life of the church was literally centred on the liturgy. The Eucharist was being celebrated at the altar. A baptism was taking place in one aisle, a wedding in another and a funeral, with open coffin, at the back. As a priest, I was taken behind the Holy Doors, where I found the aged and rather confused Patriarch Alexi I holding a meeting with his diocesan clergy. I was somewhat taken aback, when he immediately asked me how old I was and if I was married. Mikhail later explained that, if I had been 30 and unmarried, I ran the risk of being consecrated bishop on the spot, such was the shortage then. We returned to the body of the church. A young bishop was preaching on his little round carpet in the nave. Suddenly the doors were flung open and, in a flurry of noise and snow, a crazed demoniac rushed in, made his way through the crowd of worshippers and threw himself at the feet of the bishop, who blessed him in an off-hand manner and continued with his sermon. He immediately calmed down and was

passed back through the congregation, who were stroking him, murmuring gentle words of comfort, offering him a kind of corporate motherly bosom such as only Christian, not Soviet, Russian womanhood could provide. I said to Mikhail, 'This is just like that scene in Dostoyevsky, where…' and he interrupted, 'The trouble is, you read Dostoyevsky and you think that that is what Russia is like now!'

Mixed Emotions

It is an unwritten rule that one interpreter never corrects another in public. When I was accompanying Archbishop Donald Coggan on his visit to Russia in 1977, he pressed his hosts hard, live on television, about the fate of an imprisoned Baptist leader, about whom we had been briefed by Keston College. He asked how far from home he was and was told, 'Three thousand kilometres.' This was translated by the official interpreter as, 'Three hundred kilometres.' I wrestled with my conscience, not wishing to break a professional code but unwilling to let this crude falsehood pass; and I blurted out, 'Three thousand kilometres.' When we saw the recording, I was horrified to see how strong was the interplay of conflicting emotions on my face. No wonder I have never had a career in television.

Lovers' Meeting

Some years later, when I was Dean of Rochester, I went on behalf of Archbishop Runcie to visit the ROC together with my friend Peter Moore, the Dean of St Alban's. The ROC was disquieted by the prospect of the Church of England ordaining women priests; our Archbishop wanted to raise some difficult questions about the treatment of dissidents in the Soviet Union. He needed to keep a low profile, so he decided to send two deans, rather than two bishops. Peter was opposed to the ordination of women; I was in favour, and between us we hoped to present a synoptic picture of the state of play.

Because of the delicacy of our mission, we could not go as guests of the ROC. Our ambassador graciously offered to host us instead. When I was at Heathrow, waiting to board BA 007 (sic) to Moscow, a beautiful woman came up to me and murmured languorously in a deep alto voice, 'Are you the man I am looking for?' This was the wife of the Military Attaché, returning from holiday and detailed to look after me. After passing effortlessly through customs and passport control, we were driven to the (old) Embassy, where I was comfortably lodged in a first floor room with a spectacular view of the floodlit Kremlin and (courtesy, no doubt, of the KGB) a buxom and amiable chambermaid.

When we had completed our business in Moscow, Peter and I departed for Leningrad. We soon noticed that we had stepped off the magic carpet of privilege into the squalor of internal flights for ordinary Soviet citizens. Take-off was delayed and a noisy row broke out, when it transpired that there was an extra passenger on board. After repeated checking and re-checking of papers the culprit was discovered, sitting with his girl-friend, who did have a ticket, just in front of

us. The large and intimidating Chief Stewardess launched into a tirade, the likes of which I have never heard before or since. She berated him with every known, and indeed to me unknown, insult in the Russian language. Then she looked at him and his companion in a motherly way and said, 'Well, you're young; you are in love. You can sit in the coat cupboard at the front.' So the young lover flew free to Leningrad, a living example of the paradox, that in Soviet Russia, where the simplest things were impossible, difficult things could be astonishingly possible.

Journeys End

Then in 1986, when I was a member of the delegation of the British Council of Churches, I went with Dr David Coffey of the Baptist Union to visit the wife of another imprisoned Baptist leader, again on the basis of information supplied by Keston. We hailed a cab and I gave the address, but, as a simple subterfuge, with a different number for the block of flats, thinking we could complete our journey unobtrusively on foot.

When we reached the street in a glum suburb of Moscow, no such address could be found. In fact, it corresponded to a gap in the buildings for an electricity sub-station. I could see the block we wanted, so I paid off the cabdriver and said that that would do; but he insisted on taking us to the right address and a small crowd gathered, all trying to be helpful. Far from concealing our destination, I had only succeeded in drawing attention to ourselves. No wonder I have never had a career as a secret agent, either. When we entered the flat we saw on the wall opposite a picture of the prisoner framed with a stencilled crown of thorns. His impoverished wife insisted, despite our protests, on feeding us. She told us harrowing details of his life in the *gulag*, but said that he enjoyed the respect of the other prisoners and even the protection of the leader of the gang of homosexual criminals, used by the authorities to rape and brutalise the 'politicals'. We prayed together and then David and I made our way back, this time to the right address.

On the banks of the Oka

During that visit I found myself one day, like Solzhenitsyn and many others, walking 'on the banks of the Oka', a tributary of the Moscow River in the heart of Holy Russia.

There I met and started talking with a very old woman, clothed in black, bent in body but alert in mind and spirit and with a face like a wrinkled apple. I remember asking myself, if she was 90 years old in 1986, what she had witnessed in the course of a long life. She pointed to a disused and overgrown cemetery with a ruined chapel across a shallow ravine. 'There lie our dead,' she said, 'and the villagers are not permitted to tend their graves; but they pass by continually, bow, cross themselves and weep (*preklonyátsya, kreshchátsya i pláchut*).' Pushkin himself could not have written a more plangent or elegiac line.

Cardinal Kazimierz Świątek

by Michael Bourdeaux

The altar was prepared for communion, with a clean cloth carefully laid out, but the church was dilapidated, and there were only about 30 old women in the expectant congregation. A man, young looking, but gaunt of figure, came in and stood by a pillar. An old man hobbled from the vestry and placed a chasuble and chalice on the altar, then rang the sacristy bell to signal the start of the mass. The *babushki* stood up, but no priest appeared. One of the women made the sign of the cross, announced what Sunday it was and began to read the introductory prayers. There was no priest!

The year was 1954. The man standing against the pillar had just returned to Pinsk, in what was then the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, having been released from almost ten years in the *gulag*. Cardinal Kazimierz Świątek, who died on 21 July 2011 aged 96, was that man. Bearing still the marks of his suffering, he returned to the city where he had briefly served as a young priest from his ordination in April 1939 up to his arrest by the NKVD two years later.

Fr Świątek went into the vestry after the priestless mass to speak to the old man and takes up the story in his own words (from his Prison Diary): 'It turned out that six years ago the cathedral's parish priest was arrested and condemned to 25 years in prison. I asked if they wanted a priest. "Yes", he responded, but they didn't know where to find one. I then said that I was a priest and had just been freed from a Soviet *gulag*. This is how I began my service as a pastor of souls.'

Kazimierz Świątek was born to Polish parents in Valga, Estonia, in what was then the Russian Empire in October 1914. As political changes overwhelmed the region, his father enlisted in the Polish army to fight the Soviets, but was killed. His widow moved with Kazimierz to Pinsk, which was then in independent Poland, and it was there that he assimilated the traditional Catholicism of the region and went to its seminary.

He served briefly in the parish of Pruzhany after his ordination in 1939, but disaster was about to assail him, worse for a priest than for millions of his fellow sufferers in the region. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact divided Poland and Pinsk was absorbed into the Soviet Union (Belorussia). In April 1941 the Soviets sentenced him to death without trial, but after two months in a condemned cell he escaped as the invading Nazi forces conquered the region. He returned to Pruzhany to continue his priestly service, but his relief was only temporary. As the war tilted the other way, the Soviets returned and this time (December 1944) his sentence was to ten years.

Young, strong and fit, he survived nine years of slave labour as a logger in the Siberian taiga of the Vorkuta prison complex. When not working he was isolated from other prisoners for many years so that he could not celebrate

mass for them. Some new Catholic prisoners smuggled in hosts, which he preserved in a matchbox. Using a ceramic cup, he celebrated Easter mass in a laundry, surrounded by clouds of steam, but with a handful of the faithful present.

On another such occasion, at Christmas, a guard with a rifle and bayonet at the ready broke in. When Fr Świątek offered him the host, he dropped his weapon and allowed the mass to continue. However, next day Fr Świątek was summoned to the commandant and sent to an even bleaker region further north.

The brief Prison Diary (available on the internet) is one of the many spiritual classics from the persecuted church which has remained virtually unknown, even to the Catholic world. Yet the heroism of such people—women, as well as men—led not only to the survival but also the revival of religious belief under persecution and would, eventually, become a factor in the collapse of Communism.

When he took up the post of parish priest after his release, the only cleric in what had been a great cathedral in Pinsk, his troubles continued, but he performed his ministry with unflinching loyalty to the Church. Although 1954, a year after the death of Stalin, was supposedly a better time, the Soviet authorities interrogated and threatened him for five months before finally giving him a license to serve as a priest. Outside Lithuania, now under Soviet control too, his was one of the few Catholic churches open on Soviet territory, and he often reflected that his parish stretched from the River Bug in the west to the Pacific Ocean. People sometimes travelled literally thousands of miles to worship in this cathedral. Local churches had almost all been closed, so he travelled widely to celebrate mass secretly in private apartments. Beads of breadcrumbs were often used for rosaries.

Fr Świątek's ministry, frequently interrupted by KGB interrogation, remained virtually unknown to the wider world over the next 37 years until the collapse of the Soviet Union, but he had already been recognised by Pope John Paul II. He became a bishop and then, in 1991, Archbishop of now-independent Belarus (the diocese of Minsk-Mogilev). Now in his late seventies, he undertook the reconstruction of the church in the whole country—that meant endless rebuilding, as well as establishing an administration from scratch (the Russian Orthodox Church had, all this time, been granted more latitude and eventually a degree of protection by Moscow). Having suffered virtual martyrdom and survived, he inspired immense personal devotion wherever he went.

In 1994 the Pope proclaimed him Cardinal at the age of 80 and it was only at 91 that he resigned his office, while remaining a figurehead as Apostolic Administrator of his old diocese of Pinsk. He held this post until June 2011, when he retired after an illness. Stalin once asked, in scorn, 'How many legions has the Pope?' The ministry of Cardinal Świątek provides the answer.

[Reprinted with kind permission from the *Guardian*, 26 July, 2011.]

Jiri Kaplan

by Janice Broun

With the death of Jiri Kaplan at the age of 86 in October 2011, five years after that of his wife Marie, a long link between the Czechoslovak church resistance and Keston was broken.

Jiri Kaplan

The Kaplans were first call for many who smuggled books unavailable there—titles by Havel, for instance—and who left, as I did, with copies of the invaluable *Informace o Cirkvi* tucked inside our trousers—'just in case the STB paid a visit.' They welcomed everyone at their regular Taizé evenings, even plain clothes STB. 'Keston was such a precious contact,' said Jiri.

The Kaplans were an amazing, talented couple, able to communicate in several languages. They organised summer camps, which came under the category of banned religious activities, for a hundred youngsters each year in the Sumava mountains. They were always hospitable—I stayed with them on my last visit in 1999. 'It was so important to open Christian homes when the church was in such difficulties. When people have problems they often meet others who can help them,' Jiri explained. 'One must be sensitive, observe, sometimes remain silent. I have seen miracles, both small and great.' They were in the thick of the unofficial church 'underground', providing proscribed facilities, an uncensored religious press, and translated religious books from abroad. This came at a cost.

In 1979 Jiri and a hundred others were arrested. Most were released in three days, but he was under investigation in prison for three months. 'Un peu de douleur, mais aussi une chose magnifique! It was an experience which strengthened me for life. I felt balanced. When interrogated, I always smiled.' His case was dropped. Jiri added:

> 'Publicity abroad saved me—like Amnesty, German TV. There was a large photo and article in *Il Sabbat*o by eight Italian friends from Communione e Liberazione; we met when they were students in Sumava in 1968. We were an invincible communion! Then they demanded I resign my job to avoid publicity. I refused. I was told I would be sacked, but I wasn't.

Several times my interrogator asked for the return of 80 books, cassettes, correspondence... Six others, mainly priests, were kept in prison. After three years my case was closed.'

But the underground press carried on undeterred, and it was not hidden away in the Sumava. Margaret Conway, who remembered the Kaplans well, recalled how when their daughter guided her and her son from Wenceslas Square through the old town along a busy thoroughfare, she shuddered as they passed a high office building: 'My father is at work up there,' she explained.

After the collapse of Communism, Cardinal Miroslav Vlk involved Jiri in the lustration process and asked him to examine the files of the State Bureau of Investigation of Church Affairs, which was still active in 1999. Leading Catholic dissident Vaclav Benda, whose essays were published in Keston's journal, directed the investigations until his death in 1998. Jiri explained:

'Vaclav Maly, a close friend of ours, recognised the STB officer who beat him up and we managed to charge him. (Maly is now assistant bishop of Prague.) But it is difficult to bring charges—they always deny it! It was depressing for me to see all this misery, what people were capable of doing to gain advantages, to see how they exploited the weaknesses of priests, tightened the screws on those who were feeble so as to manipulate them. I found some very tragic cases of priests who collaborated, three for long term, for cash. They are dead now... The Cardinal appealed to clergy to confess to him personally but few did. It is perhaps too painful for the hierarchy to admit collaboration.'

Slovak activist Fr Anton Shrolec, another close friend of the Kaplans, told me that the Slovak Archbishop of Trnava, Jan Sokol, whose father was a Communist, had been pressurised into collaborating.

Jiri went on:

'I read my dossier. About 20 had informed on me. I should leave their names for examination to the family eventually, but I can't do it—it would only increase hatred. Lustration will be demanded again and again. It is essential to confront each case, to produce a balanced judgement and then close it with a black line—but that is impossible, for they live on in people's souls. Hundreds of thousands of families were exposed to heavy oppression during the collectivisation campaign. We don't know how many people died... Who will take responsibility for listing all these tragic stories? There were also several cases of demolition of churches in Sudentenland where Communist ministries had military zones.'

Both Jiri and Marie promoted ecumenism. Brought together in warm contacts with Protestant dissidents through their active resistance to Communism, they experienced a beneficial 'cross fertilisation' of ideas and theology. Their friends included Czech Brethren

Milos Rejchrt, Jan Dus, leading theologian Jakub Trojan, and a Hussite lady bishop. So after living through a period of euphoria immediately after the Velvet Revolution, when Jiri became Catholic representative for the Ecumenical Council of Churches, they became deeply disillusioned when they saw key figures in their church reverting to a pre-Vatican II mentality and insisting that only Catholics had the plenitude of truth.

Dean Wolf of the newly reintegrated Catholic faculty of Prague's Charles University was notorious for trying to protect his students from any threat from 'heretical' theology. His faculty and the other Catholic faculties refused a generous gift to restock libraries from German and Austrian Catholics. (In Prešov Greek Catholic seminary I met one Slovak Jesuit, Fr Georgi Novotny, who had worked in Canada and Scotland for a time and would have welcomed the books to fill his empty shelves!) Jiri was relieved when Cardinal Vlk replaced Wolf. He greatly valued the annual Council of Churches conference when about a hundred people, Czechs and Slovaks, met to discuss their key concerns, welcoming theologians from the outside world.

I noted Jiri with his viola, off to play in a quartet. The Kaplans were a talented family. On my first visit I handed over a moving akathist, a prayer of thanksgiving by Fr Georgi Petrov who perished in a labour camp. I had discovered it in the Italian *Russia Cristiana* and translated it into English. Marie handed it to one of her daughters, and an hour later during the Taizé worship I recognised the chant, now in Czech.

By my last visit Jiri, like many other Christians who had struggled heroically to maintain their faith and provide some sort of church life, was having to come to terms with the fact that a younger generation did not necessarily accept the values he and Marie had taught. Monika, their youngest daughter, a nurse, was just moving out of her room, which I had been given, to live with her boyfriend.

Keston AGM

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The Hare Krishna Movement in Soviet and Post-Communist Russia

by Maria Petrova

This article examines the position of the non-mainstream (alternative) religious movements in Russia during the Soviet and post-Communist periods, and compares the policies towards these movements adopted by the Soviet and post-Soviet authorities, as well as by some groups and organisations which influenced public opinion. The development of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in Russia is used as a case study. The following primary sources have been used: documents from the Keston Archive (Soviet and perestroika periods); publications of contemporary anti-cult and Orthodox Church leaders; and material from the Russian press and popular internet sites (post-Soviet period).

The Russian Hare Krishna movement can be traced back to 1973, when the founder of ISKCON Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada paid an official visit to Moscow at the invitation of Professor G. Kotovsky, an Oriental scholar from the USSR Academy of Sciences. Swami Prabhupada planned to give a lecture about the tenets of his religion to an interested audience of academicians, but the idea, not surprisingly, was turned down by the Soviet authorities. Nevertheless, by the time he was due to leave the Soviet Union, Prabhupada had acquired a devoted follower, to whom he managed to convey much of the philosophy and beliefs of Krishna Consciousness. This was Anatoli Pinyaev, a young man who became the first propagator of the new faith in the USSR and whom a few members of the Hare Krishna movement managed to visit over the next ten years. He also travelled to many different parts of the country, where he preached and taught what he learnt from his spiritual masters. The 1979 International Book Fair in Moscow was an important milestone in the dissemination of the movement in Russia: David V. Jakupko, a Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT) representative, managed to set up a BBT stall and introduced the main books of Swami Prabhupada to thousands of Muscovites. This was the moment when the Hare Krishna movement began to gain substantial influence in the USSR.

Hare Krishna underground groups functioned not only in the main Russian cities, such as Moscow and Leningrad, but also in other parts of the country—in Siberia, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia and the Baltic republics. In 1980, two Hare Krishna leaders, Shri Vishnupada and Kirtiraga dasa, came to the Soviet Union and attempted to organise a *kirtan* (ritual Hare Krishna chanting) and a lecture in Riga. Those taking part were dispersed by the police and KGB, and the foreign guests were advised to leave the country. Hare Krishna followers received their first publicity in 1981 in the pages of the journal *Kommunist*: a

KGB agent Semyon Tsvigun stated that 'the three greatest threats to the Soviet Union were Western culture, pop music and Hare Krishna.' Later this was followed by further negative articles about the movement in the Soviet press, in, for example *Sotsialisticheskaya Industria* ('A yogi with the blue eyes or the real face of the Krishna followers' by A. Motsov and S. Sadashenko, 24 January 1982), *Nauka i Religia* ('This strange world Hare Krishna' by L. Timoshin, No 1 & 2, 1983) and *Nedelya* ('Hidden by the blossoming lotus' by V. Kassis and L. Kolosov, 30 May and 5 June, 1985). In 1981 the Hare Krishna congregation in Moscow, led by Vladimir Kritsky and Sergei Kurkin, attempted to register as an official religious group (an unregistered religious group was considered illegal in the Soviet Union), but its application was rejected by the Council for Religious Affairs on the grounds that the Hare Krishna movement was an 'ideological deviant' and that 'there was only one ideology permitted in the Soviet Union, and that was Marxism-Leninism.'[1] Both Kritsky and Kurkin were soon arrested and charged under article 227 of the RSFSR Criminal Code (infringement of the person and rights of citizens under the guise of performing religious rites).[2]

In the early and mid-1980s several dozen Hare Krishna followers were imprisoned or confined to mental hospitals.[3] (The exact number varies in different sources at different periods, but in general the number was not less than 50 or possibly more). The question of timing is important: we can see that the repressions started in the early 1980s, almost a decade after the teaching of Hare Krishna had been introduced in the USSR. This time gap led opponents of the Hare Krishna movement to suspect that Hare Krishna followers and their leaders (who allegedly managed to obtain visas and penetrate the country with surprising ease) were, in fact, involved with the KGB, 'who pinned certain hopes on them, which for some reason were not justified'.[4] However, the followers themselves attribute the start of repression to the policy of the new General Secretary of the Communist Party, Yuri Andropov, who increased religious persecution. In an interview Vladimir Kritsky stated that Leonid Brezhnev, the former General Secretary, 'at least had enough reason to understand that the principles of morality, public opinion and humanism should not be violated openly.'[5] The trials of Hare Krishna followers started soon after Brezhnev's death.

Offences attributed to the believers included propagating vegetarianism, encouraging the recital of 'mantras' and prayers (which allegedly had a detrimental effect on the physical and mental health of converts), luring people into the illusory world of mysticism, anti-Soviet activities and parasitism, away from 'socialist reality', the Soviet way of life and the class struggle. In one trial the indictment claimed that Hare Krishnas had developed a political programme, which aimed to change the social structure and state system in the USSR and to introduce a universal state, based on the sect's teaching and ancient Indian caste system.[6] The press hinted at Hare Krishna contact with Western secret services, such as the CIA, and involvement in espionage.[7] Even more absurd

accusations were made: for example during one trial the prosecution seriously considered the claim of a mentally retarded woman who said that some Hare Krishna believers had wanted to sacrifice her underage child.[8]

Hare Krishna followers suffered greatly in prison because of their religious beliefs and their special diet. The Keston Archive contains numerous records of beatings, torture, force-feeding (with raw eggs and other forbidden products), psychiatric abuse, back-breaking labour and other human rights violations. A few so-called 'mental patients' died from huge doses of psychotropic drugs and insulin. The overwhelming majority of Soviet Hare Krishna followers were relatively young, many with higher education, and belonged to intellectual circles.[9] This may have been one of the reasons for the state's intense animosity. Soviet ideology after all portrayed religion as a kind of anachronism which was the prerogative of elderly, ignorant people. Many imprisoned Hare Krishnas had children, who were used to exert psychological pressure on their parents; many families faced threats that their children would be taken into care. One victim, a 37 year-old mother of two, Olga Kiseleva, a poet and Moscow university graduate, was tried and sentenced when she was nine months pregnant; she gave birth in prison, and the baby died soon afterwards in an orphanage. This case outraged many academics and defenders of human right in the USSR and aroused public concern abroad; evidence of this are the many articles in the Western press – the *Daily Telegraph*, *Sunday Morning Herald* and Radio Liberty reports.[10] Despite severe persecution Hare Krishna followers always felt part of a powerful tradition (Gaudiya Vaishnava) and the international Hare Krishna movement. Furthermore, Soviet prisoners of conscience, their families and friends fought back: they alerted the public and wrote numerous letters of protest to the Soviet authorities, including President Gorbachev, and to foreign leaders such as President Reagan and his wife, President Rajiv Gandhi, the Pope, and the Conference for the Investigation of Psychiatric Abuse in the Soviet Union.[11]

With the advent of perestroika the situation began to change. One by one the Hare Krishna prisoners were released and rehabilitated, and in 1988 the first Hare Krishna group was officially registered in Moscow. Later further groups were registered in St Petersburg, Kiev, Minsk, Riga, Samara, Yaroslavl', Ufa, Perm, Ekaterinburg, Novossibirsk, Yerevan, Tbilisi, Baku, Vladivostok and other cities. In 1989 a large group of former detainees was even allowed to go on a pilgrimage to India. In 1990 the Moscow mayor allocated an old two-storey building to Hare Krishnas who repaired it and used it as a temple. New temples, communes, Vedic research centres and education centres were established during the 1990s. Indeed this was a fruitful period for ISKCON: the movement was able to preach and publish, while its radio station, Krishnaloka, broadcast round the clock. The number of followers who received theological training and regularly took part in preaching, charity work and book distribution increased from 3000 in 1997 to 11,000 in 2004, with the approximate number involved in the

movement reaching 100,000. In the 1990s Hare Krishnas ran a charity called 'Food for Life' which involved travelling to conflict zones or disaster areas and distributing hot vegetarian food. Their work was greatly appreciated and received positive feedback.[12] Opponents in the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), however, insisted that Hare Krishnas did not aim to help the poor, but rather to spread their 'idol-food,' first offered to the pagan god Krishna, thus making people break the rules of their religion (Christians, Muslims and Jews were forbidden to eat this type of food).

The suppression of religion and any kind of ideological dissent is typical of totalitarian regimes. The general view today is that in post-Communist Russia there is religious freedom and that the time when believers were incarcerated in prisons and mental hospitals is over. However, the current position of non-mainstream religious groups in general, and of Hare Krishna followers in particular, is not at all simple or problem-free, and proves that any idea about religious freedom in Russia is at least premature. Moreover, clear parallels can be drawn between the persecution of some non-mainstream religious groups during the Soviet period and the hostile attitude towards them of the so-called anti-cult movement within the ROC and of some Russian authorities, largely influenced by the Church. The methods used to discredit such religious groups and the accusations directed against them by the Orthodox and anti-cult activists, as well as the style, tone and even the vocabulary of these statements, are strikingly similar to those of their Marxist-Leninist counterparts. Today's anti-cult activists, in fact, repeat the arguments used by the propagandists of the supposedly alien atheist ideology of the Soviet era. It is interesting to examine the position of non-mainstream religious groups in the context of changing religious policy and legislation on religion in post-Communist Russia. A keen interest in all forms of religion was noticeable in Russia immediately after perestroika and especially after the adoption of the liberal law 'On Freedom of Conscience,' passed in 1990. The law proclaimed freedom of religion as an 'inalienable right' for all citizens of Russia, who could now enjoy the right to practice any religion and to establish religious organisations. All religions and religious associations were proclaimed 'equal before the law'. The law also banned those executive and administrative bodies which had previously been used to control religion. These changes resulted in the immediate numerical growth of religious organisations, a drastic increase in the activities of foreign missionaries, and a revival of interest in national history and religions among Russians and non-Russians alike. Initially the new law was enthusiastically welcomed by both Russian society and various religious confessions and institutions, including the Moscow Patriarchate.

However, this period of relative religious freedom was short-lived. From the mid-1990s concern about the new 'sects' and 'cults' posing a threat to society and the state, and destroying the 'historically established ethno-religious balance of Russia' began to be expressed increasingly often;[13] they threatened to destroy the national and

cultural identity of the Russian people. The parents, family members and friends of people involved in these movements were among the first to object to non-traditional religious movements: they were mainly concerned about the psychological effects on the converts, and the influence the new religions had on their personal lives, careers and family relationships. With little information and no support from the state, groups of parents soon found help in the ROC which became a powerful enemy of the non-mainstream religious movements.

When the collapse of Communism led to an identity crisis and an ideological vacuum, Russian Orthodoxy, which in the past had been closely linked to Russian spiritual and cultural tradition, appealed to many people. Indeed, for many Russians, Russian Orthodoxy became a symbol of their cultural and national identity. The growing authority of the ROC coincided with the strengthening of the Church's position within the state, while the attitude of the authorities towards the Church to a great extent depended on public opinion. Thus, both state leaders and prominent politicians sided with the ROC in order to enhance their authority within society and routinely emphasised their friendly relationship with the Orthodox hierarchy. In these circumstances, it is no surprise that the ROC has tried to maintain its superior position and has treated successful non-mainstream religious movements as dangerous competitors, whose allegedly pernicious impact on the souls of Russian people has to be annihilated.

In addition to Orthodox clergy, former members of non-mainstream religious groups and their families and friends, the Russian 'anti-cult' movement is also supported by some public figures, writers, scholars, journalists and psychiatrists who are close to ROC circles and fully support Orthodox views.[14] Among the most active ideologists of the anti-cult movement are Deacon Andrei Kuraev, author of many books and articles, and Aleksandr Dvorkin, a *religioved* (specialist on religion) who lived and worked for a number of years in Europe and the US and was associated with Western 'anti-cult' circles. In 1993 Dvorkin set up the main Russian anti-cult organisation, *Tsentr Sviashchennomuchenika Irineia Lionskogo* (The St Irenaeus of Lyon Information Centre or SILIC). At about the same time he enriched the classification of religion in Russia with a new term, 'totalitarian sect'. According to Igor Kanterov, another *religioved*, the roots of this term can be found in its rather sinister connotations, uniting as it does the traditionally negative understanding of the word 'sect' and the word 'totalitarian', which is currently associated in the public consciousness with concentration camps, forced labour and a failing economic system.[15]

In general the introduction of the terms 'totalitarian sect' and 'destructive cult,' which are never used in academic discourse because of their vagueness and absence of clear criteria, has helped give non-mainstream religious movements the image of an enemy, a threatening 'other'. Meanwhile, the ROC and anti-sect organisations have published dozens of brochures, which describe the 'demonic' and 'satanic' character of non-mainstream religious movements and

accuse their leaders and members of committing horrible crimes.[16] The facts and figures given in these sources are often exaggerated; one brochure claims that around 3-5 million Russians are involved in 'totalitarian sects' and are responsible for kidnappings, murders, torture, sexual crimes, fraud, extortion and even the organisation of mass disorder.[17] No record of such criminal activity has ever been made. In December 1994 the Moscow Patriarchate's Holy Synod announced that 'quasi Christian sects, neo-paganism and occultism'—which included a number of movements and ISKCON—were destructive, false and anti-Christian.

This was the background against which the new law 'On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations,'—aiming to prevent foreign proselytism and to introduce restrictions for a number of religious organisations—was being prepared. The law was finally adopted in September 1997. It drew a clear distinction between the first-rate religions (often referred to as 'traditional' or mainstream, i.e. Russian Orthodoxy, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism) with Orthodox Christianity granted special status, and second-rate religions—the so-called 'non-traditional' or, in this article, 'non-mainstream' religions (mostly newly created religions, or those whose historical links with Russia were weaker). The 1997 law seriously restricted the rights of the latter.

The adoption of the law encouraged anti-cult activities all over Russia. In 1998 Dvorkin published a book entitled *Introduction to the Study of the Sects* which was based on a course of lectures he gave at the Russian Orthodox St Tikhon Institute. The book (reprinted and revised in 2000 and 2007) described so-called totalitarian sects: Dvorkin's list included many religious denominations—Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons and Scientologists, Hare Krishnas, Brahma Kumaris, Theology, various New Age groups and even Herbalife.

In March 2000 a self-proclaimed Krishna follower from the Krasnoyarsk *oblast* committed the brutal ritual killing of an Orthodox priest, Fr Grigori Yakovlev,[18] while a few months later another Krishna follower was arrested in Moscow on charges of child abuse.[19] These tragic cases caused justified public outrage and served as proof for the ROC of the savage and fanatical character of the Hare Krishna movement in general. Criminals and mentally disturbed people, unfortunately, can be found in all religious denominations, including traditional ones, and there is no record that the level of criminal activity among Krishna followers in Russia is higher than in other religious groups and movements.

Another conflict between the ISKCON and some particular circles of Russian society arose in the mid-2000s when the Moscow authorities allocated a plot of land near the Khodynskoe field for Krishna followers to build a temple. The project to build a 38-metre high spacious 'pagan shrine' (it supposedly desecrated the city) aroused the indignation of Orthodox believers and members of other traditional religions. Under pressure from Orthodox public opinion, supported by some State Duma deputies, educational organisa-

tions and prominent public figures, Moscow city officials rescinded their decision to allocate land for the temple. The Krishna followers took their case to court, but it was finally dismissed in 2006.[20]

The latest scandal linked to the movement took place in 2011 in Tomsk, where the local authorities brought an action against ISKCON, claiming that Shrila Prabhupada's commentary on the sacred Hindu text *Bhagavat Gita* should be categorised as an extremist book because it allegedly 'contained material which provoked religious hatred and discrimination on the basis of gender, race, nationality, origins, language and religious affiliation'. A number of human rights activists and Oriental Studies scholars—experts on Indian culture—appeared in court to speak in defense of Prabhupada's book, and thanks to their efforts the prosecution's case was rejected. However, the prosecution office of Tomsk has appealed against the court's decision so the case is far from settled.[21]

Conclusion

Apart from a short period of religious tolerance after perestroika, official attitudes towards non-mainstream religious groups in Russia have always been guarded and negative. In fact it is possible to identify continuity between the methods and arguments used against non-traditional beliefs in the Soviet period and in post-Communist Russia. Thus, for example, both Soviet and present-day opponents of the Hare Krishna movement accuse it of committing various criminal offences (including serious crimes like human sacrifice, torture, sexual offences, fraud, arms and drug trafficking), of being in contact with the CIA, of planning a coup d'état in order to establish its own totalitarian government (based on the caste system), of being unpatriotic, promoting social nihilism, destroying the family, brainwashing, abusing children, discriminating against women and injuring the mental and physical health of its followers through insufficient nutrition (vegetarianism), lack of sleep and the reciting of ritual mantras. Contemporary anti-cultists also add in some demonic elements to their accusations—devil worship, Satanism—as well as contact with the KGB. Contemporary church and anti-cult ideologists not only read the works of their atheist predecessors (who nevertheless often had a solid background of scholarship on religion or were oriental scholars—something modern anti-cultists cannot always claim) but also widely use them and repeat their ideas without sometimes fully understanding them. The reasons for their animosity are also somewhat similar to those of their Soviet forebears: on the one hand, their animosity is based on a desire to maintain an ideological monopoly and to eliminate dangerous competitors, while on the other, in the case of exotic cults such as Hare Krishna, it reveals a typical kind of xenophobia and rejection of what is new and unfamiliar.

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Footnotes

1. David V. Jakupko, *History of the Hare Krishna Movement in the USSR*, Keston Archive.
2. Ibid.
3. 'Psychiatric Abuse of Hare Krishna devotees in the USSR', October 1987, an Information bulletin from CFSHK, Keston Archive.
4. Alexandr Dvorkin, *Sektovedenie: Totalitarnye Sekty*, (Nizhni Novgorod: Izdatelstvo Bratstva vo Imia Sv. Kniazia Aleksandra Nevskogo), p. 284.
5. Vladimir Kritsky, 'Vishvamitra Das vspominaet o zhizni sovetskikh Krishnaitov pri Brezhneve, Andropove i Gorbacheve', http://www.krishna.ru/stories-and-thoughts/historical-records/1760.html.
6. 'The Indictment of Hare Krishna trial in Urupsky region', 30 April, 1985, Keston Archive.
7. N. Efremenko, 'Istina pod kopirku', *Dnepr Vechernii*, December 1986.
8. Record of the trial against Krishna followers, Keston Archive.
9. The profiles of Hare Krishna followers, Keston Archive.
10. Nigel Wade, 'Crackdown on Hare Krishna in Russia', *Daily Telegraph*, 30 November, 1985; Alan Gill, 'Glasnost passes Hare Krishnas by', *Sunday Morning Herald*, 9 March, 1987; Julia Wishnevsky, 'Persecution of the Hare Krishna movement in the Soviet Union', *Radio Liberty Research*, 14 November , 1985.
11. Letters of Hare Krishna followers, Keston Archive.
12. Michael Specter, 'Krishnas Cast Bread on Rolling Waters in Russia', *New York Times*, 12 December, 1995.
13. Marat Shterin, 'New Religions in the New Russia', in Philip Chatles Lukas & Thomas Robbins (eds.), *New Religious Movements of the Twenty-First Century: Legal, Political, and Social Challenges in Global Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 102-103.
14. Marat Shterin, 'Kriticheskii Obzor Metodologii A. Dvorkina', 1 November, 2006: http://sektoved.narod.ru/metod.html.
15. Igor Kanterov, 'Destruktivnye, totalitarnye i dalee vezde', in A. Pchelintsev & T. Tomaeva (eds.), *Desiat' let po puti svobody sovesti* (Moscow: Institut religii i prava, 2002), p. 32.
16. 'The demonic image of Krishna in the light of Orthodox doctrine', *Troitskii Blagovestnik*, No 23, 1991, Keston Archive.
17. A. Khvylia-Orinter, S. Lukianov, *Opasnye totalitarnye formy religioznykh sekt*, (Moscow, 1996).
18. 'Krishnait sovershil ritual'noe ubiistvo pravoslavnogo sviashchennika', http://iriney.ru/sects/krishna/news004.htm.
19. 'Moskovskii krishnait iznasiloval 11-letniyu devochku', http://iriney.ru/sects/krishna/news001.htm.
20. 'Moskva: Spory vokrug Khrama', http://iriney.ru/sects/krishna/news024.htm; 'Moskovskie krishnaity ne poluchat zemliu. Tak reshil arbitrazhnyi sud', http://iriney.ru/sects/krishna/news047.htm.
21. 'O Tomskom protsesse, krishnaitakh i grazhdanskom obshchestve', http://iriney.ru/sects/krishna/news098.html.

Home News

The Newsletter is now in a smaller format in order to save postage. Faced with the recent steep rise in postal rates, the Council decided to try to keep costs down in this way.

The President and Chairman in November 2011 attended a conference in Chernihiv, Ukraine, on the Catacomb Church in the USSR, at which great interest was shown in Keston's work in defence of persecuted religious believers during the Communist period. The President in December then attended a conference in Chisinau, Moldova, which was entitled 'Unobservable Laws: on God, Taxes, Trends and Democracy'. He reported: 'this was one of the most memorable foreign trips I've been involved with in recent years and the chance to meet so many young people, to talk about my own experiences and to promote the work of Keston and the Archive made it more than worthwhile.' In January 2012 the Chairman joined the Encyclopaedia team on a field trip to Kalmykia (part of the Russian Federation, nearly 2000 km south of Moscow and west of the Caspian Sea)—the only Buddhist country in Europe—and then on to Astrakhan, at the mouth of the Volga. Once back in Moscow the Encyclopaedia team organised the official launch for a collection of essays (funded by Keston) by members of the team on the current religious situation in Russia. In March the Chairman flew with the team to Archangel where they continued their research for a second edition of the Encyclopaedia.

In February the Chairman and another member of Keston's Council, Mr Roland Smith, visited Baylor University for talks on the future of the Keston Center. Professor Christopher Marsh had resigned as Director in 2011. The Chairman and Roland Smith were delighted to meet Professor Robyn Driskell who has been appointed Interim Director. She organised a series of meetings for them with key people at the university, and chaired a meeting of the Board which oversees the work of the Keston Center. She will continue as Interim Director until mid-2013 and will attend the June Keston Council meeting in the UK. The Chairman and Roland Smith were able to spend time with the Center's archivist, Larisa Seago, and saw the progress which had been achieved on conserving documents, digitising material and constructing a list of the Archive's contents which, the Council hopes, will eventually be the basis for an electronic catalogue.

This year the AGM will be held at St Andrew's Holborn, London, on 3 November at 12 noon. Please do come if you can. The Chairman and Council look forward to meeting members and their guests on that day.

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