Keston Newsletter

No. 18, 2013

Andrei Semashkin, a champion sled team driver who is able to reach the isolated villages of Kamchatka, works as a missionary for the 'Good News' church

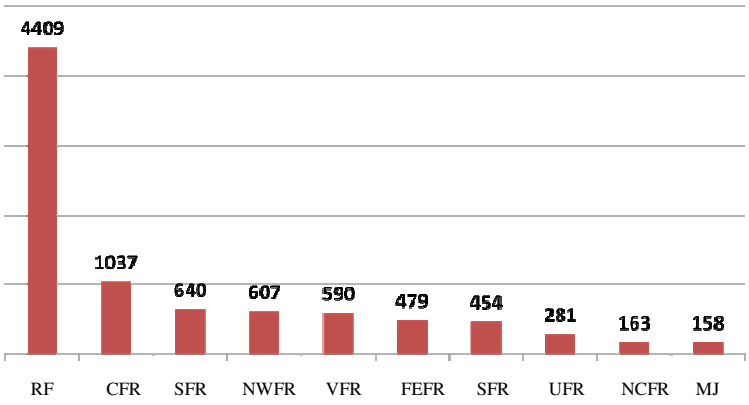
Protestants in Russia Today

by Roman Lunkin

Interest in religious faith, a product of Russia's religious boom in the 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union, led to the revival of a whole raft of national traditions, religions and churches which became symbols once more of national pride, patriotism and a source of cultural values. However, people's knowledge of concrete church observances and religious practice in post-Soviet Russia was extremely limited. Statistics on church attendance in the post-Soviet republics, even after 20 years of relative religious freedom, are lower than in Western Europe (Ukraine is an exception). In this situation interest in 'pure faith' free from ideological accretions was embodied in the development of a Protestant movement – a

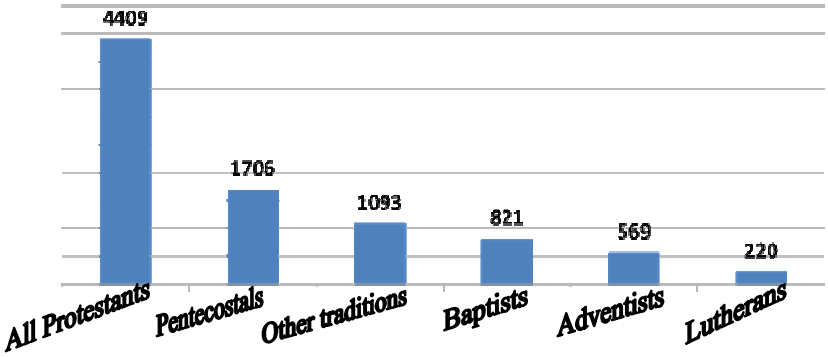
new phenomenon for post-Soviet Russia.

In Russia and Belarus Protestants form no more than 1% of the population (from 1.5 – 2 million), in Ukraine about 5% (2 – 3 million) – and yet they are beginning to play a constantly growing role in their country's social and political life. Within the former Soviet Central Asian republics – Tadzhikistan, Azerbaidzhan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan – Evangelicals make up no more than 0.5% of the total population (from some tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands), but they are socially active and often the state authorities see in them the threat of an 'Orange Revolution'.[1] Officially in Russia there are about 4.5 thousand registered 'religious associations' belonging to 'non-traditional' religions,[2] 80% of which represent various types of Protestant churches. About the same number of groups and communities function without registration (Protestant spokesmen calculate that in reality the number is three times higher). According to a rough estimate there are about 8000-9000 non-Orthodox Christian communities and groups in Russia which involve about two million people. As a rule all those who associate themselves with some type of Protestant confession are practising believers – for the majority involvement in such a group is a serious conscious decision. Furthermore, the level of religious observance is far stricter than for religions which are ethnically and historically associated with Russia.[3] Statistics for 2012 enable us to see the development of non-Orthodox Christian denominations over a period of 20 years. The following picture emerges from data for September 2012 collected by the Ministry of Justice:[4]



RF = Russian Federation
CFR = Central Federal Region
SFR = Siberian Federal Region
NWFR = North-Western Federal Region
VFR = Volga Federal Region
FEFR = Far-Eastern Federal Region
SFR = Southern Federal Region
UFR = Ural Federal Region
NCFR = North-Caucasus Federal Region
MJ = Ministry of Justice

Thus 18% of all registered 'religious associations' are Protestant. Pentecostals form the largest group according to the following data from the Ministry of Justice also dated September 2012:



Other strands include a variety of Protestant churches which usually call themselves either simply an 'Evangelical Church' (or a 'Christian Evangelical Church' or 'Christian Church'), or a church of Evangelical Christians, which can denote similarity to the Evangelical Christian-Baptists or to the Pentecostals. In addition, these 'other strands' can include Methodists, Presbyterians and members of the Reformed Church. In the Urals, Siberia and particularly in Russia's Far East where there are not so many registered 'associations', the Protestant churches make up a significant proportion of them or are even more numerous than Russian Orthodox ones. In these regions where 'traditional' religions are historically not as strong as in other areas, Protestantism is one of the leading forces in the religious field.

In almost all Regions of the Russian Federation Protestant churches come second after the Russian Orthodox when comparing numbers of 'associations' (except for the Far Eastern Region where Protestants come first). Exceptions are the North Caucasus Region and the Volga Region where Protestants come third after the Orthodox and Muslims. A trend noticeable since 2000 is the growth of registered Muslim 'religious associations' which have pushed Protestantism into third place in Russia as a whole, according to Ministry of Justice statistics (from the mid-1990s until 2012 Protestants were in second place after the Orthodox).

It should be noted, however, that the majority of Protestant congregations – up to a third – do not get registered, owing to the complex accounting demanded by the authorities and general distrust towards the latter. They prefer to exist as religious 'groups'. Alexandr Kornev, President of the Evangelical Christian Missionary Union, observed (in an interview with the author in 2012) that a significant proportion of Protestant congregations – up to two thirds – prefer to remain 'in the shadows', in the form of house groups in order not to complicate their life (accountability and renting of premises

Harvest Festival at Penza's Living Faith charismatic church

were particularly complicated). Prayer houses were thus registered as private property as was the case during the Soviet period. The adoption in 2009 of a new Law on Non-commercial Organisations, which applied general regulations on accountability to religious 'associations' (later these regulations were simplified for the latter) made their position yet more complicated. The general political situation associated with the growth of the Russian Orthodox Church's (ROC) influence, together with the increased control over NGOs dating from the summer 2012, confirmed the belief of many Protestants that it was better to exist in the form of 'house groups'. In spring 2013 religious 'associations' were subjected to widespread checks by the Procuracy in the context of a general examination of all non-commercial organisations and the government's search for potential 'foreign agents'. Although 'religious associations' were not subject to the Law on Foreign Agents, the Procuracy nevertheless examined the funding sources of the churches (mostly Protestant and Catholic churches), as well as those of NGOs and charitable foundations set up by churches.

The important role played by the evangelical churches in the religious development of Russia, particularly in the sphere of social work, has not so far been fully acknowledged by the authorities and society. The official attitude to Protestants owes much to Soviet religious policies dating back to the worst period of the 1930s-1950s, which in their turn relate back to the intolerance towards 'sectarians' of tsarist Russia. Believers of other faiths are seen as Orthodoxy's ideological opponents, their image is often blackened with Soviet stereotypes about 'sects', 'sectarians' and their 'leaders', thanks to Russian Orthodox anti-sectarian activists. Yet it is in fact Protestants who in many regions

Baptists in Volgodonsk (Rostov oblast) evangelise

Baptist children sing for the start of the new school year at the Volgodonsk Christian School

are able to challenge the Orthodox; many people regard Protestants as believers with a faith which has been carefully thought through and is free from ideology.

Protestant leaders acknowledge that if the church is to fulfil its spiritual 'goals', every believer must participate in civil society and help alleviate society's ills. Almost every Protestant congregation organises groups of believers to work with drug addicts, street children and in children's homes and old people's homes. Alcoholism, drug addiction and such social problems as poverty, abandoned old people and homeless children, are understood in the light of biblical teaching: drug addiction is seen as a consequence of the Fall and many illnesses are associated with the spiritual state of modern society. Sin, sickness and the future 'rebirth in God' are seen as stages in a process which will inevitably bring a convert healing. The majority of those who head drug rehabilitation centres speak about 'miraculous' healings which have taken place without the help of medication. The many 'healings' of drug addicts, alcoholics, cancer patients and AIDS victims in these churches and rehabilitation centres are not only possible in their eyes, but in the minds of believers – of pastors and converted former addicts and alcoholics – are seen as fore-ordained.

One of the largest Protestant centres organised by the Pentecostal 'New Life' church and led by Sergei Matevosyan is in the Kingisepsky district of the Leningrad oblast. A well-known organisation dealing with addiction called 'Exodus', runs rehabilitation centres alongside church congregations mostly in the south of Russia (its leader is Eduard Deremov, a Pentecostal bishop). Drug addicts who have gone through the rehabilitation process, earn the trust of others within an 'Exodus' centre by leading groups, and then gradually join in the life of the church where they take part in worship and start leading Bible study groups. Some of them later become church leaders – indeed the majority of church leaders in 'Exodus' are former drug addicts.

One of the best known programmes for drug rehabilitation during the first part of the decade after 2000 is a project called 'Train to the Future' which sent Christians from city to city organising anti-drug demos and educational seminars.[5] Then a project called 'Experience the Power of Change' became famous: it aimed to link up all the Christian churches in a region, to share experience, to coordinate their social work projects and publicise them in the media. This met with opposition

in a number of areas (in Arkhangelsk, Nizhni Novgorod, Lipetsk, Yaroslavl) from the ROC which sent protests to the Procuracy, leading to checks and bans on advertising Christian social projects.[6] Despite such opposition, however, the Central Federal Region recognised the Protestant rehabilitation centres as the most effective in the fight against drug addiction.[7]

An indication of Protestant social and political involvement has been the formation of evangelical business groups since 2000, of business associations, various associations of Full Gospel businessmen, groups of entrepreneurs and church clubs involved in small and medium businesses, whose ethical standards and members' mutual trust mark them out from the rest of Russia's business world. Efforts were furthermore made to work out a political philosophy through regular seminars (http://evangelicals.ru/) and discussions in the Russian Evangelical Council organised by the Pentecostal Church (the latter's central body is called the Russian Joint Union of Evangelical Christians—RJUEC) which developed the view, now generally held by Russian Protestants, that democracy is closest to a Christian political and social structure.

After 2005 an increasing number of Protestants became involved in politics.[8] By the late 1990s the majority of religious minorities – Catholics, Protestants, Old Believers – were represented on the main state councils – on the President of the Russian Federation's Council, and on many regional councils and commissions – and by 2005 Protestants as well as Catholics by 2009 were represented in the Federal Public Chamber (the Pentecostal leader, Sergei Ryakhovsky, is the main and most active representative of religious minorities). At a municipal level members of Protestant congregations began to put forward candidates for the post of deputy or city mayor, and by 2010-2012 candidates who openly declared their Protestant allegiance began to win elections. Protestant mayors were elected in Togliatti (Samara oblast) and Nikolaevsk-on-Amur (Khabarovsk krai) in 2012.

These were historic events. In tsarist Russia Protestants and Catholics (with West European roots, mostly Germans) were governors and city leaders, but in modern Russia this was the first time that any Russian Protestant had won such important posts. The Protestant Sergei Andreev was elected mayor of Togliatti during the second round of voting on 18 March 2012. According to *NG-Religia,* 4 April 2012 (http://religion.ng.ru/events/2012-04-04/3_protestant.html) he had recently served as Minister for Natural Resources, Forestry and the Environment in the Samara oblast and had headed the political party Right Cause's regional organisation. In one of Andreev's interviews he explained his relationship with various political parties: 'I belonged to the Union of Right Forces, then to Right Cause. But when Mikhail Prokhorov [billionaire businessman turned politician who resigned as leader of Right Cause in September 2011 and then contested the presidential election in 2012. *Ed*] was driven out, I left a week later.' He openly declared himself to be a Protestant and was known to be the leader of a 'Living Word' church in Togliatti which he had founded in 1993 (the

Russian edition of *Christianity Today* stated that he came to Togliatti from St Petersburg as a 'New Life' missionary). However, there was opposition: the *Togliatti Review* on 5 February published a scare-mongering article entitled 'A sectarian Baptist is able to become mayor of Togliatti!' under the banner headline 'For faith! For the truth!' while on the eve of the first round of voting on 4 March, advertisements containing the words 'Baptists. New Life. 4 March. Togliatti expects change' were ripped down. Andreev despite all won.

In Nikolaevsk-on-Amur in the Far East the denomination of the mayor became a politically important factor when a mass campaign was organised against him. Pyotr Volynsky, a Pentecostal representing the Just Russia party, won a majority during the election in October 2010, and came under fire from local elites with whom he had not managed to find common cause. He was soon accused of being a 'sectarian'. Recognising the strength and honesty of this newly elected mayor and his growing popularity, some powerful elements within the city decided that he must be removed before the elections for the Nikolaevsk district in 2013. Offensive anti-sectarian leaflets were circulated with the provocative banner headline 'Watch out! Sectarians may grab power and control of the economy!' before the mayoral elections in 2010. The local press announced that the mayor belonged to a 'religious sect' and *Khabarovsk Express* stated:

> 'In the early 1990s Volynsky came to Nikolaevsk-on-Amur from Argentina as a preacher from a religious sect. He became the director of a private utility company. Thanks to technological expertise and an ability to speak to large crowds, acquired through this sect, he has managed to influence the citizens of Nikolaevsk-on-Amur and win their votes in the elections.'[9]

This campaign against Pyotr Volynsky, however, initially backfired when many in the city were indignant at his treatment and collected signatures in his support. But in 2012 a criminal investigation was launched against him.

The political involvement of Protestants is particularly evident in Russia's Far East where more evangelical churches are registered than Orthodox ones. For example, in Blagoveshchensk (Amur oblast) some of the deputies (elected in the regions as independents) in the city Duma belong to the New Generation charismatic church, whose leader Mikhail Darbinyan, commenting on the role of Christians in politics, said to the author:

> 'The church does not ally itself with any political party; we have to fulfil God's plan rather than the plan of a political party. People may not agree with a party, parties may not fulfil people's hopes and become discredited. Furthermore, United Russia is a state party which has made some big mistakes at government level. We vote for particular people, not for a political party.'

Darbinyan then added that the socio-

Sergei Ryakhovsky

political situation in the Amur oblast was particularly promising for Protestants:

> 'Here we are not treated as second-rate people because we are known for our high standards – in the way we present concerts, prepare TV programmes etc. Public opinion approves of us. We do not feel we are in decline; we do not see ourselves as American agents.'

Some 1,600 km further west in Chita the situation is much the same: one of the largest Protestant churches, the Pentecostal church 'Salvation in Jesus' with its pastor, Sergei Novikevich, has established itself, while one of its church members, Igor Ten, has been elected to the krai's Duma as a representative for the United Russia party. 'Salvation in Jesus' as a body refused to support any particular party, although during the elections United Russia activists tried to distribute their party's campaign literature among the church's members.

In general, the Protestant churches in Russia's Far East are an example of Christian unity, partly thanks to their tradition of tolerance. By 2008 a Consultative Council of Protestant Bishops and Pastors in Russia's Far Eastern Federal Region was formed to which over 100 evangelical churches and groups now belong. In most major cities, and particularly in the Far East and Siberia, the number of active members of Protestant churches number at the very least a few thousand.

After 2000 two camps became discernible within the Protestant community: on the one hand, there were those who support democracy, while, on the other, those who advocate a traditionalist position. No individual confession or union, however, can be said to represent either of these positions since there are people from both camps in most Protestant churches and unions. But certain church leaders have become identified in the eyes of believers and government representatives as belonging to one or other of them: Yuri Sipko, for example, former head of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, (RUECB) supports a democratic line, while Sergei Ryakhovsky, head of the RJUEC and member of the Russian Federal Public Chamber and the Russian President's Council on Cooperation with Religious Associations, holds to a traditionalist line.

Yuri Sipko bases his views on the simple idea that Russia needs free citizens who have the right to expose government failures and through genuine elections to choose officials who uphold the rule of law. In Sipko's eyes a

Yuri Sipko (text on wall, Ephesians 4:4-6)

must do this: these include Russia's tendency historically to limit and suppress free thought; its lack of respect for the individual; the government's undermining of its own laws and statements on democracy; its self-justification and refusal to admit appalling past mistakes. 'Honesty is the best political policy,' proclaims Sipko. He emphasises:

love of liberty, an individual's rights and freedoms, the importance of the individual and his opinions, are all Christian values. According to him:

> 'For Christians, Europeans or Americans, the value of the individual human being, the liberation of a believer through the Good News, as revealed by God in the New Testament, are of primary importance. A free human being naturally wants to promote personal and social wellbeing. God sent His Son to save human beings – I am convinced that democratic convictions are based on this Gospel message. Protestantism has altered social relations because it acknowledges the value of the individual.'[10]

Criticism of the government, from Sipko's point of view, is a natural response of the Christian conscience since this helps society rid itself of social and political failings. For him there are clear reasons why a person

> 'First and foremost, if we don't speak truthfully about how things really are, we will not break out of the closed circle of servility, we will not remedy our lack of civil rights, so characteristic of Russia, our failure to respect the individual from cradle to the grave. The desire to oblige those in positions of power seeps down even into the church. We would like to be allocated land for a church without all the usual problems – the fault-finding inspections and checks – while the immense pressure put on pastors and bishops forces them to capitulate.'[11]

Sipko views Russia's unique character in terms of culture, rather than as justification for its own 'special path' which sets Russia apart from other European countries.

Sipko comes from a long line of Baptists from Omsk. He became well-known in 2002 when he was made

President of the RUECB, and even when he retired after two terms in this post he continued to be the most prominent figure within the Evangelical-Baptist movement. Although, unlike the Pentecostal leader Sergei Ryakhovsky, he was neither made a member of the Russian President's Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations because of his critical statements, nor did he did try to become a member of the Russian Federation's Public Chamber, this did not hinder his activity. He remained uncompromising and continued to make bold statements in defence of the churches, to write appeals to the Procuracy and to give interviews to the media.

In his many statements Sipko has set out a broad and carefully considered programme from a Christian democratic point of view. He has criticised the government for incompetent reforms and other Protestant leaders for their excessive loyalty to the government; he has criticised Orthodox bishops for their efforts to introduce Orthodox courses into schools and Orthodox clergy as army chaplains, as well as their refusal to promote dialogue with other Christian confessions; he has criticised the ROC's connections with government bureaucracy; and he has condemned the Ministry of Justice's proposed legislation, which would limit missionary work, and its plan to set up a Council headed by the anti-sect activist Alexandr Dvorkin.[12]

After Medvedev in September 2011 made way for Putin to run in the 2012 presidential election, Sipko made a most striking statement:

> 'The Putin-Medvedev problem is the lie which is used as a basic means of government. Of course Putin and Medvedev were the product of their time, brought up in a false godless system whose cornerstone was a lie, a system which hated the truth, banned it from the country and allowed those who were not banned to rot within the walls of the Gulag.[...] I felt rather sorry for Medvedev. I always feel sorry for the weak and those who are insulted. [...] The role of throne-preserver is insulting even for someone who is president. [...] He who affirmed that until May next year [2012] power remained in his hands, had already lost everyone's respect, even the respect of those who tried to respect him. And I tried.'[13]

Sipko has never called anyone out onto the street to demonstrate, he has never pushed for revolutionary decisions, but has simply spoken out as a citizen, openly and on principle. Yet, because he has stood out as a dissident among Russia's church leaders, he has become famous as, some would say, a radical oppositionist.

Sergei Ryakhovsky, in contrast, bases his views on the need to compromise and to be flexible during a situation in which democracy, in his eyes, is evolving, so as to acquire some influence, even if only slight, on government. At the same time Ryakhovsky undoubtedly supports democratic values and the development of civil society. Criticism of government, he argues,

(Left to right) *Vladimir Putin, Sergei Ryakhovsky & Alexandr Semchenko at reception for Victory Day, 9 May*

should focus not on its failures and those of officials, of the President and Prime Minister, but on the general stupidity of the bureaucracy and particular government institutions, as well as on the failure of official religious policy. Ryakhovsky almost never refers to socio-political problems apart from those directly related to the churches (e.g. problems faced by congregations and their social work projects). If he does make a statement, then it is in support of government policy. For him the symbolic representation of all Russia's Protestants and the presence of a Protestant within the political establishment have gradually become important ideological elements in his thinking, and justification for many of his actions and pronouncements.

Sergei Ryakhovsky was born into a Pentecostal family. In 1998 he became the head of the Charismatic movement in Russia when the RJUEC was formed. Since then he has led this Union continuously, and in 2002 became a member of the President's Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations where he is seen in the public eye, by the press and bureaucracy, to represent the whole evangelical community, although other Protestants – a Lutheran and an Adventist – are also members. Thanks to his efforts to open a dialogue with the Moscow Patriarchate leadership and his political support for the President, Ryakhovsky in 2005 was included in the President's list of members for the Russian Federation's Public Chamber where he sits to this day.

Ryakhovsky uses his position to travel round the country visiting Governors and helping churches in difficulty, on whose behalf he writes letters and appeals to the authorities which often bear fruit and have an effect on local officials. On a Federal level Ryakhovsky participates in television programmes and various public events, some of which take place behind closed doors. His politically correct statements and interviews are nearly always intended to show that Protestants have serious proposals to make to the government on how to create a civil society and to get rid of many social ills. His strategy, which is not shaken by the discrimination against Protestants shown by some local officials, is to support all democratic initiatives on the part of the authorities, of the President and government. This political position was clearly demonstrated by RJUEC's response to the demonstrations following the elections on 4 De-

cember 2011. Immediately after the elections Ryakhovsky expressed the hope that the new All-Russian People's Front founded by Putin would pour fresh blood into United Russia[14] and then he criticised the demonstrators when he said:

> 'In our country's history there have been times when people have wanted to change the government through revolution, when almost the whole of society believed this would lead to an improvement. In fact it all ended in tears. Nicholas II was possibly not the best of tsars in the whole of Russia's history; today's government may be at fault. But those who try "to rock the boat" are far more dangerous.'[15]

During Putin's pre-election meeting with religious leaders on 8 February 2012, Ryakhovsky stated that Protestants supported Putin's candidacy for the Presidency and criticised his fellow believers in Ukraine for their involvement in the 'Orange Revolution', while the day after he stated in an article on RJUEC's website:

> 'We are ready to support many of the projects which were announced today without waiting for the results of the elections.'

Accusations that Protestants are 'unpatriotic', 'spies', 'Western agents' and potentially dangerous, and suggestions that all Protestants are extreme westernisers and democrats are not backed up by reality. Ideas stemming from Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution' are not at all popular in Russian Protestant circles, although congregations of the Ukrainian church 'God's Embassy' have existed and continue to function in Russia. In 2000 the majority of Protestant pastors supported Putin and a strong state. In 2012 Protestants, despite their democratic views, were not a major element in the anti-Putin demonstrations and did not swell the ranks of the opposition, although a large number of evangelicals, like the rest of Russian society, recognise the absence of the rule of law, the corruption, the political system's faults, the lack of respect for individual rights and freedoms, not to speak of the discrimination surrounding freedom of conscience. For this reason the majority of Protestant pastors both admire Yuri Sipko's bravery while at the same time recognising the importance of Sergei Ryakhovsky's presence in the upper echelons of power, if only because this demonstrates that both government and society have to come to terms with Protestants. The political views of Protestants directly reflect what is happening in the country: most citizens understand that the current situation is unjust, but the majority support political stability.

The influence of Protestants in society is particularly noticeable in a number of national republics, from Adigeya in the south to Russia's Far North, because of their mission to Russia's indigenous peoples. Unlike the Russian Orthodox who tend to ignore the importance of national languages and customs, Protestant missionaries show respect for local traditions and use local languages in their work. This has made their missions particularly suc-

cessful among a number of indigenous peoples, including the Yakuts, Kalmyks, Buryats and those on the Kamchatka peninsular. In Buryatia, for example, the Association of Christian Churches, headed by the Protestant bishop Viktor Kalmynin, is running missions to the Buryats, while in Kamchatka a striking example is the missionary work of the Full Gospel 'Good News' church among the Koryaks, Aleuts and Eveni which is having a significant effect on this region. Andrei Semashkin, an Aleut, is a well-known member of the 'Good News' church in Kamchatka and a champion sled team driver [see front cover. *Ed*] who has founded new Christian congregations in Atlasovo and Esso as well as in other villages in the north of Kamchatka. He and his wife have also founded a centre for preserving the culture of Kamchatka's indigenous ethnic groups – the Koryaks, Itelmens, Eveni, Aleuts and Chukchi.

Since 2000 the 'Good News' church's missionaries have managed to establish evangelical groups among the indigenous peoples in almost every northern village and among the Aleuts in Nikolskoe on the Komandorsky Islands, about 700 km east of Kamchatka. Each new group has a leader from one of the indigenous peoples. The 'Good News' church also runs missionary festivals every year, attended by their many converts, at which dancers and musicians from amongst the indigenous peoples, wearing national costume, perform before crowds of people from distant villages. This church already has more than ten pastors who are Koryaks. Local congregations compose songs in the languages of the northern peoples; Christian hymns are translated into these languages; worshippers wear national costume and play traditional instruments during services.

The 'Good News' church's missionaries say that the Koryaks are the most receptive to their preaching partly thanks to their close-knit communities and to their interest in the spiritual and supernatural. After a person is converted and shows through their behaviour what a radical change has taken place, whole families often join the church as a result. The 'Good News' church has furthermore organised a conference at which members of indigenous groups were able to talk about how offended they had been by the attitude of the Russians: the Koryaks, for example, spoke about how the Russians had destroyed their traditional way of life, had introduced alcohol into their communities with disastrous results, and had treated them like second-rate people. The conference provided an opportunity for them to forgive those who had hurt them and thus to be delivered from a long-term psychological burden.

In Russia the participation of Protestant churches in the life of civil society is far greater than their numerical strength when compared to other religious denominations, especially to the ROC which has vast resources. Protestants, many of whom are treated as an unavoidable 'evil' in Russia, lead a consciously well-ordered Christian life, attending church services regularly, and participate in political life at all levels. They are present in all parts of society – from the working class to the rich business class – and run social work projects on an equal footing with

the Russian Orthodox. (There are fewer of them in intellectual and cultural circles, although this is already changing.) Protestants attract those members of society who are looking for a thought-through faith which can be applied to everyday life and which is free from ideology. In this sense they will always be in 'a minority'. Be that as it may, Protestants in Russia will continue to have an influence – and they will become active citizens in those areas where the public and government least expect it.

---

[1] The 'Orange Revolution' took place in Ukraine from November 2004 to January 2005 during the presidential election when the run-off vote between the two leading candidates in November 2004 was deemed to have been rigged. *Ed.*

[2] Since Russia's 1997 Law on Religion was adopted, Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism are termed 'traditional' religions. *Ed*

[3] For more detailed statistics on the current religious situation, see: Filatov, S. & Lunkin, R., 'Статистика российской религиозности: магия цифр и неоднозначная реальность', *Религия и российское многообразие. Сборник статей*. S.B. Filatov (ed.) Moscow, SPB, Letnii Sad, 2012.

[4] Data for 4 September 2012 from the Ministry of Justice (Russian Federation) includes information on all registered religious associations in the Russian Federation and on each main administrative area of the Federation. This information is available on the Ministry of Justice's website at http://unro.minjust.ru/NKOs.aspx and includes data for the Russian Federation as a whole (RF), for the regions – Central Federal Region (CFR), Siberian Federal Region (SFR), North-Western Federal Region (NWFR), Volga Federal Region (VFR), Far-Eastern Federal Region (FEFR), Southern Federal Region (SFR), Ural Federal Region (UFR), North-Caucasus Federal Region (NCFR) – and for those organisations which are directly registered with the Ministry of Justice (MJ).

[5] Roman Lunkin, 'Former drug addicts also have a future. Fasting and Prayer instead of Heroin and Marijuana', *NG-Religia*, 2 March 2005, http://religion.ng.ru/printed/91492

[6] See the official website of the project: http://www.sp-russia.ru/

[7] http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=31919&cf=\

[8] For examples showing the involvement of Protestant churches in social and political life, see: Roman Lunkin, 'Protestants and Political Conflict in Evrazia: Salvation of Souls and Controlled Democracy', *Религия и конфликт*, Moscow Carnegie Centre, Rosspen, 2007, pp.175-222.

[9] http://khabarovskonline.com/public/deputaty_nikolaevska_na_amure_obyavili_voynu_meru_goroda_/

[10] Interview with the author, *Russian Review*, May 2005, www.keston.org.uk.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Alexandr Dvorkin is a leading anti-sect activist in Russia. *Ed.*

[13] Interview published on www.Portal-credo.ru, 28 September 2011.

[14] See S.V. Ryakhovsky, 'United Russia must take note of society's reaction to its policies and open a dialogue with other political parties', *Religia i pravo* website, 8 December 2012.

[15] *Religia i pravo* website, 9 December 2012.

Roman Lunkin *works for the Institute of Europe (Russian Academy of Sciences) in Moscow and is a member of Keston's Encyclopaedia team.*

The Armenian Apostolic Church and Vernacular Christianity in Soviet Armenia

by Konrad Siekierski

Most studies on Christianity in the USSR concentrate either on the content and implementation of official atheistic/secular ideology and legislation, or on relations between the state apparatus and religious organisations, including persecution of the latter. Such a focus could be said to imitate the concerns about religion of Communists, acting, first of all, against the structural bases of religious organisations and official manifestations of religious life. Meanwhile vernacular Christianity[1] – that is beliefs, traditions and practices which are not included within the teaching and control of official church institutions, and which were often 'domesticated' during Soviet times in families and local communities (see **Sources**, p.19, Dragadze 1993) – seems to be a phenomenon somewhat overlooked by state atheist policies[2] and almost absent in studies by Western scholars and human rights activists. This article aims to address this deficiency, and advocates a more thorough approach to this neglected subject.

After sovietization in 1920, Armenia like other parts of the USSR[3] experienced hostility towards religious organisations and the implementation of atheist ideology. This policy reached a climax before the outbreak of World War II with the assassination of the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church[4] (AAC) Catholicos Khoren I by the NKVD (Corley 1996a: 9; Mouradian 1990: 371). At this point the AAC almost ceased to exist in the USSR. After the mid-1940s the situation improved to a certain extent when the policy which aimed to annihilate religious organisations was replaced by limited acceptance of a number of 'traditional' churches, including the AAC. As a result, the election of the new Catholicos (Gevorg VI) was permitted, the Ejmiatsin seminary was able to reopen and a few churches started to function (Corley 1996a). Further improvement was achieved under the leadership of the Catholicos Vazgen I (1955-1994), who reached a *modus vivendi* with the Soviet authorities, and Armenia was presented and perceived as an oasis of religious freedom, something rarely observed in many other republics (Corley 1996b, Mouradian 1998).

The Keston archive contains articles written by visitors to Armenia and press reports about the foreign visits of Catholicos Vazgen I which fit in with this picture. For example, one author entitled his report 'An Island of Religion in a Sea of Communism' (Owen 1983), another 'Soviet Armenia and Georgia: Where Men Still Pray' (Wilkins 1977). Yet another visitor described his impressions thus:

> 'a foreigner who travels across Russia can easily conclude that the Orthodox Church is now little more

> than a withered refuge for the elderly and eccentric: a trip through the Caucasus leaves a different impression.' (Kaiser 1972)

At the same time Catholicos Vazgen I repeatedly told Western journalists during each of his foreign trips that half of Armenian society were practicing members of his church, that 70-80% of Armenians had been baptised, and that the country was experiencing a religious revival (AKSA1978; Decisive 1963; Religious 1975).[5] The impressive number of baptisms at the two main monasteries of Ejmiatsin and Geghard were quoted (Schipler 1977; Willis 1977), as well as the large number of people attending church festivals celebrated at these monasteries (Kaiser 1972; Masters 1965).[6] These shrines were also highlights in the itineraries of foreign visitors to Armenia, serving as examples of religious freedom (Brien 1973; Kaiser 1972; Masters 1965; Wilkins 1977; Willis 1977).

However, in spite of its important representative and symbolic function, the AAC's presence in the everyday religious life of most Armenians was actually restricted. Behind the distinct but lonely role of the Catholicos and religious life in Ejmiatsin and a couple of other places, there were in fact only a few dozen priests, the number of open churches varied from less than 20 in the mid-1960s to about 30 in the mid-1980s (Corley 1996b; Thatcher 1985), while no forms of religious education were permitted and parish life hardly existed. According to Eduard Oganessian:

> 'As a general assessment of the activity of the Armenian Church, [...] it should be noted that this activity is of a nationalist rather than religious character. [...] And this is why the Armenian Church is no longer subjected to persecution: it lacks faith and does not oppose the ruling ideology.' (Oganessian, undated)

Under such circumstances, what remained comparatively vital were 'grass-roots' religious phenomena – veneration of local shrines and 'home saints', miraculous dream-visions and pilgrimages[7] which were the source of periodic social mobilization on a scale hardly achieved on the level of institutional religion. During the Soviet period, clergy usually distanced themselves (perhaps involuntarily)[8] from such mass gatherings and neither led pilgrims to shrines nor participated in the rituals performed there. (Corley 1996a: 36-37).

Vernacular Christianity remained largely 'invisible' not only to the church but also to Communist anti-religious decision makers, to Western organisations monitoring their policies, and to academic inquiry. As a result written sources on such practices are scarce – and this is reflected in the materials collected by Keston. However, press reports in the archive about the visits to Armenia of foreign guests usually devote at least a paragraph to time spent in Ejmiatsin and/or Geghard. At these places official and vernacular religion interwove as shown in the following extracts:

> 'The next day I met His Holiness in his office and asked a lot of questions about the Armenian Church. In conversation I mentioned that I

had seen the previous day a number of beribboned sheep being urged around the Cathedral. He confirmed something of what I had already heard. The sheep were for sacrifice. The clergy has no part in this. The animal is bought and the owner declares the reason for the sacrifice. [...] The animal is then decorated with ribbons and made to walk three times round the church. It is then killed and cooked and friends bidden to the feast.' (Masters 1965)

'On Sundays in the baking heat of a four-month-long Armenian summer, pilgrims journey east from the capital Yerevan to the 12th century mountain monastery Geghard. [...] Travellers offer small animals for blessing. If a chicken, it is sacrificed, cooked over a wood fire, eaten at the 10-ton natural picnic tables scattered around iced-cold roaring cataracts. If a lamb, only the ear is cut, the blood ceremoniously daubed on the forehead of children.' (Brien 1973)

'The Armenian Church is unique among Christian Churches in its practice of animal sacrifice, and we were taken to the place near the cathedral [in Echmiadzin] where they are performed. We found two brawny Armenian butchers skinning a sheep which was hanging suspended from a tree. [...] Sitting around was a family enjoying their own specially consecrated Sunday lunch – according to a priest it is the custom to consecrate either the animal itself or the salt with which it is eaten. Nearby on a table a wooden cage held fluttering black and white pigeons whose turn would soon come. "We don't encourage it," the priest told us. "It was the people who kept it, not the Church."' (Wilkins 1977).

'If a boy is ill, his mother may take him to Echmiadzin with some salt and a live sheep. The priest blesses the salt, cuts the sheep's ear, and makes a cross with sheep's blood on the boy's forehead. [...] Such ritual can still be seen on holidays at the monastery [of Geghard]. On bushes around the monastery handkerchiefs have been tied by young women hoping that the gesture will bring them luck in finding a husband.' (Schipler 1977)

Although these quotations, like other similar records, offer only cursory and imprecise information they nevertheless give some insight into the praxis of Armenian vernacular Christianity during the Soviet period. Thus, when added to other sources, especially to oral history, they may help to shed light on this neglected phenomenon. For example, descriptions left by visitors to Armenia confirm the central role of the animal sacrifice *madagh* within Armenian religious customs. Furthermore, the first quotation (Masters 1965) provides an ethnographically significant variation in the ritual: ribbons are tied to the sacrificial animal. This action seems to represent a fusion of *madagh* with another widespread custom of tying cloth to trees in sacred places.[9]

Travellers' accounts have also recorded traditions which have already disappeared. The institutional revival of the AAC observable since Armenian inde-

pendence has led to many changes, including the disappearance of such customs as *madagh* from Ejmiatsin. This represents one small element in a process taking place in contemporary religious life in Armenia whereby the church increasingly interferes in vernacular religion, sometimes giving it official approval and using it for its own ends (Siekierski 2010b), and sometimes opposing it and labelling it 'pagan superstition'. This new situation, together with other contemporary cultural transformations, seems to affect traditional beliefs and customs no less than the Soviet social engineering. For this reason thorough interdisciplinary studies which manage to fill the gap in existing scholarship are needed. Without such studies future anthropological research on the modern religious situation in Armenia will lack an appropriate historical contextualization, while historical studies on the Soviet period will leave out an important element of popular culture.

---

[1] Following Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, (2006: 2) I use the word 'vernacular' instead of the more widespread, but also highly contested, terms 'folk' and 'popular'.

[2] A Cheka report for 1920 records: 'Our peasants and workers are still believers. It is impossible to eradicate faith from their heads immediately. [...] The only thing we can temporarily accept – and we do this now – are popular superstitions' (Mouradian 1990: 367-368). Planned as temporary, this concession generally remained valid throughout most of Soviet history (with the exception of particularly fierce anti-religious campaigns, especially during the 1930s and late 1950s to early 1960s).

[3] For an analysis of the religious situation in Soviet Armenia, see for example: Alexander 1955; Corley 1996a, 1996b; Dadrian 1977; Mouradian 1990, 1998; Siekierski 2010a.

[4] The AAC is an autocephalous church, belonging to Oriental Orthodox Churches. Armenians claim to have been the first to adopt Christianity as the state religion at the beginning of the 4th century. The AAC has been a leading institution for Armenians during the past 17 centuries. Today in Armenia the AAC is the 'National Church' according to the Constitution, and its members amount to 90% of the population according to official estimates. Its leader – the Catholicos of All Armenians – resides in the monastery of Ejmiatsin, located not far from Armenia's capital, Yerevan.

[5] While Vazgen I reported invariably that the AAC was flourishing, his (initially very high) estimates on baptisms and church attendance did not show any growth over the 1960s-1970s.

[6] See for example articles about the ceremony called the Blessing of the Holy Muron in 1976 (Bauswein 1976; Historic 1976).

[7] Generally speaking, places of pilgrimage – monasteries and churches (often ruined), chapels, *khachkars* (cross stones), home-saints, caves, springs, stones and trees can be found in great numbers across Armenia. Some of them are popular locally, while others attract pilgrims from a given region or even from all over the country. Such places usually have their annual festivals, but can also be visited on other days, depending on believers' preferences. Traditionally, a 'full-scale' visit to a shrine includes lighting candles and other ritual actions (circling the place a number of times, tying pieces of cloth onto trees, sticking stones into walls), offering animal sacrifices – *madagh* (usually a lamb or rooster, cooked in a special way and shared with family members, neighbours and those in need) – and a common meal, often in the form of a picnic.

[8] A similar situation could be observed in the Russian SSR. As Ulrike Huhn shows, in the period between World War II and Stalin's death (coinciding with the period of Gevorg

VI's reign) Orthodox pilgrimages were permitted by the Soviet authorities, but no priests were allowed to take part (Huhn 2012).

[9] The author has observed another example of such interweaving at a shrine in northern Armenia, where roosters' heads and legs were tied to the branches.

Sources

AKSA

1978 AKSA, 1 December, typescript, Keston archive, Keston Center for Religion, Politics & Society.

Alexander, Edward

1955 'The Armenian Church in Soviet Policy', *Russian Review*, 14 (4) pp.357-362.

Bauswein, Jan-Jaques

1976 'Armenian Celebration', *One World*, November, pp.7-9.

Brien, Alan

1973 'Alan Brien in Russia', *Sunday Times*, 1 July, p.32.

Burkhalter Flueckiger, Joyce

2006 *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India*, Bloomington, Indianapolis.

Corley, Felix

1996a 'The Armenian Church under the Soviet Regime, Part 1: The Leadership of Kevork', *Religion, State and Society*, 24 (1), pp.9-53.

1996b 'The Armenian Church under the Soviet Regime, Part 2: The Leadership of Vazgen', *Religion, State and Society*, 24 (4), pp.289-343.

Dadrian, Vahakn

1977 'Nationalism in Soviet Armenia – a Case Study of Ethnocentrism', G. Simmonds (ed.) *Nationalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe in the Era of Brezhnev and Kosygin*, Detroit, pp.201-258.

Decisive

1963 'Decisive Leader of the Armenian Church', *The Times*, 9 October.

Dragadze, Tamara

1993 'The Domestication of Religion under Soviet Communism', C. Hann (ed.) *Socialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Local Practice*, London.

Historic

1976 'Historic Celebrations in Armenia', *Church Times*, 8 October.

Huhn, Ulrike

2012 'Mit Ikonen und Gesang oder: ein Bischof auf der Flucht vor seinen Kirchenvolk. Massenwallfahrten in Russlang unter Stalin und Chruščev', *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung*, Berlin, pp.315-333.

Kaiser, Robert

1972 'The Church That Nearly Died', *The Guardian*, 4 January.

Masters, William

1965 'A Visit to the Holy City of Etchmiadzin', 23 April.

Mouradian, Claire
1990 *De Staline à Gorbachev, l'histoire d'une république soviétique: L'Arménie*, Paris.
1998 'The Armenian Apostolic Church', P. Ramet (ed.) *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, Durham, pp.353-374.
Oganessian, Eduard
'The Armenian-Gregorian Church Today', typescript, Keston archive, Keston Center for Religion, Politics & Society.
Owen, Richard
1983 'An Island of Religion in a Sea of Communism', *The Times*, 11 January, p.24.
Petrosyan, Hamlet
2001a 'Symbols of Armenian Identity', L. Abrahamian, N. Sweezy (eds) *Folk Arts, Culture, and Identity*, Bloomington, Indianapolis, pp.33-39.
2001b 'The Khachkar or Cross-Stone', L. Abrahamian, N. Sweezy (eds.) *Armenian Folk Arts, Culture, and Identity*, Bloomington, Indianapolis, pp.60-69.
Religious
1975 'Religious Revival in Armenia Reported', *Church Times*, 27 June.
Shipler, David
1977 'Religion Still Strong in Soviet Armenia', *Armenian Weekly*, 25 June, p.9.
Siekierski, Konrad
2010a 'Księża i komisarze: Ormiański Kościół Apostolski w czasach władzy radzieckiej', P. Adamczewski (ed.), *Konflikty na Kaukazie Południowym*, Poznań, pp.17-35.
2010b 'Vstrecha u dereva: Dub polkovodtsa Vardana i politika simvolov v sovremennoi Armenii', L. Abrahamian, P. Avetisyan (eds) *Avandakane ev ardiakane hayots mshakuyt'um,* Yerevan, pp.273-287.
Thatcher, Gary
1985 'Armenian Bishop Quietly Preaches Religion in an Atheistic Land', *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 January, p.8.
Wilkins, John
1977 'Armenia's Religion', *The Tablet*, 6 August, pp.741-742.
Willis, David
1977 'Soviet Armenia and Georgia: Where Men Still Pray', *Christian Science Monitor*, 26 December, p.6.

Konrad Siekierski *is a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, National Academy of Sciences of Armenia, and at the Institute of Eastern Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland. His research interests concentrate on the religious situation in the post-Soviet Republic of Armenia, as well as in the Armenian diaspora.*

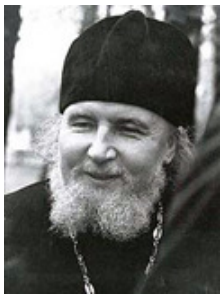
Review

Fr Dmitri Dudko

The Last Man in Russia and the Struggle to Save a Dying Nation.
By Oliver Bullough, Allen Lane, £20, (978-1-846-14373-1)

'The evil that men do lives after them,
The good is oft interred with their bones.'

So said Brutus of Julius Caesar. With Fr Dmitri Dudko, the opposite is true, yet he tried, under threat of further imprisonment at the hands of the KGB, to undo all the good he had done.



Fr Dmitri Dudko

He was one of a handful of priests of the Russian Orthodox Church who had stood heroically against state atheism. His outspoken sermons, especially his question-and-answer sessions at the end of the liturgy, drew thousands and influenced a generation of young people in the 1970s. Yet he betrayed his followers and renounced his conduct in an infamous TV interview on 20 June 1980. In a subsequent article in *Izvestia* he confessed to being a criminal, to betraying the Soviet state and his own hierarchy. He rejected what he had preached, what he had written and the friends, both foreign and Russian, who had supported him while he was being persecuted. In the 24 years up to his death in 2004 he never regained his former influence – indeed, he flirted with anti-Semitism and ultra-nationalism. This was such a direct reversal of his earlier insistence in his sermons and writings on the equality of all humanity that the suspicion remains that he was subjected to some kind of pernicious drug leading to a mental breakdown. After all, at the same time the KGB was incarcerating dissidents in mental hospitals and subjecting them to behaviour-changing injections.

Keston followed these heroic – and later tragic – events in detail and the world's press often quoted us as the source of the information which streamed out of the Soviet Union in *samizdat.* The index to Jane Ellis's great book, *The Russian Orthodox Church: A Contemporary History* has no fewer than sixteen references to Fr Dmitri in the index, many of them several pages long. The extensive file on him now held in our archive at Baylor University would, in itself, provide enough information to form the basis of a book, and indeed Oliver Bullough in his magnificent biography graciously acknowledges the extensive help Keston provided.

As a teenager, Fr Dmitri suffered under the German occupation and was later unjustly accused of collaboration. At the age of 26 he was imprisoned for eight and a half years for allegedly writing an anti-Stalinist poem. He had to wait until he was in his mid-thirties before he could become a student at one of the recently reopened theological seminaries. Subsequently, following ordination to the priesthood, he

claimed that no week of his life passed without harassment by the KGB.

In his ministry, both in his sermons and his *samizdat* writings, he often seemed to be pushing his activities to the limit to see how far he could go, so his constant harassment was no real surprise. In 1975 both his legs were broken in a horrific car accident, almost certainly engineered by the authorities. Worse, he was constantly criticised, even betrayed, by his own church leaders. A letter from his bishop accused him of 'systematic inclusion in his discussions and sermons of political material of an anti-social character, including tendentious criticism of the life of our state'. These are the same bishops, Bullough tells us later, who now justify their conduct of church affairs during the Communist period.

Fr Dmitri's fearlessness struck a chord in a whole generation of young people and he baptised thousands who had been brought up as atheists. In this, the power of his ministry lives on in his disciples. However shocked they were when he eventually betrayed them, they did not abandon the faith.

Fr Dmitri immediately realised the enormity of his betrayal. In my obituary of Fr Dmitri for *The Guardian* I included a quote (not in Bullough's book) which indicates the torment he felt before his capitulation. Xan Smiley, then a British correspondent in Moscow, had a conversation with Fr Dmitri and reported him as saying: 'I thought if I didn't agree I wouldn't live… Compared to the hell that I then brought into my soul, anything even torture or execution, would have been easier to bear.' Later Bullough quotes him in a letter to Archbishop Vasili of Brussels as saying: 'I have never suffered such torments as now. I now know from my own experience what hell is. I am ready to do anything to correct the situation, but I don't know how.'

How exactly did the KGB break him? Someone said he looked as though he had descended from heaven to the TV studio, rather than having come straight from the hell-hole which was the Lefortovo gaol. Alyona Kojevnikov, who reported the interview for Keston, said he 'looked like a condemned man'. Bullough could not trace any copy of it. One certainty, though, is this. As I wrote in my obituary of 2004: 'The greatest shame in this episode belongs not to Fr Dmitri, but to the duplicity and brutality of the KGB itself.' The triumph is that, over the next ten years, it would be the Christian faith which grew, while the power of the KGB to break it waned.

Oliver Bullough has written two books in one, seamlessly interwoven. He tells Fr Dmitri Dudko's story fully and in detail, but at the same time his field researches lead him to the places where his subject lived, worked and was imprisoned. Simultaneously he records his impressions of Putin's dying rural communities, drowning in alcohol and a world removed from that of Moscow's oligarchs. His characters leap from the page: he is a fine writer. In a recent *Church Times* back page interview (5 July), Bullough claims not to be a believer, though few Christians have written about the Russian community of faith with more sympathy and insight.

Michael Bourdeaux

Fr Arsenie Boca:
Guide of Souls in Communist Romania

by Alexandru Popescu

On 28 November 2009, the 20th anniversary of the death of Fr Arsenie Boca (1910–1989), around 30,000 people made the pilgrimage to his grave at Prislop Monastery in the county of Hunedoara, Transylvania, in the south west of Romania. Such pilgrimages occur each year and Fr Arsenie is regarded as 'the saint of Transylvania' by local people although he has not yet been officially canonized by the Romanian Orthodox Church.[1]

> *Fr Arsenie was a unique phenomenon in the history of Romanian monasticism, that is, a figure of high monastic stature, of a kind that the Romanian Orthodox Church never had before him.*
> (Fr Dumitru Stăniloae)

He experienced the First World War and the formation of the modern state of Romania in 1918. Ordained as a deacon in 1935, he went as a pilgrim to Mount Athos and returned to serve at Brâncoveanu Monastery, Sâmbăta de Sus, in Southern Transylvania, bringing with him manuscripts from the *Philokalia,*[2] a collection of ascetical texts originally written in Greek by the early Church Fathers. In 1940, during the Second World War, he was tonsured as a monk and ordained a priest in 1942 by Nicolae Bălan (1882-1955), Metropolitan Archbishop of Transylvania. Between 1945 and 1948 he initiated and supported the translation of the *Philokalia* by Fr Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993), priest and professor of theology, who worked for over 45 years on a comprehensive Romanian translation of this spiritual treatise.[3] As Abbot (*Starets*) of Brâncoveanu Monastery, Fr Arsenie also inspired a powerful neo-philokalic movement and was a spiritual guide to great numbers of people. Whilst completing his major book of pastoral guidance, *The Pathway of the Kingdom,*[4] he was also expounding the Sermon on the Mount in catechetical lectures and involving pilgrims in practical farming work. He gave spiritual and material help to the anti-Communist resistance in the Făgăraş mountains.

Before, and soon after, the end of the war Fr Arsenie is known to have discreetly ministered to the Romanian Royal family.[5] After the abolition of the monarchy in December 1947 under pressure from the occupying Red Army, he was transferred in November 1948 from Sâmbăta de Sus to Prislop, a remote monastery in the south west of Transylvania.[6] His protector, Metropolitan Bălan, explained officially that Prislop Monastery had been taken over by the Greek Catholics and burned to the ground on the orders of the Austrian General Adolf von Buccow, military commander and governor of Transylvania in the 18th century, and then recovered by the Orthodox; but it was deserted and needed to be restored.

However, the Romanian *Siguranţa*, i.e. Safety Police (precursor of the infamous *Securitate* founded in 1948 with help from the Soviet NKVD), had already started to interrogate Fr Arsenie about his alleged anti-Communist activity and he was sent to the Danube channel labour camp in 1950.

Between 1951-1959 he was intermittently interrogated and detained in political prisons, accused of having an anti-Communist allegiance. Months before the closure of the monasteries following Decree no. 410/1959, he was defrocked and forced by the *Securitate* to leave Prislop Monastery which became an old people's home. He then moved to the capital, Bucharest, and was paid by the Church for various jobs as a layman until he took his pension. Between 1959 and 1989, for the last 30 years of his life, while marginalised by the Romanian Orthodox Church, he continued unofficially as a spiritual director, church iconographer, and author of *samizdat* religious writings. After he retired in 1968 he started to paint the St Nicholas Church in Drăgănescu, near Bucharest, and this took him 15 years.[7]

After that he was moved to Sinaia (formerly the residence of Romanian monarchs in the Carpathian mountains) to Schitul Maicilor (Nuns Skete) where he spent the rest of his life as a recluse until his death.

According to Fr Arsenie's information surveillance file, he was followed by *Securitate* informers, who supplied written reports about him, right up until his last breath. For example the following informer's handwritten report is dated 10 April 1989 and marked 'Strictly secret. Unique item', meaning there were no copies:

Today, date as above, I went to the domicile of the aforesaid Boca Zian-Vălean from Sinaia, 16 Nightingales Street, Prahova County, to check information provided by 'Tâmplaru'.

On this occasion I established that Boca is paralysed and immobilised in bed. I have tried to discuss with him, but I could communicate with him only with difficulty because he has a facial paralysis and one can only barely understand what he wants to say. On the other hand, suffering from a heart condition, he is protected in order not to expose himself to physical effort and emotions.

In discussions with his carer, i.e. Sângeorzan Ioana, I was told that Boca does not receive visits and is under her permanent supervision. Because she was used by our Organization as an informer, she was given instructions and the aforesaid Boca Zian-Vălean was assigned to her care.

Principal Officer, Major Cocârlea Constantin
Ministry of the Interior, Inspectorate of Prahova County, Security of Sinaia[8]

During his first periods of imprisonment by the *Securitate* Fr Arsenie was compelled to write down his life story. The following autobiography only covers his life up until July 1945, less than a year after the Soviet take-over of Romania.

Autobiography

The undersigned was born on 29 September 1910 in Vâtza de Sus, Hunedoara County, Transylvania. Primary school and Lyceum [High School] in Brad, where a certain inclination towards loneliness and a preoccupation with religious themes was noticed, even at that early stage of my development. So, for example, I have a book by Emmanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason*, signed 'Boca Zian, Class 4 Lyceum'. On my admission into High School, I lost my father who was a shoe maker and a very good pedagogue to his son. I know to this day that he once punished me for 'wasting time' – which I promised him not to do. I have not forgotten that and it has helped me in life many a time.

At the Lycée I enjoyed maths, physics, religion, art, and music very much. When I finished the Lycée I passed the Baccalaureate at the first attempt. I was drawn to the positive sciences and could have followed my inclination had I had the necessary resources or tutors who would have vouched for me: I would have applied to study aviation, but I was unable to do so, on account of poverty. As a result my contemplative inclination won through and in 1929 I applied to study at the Theological Academy in Sibiu.

Fr Arsenie Boca

During this time I sold my parents' home in order to be able to continue my theological studies. I was also given a grant. I did not dare to ask for support from my mother because she had been divorced from my father and I was put into his care under the divorce settlement. Because of his job he was better able to guarantee my education.

During my theological studies the beauty of the monastic life was revealed to me and I wanted to teach myself, as seriously as I could, especially in the mystical aspect of life. During that time some characteristic features appeared in me: out of concern for my mother I tried gently to distance myself from her, writing as little as possible, in the hope that she somehow would 'forget me' and find it less difficult to accept my becoming a monk.

Since my departure from Brad, I had put myself under a certain austere discipline, the details of which were unusual. For example, I decided that, while I was studying theology, I should avoid getting acquainted with any young women, an aim I didn't achieve, because in that very year, 1929, the Ministry of Education allowed girls to study theology, so I was surrounded by female colleagues. But I did manage not to meet young women in town and this in spite of the fact that I was a

member of the mixed choir in Sibiu conducted by Nicolae Oancea.[9]

I had to tackle the problem of training the will in order to control my senses. Moreover, while studying comparatively the mysticism of various religions, I was eager to discover, through personal experience, what part is played by the will in the domain of psychological and biological life. I was interested to see if it was true what books affirm about reflex actions and instincts, considering them as independent of the will and the control of consciousness. However, my personal experience convinced me that the action of will and consciousness can prevail over instinct and reflex actions according to a certain variable.

I was helped in these reflections by Mircea Eliade[10] who at that time was studying Oriental religions in Calcutta where he had been sent by the University of Bucharest. Some of his studies were published in the *Journal of Philosophy* in Bucharest and I had access to them. I was interested in all these articles and in testing them out with a view to becoming a monk.

I abstained from 'expeditions into the city' choosing to stay in the seminary, despite the open gates. I would not go out into town with colleagues unless this was required in the interests of study, or when accompanied by teachers as for a musical rehearsal. I didn't dance and I have never learned how to dance. In this I was following my father's advice, even more strictly now, as a theologian, and I could not even envisage doing these things. I was perfectly indifferent to and unaware of other people's lives outside the world of theology.

All my interests were, and have remained until now, internal rather than external. From early boyhood I disliked talking. I even chose my monastic name because Abba Arsenios[11] had chosen to observe the habit of silence through which he attained inward perfection. The thesis I submitted at the Theological Academy summarised my aspiration towards that inner personal perfection and was entitled 'Striving after Spiritual Life'. I completed my theological studies in 1933.

During holidays I used to paint and painting extended my education because, when Metropolitan Bălan found I had a talent for this, he sent me in the following year 1933-34 to study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bucharest, where I remained for five years. I was taught by painters such Francisc Șirato[12] and Costin Petrescu,[13] and by professors from the Faculty of Medicine such as Dr Francisc Rainer.[14] I was often unable to attend the medical courses because of the student strikes and turmoil which worried me, as they made me waste time and did not allow me to deepen the knowledge of anatomy and anthropology [...] The political student movements made an unpleasant impression on me: I never actually joined the student strikes or movement, nor had I the right to do so, because the Academy of Fine Arts was not part of the University [...].

I was working very hard at the painting workshop. During the spring I would go there at five in the morning and return to the seminary in the evening for supper. I spent three years at the seminary to make sure I didn't 'waste time'. Other students who were members of the right-wing Legionary movement used to come there from time to time and invited us to their meetings. I never went. I was totally absorbed in study and I did not have time to waste. (The beating received in my childhood to stop me wasting time acted as my guardian angel.)

I was studying long hours. The remaining free time was spent at the seminary reading and discussing theology with another colleague who was a student at the Conservatoire. Once, because I very much liked the mystical writings of St John of the Ladder, I translated these into Romanian

over five months. It helped a lot to confirm my conviction that I should become a monk [...].

Among my colleagues during my early school years there was a Communist who wore a red tie, but we never had discussions together. There was also a Jewish boy (Itzoc Steinberg) – we were friends. I told him once: 'Hey, Steinberg, you are Jewish and I am Christian, which would mean that we ought to compete with one another. However, I will try to be kinder than you and I hope you won't mind if I win this part of the competition' [...].

I graduated successfully in the Fine Arts Course and began a year of work experience. This was cut short by Metropolitan Bălan who sent me to Athos, the Holy Mountain, to learn there about monastic life. In 1938, before anyone could obtain a visa, they would be subjected to the most intense scrutiny, which meant that none of those who were in the Legionary movement would ever be able to leave the country. There was nothing about me in the records so I got a passport to travel in Europe 'Sans Russie' from the Prefect of Police in Sibiu. Because I was a deacon I was given permission from the three Patriarchates of Romania, Constantinople, and Athens and from both the Romanian and Greek governments.

I returned to Romania after three months on 8 June 1938 [...]. From that date until Easter 1939, having gathered together all my painting equipment and materials, I went to Chişinău in Bessarabia to study gilding with gold under some Russian masters, who also taught me other skills needed for an icon workshop.

In 1939, on the Friday immediately after Easter, the feast of the Life Giving Spring of the Mother of God, I was tonsured as a monk and given the name Arsenie. For a year I was the first and only monk at Brâncoveanu Monastery, Sâmbăta de Sus, in Transylvania. As I was busy getting the monastery into order, I did not have any time for painting that year or the next [...]. It so happened during this time that people came to the monastery with their suffering and difficulties. I asked the other monk, who by then had joined me from Mount Athos, to be ordained instead of me, because I felt unworthy to be a priest. He accepted and we were then able to celebrate the liturgy at the monastery.

During the winter of probably 1941 we just found ourselves under an avalanche of people of all ages and ranks wanting to talk to me about their problems. I awakened to find myself a spiritual father for many people although I was not even a priest. I knew that all their difficulties were the result of errors or sins, so I found myself forced to accept priesthood and the major mission of evangelisation, to spread the word of Christ as true God and true Man, and the deification of mankind [...]. I taught them to be clean in their dealings with other people, and with God – to render to Caesar what is Caesar's (civic obedience and taxes) and to God what is God's (clean thoughts, purification of soul, and a body cleansed of passions).

As to my teachings, I take as witnesses everyone who listened to the advice I was giving them in obedience to God: love for God, love for all others without discrimination, and clean living; these make it possible for us who follow his precepts to re-enter the kingdom of our origin, from whence God sent us on earth for a short trial of our wisdom and love in the arena of life.

This is all my mission and purpose on earth, for which, although I am unworthy, I have been endowed with gifts. This is why I am requested everywhere to propagate God's love and the sanctification of people through love. Any other thoughts or plans are foreign to me.[15]

St Nicholas Church in Drăgănescu

Christ Pantocrator, with right-angled eyebrows characteristic of Fr Arsenie's iconography

After being defrocked in 1959, Fr Arsenie left Prislop Monastery with ex-Abbess, Mother Zamfira (Julieta) Constantinescu (1925-2005) and moved to the capital, Bucharest. Mother Zamfira's sister, Ligia, was the wife of Fr Savian Bunescu (1911-2005), the parish priest of St Nicholas in Drăgănescu, a short bus ride from Bucharest. Together the two priests began to think about how to paint the inside of this church, as reported by Fr Arsenie in an autobiographical note published in a catalogue of its frescoes together with an introduction and explanations.[16] The catalogue has the subtitle 'The Sistine Chapel of Romanian Orthodoxy' and includes reproductions of the unique style of Fr Arsenie's vision of theology in paint, including both words and images. This amazing masterpiece of iconography unites the visual image with the catechetic words from the Gospel.

From Fr Arsenie's earliest years, even before he was a monk and spiritual father, as a young theologian, his presence was described by his contemporaries as percipient, inquisitive, and sometimes frightening, especially for novices and those who had not yet got to know him. Particularly penetrating were his eyes, beneath their straight eyebrows, with eye-sockets which often looked too small to contain the bright, far-sighted eyes within them. He projected this same facial expression onto his frescoes of Christ and the Mother of God whose right-angled eyebrows and shadowed bony sockets seem to heighten and amplify the depth and colour of their luminous, piercing eyes.

The Mother of God

As depicted in Fr Arsenie's frescoes, the bodies of Christ and the apostles do not follow literally the Orthodox iconographic *typikon* (rule); far from being 'dogmatic' or two-dimensional, they resemble art techniques such as *trompe-l'oeil* and other

Madonna and Child, with Christ wearing striped prison uniform

forms of perspective illusionism. Because of the overlapping transparent mediums depicted, such a perspective acquires and transmits depth, creating the optical illusion that objects exist in three dimensions: their pristine clarity does not exclude, but amplifies the mystery behind them. His manner of painting seems to make the mystery visible although never exhausting it. Unusual frescoes by him in other churches include a depiction of the Madonna and Child, with Christ wearing a striped prison uniform, which seems to have escaped the eyes of the *Securitate*.[17]

Archangel Michael

The content of Fr Arsenie's iconography also includes scenes of contemporary life in order to illustrate not only passages from the Gospels but also his own critical view of 20th century humanity. On the right wall of the nave in the Drăgănescu church there is a fresco of the Ascended Christ, surrounded by many individual saints in medallions; and, directly below, the Mother of God and the disciples are depicted on the Mount of Olives. To the right of this fresco the Archangel Michael is represented as the celestial warrior with a flaming sword in his right hand and the monogram of Christ emblazoned as a shield in the left. He looks down with piercing, slightly threatening eyes, upon the world. Below him on the terrace of a modern villa, with capitals and columns, the plight of Modern Man is portrayed, almost as a caricature. Out of the window we see a space capsule powered by four rockets leaving in its wake a sulphurous stream of thick smoke. In the background we see a huge observa-

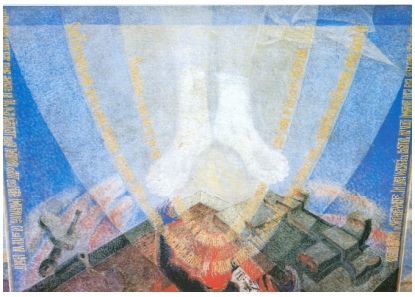
The Ascended Christ with the Mother of God and the disciples below

Modern Man in a green armchair

tory telescope and a radar dish rising from a green forest with pyramids behind. On the terrace, sitting comfortably in a green armchair beside a television set, we see Modern Man, cross-legged, wearing sandals, blue shorts, a decorated T-shirt and with the earth engraved on the buckle of his belt. Behind him, a woman with long hair, wearing a bright summery top, peeps out from her boudoir. On the back wall there is a map of the whole world. The man is looking up towards an angel in the top left corner announcing: 'Come up to the Supper, for all things are now ready' (Luke 14:17). Rather as in a cartoon there are more Gospel words: 'What did you gain from the whole world if you lost your soul?' (cf. Matt 16:26), followed by Fr Arsenie's prophetic injunctions: 'You have knowingly unleashed the cataclysm of sciences upon yourselves. You deserve that. You started the end of the world.' The Modern Man (Superman?), holding a blue telephone receiver, also using a mixture of Scripture and his own words, replies: 'I have married; I have acquired land; I have bought five million horsepower; I am looking for a house on another planet; and therefore I cannot come. I ask to be excused.' (Luke 14:18f) In larger, underlined writing, Modern Man, backed by Modern Woman, finishes his reply to Divinity with: 'We are no longer interested.'

In the icon of the Resurrection, Christ's feet are those of an incarnate human being, but the rest of the figure is translucent with divine energy which penetrates and transfigures his risen body.

Icon of the Resurrection



Christ's feet in the icon of the Resurrection

There is a sense of other-worldliness which is made visible. Fr Arsenie's painting technique amplifies even more this sense of moving and embracing images which include the viewer, inviting him to contemplate the biblical figures they represent. This inexhaustible, living mystery seems to pulsate behind the stickled varying textures of transparency. Jesus' right hand stands out to draw one's attention to his blessing and also to the wound of the nail through his wrist. The painting conveys the real presence of the Risen Christ while also illustrating the nature of his risen body, which suddenly appeared in the Upper Room when the doors were locked. Even the cross in Christ's left hand is alive and contains all the nuances of gold and pink, intermingled, signifying the history of the cross in a person's life, in Christ's life. His real flesh defies the mineral universe and transfigures it. Inscribed across the holy table represented as penetrated by the rising Christ, standing on the two beams of the cross bridging the opened and destroyed mouth of hell, are the words used by the priest while censing crosswise, from all sides, the holy table immediately before the Liturgy of the Catechumens:

> 'In the tomb with the body, in hell with the soul as God, in paradise with the thief, and on the throne with the Father and the Spirit, Thou fillest all things, O Christ, Thyself uncircumscribed.'

The known Christian narrative appears to be immersed in a cosmic, many-layered space which acquires an almost stroboscopic quality. This somehow shakes the onlooker's expectations, however knowledgeable about icons or modern art they may be. There is a certain severity or seriousness on the face of Christ in the icon, but this is not threatening – love shines through. This solemn and symbolic representation of

Fr Arsenie painting a fresco

Fr Arsenie's fresco of the Martyrdom of St Stephen the New in St Nicholas Church, Drăgănescu

the Resurrection is all-embracing and draws the onlooker closer. Questions seem to be inherent there as to why his feet are material whilst above are the diaphanous garments and an almost transparent body. The icon is vivid and lively, young and new, as if the Resurrection is taking place here and now and is not subject to ageing or decay. The whole experience before this icon takes a person beyond a simple visual experience. It is a liturgical experience which engages and transcends the senses. You almost hear the score of the musical tones as you read the words and see them transmuted into honey-like light, and one's nostrils almost perceive the waves of incense as the Resurrected Christ invites us to share in the Eucharist.

Death of Fr Arsenie

In the summer of 1989 Fr Arsenie asked a village carpenter to make him a wooden cross for his grave. He then asked to have the year of his birth inscribed on it and also 1989 as the year of his death. The carpenter said: 'Father, don't you want to be with us in 1990?' 'Not even for one hour,' replied Fr Arsenie.[18]

By mid-autumn 1989, Fr Arsenie was re-arrested by the *Securitate* and there are anecdotal reports from spiritual disciples that his death was preceded, if not provoked, by torture at the hands of Ceauşescu's secret police. On 28 November 1989 he died – after the fall of the Berlin Wall and only weeks before

the fall of Ceauşescu at Christmas 1989. The day of Fr Arsenie's death coincided, in the Romanian Orthodox Calendar, with the feast of St Stephen the New whose martyrdom – during the reign of the iconoclast Byzantine Emperor, Constantine Copronimos (741-775) – he had depicted prophetically in the fresco on the altar apse of St Nicholas Church in Drăgănescu.[19] After death, his body was carried a few hundred miles from Sinaia back to Prislop Monastery, where he was buried quite quietly. Before burial Fr Arsenie, vested once again as a priest, lay in the church in an open coffin, in accordance with the Orthodox tradition. Mourners noticed facial wounds and fingers without nails, but the cause of Fr Arsenie's death continues to be disputed.[20]

Romanian Translation of the *Philokalia*

The *Philokalia* is regarded, next to the Bible, as 'the most widely read book in the Orthodox world today'.[21] It was compiled in the 18th century by two Greek monks of Mount Athos, St Makarios and St Nikodimos, using texts on the spiritual life dating from the 4th to the 15th centuries. The original Greek edition was published in Venice in 1782, although, possibly because of its editors' humility, it does not mention their names. A Slavonic translation, the *Dobrotolubie*, was published in 1793 by St Paisi Velichkovsky, who was born in Ukraine but spent more than half of his life as a monk in Northern Moldavia, a part of contemporary Romania.[22] From his monastery of Neamţ, in Moldavia where he had been Abbot and died in 1794, this book exerted a remarkable influence on the Slavic world, not only on monks but also on lay people and writers such as Gogol, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy.

Before the now well-known enlarged version of the *Philokalia* translated into Russian by St Theophan the Recluse in 1877 appeared, there is reason to believe that the first integral translation of the original Greek *Philokalia* into a modern European language was that made by disciples of St Paisi into Romanian in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.[23] Although until recently unknown and unreferenced by academics, this first edition of the Romanian *Philokalia* circulated in manuscript form throughout the Balkans. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the first volume of the English translation of this seminal work, which is still unfinished, was published in 1979.

Earlier in the 20th century Fr Dumitru Stăniloae embarked upon a lifelong task of both enlarging the body of texts and translating, with significant commentary, the whole *Philokalia*. This is the second integral translation of the *Philokalia* into Romanian. Fr Stăniloae himself acknowledged that he could not have persevered in this work, comprising 12 volumes (published between 1946 and 1991), without the decisive vision and contribution of Fr Arsenie to this project. We quote below fragments from Fr Stăniloae's Forewords to the first two volumes of the Romanian version of the *Philokalia*, dated Christmas 1946 and Ascension Day 1947 respectively:

> 'For some writings I also used copies of older Romanian manuscripts brought from Athos by the Revd Fr

Arsenie [...] I must extend a warm word of gratitude to Fr Arsenie from Brâncoveanu Monastery, my good student from an earlier time, who always remained close to me. The Revd Fr Arsenie was so kind as to write at my dictation the largest part of this translation in its first version. Besides, thanks to his almost continual presence and his insistence that I make this translation, he fuelled my courage considerably to persevere to the end of such a demanding work which otherwise I do not believe I would have finished. His Reverence designed the cover as well.'[24]

'My former student, Fr Arsenie, has given decisive help with the editing of the second volume. Because he procured very many subscriptions we were able to overcome huge difficulties which mounted up and stood in the way of publishing this second volume. Fr Arsenie can be rightly named as a main founder of the Romanian *Philokalia*. As he had first of all continually nudged me into translating this work, so now he supports its publication with undiminished energy. If with God's help the whole *Philokalia* is to appear in Romanian, this achievement will remain linked in great measure with Fr Arsenie's name and with the religious movement which he inspired around the Brâncoveanu Monastery, based on the most authentic foundation and practice of a most pure spirituality, indefatigable learning and with great love for human souls.'[25]

Between 1947 and 1948 Fr Arsenie managed to send the newly published first four volumes of Fr Stăniloae's version of the Romanian *Philokalia* to political dissidents detained in Southern Transylvania, in labour camps and colonies modelled after Stalin's Gulag system. Many of such camp prisoners were then transferred to a Soviet-designed experiment of de-Christianisation through terror and 're-education through torture'. The aim of this was 'to eliminate religion, particularly Christianity, and traditional Romanian culture, especially among the younger generation', and to replace it with an atheist proletarian identity of a 'new man', *homo Sovieticus.*[26] This was already in operation in political prisons in the early 1950s, when Fr Arsenie himself was interrogated, arrested, and detained for alleged 'counter-revolutionary activities'. One cannot overstate the revelatory importance of studying and discovering the solitary, communal, and selfless spirit of contemplative prayer – as taught by the *Philokalia* writings, alongside the lives of the saints, and the Bibles smuggled into prison – in preparing political prisoners, including priests, to resist the profoundly deleterious effects of physical and psychiatric abuse on their mental and spiritual health.

One of the political dissidents who greatly influenced this author's teenage years, Virgil Maxim (1922-1997), wrote about the effect of these books on himself and his fellow inmates who endured persecution under the Communists, while experiencing, assuming and continuing the patristic tradition of solidarity in prayer, as inspired by a neo-philokalic spirit of the 'Imitation of Christ':

'For each one of us and for all of us

together, Christ was not only an external ideal to whom we hoped somehow to attain. He Himself was our daily life at every moment; the desire to be part of Him, as a permanent way of being, was not fortuitous or occasionally stimulated by church festivals when we paid Him greater attention. The lives of the saints, from the *Patericon* or the *Philokalia* were (forgive my audacity) lived again, put to the test as possibilities to be attained by political prisoners, not only intellectually but in practical experiential living. The chief characteristic of the new prison saints was humility. Each one was appreciated by the others for his own personal qualities, for the gift which God had given him, and which was effective for good and for the growth of all in Christ.'[27]

Conclusion

As a spiritual guide, Fr Arsenie Boca led by example. As he himself expressed in one of his most striking insights, 'The longest pathway is the way which leads from ears to heart'. Today he is regarded as a 'painter of souls and of churches' and an 'apostle and prophet of the Romanian people', as described in a biographical documentary film.[28] Fr Arsenie is undoubtedly one of the greatest spiritual fathers of 20th century Romania.

---

[1] See also, *28 Noiembrie 2009, Pomenirea P. Cuv. Pr. Arsenie Boca/Biserica din Drăgănescu*, double DVD, produced by S.C. ALCAS CONF IMPEX S.R.L. (The 20th anniversary of Fr Arsenie's death celebrated at St Nicholas Church, Drăgănescu).

[2] *Philokalia* - Greek word for 'Love of what is beautiful' or 'Love of what is good'.

[3] See p.33, Romanian Translation of the *Philokalia*.

[4] Ieromonah Arsenie Boca, *Cărarea Împărăţiei*, 5th edition, edited by Simion Todoran and Nun Zamfira Constantinescu, Editura Sfintei Episcopii Ortodoxe Române a Aradului, Deva, 2006.

[5] Author's interview with Mother Alexandra (the former Princess Ileana of Romania), 8 October 1990. See also, *Părintele Arsenie Boca, obiectivul 'Bratu'*, Patmos, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, pp.79-87. Cf. *Alte mărturii despre Părintele Arsenie Boca*, edited by Ioan Cişmileanu, Agaton, Făgăraş, 2008, p. 109.

[6] Prislop Monastery was founded in the 14th century by St Nikodimos of Tismana, reorganiser of Romanian monasticism in the early Middle Ages. See also Appendix II, 'Short History of Hesychasm' in Romania, in Alexandru Popescu, *Petre Ţuţea, Between Sacrifice and Suicide*, Ashgate, Aldershot, UK, 2004, pp.279-285.

[7] See p.28 on St Nicholas Church in Drăgănescu, .

[8] George Enache & Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *Părintele Arsenie Boca în atenţia Poliţiei Politice din România*, Partener, Bucharest, 2009, p. 113.

[9] Nicolae Oancea (1893-1974), music teacher, composer, and conductor.

[10] Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), Romanian born historian of comparative religion, writer and philosopher, Professor Emeritus of the History of Religions at the Divinity School, University of Chicago. Between 1923-1931, as a student of philosophy in Calcutta, he 'mastered Sanskrit, learned yoga, fell in love, and wrote a novel' (see *Chicago Tribune*, 23 April 1986).

[11] Abba Arsenios (early 5th century AD), desert father of Sketis in Egypt.

[12] Francisc Şirato (1877-1953), painter, graphic designer, and art critic.

[13] Costin Petrescu (1872-1954), painter who coordinated, between 1934-1939, the execution

of a monumental fresco in the Romanian Athenaeum, a concert hall in the centre of Bucharest.

[14] Francisc Rainer (1874-1944), Professor and Head of the Academy Department at 'Carol Davila' University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Bucharest, founder of the Romanian School of Anthropology, Honorary Member of the Romanian Academy. Rainer was described as a 'providential teacher and master' by George Emil Palade (1912-2008), Nobel Prize Laureate, 'the most influential cell biologist ever' (see *The Independent*, 22 October 2008). See also *Alte mărturii despre Părintele Arsenie Boca*, p. 108.

[15] Fragments translated from the autobiography published in George Enache & Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op cit*, pp. 90-94.

[16] Părintele Arsenie Boca, *Biserica de la Drăgănescu, 'Capela Sixtină' a Ortodoxiei Româneşti*, edited by The Very Revd Dr Daniil Stoenescu & Nun Zamfira Constantinescu, Charisma Advertising, Deva, 2005, p.18.

[17] This fresco of the Madonna and Child is in St Elefterie Church, Bucharest. Valentin Iacob, 'Iisus in Zeghe', *Formula AS*, nr. 822 (22), 31 May - 7 June 2008. See also http://www.formula-as.ro/2008/822/spiritualitate-39/iisus-in-zeghe-9711

[18] Valentin Iacob, 'Pe urmele Părintelui Arsenie Boca', *Formula AS*, nr. 621, 14-20 June 2004. Cf. *Mărturii din Ţara Făgăraşului despre Părintele Arsenie Boca,* edited by Ioan Cişmileanu, Agaton, Făgăraş, 2004, p. 122.

[19] See *Mărturii...,* p. 123.

[20] *Noi mărturii despre Părintele Arsenie Boca*, edited by Ioan Cişmileanu, Agaton, Făgăraş, 2005, p. 93. Cf. *Mărturii...*, p. 122. See also Dan Lucinescu, *Părintele Arsenie Boca, un sfânt al zilelor noastre*, Siaj, Bucharest, 2009, pp.111-116.

[21] *The Philokalia, A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, edited by Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif, Foreword by Kallistos Ware, OUP, Oxford, 2012, p. 3.

[22] Dan Zamfirescu, *A Fundamental Book of the European Culture*, Roza Vânturilor, Bucharest, 1991, p. 3.

[23] Dan Zamfirescu, *op. cit*., pp. 12-13.

[24] *Filocalia sfintelor nevoinţe ale desăvârşirii*, Vol 1, translated from the Greek original, with an introduction and notes by Dumitru Stăniloae, Tipografia Arhidiecezană, Sibiu, 1946.

[25] *Filocalia sfintelor nevoinţe ale desăvârşirii*, Vol 2, translated from the Greek original, with an introduction and notes by Dumitru Stăniloae, Tipografia Arhidiecezană, Sibiu, 1947.

[26] See chapter 'Re-education and Unmasking', in Popescu, *op. cit.,* pp. 61-90. Cf. Mariana Alina Urs, 'Life in a Romanian Communist Prison', *Keston Newsletter*, No. 17, 2013, pp. 1-10.

[27] Virgil Maxim, *Imn pentru Crucea Purtată*, Vol 1, Gordian, Timişoara, 1977, p.182.

[28] *Father Arsenie Boca, A Man of God*, documentary directed by Nicolae Mărgineanu, DVD produced by Ager Film, 2011.

Acknowledgements
The Very Revd Dr Daniil Stoenescu, Deputy Bishop of Dacia Felix, for permission to reproduce plates from the catalogue of Fr Arsenie's frescoes. Mother Helena (Edna) Brooks and Sister Isabel Mary (SLG) for their editorial support and unconditional love.

Alexandru Popescu *is an Honorary Research and Pastoral Associate of Balliol College, Oxford, and works as a Community Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist in the Oxford Deanery. A former Visiting Research Scholar at the Neuropsychiatric Institute, UCLA, he completed post-graduate studies at the Tavistock Clinic in London and a doctorate at Oxford University. He is the author of* Petre Ţuţea: Between Sacrifice and Suicide *(Ashgate, 2004).*

From Fr Arsenie Boca's Sayings

God doesn't ask us to do miracles: He does them for us.

Asceticism has a Christological character. In surrendering the will, not only the human person is present, but also Christ. In our endeavours the power of Christ's human nature is present.

Atheism is an infirmity, a monstrosity, and a fundamental error of human nature.

As once upon a time Noah's ark floated on the turbulence of the flood, so now Christ's Church surmounts the lostness of humanity. The difference is that Noah's ark was sealed closed and shut in by God and afterwards nobody could enter it (Genesis 7:16); whilst the ship of the Church, with the cross as its mast, is open to be entered by people who are sinking in the flood. There was Noah, here is Christ, whilst in the waves is the evil one, causing people to sink.

You cannot preach the kingdom of heaven with the heavy lead of matter on your wings.

Lay people come to the monastery for prayer but monks do not go out into the world for rest. All professions enjoy holidays, but not monasticism.

A sad monk is a monk with the light turned off.

Monks and nuns, through their communal life, are an ancient icon of the new world.

Religion is founded on the grain of faith, that is, the grain of our communion with God.

Faith is a risk: against reason, against life, against human limitation, sometimes even against normality. This is why the saints abstained from performing miracles, although in many cases they did perform them, but only as a proof of their love for humanity and to alleviate human suffering.

Jesus wants from the world's faithful a profound silence: the silence of faith in God. This would make one think that around a quiet man peace is made on earth because of his roots in heaven.

To see Jesus is a blessing which does not resemble any earthly joy. This happens from time to time and from nation to nation, so that certainty in God's existence is not extinguished from among people.

As we cannot be the contemporary of Jesus, it is Jesus who is our contemporary throughout the ages. We breathe in his all-presence in his Most Holy Name and we breathe out the filthy air of our sins. We breathe in the Holy Spirit and we breathe out the evil spirit within ourselves.

God descends among people and lifts them up to Himself on the ladder of the holy Liturgy.

Faith in God and confession of God are the exit of the soul from darkness into divine light, the exit into the light of the age to come.

God listens to you to the extent that you listen to God.

The most refined temptation of those seeking holiness is that of vainglory. That is why the real saints are those who are not aware of their holiness and stoutly acknowledge their sins.

God's love for the greatest sinner is greater than the greatest saint's love for God.

Translations from a collection of 800 sayings by Fr Arsenie, entitled '*Părintele Arsenie Boca, Mare îndrumător de suflete din secolul XX'*, selected and edited by Ioan Gînscă, Teognost, Cluj-Napoca, 2002 [*Fr Arsenie Boca, Great Guide of Souls in the 20th Century*].

Fieldtrip to Kamchatka

by Xenia Dennen

Volcano rises behind Convent of the Kazan Mother of God Icon

The Encyclopaedia team – myself, Sergei Filatov and Roman Lunkin – set off from Moscow in June on one of our longest journeys – over 4000 miles to Kamchatka. The flight took more than eight hours and as we flew over Magadan I could see many snow-covered mountains below. We were met by Roman's contact, Sergei Klyachin from a Charismatic church, who as he drove us to our hotel in the capital Petropavlovsk pointed out one of Kamchatka's many volcanoes – snow-capped and nearly 3,500m high. On the way he showed us an enormous new domed building which his church had recently constructed, large enough to hold 2000 at a service, and with many rooms for offices and group meetings.

Once installed in our hotel we decided we should first get acclimatised and so set off downhill to the seashore, through the city's main square with its statue of Lenin and nearby one of SS Peter and Paul (after whom the capital was named). Uninviting seaside hot-dog stands stood on the roadside leading to the beach; the paving stones along the seafront were broken; the grass covered in dandelions; an occasional rusting yellow metal chair graced the beach's gloomy grey volcanic sand. An enormous bay stretched out beyond the shore with a distant row of mountains protecting the capital from potential tsunamis – the land was frequently rocked by earthquakes. No one could swim in the water even in summer – it was far too cold.

When Sergei rang the Diocesan Administration he was told that the bishop (Bishop Artemi) was in Moscow until Sunday (by which time we would have left). Our hearts sank: had we come all this way only to find we were unable to interview anyone in the Russian Orthodox diocese? The next morning, however, we breathed a sigh of relief: the diocesan press secretary rang back after receiving the bishop's permission to organise a meeting for us with clergy at the city's Trinity Cathedral later that day.

Orthodoxy in Kamchatka had a relatively short history. Few Russians

moved to Kamchatka until the second half of the 19th century and there were few churches built. A diocese was founded in 1840 which included not only Kamchatka but the whole of Russia's Far East. The first bishop was the famous missionary Innokenti Veniaminov, but as early as 1861 the Kamchatka mission was closed, leaving just a few clergy. Only in the early 20th century was a new mission organised when Ieromonakh Nestor (Anisimov) in 1907 was sent to Kamchatka. Nestor founded a brotherhood which built churches, schools and hospitals, while converting many among the indigenous peoples. With the Revolution, however, the results of all this missionary work were destroyed and by the mid-1920s not one Orthodox church remained. Today's Kamchatka diocese with its own bishop was established in 1993.

Before our meeting at the cathedral we arranged to interview the Roman Catholic priest, the only one in Kamchatka. This was Fr Jan Radoň, a Polish priest and former champion volleyball player who collected us in a small 4 x 4 and drove us high up the hill above our hotel to the Church of St Theresa. A mountain stream cascaded down past the church and through a small garden with a grotto and statue of the Virgin Mary.

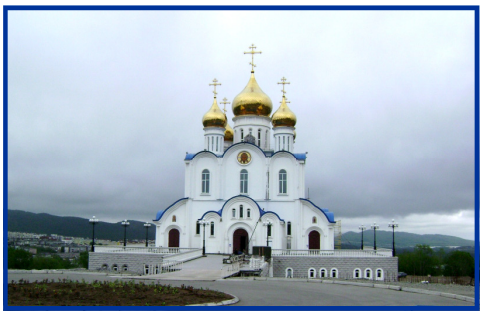
A Catholic church had been founded in Kamchatka in 1999 while Fr Jan had arrived five years ago. His congregation was about 30-strong on Sundays – mostly Lithuanians, Ukrainians and a few Russians – with 50 at Easter. Kamchatka, he commented, was 'different' from other parts of Russia because all religion had been obliterated under Communism, and now the young could choose from a variety of denominations which in their eyes were all on an equal level – Orthodoxy was not seen as superior. All around was a desert, he commented: mothers nearby were alone for months on end, and often took to drink while their fishermen husbands were at sea. Their children had nowhere to play and did not attend school.

Left to right: *Fr Jan Radoň & Sergei Filatov*

Relations between the Orthodox and Catholics were frosty: Fr Jan had not been able to meet Bishop Artemi once, although the latter had been appointed to Kamchatka two years ago. In contrast Fr Jan's relations with the Protestants were most warm and he admired them for their 'fantastic' work among the indigenous peoples. The FSB kept a close watch on him. All churches had recently been checked by the Procuracy, while the FSB came round to his church twice every quarter, and not long ago had woken him up at 1a.m. insisting on examining all books and journals in case they contained some anti-government propaganda.

Mist had descended and it was wet and cold by the time Sergei and I arrived at the Trinity Cathedral which stood on high ground overlooking Petropav-

lovsk, its new gold cupolas not quite as eye-catching as on a sunny day. In the bishop's grand council chamber three Orthodox priests had assembled – Fr Viktor Muzykant, head of social work, Fr Matvei, diocesan secretary and Fr Fyodor Malakhinov, Abbot of the St Panteleimon Monastery.



Trinity Cathedral in Petropavlovsk

Fr Matvei told us that before the Revolution there had been 64 parishes in Kamchatka, and that 26 well-established parishes now existed with 40 priests plus two deacons. Eight men were training for the priesthood either in Moscow or Khabarovsk. The general low standard of living meant that parishes had difficulty raising enough money to support a priest. In northern villages with a population of 500-600 about 10% had been converted to Orthodoxy whereas in the cities only 7-10% were practising Orthodox believers, although about 80% identified with the Russian Orthodox Church. About 23% of children had chosen to take the Orthodox school course, *Foundations of Orthodox Culture*, but there were few teachers qualified to teach these classes. Many missions consisting of one priest and a seminarian (from the Belgorod seminary) had been organised who set off to distant villages where they would stay for a few days. Some villages were only accessible by air, some by water in the summer, and in winter snow-mobiles could sometimes be used. Fr Fyodor claimed that many Koryaks (one of the indigenous peoples) had a 'genetic memory' about Orthodoxy and remembered where a priest had been killed; many of them wanted to build chapels. At the moment, however, there were no Koryak priests.

Fr Viktor Muzykant described some of the church's social work. A Martha and Mary community of 15 sisters who visited hospitals and helped the elderly and disabled had been established, as well as a youth centre, founded in 1999, which organised summer camps for young people aged 9–18 'with a military-patriotic emphasis'. I later met the organiser of these camps at the Convent of the Kazan Mother of God Icon, Fr Alexei Alpatov, who was extremely suspicious of me, a foreigner. These camps, he said, were run according to strict military discipline and the children were taught hand-to-hand combat and used real guns.

Fr Viktor's social work department sent a priest into local prisons and had set up a community for former prisoners and down-and-outs in the countryside, where members had to be physically fit – they worked as labourers helping local people with construction work and repairs to buildings. Twenty five former homeless men belonged to an Orthodox centre named after the Mother of God of Unexpected Joy Icon and worked on the land. In Petropavlovsk the church had organised three feeding centres, a medical centre, a centre for distributing clothes and planned to found a centre for

women ‘in trouble’ where the church would discourage abortions. He regretted that the church did not yet run a drug rehab centre. We noted that unlike some dioceses where the Orthodox recognise the value of Protestant work helping drug addicts and alcoholics, Kamchatka’s Orthodox had no dealings with other denominations.

Fr Fyodor, a graduate of the Moscow College of Mines, explained that his Monastery of St Panteleimon was now well-established with 25 members of which 14 were monks and the others homeless men and former sailors who were helping construct the buildings. Many of the monks were more interested in an active religious life, he said, and were involved in mission, social work and teaching in schools and colleges. For those monks drawn to contemplative prayer Fr Fyodor had founded a skete 60km from Petropavlovsk in the wilds, which, he added, was heated by water from a volcano. A large church was to be built as part of the monastery in memory of fishermen and sailors who had died at sea.

Even during the Soviet period Kamchatka – an area like Siberia and the Far East of Russia where Russian Orthodoxy was not well-established – had a number of Protestant groups which missionaries from the mainland had founded. After the fall of Communism in the early 1990s a mass of new Protestant groups arrived – Charismatics, Presbyterians, Pentecostals. The most influential and the largest was the Charismatic ‘Good News’ church. Dmitri Klyachin, who had met us at the airport, was a deacon in this church and dealt with its public relations. He collected all three of us from the hotel towards the end of the fieldtrip and took us to his church to meet members of the indigenous peoples who had been converted and were now active church members. There were by now ‘Good News’ groups in almost all the isolated villages in the north, each led by a local person.

Left to right: *Dmitri Klyachin, Sergei Filatov & Xenia in front of the ‘Good News’ church*

Round a table were gathered Anton Pavlovich, an Even from Khailino, Margarita Suzdalova, a Koryak woman pastor from the village of Lesnoi, Liliya Khomich, an Aleut from the Komandorsky Islands, and Nadezhda Roganova, a Koryak from Palana.

Anton Pavlovich, told us that he had been a pagan, worshipping the spirits of water and fire and offering sacrifices of reindeer hide and fat, while after his conversion he had been able to stop smoking, had got married and ‘found himself’. Margarita Suzdalova added ‘My family used to bring offerings to the spirits....We Koryaks are drawn to God, and when you come to God you change completely.’ Her village celebrated an autumn festival when the number of bears caught and wild ani-

mals killed during the year would be counted and the villagers would dance and sing: 'Now we dance and sing in praise of God.' Liliya Khomich commented: 'My granny was Orthodox. I was taught atheism, but I felt the need for God. Then my children joined an evangelical church and in 1995 I went to a conference in Moscow where I found God. I realised that He loved me and the world turned upside down.' Nadezhda Roganova had been converted by her sister she said, adding: 'I always looked for God. Indigenous people have been wounded – they are very open, sensitive to spiritual things. You just need to love them.'

Anatoli Paprotsky, a Ukrainian and now a bishop of the 'Good News' church, who had taken over the leadership when the founding American missionaries from Alaska had left in 1992, was sitting at the table with us. He said:

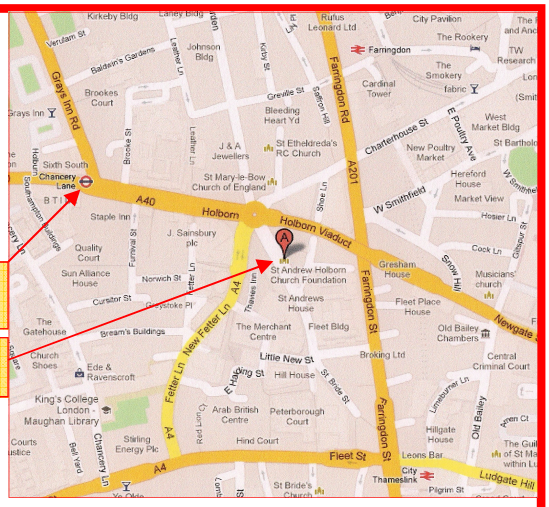
> 'Kamchatka is the Eastern outpost of Russia. I believe that God has a special purpose for Russia. Kamchatka – the world's end – is also part of His plan!'

I from distant London certainly felt at the world's end, and hoped Anatoli was right about Kamchatka's destiny.

Keston AGM

Saturday 2nd November 2013

St Andrew's Holborn
7 St Andrew Street
London EC4A 3AB



12.00 noon AGM

12.45 p.m. Lunch

2.00 p.m. 'Religious Education in Russian Schools: the First Years of Mandatory Teaching', a talk by Andrey Levitsky, a religious education specialist from Ekaterinburg, Russia, who is currently at Oxford University.

3.00 p.m. 'Learning from the Past to Re-imagine the Future: Theological Education in the (Former) Soviet Union', a talk by Dr Joshua Searle, Tutor in Theology and Public Thought, Spurgeon's College, London.

4.00 p.m. Tea

Review

Sir Sigmund Sternberg

Sir Sigmund Sternberg: the Knight with Many Hats.
By Emma Klein, Valentine Mitchell, £25, (978-0-85303-835-1)

'Sigi', as Sir Sigmund Sternberg is known to his many friends, is (apart from our Chairman, Xenia Dennen) Keston's longest-serving Council member. Now aged 92, he has supported us over four decades and it is a delight to be able to recommend his biography to our members.

Emma Klein has done much more than assemble the bare facts of his life. His bravery and initiative brought him to this country aged 18 as a refugee from Hungary immediately before the outbreak of war. Denied the opportunity of higher education, he threw himself into setting up a business as a scrap metal dealer. Ms Klein recounts Sigi's rise from this unpromising beginning to his becoming one of the UK's most distinguished philanthropists with compelling pace and an eye for detail. What is especially notable, though, is the direction in which his generosity led him: ceaseless work to promote understanding between Christians and Jews and then, later, bringing Muslims into the equation, with the founding of the Three Faiths Forum.

Lest anyone should think of this book as a work of hagiography, the author does not ignore the difficulties in Sigi's life, particularly the sadness caused by the breakdown of his first marriage. The sensitive portraits of Ruth and, subsequently, Hazel, his second wife, are one of the strengths of this book.

For supporters of Keston, one chapter will stand out: the account of Sigi's role in beneficially influencing harsh Jewish and Catholic opinion over the 'Carmelite Convent at Auschwitz' affair. I was previously aware that Sigi had played a reconciling role, but I knew little of the dramatic detail which appears in the book.

The later part of the biography perhaps becomes a little bogged down in listing the honours showered on Sigi during the later part of his life, but there is a page on his role with Keston. We were always delighted to have a wise and influential Jewish presence on our Council, as well as having the Chief Rabbi as a patron. Sigi was particularly proud of having been made a Papal Knight in 1985, a unique honour at the time for a Jew. Soon after, in my presence, the Archbishop of Canterbury welcomed Sigi to Lambeth Palace, but regretted that he had not made his entry seated on a horse, as might have been expected of a knight. Sigi revelled in the joke.

Michael Bourdeaux

Home News

In June Keston's Council were pleased to welcome the Director of the Keston Center (Baylor University), Professor Kathy Hillman, an *ex officio* Council member, who reported on progress at the Center. Dr Joshua Searle, Tutor in Theology and Public Thought at Spurgeon's College, London, was awarded a scholarship by Keston and worked in the archive during the summer. Alina Urs from Romania, who gave a talk on the Romanian Orthodox Church at last year's AGM, plans to work in the archive in November thanks to a Keston grant. During that month the Keston Center will also host a symposium at which Michael Bourdeaux will be one of the main speakers.

Work on a new edition of the Keston Encyclopaedia is continuing and in October the first volume will be published. The team, including the Chairman, have been on fieldtrips to Volgograd, Petrozavodsk (Karelia) and Kamchatka so far this year. In November they will be travelling to Siberia!

Michael Bourdeaux writes:

My thoughts over the summer have been filled by reflecting on the lives of two very different Russian Orthodox priests. I received a remarkable book which I have reviewed for this issue of the *Keston Newsletter* – a biography of Fr Dmitri Dudko which tells a tragic story: how the heroic Fr Dmitri broke under interrogation (and probably torture) by the KGB and appeared on TV not only to renounce his activities, but even to condemn himself as a criminal. The contrast with Fr Pavel Adelheim was complete. He, too, was a victim of the KGB and was brutally treated in labour camp in his younger days, but he survived with courage unbroken and took up a remarkable ministry in the ancient city of Pskov. He became my friend and I was able to put him in touch with the Anglican parish of Tring, Herts. They financially supported his ministry among Pskov's youth over many years. In August we received the terrible news that Fr Pavel had been murdered – by a young man, apparently a psychopath, whom he had tried to counsel. At least I had the privilege of telling Fr Pavel's story in an obituary I wrote for *The Guardian*.

The focus of my travel for Keston has been a visit to Iaşi, Romania, to give two university lectures and a public one on the work of Keston. At each, discussion continued without a break after I had spoken, the sessions lasting three hours, so the interest was considerable. In one I surveyed the work we had done on Romania in the past, mainly through the good offices of (now Bishop) Alan Scarfe. This opened my eyes even more to see the richness of that section of our archive.

Keston Institute
PO Box 752, Oxford OX1 9QF
admin@keston.org.uk www.keston.org.uk