

# Keston Newsletter

No. 27, 2018

## The 1917 Revolution and the Russian Orthodox Church

by Xenia Dennen



*Patriarch Tikhon*

The year 1917 was momentous for Russia and for its church. The Russian Orthodox Church from the reign of Peter the Great had no Patriarch and was run like any government department with a secular Chief Procurator in charge. Soon after the Bolshevik *coup d'état* in October 1917, amidst violence on the streets of Moscow and a threatened artillery bombardment of the Kremlin, a church Council or *Sobor*, which had opened on 15 August in the presence of Kerensky, then the Prime Minister, decided after much deliberation that a stable central point was needed by the church and that a Patriarch should be

chosen. Sergei Bulgakov, a convert from Marxism to Orthodoxy who was ordained

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## *AGM 2018*

*The next annual meeting will be held on Saturday 3 November at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine, 2 Butcher Row, Limehouse, London E14 8DS. The speakers will be the President of Keston Institute, Rev Canon Michael Bourdeaux, and one of our trustees, Rev Dr Keith Clements.*

## *AGM 2019*

*In 2019 Keston will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of Keston College. The speaker on this occasion will be the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Bishop Rowan Williams.*

in 1918, described the spiritual transformation of the *Sobor*: “something came to pass in the actual atmosphere; there was a new spiritual birth; deep within the conciliar consciousness of the church the idea of the Patriarchate was born.” Three bishops were elected and their names placed in a small casket tied with cord, which on 5 November 1917 was placed in the sanctuary of Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev, the senior of the Metropolitans, who had celebrated the liturgy when the *Sobor* opened, was again officiating on 5 November. Prince Vasilchikov, a member of the *Sobor*, described the scene:

“At the end of the liturgy the Metropolitan brought out from the sanctuary a small casket which he placed on a small table before the Vladimir icon of the Mother of God, to the left of the Royal Doors... Fr Alexei, a *starets* (senior monk), in a black monastic habit emerged from the sanctuary and went up to the icon of the Mother of God and began to pray, bowing to the ground many times. There was total silence in the cathedral and you felt the general

nervous tension growing. For a long time the *starets* prayed. Then he got up from his knees, took a piece of paper from the casket and gave it to the Metropolitan who read it and handed it to the deacon. With his powerful velvety bass voice, famous throughout Moscow, the deacon slowly began to intone ‘Long life to...’ The tension in the cathedral was intense; who would he name? ‘the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Tikhon’ rang out through the cathedral...”

Thus began Patriarch Tikhon’s complex and painful role as head of his church, an experience perhaps better described as a living martyrdom.

The *Sobor* represented the whole church and has been called by some the Russian Orthodox Church’s Vatican II. There were 564 voting members made up of bishops, clergy and laity. The *Sobor*, defined as “the supreme legislative, administrative, judicial and auditing authority”, returned the church to its ancient traditions, re-establishing canonical conciliar structures. The Patriarch was to be only the first among equals and bishops were now to be elected by councils of laity

and clergy. The *Sobor* was concerned to bond a bishop with his diocese which he should govern “with the conciliar collaboration of its clergy and laity”. It set up a Synod of bishops and a Supreme Church Council: the former would deal with theology, discipline and church administration, while the latter would handle secular juridical matters, the church’s charitable work and questions of social policy. The Synod and Supreme Church Council were invested with the power to call a Council of all the bishops, which had the authority to remove the Patriarch. The 1917 *Sobor* restored autonomy and internal democracy to monasteries; it gave new statutes to the parishes, which now had more autonomy and the right to put forward candidates for the priesthood; it emphasised the importance of lay preachers and sermons which were comprehensible and used the local language; it debated the role of women in the church and the part the church should play in education.

The *Sobor* continued meeting until September 1918 when its funds ran out after all church bank accounts had been frozen by the Bolsheviks on 28 January that year. This followed the church’s loss of all its land and the decree of 23 January 1918 when church and state were separated: church property was nationalised, church institutions lost their right to legal personality, and all schools were separated from the church, leaving only a small aperture for teaching the Christian faith in private; church buildings in future would be leased to parish councils. The Bolshevik onslaught against the church made any enactment of the *Sobor*’s decisions impossible: it was, sadly, a Vatican II “manqué”.

Patriarch Tikhon, like many at the time, assumed that the Bolsheviks would soon be defeated and condemned them on 19

January 1918: “Come to your senses, you madmen, cease your bloodthirsty attacks. What you are doing is not only cruel, it is truly satanic and for this you will burn in the fires of Hell ... I call all you believers, faithful members of the church, to defend our persecuted and insulted Mother Church.” In August 1918, he called the Russian people to repentance declaring: “Sin has darkened our people’s minds, we are feeling our way through the dark, swaying like drunkards... We wanted to create heaven on earth but without God...” Over the next two years, 1918-20, at least 28 bishops were murdered and thousands of priests and members of the laity were imprisoned or killed.

The collapse of the economy and agriculture plus drought in 1920-21 led to famine. The church responded by offering to sell its valuables to raise money to help the starving; only the sacred vessels used for communion, said Patriarch Tikhon, should not be sold. This gave Lenin, the Bolshevik leader, his chance: in a secret letter (3 March 1922) he wrote “it is precisely now that we must wage a merciless battle against the reactionary clergy and suppress their resistance with such cruelty that they will remember it for several decades...” and on 6 May 1922 Patriarch Tikhon was placed under house arrest, accused of resisting the confiscation of church valuables. Under the pressure of foreign public opinion (a telegram dated 31 May 1922 was sent to Lenin by the leaders of all the churches in the United Kingdom and published in *The Times* on 1 June) Patriarch Tikhon was eventually released in June 1923, but only after he had “repented” before the Supreme Court and stated, “from now on I am no enemy of Soviet power”. He died in April 1925 while in hospital and, according to a respected Moscow priest, this had been hastened by the secret police. He was

canonised by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1989.

The 1917 *Sobor* remains to this day the measuring rod against which are judged the governance, practice and policies of the Russian Orthodox Church. During the Khrushchev period, when the Communist Party unleashed another anti-religious campaign (1959-64), many thousands of churches were closed and priests removed. A humble provincial maths teacher in a town north-east of Moscow, Boris Talantov, saw through the Party's promises about a future Communist utopia and came to the defence of the Russian Orthodox Church. From 1958 he began planning books and writing articles on the nature of the Soviet system and on the inevitable ideological conflict between it and religious believers. In a long document dated November 1966 he described in detail how 53% of churches open in 1959 in his diocese were now closed. In 1965 he worked out a reform plan for the Russian Orthodox Church aimed at its renewal and democratisation, based on decisions taken at the 1917 *Sobor*. In order to root out bureaucratic domination and to renew a spirit of freedom, love and unity, the governance of the church from top to bottom should be based on the principle of election. Clergy should be encouraged to focus on pastoral care. They should teach Orthodox Christians to relate to Christians of other denominations, not only with tolerance but also in a spirit of Christian love so as to promote Christian unity. In every diocese there should be a good seminary, and Talantov stressed the need to encourage women to be admitted as, after all, he noted, it was women who had kept the church going during periods of persecution; he also suggested creating an order of deaconesses. As a teacher in higher education, Talantov worked out an interesting balance for a seminary's

curriculum: only one third should be devoted to theology, and two thirds should include study of secular subjects, especially scientific disciplines, so that students were equipped to counter anti-Christian arguments. As a result of his activity, Talantov began to be regularly vilified in the local press; eventually he was arrested in 1969 and sentenced to two years in prison. He died in the prison hospital on (Orthodox) Christmas Eve 1971.

More recently Fr Pavel Adelheim, a Russian Orthodox priest, who would be tragically murdered in his own kitchen in 2013 by a deranged young man, criticised his church's current governance, arguing that it was becoming increasingly centralised which infringed the principles laid down at the 1917 *Sobor*. The structure of church governance, Fr Pavel argued, was crucial because in its present form it undermined Christian unity: the church had become an administrative system rather than a living organism inspired by the Holy Spirit; it was being built on foundations of obedience and discipline, of fear and compulsion, rather than on love. He diagnosed the church's main tragedy as its loss of *sobornost*, conciliarity, which had been emptied of its dogmatic content and turned into a purely geographical concept about jurisdiction.

Fr Pavel analysed his church's statutes, and pointed out that the latest version adopted in 2000 had taken power away from the church as a whole – from the laity and clergy – and away from its representative institution, the *Sobor*. The 2000 statutes gave legislative and judicial power to the Council of Bishops, and executive power to the Patriarch and Holy Synod. All these powers should be vested in the *Sobor*; he insisted, whereas in actual fact the latter now only dealt with canon law and matters of faith, and only met to elect a Patriarch. All power was in the hands of the bishops.

Were the decisions of the 1917 *Sobor* observed, these princes of the church, Fr Pavel argued, would be elected by the clergy and laity of each diocese.

The 1917 *Sobor* became important, too, in the United Kingdom. The Russian Orthodox Diocese of Sourozh was formed in 1962 with Metropolitan Anthony Bloom in charge, and in due course, at its first Diocesan Conference, principles on lay participation in the running of the diocese began to be discussed. By 1977 a Diocesan Assembly met, and from this body grew a committee which began work on a new set of statutes which, on Metropolitan Anthony's insistence, were intended to reflect the principles of the 1917 *Sobor* on governance. Thanks to these statutes the laity were able to contribute to decision-making with the clergy at every level within the diocese. Another important aspect of the Diocese of Sourozh was its identification with the culture of the country in which it developed; it did not try to use the Russian Orthodox Church as a

vehicle for preserving Russian national identity. This principle of acculturation was, however, by implication condemned by Metropolitan Kirill (now Patriarch) when in October 2006 he said that the Russian Orthodox Church should seek to prevent assimilation, and to preserve a separate cultural and religious identity for Russians abroad.

Sadly, after Metropolitan Anthony's death in 2003 a battle developed between Moscow and London – between the Moscow Patriarchate and supporters of Metropolitan Anthony's successor, all of whom moved over to the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Although the statutes of the Diocese of Sourozh were not accepted by the Moscow Patriarchate, they nevertheless continue to be highly valued by many Orthodox believers within Russia, who look upon the Diocese of Sourozh under Metropolitan Anthony as an ideal structure; such people hanker after a less authoritarian church – and that after all was the vision of the 1917 *Sobor*.

This article was first published in the Church Times, 10 March 2017, and is reprinted with kind permission. For information about a Church Times subscription, or a free sample copy, see [www.churchtimes.co.uk](http://www.churchtimes.co.uk) or phone 01603 785911.

*Xenia Dennen is Chairman of Keston Institute and Editor of the Newsletter. She is currently on sabbatical from the Institute as Upper Warden of the Mercers' Company.*

***The opinions expressed in the articles published in the Keston Newsletter are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Keston Institute.***

# New Life in Russia's "Frozen Wastelands"

by Neville Kyrke-Smith, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN)



*Neville Kyrke-Smith by Kremlin walls, Novgorod, Russia*

A hundred years after the Russian revolution saw the country caught in the iron grip of Communism, I was privileged to return to see once more how the Faith is flourishing after the collapse of the USSR.

What stood out from my trip were the bridges that have been built, and are in the process of being built, between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. At St Petersburg's Catholic Seminary, students – who are being supported by ACN – are studying modern media communications alongside Orthodox seminarians.

In Stavropol – whose name means city of the cross – we are working with Orthodox to support a centre helping women in crisis situations, and the local Orthodox Church is helping the city's new Catholic chapel as it goes through the process of registration. Ecumenical encounters are at the heart of our work in Russia.

We are building on the prophetic vision and work of ACN's founder Fr Werenfried van Straaten. Echoing Pope John Paul II he called for "The Church to breathe with both lungs and proclaim the Gospel... across the frozen spiritual

wastelands of the East." But today these frozen wastelands are beginning to thaw, we are seeing the shoots of a Springtime of Faith.

I pray that Our Lady of Fatima will continue to watch over Russia's Christians and the work of Aid to the Church in Need.

## Going back to the old Catholic Church (in a roundabout way!)



*Neville with members of the congregation after Mass in the old framers' workshop.*

In Stavropol we went to Sunday Mass in an old framers' workshop, which acts as the Catholic chapel – between 20 and 30 people squeezed in. But this small community is on the move.

The old church was seized by the Soviets and split up into flats for the party elite. Fr Jaroslaw Mitrzak – the first Catholic priest permanently resident in Stavropol since the 1917 Revolution – has bought one of these flats to convert to a chapel. ACN has provided £53,000 for the work.

Fr Jaroslaw tells me: "We are very grateful to the benefactors of ACN for this chapel

and as we open the chapel we are opening up to the Catholic community. Thank you!

“Every day we pray for the benefactors of ACN and we understand that the donations given are often from people who are not rich. Our only way to thank you is to pray! As a priest I regularly offer Mass for the benefactors.”

### **Finding the God of love**



*Seminarian Vladimir.*

Vladimir, a seminarian at Stavropol Orthodox Theological Seminary, told me of his incredible journey:

“I came to the Church through Islam. I am from Mozdok in north Ossetia where there are a great number of Muslims. Friends started to teach me Arabic and the Qur’an. I spoke to my brother, who said you should first learn Christianity – as I was baptised even though my parents never went to church – and then take a decision.

“Through study and with the help of an old priest I discovered a love for Christ – and comparing the Qur’an and the Bible I understood that the teaching of Christ is

the teaching of love. I asked ‘Where is the source of this love?’ and I found that in God.”

In 1920 the seminary was closed by Soviet authorities – many of its 1,000 seminarians became martyrs. But today there are 219 young men training for the priesthood – and we are giving the seminary the equivalent of c.£265 for each of them.

Pro-Rector Fr Paul Somoilenko told me, students have “an inner calling to take up the cross and change the world.”

### **Sheltering women in crisis**



*Metropolitan Kirill meeting a Muslim family at the opening of the centre in Stavropol.*

Along with Metropolitan Kirill and the Mayor of Stavropol I was asked to open a shelter for single mothers set up by the Russian Orthodox Church.

The women have either suffered violence, been turned out of their homes for refusing to have abortions, or are facing some other crisis situation.

Going round the centre we met the mothers and their children. ACN gave £22,000 to help renovate the house, which can accommodate up to seven women. The intention is that they will stay for around two months, so that around 42 women can be helped each year.



When the Pope met Patriarch Kirill in 2016 they stressed the need to help families – and ACN is also supporting another centre in Nizhny Novgorod.

Metropolitan Kirill said: “There are no boundaries to charitable love and no borders across which God’s love cannot reach. Thank you and may God bless our dear friends at Aid to the Church in Need.”

### **Offering the hope of life – and resurrection**



*Covered in snow: the chapel at the rehabilitation centre in Sapernoye.*

Father Sergii Belkov showed me two of the centres for recovering addicts he has set up – he told me they have an 80 percent success rate.

At Torfyanoe I met six young women from different parts of Russia and one from Ukraine. They are mostly in their early twenties. Alexandra, a former addict who has returned to be a volunteer, told me what a difference the centre has made: “This changed everything – everything in life, in relationships and with all people. Now I am a practising Christian. I love my work here and would like to volunteer here for a year or more. I want to be a vet!”

In Sapernoye, 65 miles north of Saint Petersburg, I meet some of the 45 young men at another centre, located on the edge of the woods. It has its own chapel and each day begins with forty minutes of prayer and reflection – and each day ends with prayer too.

Fr Sergii tells me it all began when he was in a monastery near St Petersburg: “Some young drug addicts came to the monastery to seek help and to save their lives. This moved and inspired me – I was struck by the dependency on drugs. In 1996 I started



*Fr Sergii Belkov with one of the residents in the workshop at Sapernoye, with the carpentry machinery provided by ACN.*

the centre in Sapernoye with four boys.” At the centres, residents learn practical skills they can use after they leave. There are now 80 centres in Russia.

Fr Sergii says: “In our new centre and farm being developed at Krasnoarmeyskoe, with ACN help, we hope to produce cheese. There are presently six people there and the church is being built – and we plan to have up to seventy in time.” ACN has promised more than £11,000 to cover the cost of cheese making equipment and for equipping a cattle stall where the animals can be kept.



“Thank you to the benefactors of ACN for giving pastoral and practical help – you helped with the carpentry machinery here, the kitchen and store at Torfyanoe and also for the farm at Krasnoarmeyskoe. We pray every day for the benefactors, that is our rule!”

### **Clearing the debris of Communism**



*The grounds of St Petersburg Catholic seminary  
30 August 2017.*

Tomorrow’s priests are being trained at the Catholic Seminary of Mary, Queen of the Apostles in St Petersburg – to minister to Russia’s Catholics, who clung to their faith in secret during decades of Communist repression.

The historic seminary building was returned to the Church in a terrible condition following the fall of Communism. Initially, they could only use the first floor, and seminarians crammed into the limited space available – but gradually work is continuing to allow more seminarians to pursue their vocation. It was marvelous to see what work has been done since my previous visits – I remember my first visit in the 1990s when they were still clearing debris.

This year ACN will again be helping cover their costs with a contribution of £70,000. The investment is worth it, as men like Aleksandr from Moscow, Sergei from Novosibirsk and Oleg from Vitebsk in Belarus were able to follow their vocation, and are now ministering to the faithful.

This article is taken from the report of Aid to the Church in Need no. 1801 and reprinted with permission.

All photographs by Neville Kyrke-Smith.

*Neville Kyrke-Smith is National Director of Aid to the Church in Need UK.*  
[www.acnuk.org](http://www.acnuk.org)

# After the Visit of Cardinal Parolin to Moscow Russia's Catholics Remain Sceptical

by Jonathan Luxmoore

When Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's Secretary of State, ended his official trip to Russia on 24 August 2017, news reports were full of praise for the latest expression of closeness between Rome and Moscow. But there are signs that not everyone is satisfied with the aloof tone of the four-day visit - or confident about its benefits for Catholics in Russia.



"Judging by all the goodwill declarations, there's clearly been a warming of relations - but there's been absolutely no change in Russia's policy at home and abroad, and that's what most concerns people in this region," said Marcin Przeciszewski, director of the church's Catholic Information Agency in nearby Poland, which provided the most extensive coverage of the cardinal's tour. "Russia will have scored diplomatic gains in hosting a top Holy See representative. But with no concluding declaration or summary, and

little real information available about his exchanges, it's open to question what the Vatican and church will have gained."

The visit was the first by a senior Vatican figure since Parolin's predecessor, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, travelled to Moscow in 1999, and the first on such a scale since Cardinal Agostino Casaroli's in 1990. It included talks with Patriarch Kirill, head of Russia's predominant Orthodox Church, and with President Vladimir Putin, and was accompanied by mutual pledges to build on links forged by the patriarch's historic February 2016 meeting with the pope in Cuba.

The trip sparked fresh anxieties among Greek Catholics in war-torn neighbouring Ukraine, who were denounced by the Orthodox side during the visit, and misgivings among Russia's own small Catholic minority, whose church is not recognized as a "traditional religion" and still faces discrimination and hardship.

Catholics are currently put at 773,000 by the Vatican's *Annuario Pontificio*, barely half a percent of Russia's population, and are widely dispersed over a Moscow-based archdiocese and dioceses in Saratov, Irkutsk and Novosibirsk.

The run-up to Parolin's visit saw a flurry of celebratory inter-church contacts, during which Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, visited St. Petersburg to bring home relics of the fourth-century St. Nicholas, after they'd been viewed by over 2.5 million Russians during a three-month display, and Kirill was made an honorary

citizen of Bari, Italy, where the relics are housed.

Also, the Russian Orthodox Church declared its backing for ecumenical ties in a new doctrinal catechism, its first for more than a century, while three-quarters of Russians said in a summer survey they would favour a visit by the pope.

### **Catholics seeking protection**

Msgr. Igor Kovalevsky, secretary-general of Russia's Catholic Bishops' Conference, said he also hoped for real progress on his church's practical problems, including the denial of permits to visiting Catholic clergy and the continued withholding of Catholic properties seized under Soviet rule. When Russia's Jehovah's Witnesses were banned as an "extremist organization" last April, with Russian Orthodox approval, Kovalevsky warned of "strong misgivings" that Catholics could now also face "new limits on freedom of belief."

This made Parolin's visit important for the protection of Russia's Catholics.

"The Russians understand the importance of relations with the Holy See - but in any dialogue, the local community dimension must be considered as well, not just top-level political and diplomatic questions," Msgr. Kovalevsky told NCR before the visit. "We want to be more actively involved in the life of society here, and we count on Russia's church and government being more attentive in future to Catholic needs."

Just how Parolin will have helped at this level remains to be seen.

Since his 2013 appointment as Secretary of State, Parolin has also travelled to neighbouring Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic states, making his Russia visit a natural next step. Its highlights included

talks on 21 August at the Moscow Patriarchate's Danilovsky Monastery headquarters with Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, who heads the Orthodox church's foreign relations, followed by a meeting the next day with Kirill.

Parolin also discussed cooperation with Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, who agreed at a subsequent press conference that both sides now held similar views on "problems of our times," including measures to promote peace and reconciliation, combat "terrorism and extremism" and strengthen "social justice and the role of the family".

Meanwhile, a Vatican communiqué said the cardinal had met Putin "in a positive, cordial climate of respect and mutual listening," engaging in an "open exchange of views on various topics." The Russian president has visited the Vatican five times, meeting Francis in November 2013 and June 2015, and was expected to meet him again in January 2018, when he opened a Russian art exhibition.

Besides current crises in the Middle East, Ukraine and Venezuela and the plight of persecuted Christians, Parolin said his Russian interlocutors had debated "a whole gamut of political issues," as well as "numerous cultural initiatives".

He also welcomed the "undoubted new dynamism" in Catholic-Orthodox ties, and said everyone had concurred that co-operation should become "ever wider and friendlier." Although the Vatican and Russia exchanged representatives during the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, they opened formal diplomatic ties only in 2009; the focus on top-level relations is understandable.

But in a TASS news agency interview before his arrival the cardinal also pledged

to raise issues facing Catholics in Russia, reiterating the promise during his visit to Gaudete-Ru, an online Catholic magazine. His first purpose, Parolin assured Gaudete-Ru, was "to meet with the local Catholic community. Each religious community needs a proper place, a church, a temple, to have the opportunity to profess its faith," he told the magazine. "This is a fundamental principle of religious freedom".

However, Parolin admitted the "very serious ... urgent problem" of Catholic property restitutions and clergy work permits had been discussed long ago by Sodano. Speaking later to journalists, he confirmed that his concerns had been "heard with understanding" and said he hoped "concrete steps" would now follow.

He made no mention of the issues while preaching at Moscow's Catholic Immaculate Conception Cathedral during his only direct encounter with Russian Catholics. Instead, he lauded "the path of mutual rapprochement, brotherhood and cooperation" begun by Francis and Kirill in Cuba and urged Catholics to be "considerate, pliable and grateful."

In the event, the only practical step announced during the four-day visit was a mutual agreement, signed by the Vatican's nuncio, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, to waive visa requirements for Russian and Vatican diplomats.

With little information available about more serious church problems, some locals are understandably disappointed.

Kovalevsky, the bishops' conference secretary-general, felt it necessary to issue a statement on 22 August, the day of Parolin's talks with Kirill and Lavrov, recalling the hardships facing Russia's Catholics - even in Moscow itself. Although

government officials had been ordered last May by an arbitration court to return the city's Sts. Peter and Paul Church to the Catholics, they'd failed to do so, Kovalevsky said.

This was not a "trivial property dispute" but a "planned policy by the Moscow authorities, aimed at stripping away the rights of Catholic believers," he said in the statement.

For this reason, he was withdrawing remarks he'd made before Parolin's arrival about "an improvement in church-state relations in Russia," Kovalevsky added. If the real situation wasn't one of "direct persecution," then it was certainly one in which rights were being "ignored and curtailed."

"Russia's Catholic community has enthusiastically greeted Cardinal Parolin's visit - it gives us hope of an improvement in the situation of Catholics living in Russia," Kovalevsky added. "I hope the authorities will prove by real actions that, while they're interested in peace between nations and confessions, they are also ready to uphold the legitimate rights of citizens."

The bishops' conference secretary-general, clearly bitter, refused comment at the end of the visit, telling NCR on 24 August it had been "a purely official event, with no effect on the local church".

### **Greek Catholics in Ukraine**

Meanwhile, Greek Catholics in Ukraine, whose church combines the eastern rite with loyalty to Rome, are also worried about the visit's implications. When the pope met Kirill in 2016, their 30-point declaration contained negative references to Greek Catholics, fueling fears the Ukrainian church could be sidelined in the interests of wider diplomatic and

ecumenical advances. These fears were stirred again when Hilarion attacked Ukrainian Catholics during his talks with Parolin, accusing them of "politicized statements and aggressive actions."

Although Parolin did not publicly reject the accusation, Przewciszewski thinks Ukrainians can take heart from Parolin's reported warnings that Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea violated international norms and demands that the Russian government "rigorously uphold the main principles of international law". But these were just verbal statements, the Polish editor cautions. As yet, no one knows whether they'll have any impact on the course of events.

While Orthodox representatives attended Parolin's Moscow Mass, critics point out that his stay failed to include any ecumenical service - or any apparent discussion of a papal visit, which clearly evoked little interest on the Russian side. Parolin declared himself "honoured and

thrilled" with his one-hour meeting with Putin, but critics note the cardinal had to travel to Sochi on the Black Sea for the privilege, a location pointedly close to eastern Ukraine and Crimea.

If this is to reflect well on the Vatican, it will have to be followed by meaningful steps to help Russia's Catholics, as well as the prospects for international co-operation. So far there have been no clear results of these promises.

"It is quite characteristic, and quite worrying, that few if any positive voices have been raised about this visit within Russia's Catholic community - they simply have no idea what they may gain from it," Przewciszewski told NCR. "If we look at it as a contribution to dialogue and peace, then we can certainly see it as a success. But for now, at least, everything remains at the level of hope and conjecture. Expectations have been encouraged and dispelled many times before."

*National Catholic Reporter*, August 30, 2017 [www.ncronline.org](http://www.ncronline.org)

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/russias-catholics-react-skeptically-cardinal-parolins-visit>

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*Jonathan Luxmoore is a freelance writer covering church news from Oxford, England, and Warsaw, Poland, and serving as a staff commentator for Polish Radio. He is the author of several books, including a two-volume study of communist-era martyrs, The God of the Gulag.*

# Islamic State and the Radicalised Fighters of Northern Caucasus

by Mikhail Roshchin

What impact did the rise of Islamic State (IS, or ISIL) have on the radicalised Muslim underground in the North Caucasus and any future changes? The oath of loyalty to IS taken by a number of armed groups led to a split from those who continue to recognise the “Emirate of the Caucasus” as the fundamental underground structure for the radicals. Some former supporters of the Emirate decided that IS today is a more attractive option for continuing the armed struggle. In the first place this was linked to the declaration of the Caliphate by IS and the confirmation in post of “Caliph” of Abu



Bakr al-Baghdadi (29 June 2014). The new Caliph declared himself to be descended from the Prophet Muhammed, and as such added to his name that he is al-Qureshi, someone from the

Prophet’s Qureshi tribe. How true this is, we cannot tell. However, the question of the Caliphate is important for many Sunni Muslims. The historical Caliphate ceased to exist with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire because the Ottoman Sultans were at the same time Caliphs of the Sunni world. The last Ottoman Sultan, Mehmet VI, left Turkey on 17 November 1922, and on 3 March 1924 the Caliphate was officially dissolved.

For a new Caliph to be recognised, he must possess certain qualities without which he

will not be recognised by the Islamic world. Many prominent Muslim scholars have criticised the declaration of the Caliphate by IS. Among them, for example, is the well-known theologian Yusuf al-Karadavi, president of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, who condemned the declaration of the Caliphate by a small group of people who are known for their cruel and extreme views. Furthermore, in his opinion, the declaration of the Caliphate was not based on Sharia, and represents a threat for the Sunnis of Iraq and what he calls “the Uprising in Syria”,<sup>1</sup> because it undermines the image of those rebels who do not hold extremist views in their battle against the official Syrian government.<sup>2</sup> Other scholars share the horror at the savagery of IS, and agree that the declaration of the Caliphate does not have the support of the Muslim *umma* (community).<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, the well-known Syrian Sufi Sheikh Muhammed al-Yacoubi called the declaration “illegal” and supporting it “*haram*” (forbidden in the Koran)<sup>4</sup> 126 imams and Muslim scholars accused al-Baghdadi of distorting the interpretation of the Koran and Hadith.<sup>5</sup>

All of which demonstrate that recognition of IS and its ideas was by no means unconditional even among the Salafists. There is a false impression that in the Islamic world there is no difference between the spiritual and political elements of power. That there is a difference was demonstrated brilliantly as long ago as the beginning of the twentieth century by the

outstanding Russian orientalist Vasily Bartold in his magisterial work *Caliph and Sultan*, first published in 1912.<sup>6</sup>

How significant IS is for the Muslims of Russia, and of the North Caucasus in particular, needs close investigation. It is clear that after the bombing of the Russian airliner A321 over Sinai on 31 October 2015, the series of terrorist outrages in Paris on 13 November 2015, the tragic events in Brussels, London, St Petersburg, Stockholm and Barcelona, IS dramatically redirected its attacks to the wider world.<sup>7</sup> This was partly to rehabilitate itself after its defeats in Iraq and Syria, and partly to try to frighten its old and new opponents.

In the North Caucasus in recent years there has developed a real crisis in traditional Islam. This is not only as a result of the Syrian conflict, but also because new Muslim ideas (including the most radical) have found their way into Russia, while local young people have been able to travel freely to Arab countries to study. The Syrian conflict has merely revealed these problems. The Muslim republics of the North Caucasus are part of Russia, but culturally they gravitate towards other Muslim countries, including in the Middle East.

Until recently radical young people from the North Caucasus were attracted by the 'romantic' appeal of IS. We do not have exact figures for jihadist fighters from Russia, but it is suggested that overall in recent years there were some 2-3 thousand. Apparently, the flow of activists from the radical underground out of the North Caucasus reduced its manpower at home, which the latest statistics show.<sup>8</sup>

A number of people from the North Caucasus, principally Chechens, now live abroad. At the end of December 2016, a criminal court in Bruges (Belgium)

sentenced 12 emigrants from Chechnya to prison terms from 1.5 to 10 years for extremism and recruiting fighters to take part in the Syrian conflict. All those found guilty had been living in Ostend; the two leaders, one of whom had fought in Syria, were sentenced to 8 and 10 years in prison.<sup>9</sup>

A prominent figure among the military leaders of IS was Umar ash-Shishani (Tarkhan Batirashvili) a Chechen from the Pankisi Valley in Georgia. According



to press reports he oversaw the Northern Front of IS. On 13 June 2016 the Amaq news agency, which is controlled by IS, announced that Batirashvili had died in the battles around the Iraqi city of Shergat, south of Mosul.<sup>10</sup>

In the North Caucasus recently (in Dagestan, Chechnya, Kabardino-Balkaria and, possibly, Ingushetia) IS cells have started to appear, but it is important to understand that they are more of an attempt to re-orient the "forest people", as jihadist fighters are known, at a moment when the old underground structure, the "Emirate of the Caucasus" is weakening. It is quite obvious why a "caliph" based in the Middle East can hardly give them direct orders, especially after the upsurge in fighting at the main middle-eastern fronts in Syria and Iraq and IS's loss of the military initiative.<sup>11</sup>

IS has an umbrella structure, and its strength lies in its declaration of the Caliphate on the territory of Iraq, where the Abbasid Caliphate flourished. Several old radical Salafist movements have merged in the IS structure, including the "Forest Brothers" of the North Caucasus and especially Dagestan. These movements, although taking their lead



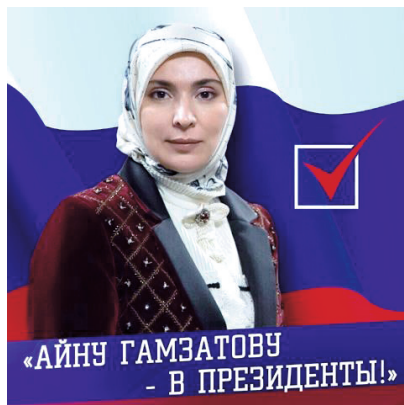
from Caliph al-Baghdadi, today are operating autonomously. It should be noted that recently the Russian special services have liquidated some prominent fighters linked to IS in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria.<sup>12</sup>

These days the IS project is actively promoted through the internet. The American Brookings Institute has calculated that on Twitter alone there are about 46,000 accounts of IS supporters. A simplified version of Salafism is also actively promoted via the internet, but the ideology of IS corresponds to it in many respects.<sup>13</sup> This virtual world is extraordinarily popular today in the North Caucasus, to which the battle of ideas and tendencies in contemporary Islam has spread.



IS parades through Raqqa.

Thanks to the internet, the popularity of Salafism is spreading globally. For various reasons the Muslims of the North Caucasus are attracted to it, but there is a real battle of ideas here. Supporters of Sufism, especially in Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia, are not giving up the fight, and are even conducting it more vigorously. An example of this is Aina Gamzatova, wife of the Mufti of Dagestan, who was recently proposed as candidate for the post of President of Russia. She had become known through her work in Muslim media resources. Although her campaign got no further than being proposed, the mere fact of her being proposed and the holding of a pre-election



meeting in Makhachkala stimulated a lively debate in Dagestan. Gamzatova is a firm supporter of Sufism and Salafists actively opposed her, accusing the ambitious woman of various “mortal” sins and of departing from Muslim traditions. Nevertheless, the serious support Aina received from the Muslim population of the republic and beyond in the Muslim *umma* (community) of Russia demonstrates that the widely-held view of the lowly status of women in Islam is significantly at odds with reality.

At the end of the 1990s there was an attempt to create an Islamic, Salafist mini-state in Dagestan. An independent Salafist *djamaat* (traditional self-governing body) known as the Kaderskaya zona, and consisting of three villages, Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi and Wanashimakhi, was declared. At first the idea was attractive, and young people from the whole of the North Caucasus, not just Dagestan, flooded in, seeking “pure Islam”. This experiment eventually collapsed.<sup>14</sup>

Today’s younger generation has changed somewhat since then, and those within Sufism who prefer Salafism are better prepared and better educated than the generation of the 1990s. They are making a real effort to understand the foundations

of Islamic doctrine. They form study groups, listen to lectures on Islamic law. This is especially the case in Dagestan. It is clear that this is a new generation. The armed, radical underground of the North Caucasus has not yet disappeared, but in many republics is far less active than it used to be; the scrupulous recording of the terror campaign carried out by the website *Kavkazskiy uzel* ("Caucasus Knot") is evidence of this.<sup>15</sup>

Returning to the North Caucasus and Russia as a whole, it is important to note that today only brain-washed "zombies" are travelling to the IS zone, and they do not usually listen to reasonable arguments. From time to time in various places on Russian territory the authorities uncover concealed, or "sleeping" IS cells. Recruitment to IS continues today more out of inertia. As the last places controlled by IS and other radical groups continue to fall, the desire to seek adventure in Syria and Iraq will grow less.

A vital task remains: the rescue of children who have become the hostages of their apology for parents. This problem is being taken more seriously in Chechnya, as the site *Svobodnaya Pressa-Yug* (Free Press-South) reports:

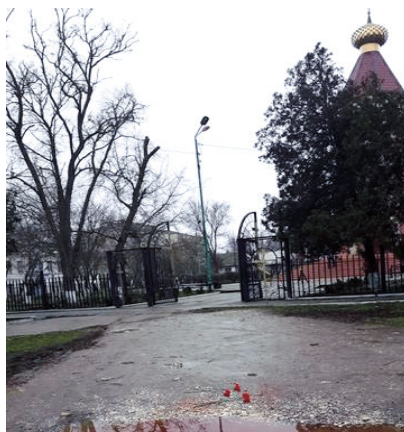
"A Chechen boy, Bilal Tagirov, was found in the ruins of Mosul, half dead, and he was airlifted home to Grozny. When he was two years old the child was kidnapped from his mother by his father, and taken to Syria and then to Iraq. The president of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov heard of this and personally oversaw the rescue of the child."<sup>16</sup>

However, there are many more such abandoned children, particularly in Iraq, and some have yet to be sought out and found.

In conclusion I should like to note that today in the North Caucasus, we can see a trend towards softening the existing contradictions between different currents

of Islam. The Ingush imam from the village of Nasyr-Kort, Khamzat Chumakov, is an example of this. In his sermons he criticises the extremist positions of both Sufis and Salafists.

After this article was completed, in Kizlyar, Dagestan, a bloody crime was committed. On 18 February 2018, the Day of Forgiveness in the Orthodox calendar, a supporter of ISIS, 22 year-old Khalil Khalilov from the village of Rasset (Tarumov district), shot in cold blood five elderly parishioners of the Saint Georgiev Church. He then tried to rush into the church where there remained part of the congregation and the priest, but they succeeded in locking themselves in and immediately called the police. One of the policemen was seriously wounded, but still able to kill Khalilov. I happened to arrive in Kizlyar the next day, Monday morning, and took part in the funeral of the dead, which was conducted in the church by the Archbishop of Makhachkala Varlaam. Outside the church wall was a grim reminder of the terrible events: a pool of blood from the innocent victims. IS still exerts its cruel and bloodthirsty influence.



*Church of St Georgiev, Kizlyar, Dagestan*

<sup>1</sup><http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/10948480/Islamic-State-leader-Abu-Bakr-al-Baghdadi-addresses-Muslims-in-Mosul.html>

<sup>2</sup>It is important to remember that for all his criticisms of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and IS, Yusuf al-Karadavi is in no sense a supporter of President Assad.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/jordan-maqdisi-jihad-iraq-isis-caliphate-qaeda.html#>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/07/muslim-leaders-reject-baghdadi-caliphate-20147744058773906.html>

<sup>5</sup>[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/24/muslim-scholars-islamic-state\\_n\\_5878038.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/24/muslim-scholars-islamic-state_n_5878038.html)

<sup>6</sup>Bartold V.V. *Khalif i Sultan*, Works, 9 vols, Moscow 1966, Vol 6, *Raboty po istorii islama i arabskogo khalifata* (Works on the History of Islam and the Arab Caliphate).

<sup>7</sup>Roshchin M. 'On the consequences of acts of terror in Paris'. See: <https://news.mail.ru/video/331950/>

<sup>8</sup>Russia: Chronicle of Terror'. See: <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/70513/>

<sup>9</sup><https://russian.rt.com/world/news/344353-sud-brugge-vyhodzy-chechnya>

<sup>10</sup><https://www.rferl.org/a/pentagon-admits-omar-the-chechnyan-died-this-week-not-in-march-air-strike-mosul-iraq/27859533.html>

<sup>11</sup>For more details see: Roshchin, M. '«Islamskoe gosudarstvo» sposobno raskolot' radikalnoe musulmanskoie podpole na Severnom Kavkaze' ('IS is capable of splitting the radical Muslim underground in Northern Caucasus'); see <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/260694/>

<sup>12</sup><http://www.rbc.ru/society/22/11/2015/565206629a7947810ae41752>

<sup>13</sup>[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/06/isis-twitter-census\\_n\\_6817308.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/06/isis-twitter-census_n_6817308.html)

<sup>14</sup>For more detail see: Roshchin M. 'Sled islamskogo fundamentalizma na Severnom Kavkaze' ('The trail of Islamic fundamentalism in the North Caucasus') in *Fundamentalizm*, ed. Levin, Z.I., Institute of Eastern Studies of RAN, pub. Kraft+, Moscow 2003, pp.55-57.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/70513/>

<sup>16</sup><http://yug.svpressa.ru/accidents/news/148333/>

*Dr Mikhail Roshchin is an Arabist and Senior Research Fellow at the Institut Vostokovedenia, Moscow.*

# From the Religious Boom to the Yarovaya Law: Atheism without Atheism and Orthodoxy without Orthodoxy

by Roman Lunkin

The Yarovaya Law, or Yarovaya package, consists of the Federal Law dated 6 July 2016 N 374-FZ “On countering terrorism” and separate legislative acts of the Russian Federation providing for additional measures aimed at countering terrorism and ensuring public safety. Amendments concerning religious believers and religious organizations came into force on 20 July 2016. The Law introduces amendments to the Law on Freedom of Conscience (Chapter III-1. Missionary activity. Article 24-1: The content of missionary activity. Article 24-2: Procedure for the conduct of missionary activity); to the Code of Administrative Offences (in article 5.26 CAO RF); and to the Housing Code of the RF (article 17 part 3 and article 22 part 3-2)

The provisions of the Yarovaya Law on missionary activity may be summarised as follows:

*Any religious believer talking about God outside the walls of a religious building in the name of a religious organisation, must be in possession of a document from that organization.* (In fact the police and the courts fine or detain everyone, even persons preaching on their own initiative).

*Religious groups that have formally declared their existence must also issue documents to their missionaries.* (In fact the police and the courts have begun to demand that all groups declare their existence, although this is not mandatory under the law).

*A religious service may be performed in a private dwelling, but preaching or inviting*

*non-believers to be present is forbidden. Moreover, a residential building cannot be transformed into a religious building.*

*An individual preaching his faith using the Internet or the mass media “or any other legal means” is also obliged to possess a document from an organisation.*

*A foreign missionary must obtain a contract of work with a religious organisation, enter the country on a humanitarian or religious visa, be assigned a quota number, and preach only on the territory on which the charter of the inviting organisation is valid.*

*Fines can be up to 50 thousand roubles for civilians and up to 1 million for an organisation.*

Even a short time after its adoption, the Yarovaya Law has had a significant influence on the mood of society. It has become a symbol for and the embodiment of state control over the lives of individual citizens and organisations. Immediately upon its promulgation, the Law affected religious organisations, whose representatives began to be subjected to fines. The content of this law is of significance not just for religious believers, power structures and state officials, but also for the academic community - specialists in the field of religion, sociologists, historians and political scientists. The law provoked a lively discussion, mainly around the attempts of the special services to control the private lives of citizens. Protestants, some Orthodox believers and Muslims were highly critical of the draft law, but to no avail. The Yarovaya package sowed fear

among believers and officials, on the one hand changing the attitude to religion in society, and on the other hand affirming the attitude that has evolved regarding religion in the post-Soviet period. Automatically, religion has become dangerous in a society where every civil activity is viewed with suspicion. The consequences of the application of this law will have a long-term effect on religious life and policy.

Most people know about the primacy of Orthodoxy in Russia, in the sense of the influence of the church leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate and the element of Orthodoxy in patriotic ideology. However, more than 20 years after the disintegration of the godless Soviet state, sociological polls still reveal the low levels of genuine religious belief, church attendance and religious knowledge. This phenomenon is described by many Orthodox writers, such as Sergei Chaplin, as Orthodoxy without faith, a sort of post-Soviet civil religion in post-Soviet Russia. The religious policy of the authorities and the new legislation on religion demonstrate that in everything that directly affects religious life, the state is working against rather than for the interests of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Irrespective of its economic interests, the Church is the largest Christian movement in Russia, which cannot but want more followers and better conditions and opportunities for missionary activity. In post-Soviet Russia, one of the most secularised countries in Europe, by 2016 any missionary activity and preaching of the faith fell under suspicion, and a word about God uttered without the relevant supporting document was punished by serious fines.

It is hard to resist the temptation of drawing historical parallels. At the beginning of the 20th century, following the 1905 Manifesto on religious tolerance, there was a gradual

liberalisation in the religious sphere, as in the 1980s in the USSR. For twelve years after 1917, religious movements, apart from Orthodoxy, developed relatively freely. There was also a period of religious freedom after 1991, but in 1997 the Law on freedom of conscience was adopted, establishing four “traditional faiths” in Russia – Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism. Post-Soviet freedom of conscience was rolled back gradually, until by 2016 the legislation of the 1990s was completely altered – just as in Soviet times, the 1929 Stalinist legislation on religious organisations altered the attitude of the state towards religion radically and harshly.

The present Yarovaya Law is definitely not as draconian as the Stalinist law. But the roll-back from the religious boom of the 1990s and the freedom from controls granted to believers, as well as attempts to exclude religion from public life, make the Yarovaya package comparable with the 1929 Decree of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars of the RSFSR “On Religious Organisations” in the section concerning control over missionary activity (and amendments relating to religious groups adopted in the summer of 2015).

Both sets of documents require all organisations and groups to be registered. The basic requirements for missionary activity in the Yarovaya Law and the Stalinist Decree coincide:

“19. The sphere of activity of those leading religious rites, preachers of religion, preceptors, etc., is limited to the place of residence of the members of the religious organisation they serve, and the location of the relevant place of worship. The activity of lay believers of a faith, preachers of religion and teachers permanently serving two or several religious associations is limited to the territory in which the

members making up these religious organisations reside permanently...

57... In premises not specifically intended for that purpose, prayer meetings of believers take place in rural areas with notice served to the relevant authorities: - the executive committee of the rural soviet of workers' deputies, and in towns - the executive committee of regional or city soviet of worker's deputies...

58. No religious rites or ceremonies may take place in any state, social or cooperative institutions or enterprises, or the placing of any religious objects...

61. Religious processions and the performance of any religious rites or ceremonies outside the place of location of a religious organisation may occur with a special permit on each occasion from the authority that executed the agreement regarding the use of religious property..."

The Soviet decree was aimed at creating the conditions for the closure of religious premises, whereas the Yarovaya Law aims to confine preaching inside the walls of churches and houses of prayer. For this precise purpose, the Yarovaya Law contains an ambiguous definition of missionary activity and a direct prohibition of missionary activity in residential premises, a requirement not contained in Soviet legislation.

In the post-Soviet period, where religious ideas are blended with the political significance of Orthodoxy, neither total atheism nor criticism of religion from atheist positions, proved impossible. The overwhelming interest in religion of the 1990s has receded into the past. As a result, the public perception of anything religious is now not exactly hostile, but still deeply suspicious. There is a widespread fear of religion as something unknown and potentially dangerous. A significant factor

in the formation of such a psychological reaction to religion is the fear of religion-based international terrorism and extremism, and nostalgia for the Soviet past. However, such suspicion of religion is no longer linked to the atheism and militant godlessness of the Soviet era.

Formally, the religious policy of the authorities is based on Orthodoxy - as demonstrated by politicians' pronouncements and opinion polls, which show a high regard for the Church's authority, as well as those who identify themselves as Orthodox. In fact, the quasi-Orthodoxy of the public and politicians has nothing in common with an understanding of church teachings, parish life or the social service of the ROC. In other words, people who are suspicious of any religion still call themselves Orthodox.

It is quite logical that those people who are placing restrictions on religious observance are suspicious and afraid of it. In the time of late Putin stagnation, the dominant feeling is of stability. The view of the public and politicians alike is that only religion can disturb this sense of stability in the ideological sphere. Even the hierarchs of the ROC frequently speak out not just against the participation of religion in politics, but also the discussion of purely religious (not historical) themes in the public arena.

Furthermore, politicians, officials and the staff of power structures are the most committed proponents of privatising religion, and consider it their duty to shield the public from preachers, mainly non-Orthodox ones.

Behind this maniacal desire to inflict numerous forms of punishment on the non-Orthodox lie a whole range of political phobias. An inferiority complex gives rise to all manner of suspicions regarding those holding different convictions: that they

could be more influential as “Western agents” or are simply “alien” to Russian society; that their mission might be more successful and attractive to people than “traditional faiths”; that they may be more wealthy and could collect more income from their followers. In this way religion becomes a problem from widely differing points of view.

The foundation of the “Yarovaya package” is the idea to which the state has reverted, the idea of total control of religious life for the sake of public security and stability – and these were the very arguments propounded in favour of the adoption of the Yarovaya Law in June 2016. It is worth noting that the press and television discussed only those provisions that concerned the storage of data by internet operators and the strengthening of anti-extremist policy (the provision in the Yarovaya law making the failure to report any extremist activities a criminal offence). The articles concerning missionary activity and penalties for illegal missionary work in the Yarovaya Law were ignored by the general public, as if they did not exist. However, those amendments concerning missionary activity came into legal force on 20 July 2016, while entry into force of all the amendments concerning internet operators was deferred until 2018. The significant fines provided for by the Yarovaya Law did not become subjects of discussion in either the official or the liberal press. The essence of the amendments concerning missionary activity is that every missionary is obliged to have a document for the conduct of missionary work from a religious organisation or group (as a result of which courts and local authorities in the provinces have begun to assume that groups of religious believers are obliged to inform the Ministry of Justice of their activities, although the Law contains no such mandatory stipulation). The question of

what believers may do in residential premises and whether Russian or foreign citizens can spread their convictions as private individuals was relegated to the discretion of the police and the courts.

The practical application of this Law has shown how precisely it has captured the psychology of the security agencies and part of the public. Court rulings have reflected the entire spectrum of features of the Russian consciousness, from the irrational fear of any Western influence, or of the presence of foreigners, through to anti-sectarian phobias and perceptions of religion as a swindle, or, at least, a mercenary business.

It should be noted that despite all the complexes of public consciousness, normal citizens are not aggressive and not prone to religious xenophobia. Their xenophobia is rather passive, but quite tolerant of Jehovah’s Witnesses and Pentecostals, who in real life are nothing like “frightening sectarians.” This is confirmed by the fact that in most cases fines for illegal missionary activity resulted from action by the law and order bodies themselves, and not by victimised or outraged citizens. The Yarovaya Law gave rise to a flare-up of the most diverse absurd fears and complexes, which generally are more characteristic of the psychology of the representatives of law enforcement agencies than the letter of the Law. The following illustrate some of the psychological phobias.

**After the passage of this law, police officers effectively took the view that foreigners as such could not engage in any religious activity at all.**

On 10 September 2016 two US citizens, Alexander Whitney and David Kozan were detained in Kaluga with the latter’s 19-year-old daughter Katrin. After a 5-hour interrogation, a protocol was compiled



under which Whitney and Kozan were found guilty of an administrative violation and fined 3 thousand roubles each without being deported from Russia.

What had these Americans done? They were travelling as tourists, but decided to join a prayer meeting, being Pentecostal Protestants and friends of the Kaluga church of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostals) “Word of Life” and their leader, bishop Albert Ratkin.



*Kaluga*

On 9-11 September 2016 a conference took place in the Prayer House of this church (the Church of Christ the Saviour in Kaluga) devoted to the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pentecostal Church in that city. The faithful consider that their congregation and the Pentecostal movement as a whole in Kaluga was founded in 1936 by one of the leading figures of the Protestant movement in Russia, Ivan Voronayev, who was here in exile.

US citizens Whitney and Kozan greeted their fellow believers, watched a film and a historical play based on the life and service of Ivan Voronayev. The service was also attended by the bishop of the Russian United Union of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostals), member of the Public Chamber of the RF, Sergei Ryakhovsky.

According to the bishop of the Kaluga church of Christ the Saviour, Albert

Ratkin, around 10 p.m. on 10 September 2016, the Americans were met outside the gate of the Prayer House by several special operatives and FSB officers. The district police commissioner, major Sergei Dokukov, confiscated the Americans’ passports and returned them only after they threatened to contact their consul.

At 2 a.m. police lieutenant-colonel Vladimir Grenkov wrote out an order charging them with an administrative offence concerning a breach of rules governing entry into the country and “establishing religious contacts.” The order noted that the Americans established the said “religious contacts” on 10 September from 16:00 to 21:00 hours, although they had come into the country on tourist visas. The lieutenant-colonel stated that he was in possession of a clandestine recording of the “religious contacts” of the US citizens received from a secret informer, which he did not allow the accused to see or hear.

**A foreign citizen may not talk about religious faith on residential premises, still less invite people to be present.**



*Orel (photo Andrei Koval)*

On 14 August 2016, the American Baptist missionary, Donald Osservaarde, citizen of the USA from the state of Michigan, was fined 40 thousand roubles in the city of Orel. The district police commissioner claimed that notices were posted on boards

in one of the districts of Orel, inviting any interested parties to attend a Bible study group conducted by Osservaarde on Sundays.

Osservaarde himself noted that “I am an American and a Baptist, conducting independent missionary matters in the city of Orel since 2002. (Although according to the new Law my activity cannot be classed as ‘missionary’, because I am not a representative of any religious organisation). We are a small group – 15 people. We meet in my private home. I have held a residence permit since 2005.”

On 12 August, 3 policemen arrived at the Bible study meeting. After the meeting, they asked numerous questions, and escorted the American to the police precinct, where a protocol was compiled. According to Osservaarde, the main allegations against him were that he had stuck up posters announcing the meetings, which were then held in a private house.

Osservaarde wrote in the protocol: “I, Osservaarde, Donald J., state categorically that I did not break the law, as I did not paste up invitations on house no. 22 or no. 24 on Pushkin Street. I am not a representative of a religious organisation, therefore I could not conduct missionary activity as it is defined in law FZ No.125. I meet with friends in my own home, a private matter for a private individual, which is not a breach of the law. I shall file a complaint that I was unfairly accused.”

The judge of the Zheleznodorozhny district of Orel, I.I. Sergunina, ruled that Bible study in private premises cannot be regarded as simply a personal profession of faith. It emerged during the proceedings that the American had not pasted up invitations, but did drop them in letter boxes. The judgement cited article 7 of the Law on Freedom of Conscience, which gives a broad definition of a religious group

as a voluntary association of citizens, acting without registration or the rights of a legal entity. The judge considered that the breach of the law lay in the leader of the group conducting missionary activity among people who are not members of a group. As for the possession of or lack of a report to the authorities of the activity of the group - this was deemed by the judge to be an omission for which the *de facto* existing group was responsible.

The ruling said that Ossevaarde’s guilt was proven, because he “conducted missionary activity without written notice regarding the commencement of the [activity of] the religious group.” The judge did not find any extenuating circumstances. An appeal has been lodged against the fine imposed on Ossevaarde.

**The fear of an “orange” revolution and “Ukrainian influence” has also become one of the factors in the process of bringing cases under the Yarovaya Law.**

The use of informers and denunciations is the easiest and most natural way of applying the law against individual churches and preachers. On 27 August 2016 in St Petersburg, it was on the basis of a denunciation that Sergei Zhuravlev, archbishop of the Reformed Orthodox Church of the Saviour of the Kievan archbishopric was arrested. Zhuravlev is better known in Russia and Ukraine as the founder of the Reformist Orthodox church, which inclines to Protestantism. From 1991 to 1996 he was a priest of the Moscow Patriarchate but then, by his own account, experienced a “birth from above” and while remaining Orthodox in form (vestments and a cross), is a charismatic Protestant in spirit and substance. Zhuravlev went much further than the Reformists of the Soviet period, who wanted to reform the ROC – Zhuravlev’s church rejects veneration of the Virgin

Mary and considers the day of the Baptism of Rus' as a day of mourning because Russia was Christianised by force.

On the day in question, Zhuravlev was visiting the Jewish messianic community in St Petersburg and delivered a sermon. The service was roughly disrupted by the police, terrifying those present. After a document check it emerged that the police were seeking only Zhuravlev. He was questioned for several hours in the 5<sup>th</sup> police precinct of the Frunze district of St Petersburg. A protocol of the charge against him stated that Zhuravlev conducted missionary activity without the correct documentation for doing so. Arguments that Zhuravlev was speaking personally, as a private citizen, and preaching on the basis of an invitation from another community, were ineffective.

At the same time, judging by cases already existing under the Yarovaya Law, the Procuracy, police and judges may have questions for Zhuravlev. The situation is that the Reformist Orthodox Church of Christ the Saviour is not registered in Russia. Zhuravlev resides in Tula, but travels constantly to minister to his communities and speak in other churches. Reformist Orthodox communities exist as religious groups, not even one of which has filed registration papers about its existence. Zhuravlev heads the archbishopric of the given Reformist Church, which is registered in Ukraine.

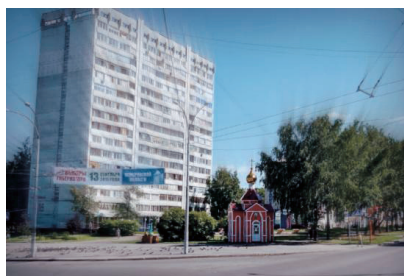
As Sergei Zhuravlev stated in an interview given to the present author, the questioning in the police precinct was based on a complaint received from a certain enthusiastic supporter of Orthodoxy. This unnamed person claimed to have followed Zhuravlev's preaching on the Internet. He reported that Zhuravlev was conducting illegal missionary activity with the aim of personal enrichment and offended the feelings of the Orthodox faithful, being a

Ukrainian citizen. It was claimed further that that he maintained contacts with right-wing extremists in Ukraine, held pro-Ukrainian views and came close to inciting people to take to the barricades.

Sergei Zhuravlev was questioned by four officers. In the course of the questioning it emerged that he did not hold Ukrainian citizenship, and his preaching was in full conformity with generally acknowledged Christian norms. However, the "Interfax - Religion" portal had already cited a representative of the law enforcement bodies, who perceived a possible discrediting of Orthodoxy and incitement of hostility toward the ROC in Zhuravlev's preaching.

On 5 September 2016 Sergei Zhuravlev was fined 5 thousand roubles.

**Application of the Yarovaya Law regarding preachers becomes an excuse for detective stories involving police chases and shadowing.**



*Kemerovo*

In Kemerovo, in August 2016, Ukrainian citizen Irina Tishchenko, leader of the family and female service in the "New Generation" [*Novoye Pokoleniye*] movement in Pershotravensk and Kharkov, came to visit her fellow-believers in the Protestant church. Subsequently, on 14 September, she was fined 30 thousand roubles, and on 27 September a resolution

was adopted to charge the Russian pastor of the “New Generation” church, Andrei Matyuzhov, with an administrative offence, as he had hosted a meeting at which Tishchenko spoke. Matyuzhov and Tishchenko were both accused of conducting illegal missionary activity.

Formally, the members of the Christian church in the Kemerovo region had nothing to fear. Ukrainian citizens do not need a visa, therefore Irina Tishchenko was not in breach of the visa regime. She was visiting friendly churches and had no intention of participating in any loud public enterprises aimed at converting strangers to Christianity. However, as members of the church know their fellow-believers, they became aware immediately of the presence of strangers.

Everything started with a meeting of the “New Generation” Protestant community in Novokuznetsk. In an interview with the present author Irina Tishchenko stated that unknown people with mobile phones were noticed at the Novokuznetsk meeting, filming the proceedings, while policemen were concealed in bushes nearby. Tishchenko decided not to take part in this meeting. She then visited Leninsk-Kuznetsky, where no other formal meetings were taking place, but believers noticed that they were being followed and kept under surveillance around the church.

The law and order bodies had clearly decided to carry out a cautionary detention of Tishchenko in Andrei Matyuzhov’s Kemerovo church. The church service was an open one. It was therefore possible for strangers to be present, and Irina Tishchenko publicly congratulated Matyuzhov’s wife on the occasion of her birthday. When police and other officials arrived at the premises after the end of the service, pastor Andrei Matyuzhov took it upon himself to refuse them entry (which

is possibly the reason for attempts to bring the pastor to book). Representatives of various official bodies decided against forcing entry into private premises. But this was not the end of the story: at 3 a.m. Irina Tishchenko was removed from a car at a police road post, where she was charged, and a statement was compiled, after which she was allowed to continue her journey to Ukraine. The decision to fine Tishchenko was made *in absentia* on 14 September.

The verdict of the court of the Zavodsk district of Kemerovo dated 14 September 2016 states that Tishchenko did not have a permit for missionary activity from the “New Generation” church. However, the church is not registered and had not given notice of its existence as a group, therefore could not issue such a permit. In accordance with the letter of the law, the “New Generation” church in Kemerovo is not a group that should issue permits, and the Ukrainian citizen preached her faith on the basis of Article 28 of the Russian Constitution. But the court, in Tishchenko’s absence, accepted the version of witness Akinyaev, who is not a member of the said religious association, and allegedly attended the service out of curiosity and videoed it. Akinyaev claimed to have passed the video to the police voluntarily. A rapid linguistic examination was carried out on it, concluding that the words spoken by Tishchenko could be classified as belonging to the genre of preaching. The verdict also stated that mainly “Surveillance” [*Nablyudeniyе*] was conducted, so the believers were not mistaken in thinking that they were being watched from the moment of Tishchenko’s arrival in the Kemerovo region. The very same Akinyaev who made the video, confirmed that he was the one who helped the police and other services with the recording, and at the same time placed himself “in danger” and was subjected to missionary influence. The

charge of preaching to those who were not members or participants of the religious organization in question was effectively based on Akinyaev's testimony.

Subsequently Andrei Matyuzhov, pastor of the Kemerovo church "New Generation" was also fined 5 thousand roubles.

The Ukrainian case in Kemerovo was the second case regarding illegal missionary activity in which the Pentecostal "New Generation" church figured. The first case was in the Mari El Republic, where a pastor was fined for a congratulatory address at a village celebration.

Irina Tishchenko is the wife of Andrei Tishchenko, leader of the association of "New Generation" churches in Ukraine, who is forbidden entry into Russia. Whatever objections the police might have to "New Generation", which is associated with supporting the "orange" revolution and Maidan, the application of the Yarovaya Law is clearly political, and cases are fabricated by the police and other bodies.

**Many cases resulting in fines for missionary activity were handled in exactly the same spirit as prevailed in the atheistic Soviet period – that is, any expression of religious belief was in principle subject to sanction.**

On 30 July 2016 in the village of Mari-Sholner in the Mari-Tureksk district of the Mari El Republic, an ordinary village celebration was being held. The elder of the village invited his friend, Alexander Yakimov, head of the religious group of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostals) to attend. Representatives of this group, formerly known as "New Generation" (part of the charismatic movement founded by pastor Alexander Ledyayev from Riga), had attended previous celebrations. Members of the group staged an impromptu concert. An old banner

reading "Happy celebration, my village" was displayed on stage and also bore the words "New Generation." Alexander Ledyayev went on stage, said a few kind words and called for God's blessing on all the locals, as well as condemning alcoholism.

Strangely N.V. Bakhtin, the public prosecutor of the Mari-Tureksk district, decided that the banner and the blessing were evidence of missionary activity. Furthermore, the decision to institute legal proceedings regarding an administrative violation stated that religious and missionary activity had taken place on municipal territory (a residential building), which does not figure in the list of locations where preaching is permitted.

For unknown reasons the law enforcement authorities documented the activity of Yakimov's specific group. Videotaping of the celebration was carried out by the police and staff of the FSB of the Mari El Republic. Furthermore, by 5 August a "socio-philosophical expert opinion" had been prepared by an unnamed expert. This expert noted that the video materials contained the identification "Church of the New Generation", which allegedly "qualifies in academic literature as neo-Pentecostal". The words spoken by Yakimov were deemed to be "preaching and prayer."

The prosecutor stressed that the preaching and prayer were delivered consciously and deliberately in the presence of minors. The case was instituted under part 4 of article 5.26 of the RF Code of Administrative Violations. However, Alexander Yakimov voiced his objection to the determination and refused to add his signature to the document.

According to Alexander Yakimov, he could see clearly that the police were keeping the proceedings under

surveillance and videotaping them. He congratulated everyone on the village feast day, blessed the village elder for his work and all the residents of the village. This was the extent of Yakimov's "preaching and prayer."

On 31 August 2016 the magistrate of the Semursk judicial district in the Mari El Republic sentenced Alexander Yakimov to pay a fine of 5 thousand roubles for "illegal missionary activity" in the Mari-Sholner village. The pastor refused to plead guilty.

**An Altai incident demonstrates clearly the fear of local authorities faced with the desire of the Protestant church to make its teachings known and enter into dialogue with the public.**

In July and August 2016, the Seventh Day Adventist Church in the town of Biysk, Altai Region, was holding a public event to enlighten the public about both religious and legal matters. The Church, acting officially in its own name, was distributing a set of books about a programme of spiritual and moral revival. The set of books included a miscellany on freedom of conscience, and Adventist literature on the spiritual history of mankind with rules for a happy life. When the Adventists, carrying their books, attempted to approach the administration of the Mayminsk district, officials declared that the Church was engaged in illegal missionary activity.

On 9 August 2016, officials of the Mayminsk district lodged a complaint with the Committee on National Policy and Links with Society of the Altai Republic, although the "breach of the law" itself had occurred back on 13 July 2016. On 22 August, a protocol reporting an administrative violation was compiled under the Yarovaya Law: part 4 of article 5.26 of the Russian Federation Code of

Administrative Violations – conducting missionary activity, together with a breach of the law on freedom of conscience.

The protocol stated that this was the activity of an organisation, there were authorised individuals, everything was done publicly with an accompanying letter and the books were being distributed to persons who were not members of the church. Moreover, there was a clear aim – to attract followers, as the brochure "10 Rules for a Happy Life" contained an invitation to Bible study at a given address. Furthermore, the staff of the administration were seemingly alarmed by the book in the "Age-old Conflicts" series ("Christ is the Hope of the World" (Desire of the Ages); "The Great Struggle"; "Patriarchs and Prophets"; "Prophets and Emperors"; "Acts of the Apostles"; "Bible Readings in the Family Circle") plus a compact disc.

In the view of the authorities of the Altai Republic and the Administration of the Ministry of Justice, there was a further breach of point 2 of article 24.1 of the law "On freedom of conscience and religious organisations" which contains a list of places where missionary activity is permitted. No state institution is included in this list.

The Chairman of the Council of Churches, Vladimir Knaub, attempted to dispute the charge, citing part 3 of article 18 on freedom of conscience, pursuant to which the state promotes cultural and educational programmes of religious organisations. Furthermore, Knaub pointed out that there was no mention of a target being set to attract anyone into the activity of the religious organisation. The literature was distributed free of charge, among other reasons to give the district administration a chance to learn about the nature of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Believers insist that they had not expected such a



reaction from the officials with whom they hoped to meet, and that they had no malicious intentions.

“Unfortunately, laws are passed so often and so frequently in our country that we are unable to keep track of them and adapt them to the practice of service. Performing a service in society, we cannot understand fully how to act...even state officials are not always able to comprehend them fully”, said Knaub. Subsequently the resolution instituting a case against the Adventists was dropped.

**The logic of the new Law and the broad definition of missionary activity it contains became the basis for suspicions of the actions of believers even on church premises, as a rule – Protestant Houses of Prayer.**

In Noyabr'sk, a large town in the Yamalo-Nenetsk Autonomous Region, representatives of the authorities closed down a children's playground organised in July 2016 near the Prayer House of Evangelical Baptist Christians. A committee, which included employees of the Procuracy, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, the town administration, the Russian Committee on Consumer Supervision and the Committee on the Affairs of Minors, claimed that the trampoline, climbing frame and children's games were “an unsanctioned children's camp”. Photographs on the Internet show clearly that what the Baptists organised was actually a playground. Nevertheless, the various officials found that there were infractions of the requirements covering children in a “camp”. For instance, “there were no arrangements to supply food.” Furthermore, the Baptists had failed to serve notice that they intended to organise such a “camp” (this last despite the fact that the pastors of the church maintained that

they were in possession of documents allowing the playground).

The organiser of the children's playground, Pastor Alexander Podkolzin, noted in an interview with the present author that there was no children's camp on the territory of the Prayer House. The local authorities were perfectly aware that this was a leisure activity for children, organised by the believers. Playgrounds have been organised for some years in Noyabr'sk and Urengoy. Moreover, the local authorities had raised no objections to the church regarding invitations to children to use the playground, as they were the children of believers, including church members. The congregation had every right to organise leisure for their members' children.

But the police and Procuracy were seemingly concerned about something other than the children's safety. The issue was that US and Ukrainian citizens were working with the 43 children. These were visitors from churches in those two countries with which Baptists maintain contact. The local officials checking their papers found that the visitors had no training as teachers and no medical records. Pastor Podkolzin said that “We cooperate with churches in the US, these contacts were organised by our fellow countrymen, former Soviet citizens, who had emigrated to the United States. They are all Russian speakers.”

Moreover, according to Podkolzin, after checking the children's playground, employees of the Procuracy entered the Prayer House and found a table with religious literature. The law enforcement officials decided that the children might have heard preaching and that the literature, in their opinion, had somehow been distributed incorrectly.



The pastor of the church, Alexei Teleus, was fined 5 thousand roubles under the Yarovaya Law. Teleus was charged with violating part 4 of article 5.26 of the RF Code of Administrative Violations: "Conduct of missionary activity in breach of the legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religious belief and religious associations." There are no more explanations of the reasons for such a penalty, and the church did not appeal against the fine.

There is a socio-political cause underlying the closure of the "children's camp" in Noyabr'sk. Local observers note that the Baptist church became "small change" in the run-up to the elections in September 2016. The head of department on matters of public security of the Noyabr'sk administration, Rostislav Isayev, acted against the church. He also commented on this matter in the press, stating that the church had received the penalty it deserved in the form of a fine, although formally the fine had nothing to do with the organisation of a "camp". The inspection of the Baptist church occurred when the mayor of the town, Aleksei Romanov, was away on leave, and his staff decided to put together a "big" case to demonstrate their importance.

Due to the "benevolent" attitude of the Procurator's Office, the playground was closed down on its last working day, in other words it had functioned for the entire intended period. The deputy prosecutor then compiled a protocol claiming illegal missionary activity and fixed the minimum penalty of 5 thousand roubles.

**The Yarovaya Law made it possible to intimidate preachers in public places.**

Two days after the provisions of the Yarovaya Law on missionary activity came into force, on 22 July 2016, the first case was instituted in Cherkessk. A follower of

the Krishna Consciousness Society, Vadim Sibirev, distributed literature and conversed with passers-by in the street at 1 p.m. The most interesting thing is that the police did not detain him on the spot, nor did any of the people he spoke to make any complaints. A complaint was filed several days later by one Rashid Zitlyaguzhev, who appended photographs to his complaint. Sibirev was detained and questioned only after this. The police officer who wrote the protocol, A.K. Dzhanuriev, described the breach of the law as "distribution of literature of a religious nature."

Vadim Sibirev was defended by lawyer Mikhail Frolov in the Cherkessk District Court. The judge terminated the proceedings, and said that there were no grounds to find Vadim Sibirev guilty.

The judgment stated that Sibirev was not engaging in missionary activity, therefore could not be charged under part 4 of article 5.26 of the RF Code of Administrative Violations, which covers responsibility for performing such activity. To charge him would be in breach of the legislation on freedom of conscience. Mikhail Frolov cited the definition of missionary activity in part 1 of article 24.1 of the law on freedom of conscience as an argument for the defence. The first clause of the definition states that missionary activity is an activity of a religious association.

A deciding factor was Vadim Sibirev's statement that he did not represent any religious association. Nor was he aiming to recruit anyone into any religious association. This "does not allow qualification of his activity as missionary" according to the ruling of the magistrate.

On 7 October 2016 proceedings were instituted in Moscow against distributors of the New Testament, thanks to actions of the staff of the Orthodox Legal Defence Analytical Centre. Police patrolmen

detained 8 people who were distributing the Bible in suburban trains at the Yaroslav railway station. The New Testament and Psalter were in the Synodal version published by the Protestant “Gideon” mission. Members of the Orthodox Centre advised the press that they had caught “Jehovah’s Witnesses.” Two persons were taken to the local Internal Affairs department, and a formal investigation began.

**Missionary activity has become the excuse for the application of other laws that are not linked directly to the Yarovaya Law. For example, foreign citizens are charged with violation of the visa regime, while Russians face charges of conducting public events without serving notice of intent.**

For example, on 23 September 2016 the Novosergiev district court in the Orenburg Region ruled in favour of Alexander Demkin, the presbyter of the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church (ECB) of Suzanovo village. The court ruled that the organisation of a children’s playground at the Prayer House did not constitute an offence under part 2 of article 20.2 of the Russian Federation Code of Administrative Violations (breach of the provisions of Federal Law No.54-FZ dated 19.06.2004 “On assemblies, meetings, demonstrations, processions and pickets”). In the summer, Baptists regularly conduct competitions for children, put up inflatable trampolines and musical equipment, and sing Christian songs. The village administration had no objections to this type of cultural programme for local children. The case was instituted after an investigation conducted by the Procurator’s Office. The deputy prosecutor of the Novosergiev district, Class 1 lawyer V.A. Babeshko, insisted that the case be submitted to the court, and called for punishment for failure to submit due notice of a “picket.”

It is also interesting to note the reaction of the law enforcement agencies to the decision of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints to cease public missionary activity – after the Yarovaya Law was passed its preachers stopped walking the streets with name badges, wearing suits and white shirts. In August 2016, six Americans were expelled from Samara for breach of migration legislation, and in September a search was conducted in the Mormon church in Vladivostok, which allegedly turned up a pornographic video. Subsequently the case was dropped.

\* \* \*

The application of the Yarovaya Law reflects a whole range of circumstances. Firstly, there is massive state propaganda boosting Russian patriotism alongside resistance to all kinds of Western influences. Secondly, this propaganda is in tune with many people’s hopes and expectations. People believe, but their faith is not related to Jesus Christ or to Buddha, it is a belief in a stable present and near future. After the Soviet period of repression and stagnation, and the discrediting of democracy and the poverty of the 1990s, faith in stability has become so absolute that for many people religion has no significance.

At the same time, missionary activists annoy many of the public. Religious people and preachers invariably introduce an element of dispute and competition; they offer an alternative picture of the world.

Numerous politicians and patriotically-minded representatives of the ROC assume that this kind of “defence of traditional religions” which the Yarovaya law represents can assist Orthodoxy or, at least, not affect it adversely. In the ROC there really is growth in parochial activity and social service, but it is not developing as vigorously and on such a wide scale as

the ROC leadership desires. Laws such as the Yarovaya Law are supposed to leave the field free for the growth of Orthodoxy.

Anti-Western feelings and lack of respect for those of other faiths may be eradicated in time, but indifference toward faith and suspicion of “religious fanatics” is much harder to overcome. This will take a long time. The absence of a genuine right for

Muslims and Protestants to preach openly or discuss their ideas will not strengthen the ROC, but will sweep religion completely from the public space. The political ideology of control over religious activity cements any faith within the confines of the church, in a society without religion, in which inter-faith or inter-Christian dialogue is not just forbidden, but also fails to arouse any real interest.

*Roman Lunkin is a Senior Researcher at the Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences.*

In our next issue we shall have a further report on the impact of the Yarovaya Law on non-Orthodox religious life in Russia.

### *AGM 2018*

*The next annual meeting will be held on Saturday 3 November at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine, 2 Butcher Row, Limehouse, London E14 8DS. The speakers will be the President of Keston Institute, Rev Canon Michael Bourdeaux, and one of our trustees, Rev Dr Keith Clements.*

### *AGM 2019*

*In 2019 Keston will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of Keston College. The speaker on this occasion will be the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Bishop Rowan Williams.*

# Keston College's Information Department

by Helena Kojevnikov

*These are the author's notes for her talk at the 2017 AGM, which gave a vivid account of the establishment and daily work of the Information Department.*



*Helena Kojevnikov speaking at the AGM on 28 October 2017.*

Dear Friends!

We have it on the best authority that in the beginning there was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God. It was the power of the Word that created the universe and all things in it, animate and inanimate. The Russian women who asked Michael Bourdeaux to “be their voice” invoked the power of the Word, and brought about the creation of Keston College. Those of us who had the privilege of working for the College also used the Word – be it spoken or written – to help Michael fulfil his promise to these women, and bring the truth about those suffering for their faith under communism to the attention of a largely indifferent world, which preferred the comfort of not knowing. I would like to tell you something about the Information Department and its work, which played a great part in spreading the word about the sufferings of believers in the USSR.

By the end of the 1960s there was a flood of information concerning the rise of dissent in the Soviet Union and its satellite states: religious, political and social dissent. This resulted in a deluge of information, in the form of *samizdat* (self-publishing: the circulation of copies of typescripts from hand to hand) which arrived in the West, one that could not be ignored but cried out for support from the free world. All the efforts of the totalitarian regimes were unable to stem that flood at a time when the end of the Cold War was nowhere in sight.

So great was the amount of *samizdat* spilling into the West that the Keston College Council of Management decided that the time had come to set up a separate department to concentrate on publicising, as widely as possible, the information it received on the situation of persecuted believers. Michael Bourdeaux and I met at the first International Sakharov Conference and discovered a mutual concern about the plight of the persecuted. At the time I was working on the Russian Desk of Radio Liberty in Germany, but when I received an offer to come to Keston College and apply my journalistic experience to setting up the Information Department, I accepted without any hesitation. That was probably one of the best decisions in my life. If not the best.

My first aim was to bring the College and its information to the attention of the secular media in a professional format: there is no need to preach to the converted, but journalists are usually hard-boiled eggs, and you have to go out and grab them to

get their attention. One of the ways to do this was to publish a regular information vehicle, in this case – the Keston News Service, the KNS. It came with distinct sections such as the latest news, commentaries, translated *samizdat* documents, analyses and so forth, a united effort by the researchers, outside specialists and volunteers. Our technical resources were limited: fax was the top-notch instrument at the time, so the KNS was posted out in printed form, and faxed to the most influential news agencies such as UPI, the Associated Press, Reuters, the television networks, the radio and various newspapers and journals. We spread our nets as widely as possible. Quite quickly, we managed to build up a reputation for reliability. Indeed, I think one of the best compliments we received was that it soon became commonplace in media circles to hear: “Oh, if it’s from Keston College, it can be used, it would have been checked as much as possible.” And we did our best to check all incoming information instead of just rushing it out. Of course, we had the benefit of the extensive archive built up over the years as a reference tool. Our presence in the media increased, we were often approached for consultations regarding various developments in our areas of study, so Michael, who was frantically juggling twelve balls in the air at the same time as running the College was able to delegate some those queries to the relevant researchers. We built up an effective exchange of information with other organisations monitoring religion in the so-called “second world” countries on the principle that the more information shared, the better.

At the same time radio stations, such as the BBC Russian Service, the World Service, Radio Liberty, Voice of America and others broadcast information supplied by us, with the result that Keston College became known to dissidents in the Soviet

Union and its satellites. One of our researchers, John Anderson, told me after a visit to Moscow that he was astounded to find out what amazing “street credibility” Keston College had in dissident circles. Indeed, we were often supplied with information outside our brief – for instance concerning political dissidents. We passed this information to persons and organizations who monitored the political scene and they, in turn, would send us any information they received about persecution of believers. Such cooperation was extremely effective.

We did have another great advantage in that as time went by, information reaching the West regarding trials of dissidents began to include the addresses and telephone numbers of relatives of those tried, as well of religious activists still at liberty. This opened the possibility of direct contact by phone. In time, we became their trusted partner. For instance, the Committee for the Defence of Believers’ Rights, started by the late Orthodox priest Fr Gleb Yakunin, relied on us to publicise the information they relayed to us by phone. Others, not directly concerned with religion, such as the Committee for Defence of Invalids’ Rights, set up by Valeriy Fefelov, also hoped that we would come to their support.

As the only native speaker of Russian, the telephone contacts were my responsibility, especially as my voice was well-known to Russian dissidents, who had heard it for years on Radio Liberty and the Russian religious programmes of Radio Liberty and the BBC Russian Service. This was not without difficulties, as the phones of known religious and political activists were tapped by the KGB, so information had to be relayed quickly before the calls would be cut off. I once mentioned this frustrating circumstance to the late Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) of Sourozh, who

suggested that I have a New Testament to hand each time I tried calling Moscow and every time a call was cut off, open it at random and start reading while redialling. He said drily that the Evil One would stop his interference in order to prevent someone reading God's Word. Believe it or not, it worked.

It is rather amusing to recall how, over the years, the College was perceived in some circles. There were the "usual suspects" in the form of the Soviet embassy and even some fairly prominent people (who shall be nameless, but ought to be ashamed of themselves) who tried to denigrate the College and its staff as flunkys of the CIA and other anti-Soviet special services, but that was something we could ignore. What was surprising was that many saw us as a body that could achieve almost anything, even in matters totally outside our brief. That, in a way, the College was greater than the sum of its parts, and this caused some of the lighter moments in our work, a few of which I would like to share with you. It emerged that in some circles, Keston College and such organizations as the BBC were perceived as practically one and the same thing, not just behind the Iron Curtain, but also in the West, even capable of exerting influence in matters of religious dogma. For instance, I remember Michael handing me a letter – with an ill-concealed grin! – saying: "Alyona, as you are Russian Orthodox, I think you are the best person to answer this." The letter was from an English lady who had been received recently into the Russian Orthodox Church, and was taking Michael to task for not confining Keston's reporting to Russian Orthodox believers in the Soviet Union, because all the others, by definition, were doomed to be consigned to the outer darkness. I spent two evenings marshalling what I thought were powerful arguments to the effect that we are all equal before God, delved into the Bible and the writings of the

Church Fathers, and felt that I had built up a pretty convincing case. A week later I received her answer which read: "Dear Mrs. Kojevnikov! Thank you for your long letter. I don't agree with you. Yours in Christ..." Another long and furious letter came from a Protestant gentleman in Greece, by the name of Apostolos, who was clearly seriously at odds with the Greek Orthodox Church and called upon Keston College to denounce that church and all its clergy to the world at large, because they were completely wrong in their preaching of the Gospel but refused to stand corrected (presumably by him). We let that one go. Some of you may remember the appearance in 1982 of full page advertisements in the major newspapers, announcing the imminent Second Coming of Christ, in the person of one Benjamin Creme, which was supposed to occur on such and such a date in London's Brick Lane. By some means unknown to me, a young woman from his entourage got hold of my home phone number, and began to pester me with calls demanding that Keston College bring this to the attention of Christians in the Soviet Union, drawing on the resources of the BBC. In the end I told her that if the Second Coming did occur, I would look forward to hearing from her on the following day.

Not unexpectedly, there were some cranks, the last thing on whose minds was religion. One letter came from Siberia from a man who claimed to have invented an elixir of youth, which he was prepared to sell and give us a cut of the proceeds. This was a time when numerous joint ventures were being set up between Russia and the West, so presumably it was up to us to cover the financial side and handle the marketing. Unfortunately, he did not disclose the formula, so I threw it away. Another snake-oil salesman in Russia claimed that for a modest fee, preferably in US dollars, he could cure any sickness over vast distances.

The fee of 100 USD would be split 50/50 with us, though how this transaction would be performed remained unclear. He sent a photo of himself standing knee-deep in a river, with a huge cross on his bare chest below a flowing white beard, looking very much like a stock image of an Old Testament prophet. He included his name and the address to which money should be sent.

Of course, these were rare instances, but they were good fun.

In closing, I would like to stress that the success of the Information Department

was based on the fact that all of us at the College worked as a team, a well-oiled machine in our individual capacities. We belonged to different Christian denominations and traditions, but that was never an issue: we were all deeply conscious of the honour and privilege of doing what we could for those persecuted for their faith, to be a small part of their voice. In fact, I think it would be fair to say that Keston College was a unique microcosm embodying the concept of “E pluribus unum” – out of many – one.

Thank you for your attention.

*Helena Kojevnikov is a trustee of the Keston Institute.*



*Keston Institute AGM 28 October 2017*



# Dr Bernard Palmer

1929 - 2017

by Michael Bourdeaux

Bernard Palmer, who died last December after a long illness, was not only an outstanding editor of the *Church Times*, but a good friend and supporter of Keston College, which in no way prejudiced his judgment of which of our News Service items to print.

It was Roger Roberts who decided to serialise my first book, *Opium of the People*, for the *Church Times*, but Bernard picked up the trail and realised that Keston College was a reliable source of hard news about the persecution of religion in the Soviet Union (and other communist countries), which in the 1960s was becoming increasingly in view. In the midst of controversies emanating from Soviet misinformation, he never wavered nor modified our contributions. Only the BBC used this information as extensively.

As well as reprinting news items, Bernard frequently asked me to write book reviews and, occasionally, feature articles. He paid me the honour of saying he always received the requested number of words and never had to edit the text. To this day, the *Church Times* continues to commission book reviews from Xenia Dennen and me.

Beyond this, Bernard became an even warmer friend after his retirement in 1989. Many a car journey "home" to Cornwall was broken by a call at Charminster, where there was always a welcome; then, after his move to Essex, he continued to attend our Annual General Meetings in London, as long as his health permitted. We shall be eternally grateful to him.

*Michael Bourdeaux is the President and Founder of Keston College  
(now Keston Institute).*

*On 5 July 2018 it will be a year since Irina Ratushinskaya died, leaving a body of poetry and prose writings imbued with her religious faith and belief in the primacy of truth and justice. She never faltered in her beliefs and could not be silenced, despite official political persecution and years in the harsh conditions of a Soviet labour camp. To mark this anniversary we are reprinting an obituary written by her friend and constant support, Helena Kojevnikov. An article commissioned from Tatiana Voltskaya, a St Petersburg-based poet and journalist, herself a believer, discusses faith in her poetry. In the next issue of the Newsletter we plan to continue the theme with a further article about Ratushinskaya's life and work.*

## Remembering Irina Ratushinskaya

4 March 1954 – 5 July 2017

by Helena Kojevnikov

The Russian poet Irina Ratushinskaya died on 5 July 2017. Her death in Moscow, at the age of 63, brought to an end a life filled not just with poetry, but civic courage of the highest order. Helena Kojevnikov knew Ratushinskaya well and contributed this obituary to the *Church Times* (14 July 2017).

ON 5 July, the poet Irina Ratushinskaya, aged 63, left this life and stepped into eternity with her usual indomitable courage, sustained to the end by an unwavering faith in God and the loving support of her husband, Igor Gerashchenko, and their twin sons, Sergei and Oleg.

She was a vital, joyous person, and it seems impossible to accept that she is no longer with us. Her friends and numerous admirers found inspiration in her poetry and books, especially her remarkable memoir *Grey is the Colour of Hope*, a scrupulous account of life in the “Small Zone”, the prison within a prison camp, as one of a group of women deemed dangerous dissidents by the Soviet authorities. They sent forth their ideological tanks to break a butterfly, yet the butterfly emerged triumphant. She was even able to continue writing in prison, and smuggle her poems out to the world.



*Book cover: Grey is the Colour of Hope*

She had not been a natural dissident. Born in Odessa to an engineer and a literature teacher, and herself a physics graduate, she married Igor, a physicist, in 1979. She brought her firm Christianity to her work as a primary-school teacher. In 1981, when she and Igor signed an appeal to the government on behalf of the exiled physicist Andrei Sakharov, and supported the appeal by joining a demonstration, both were jailed for ten days.

In 1982, at the age of 28, Irina was arrested again, and the next April, she was sentenced to seven years' strict regime camps, followed by five years' internal exile — a record term for a woman. The charge was “anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda in poetic form”.

Her release was secured by a global campaign by human-rights groups and concerned individuals. One of the foremost of these was the Reverend Dick Rogers, who spent Lent 1986 in a cage outside his church, to highlight her ordeal. When the campaign became intensive enough to worry the Soviet authorities, Irina was approached with offers to write a clemency plea in order to be released. She treated all such attempts at moral blackmail with the contempt they deserved.

The upshot was that, when he arrived in Reykjavik for a summit with President Reagan in 1986, the first words to the assembled press, from Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, as reported by witnesses, were: “No questions about Ratushinskaya. She has been released.”

We are left with the enduring legacy of her work, especially her poetry. Joseph Brodsky, one of the most distinguished Russian poets of the 20th century, who ranked her alongside such acknowledged luminaries as Anna Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetaeva, wrote that “a crown of thorns on the head of a bard has a way of

turning into a laurel. Ratushinskaya is a remarkably genuine poet, a poet with faultless pitch, who hears historical and absolute time with equal precision. She is a fully-fledged poet, natural, with a voice of her own, piercing but devoid of hysteria.”

Even in the poems written in the dire conditions of the prison camp, there is never a hint of self-pity. In a later interview she said: “I knew what I was facing, but I could not stay silent.”

There is a popular view that Russian poets are deemed to be “the voice of conscience” of the nation: Irina never subscribed to this. When this viewpoint was put to her, she laughed and said: “If Ivan Ivanov is proclaimed to be the conscience of the nation, then so much the worse for both Ivan Ivanov and the nation.”

She did not consider that what had landed her in the camps was anything outstanding, just something that anyone with a sense of justice would do.

Her poems covered an enormous range, from the happy to the sad, the downright chilling and heart-breaking, such as the long poem, unfortunately not yet translated, “Dedicated to the children of warder Akimkina”, a particularly sadistic turnkey, who delighted in taunting the women thrown into the freezing conditions of the “punishment cell” that they would never be able to have children, even if they survived their term in the camp.

She could also be delightfully whimsical, as in her poem reciting the lament of an old dragon, who is shedding his scales, and mourning his former strength and glory. The poems always contain an element of hope, even in the depths of despair, a reflection of Irina's own nature.

Stripped of Soviet citizenship, she and her husband continued their human-rights campaigning, even in their enforced exile



*With US president Ronald Reagan after her release from camp*

in the West, until they were able, in the wake of perestroika, to return to Russia, and battle for the reinstatement of their citizenship, this time Russian, not Soviet. They settled in Moscow in 1998.

Irina survived in the face of all odds. She was reunited with her husband, and, despite the turnkey's malicious prophecies, bore him sons. Two dreams deservedly fulfilled. Our hearts go out to Igor, Sergei, and Oleg in this time.

Rest in peace, Irina. May your bright soul dwell with the righteous.

## Proof of the Soul Faith in the poetry of Irina Ratushinskaya

by Tatiana Voltskaya

Irina Ratushinskaya's poetry cannot be discussed simply as verse, that is, discussed from the point of view of its technical perfection, or brilliance of imagery. The verses are inseparable from the fate of the author, who survived the Mordovan Gulag's harshest camps, enduring hunger strikes, freezing punishment cells, without faltering and without ever weakening. She never gave in to KGB pressure – to inform on other prisoners, confess to the charges against her, or write a grovelling appeal for pardon. Furthermore, after her release Ratushinskaya recalled how she did not expect to survive imprisonment, and it was the solidarity of fifteen fellow women prisoners that kept her alive: by together beginning a hunger strike of protest whenever one of their number was thrown into the punishment cell. This joint action saved all their lives: the prison camp authorities could not bring themselves to wipe out the entire group. This was not, of

course, out of pity, but because of their fear of the reaction of Western public opinion; campaigners for human rights in the USSR sent thousands of postcards to the prisoners in the Mordovan camp and these postcards helped. Because the KGB counted them.<sup>1</sup>

Of course the life of any poet is inseparable from his or her poetry, but the case of Irina Ratushinskaya is exceptional. In Russia many writers were sent into exile, but only a few survived the ordeal. When reading her poetry it is impossible to ignore – to be quite frank – the halo of martyrdom, even sainthood, which illumines these works. Because Ratushinskaya's story is truly amazing and from the very start more like the Life of a Saint than the biography of a Soviet woman. Take the first childish miracle: an unconscious prayer for an end to the lesson of atheism. And the lesson did end in a most unusual way for Odessa,

with an unexpected, huge snowfall, because of which the children were sent home from school. Then there are her unformed conjectures about God: ‘if so many people expend so much effort and so much ill-natured persistence to prove that You do not exist, that means, in all probability, that You do exist.’ This is how, naively, gradually, feeling her way, she came to her faith, as did her husband, Igor Gerashchenko, a specialist in physics. Another miracle: their marriage might not have been solemnised because they had no rings, but some of the elderly ladies in the church, strangers to them, started pulling off the wedding rings which they no longer needed because they were widows. Seeing this, the priest broke the rules and married the young people despite their lack of wedding rings. Or another example: the cross which her husband carved from walrus bone for Irina – so that in prison the guards would not tear it off her neck, claiming that metal objects were forbidden. During all the years of imprisonment she never allowed the bone cross to be taken



*Irina Ratushinskaya*

from her. It is as though Irina and her husband prepared in advance for the years ahead, which indeed they did, soberly aware that Irina’s poems, which were circulating widely in manuscript copies, were preparing the way for her imprisonment and martyrdom.

On reflection, it was not just her religious poems that were preparing the way, even though they were quite correctly understood to be anti-Soviet in meaning, but also their distribution in *samizdat* (self-publishing). There was also the open letter both Irina and Igor signed protesting at Sakharov’s exile in Gorky “at the insistent request of Soviet society” as the official announcement put it. The theme of the ordeals of imprisonment runs through Ratushinskaya’s work like a thread, which feeds into a much more important theme: the constant internal dialogue with Russia and about Russia.

*Why are the snows blue?  
Our blood lies over you, Russia!  
Our white raiment – over the dirty rabble.  
Our honour – over your shame  
Like leaves we fall – as the palest dust.*

*Well then, are you comfortable in your  
motherhood?*

This little poem, like many of Ratushinskaya’s poems, has a distinct echo of Marina Tsvetaeva, and the sense of the poem is very much like Tsvetaeva’s, where she would hurl a reproach, an accusation at real or imagined offenders (“How do you like living with another?”). But Ratushinskaya does not go in for Tsvetaeva’s favourite ramping up of the emotional tone, ever sharper from line to line. Her poem does indeed lay a serious accusation at Russia, “Our blood lies over you, Russia!”, but it was written in 1981, that is before the labour camp where Ratushinskaya is confined in 1983. There

### *Prison camp poems, easily hidden*

*Shamed and wretched,  
Mother and step-mother,  
bless us!*

These lines do not allow any thought of hatred. And here this merging of two conversations – about the Motherland and about God – leads in the most natural way to the understanding of her way of the cross as serving God. Ratushinskaya is clearly responding to Christ's call to take up your cross and follow Him, not formally, not theatrically, but in its essence, for external appearances are of little interest to her: "Here I am caught in Your wind in unbleached clothing". But Ratushinskaya turns to God with the main question which is always facing a Christian:

*What shall I say at Your judgement day, if  
I am bidden*

*Not to stay silent but turn to face the  
country -  
Stained in death, in rags, deaf and dumb -  
O my God!*

It seems that from poem to poem Ratushinskaya's conviction grows that she has guessed the nature of her service correctly: "I am already on the road. And God's hand is on my shoulder". This calm, confident line appears in 1982, one year before her sentence to the Gulag.

*What dreams I have of your crucifixions!  
How soon I shall be following their path  
For your sake -*  
*my beloved,*  
*accused -*  
*Walking towards the same death!*

*Keston Newsletter No 27, 2018*

Burning questions and doubts give way to quiet words of prayer – and almost always this prayer, not only for herself but also for all who found themselves in the same place at the same time as the poet in the comfortless open spaces of “the land which rejects God”, for which we can and must beg constantly: “Light her path, O Lord!”

Her camp poems serve as confirmation of the correctness of her chosen path. Their meaning is more dense and with a greater variety of people – new personages appear and the lyrical heroine dreams new dreams. A chef d’œuvre of Irina Ratushinskaya’s camp poetry, one of its peaks, is unquestionably the poem “Whom will the dream pay for all the accounts...”. It is about an unattainable velvet dress, which captivates the imagination of a young woman prisoner. She has done so little living, had so little chance to dress in pretty clothes, and now her surroundings are prison, guards, barbed wire, her dream is laughable and quite impossible. This makes her cry all the more touching and defenceless: “But I do so want it!” – so open, and so feminine. Ratushinskaya writes ironically of her own “Trampled childish right/To beauty”, and laments it, while justifying her dream of the dress:

*But I, in my soul, - what can I do! - am  
guilty,  
Still sewing it and the thousandth stitch  
I place in my mind, while buttoning my  
padded jacket  
And measuring a heavy-duty boot.*

In fact, she is sewing the invisible white garments of the poet-martyr, and this strengthens her awareness of her destiny, written into a familiar trajectory.

*From Elabuga to Chernaya Rechka -  
Wide is my country, my native land.<sup>2</sup>*

This is a bitter parody of a cult Soviet song performed by Lyubov Orlova in a cult Soviet film. Ratushinskaya’s country is wide, settled not only with people who have dark confusion in their souls, but with desecrated churches, their cupolas destroyed, where “the Virgin shields the child with her arm, and quietly mourns”. And Ratushinskaya mourns with the Virgin – she too fears to let the “dark-eyed child” go out into the hostile snows. She asks – as if together with the Virgin Mary:

*Surely it cannot be that again and again -  
Love, salvation and miracle,  
An open, unflinching gaze -  
Will find there is a Russian Judas  
And there will be another Russian Pilate?*

The question is well put: the icons are covered in scratches; filthy words have been written over the faces of saints. But, although in the poem we hear Christ’s angry question “What have you done to my Father’s house?”, in the end there follows a request – to be given strength to serve. And this plea can be heard in almost every poem – even one as sad as this, where

*... Russian angels,  
Like sparrows in the frost,  
Freeze by morning  
And fall from the wires into the snow.*

There is a lot of snow in Ratushinskaya’s poems, hardly surprisingly – the Mordovan camp, undoubtedly, is the place where the image of snow, of elemental cold, is one of the most fundamental. But this bleak image turns to show another side – the shining white of the garments of martyrs for the faith, pilgrims seeking the truth. “Blessed are those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.” These words are sung at the beginning of the liturgy, and the echo of this singing can be clearly heard in the lines for which the poet has paid with her own life. And it is



for this reason that the significance of these lines cannot be emphasised enough, and one can only regret that today they are seldom remembered. If and when the new Russia is destined to arise from the dust, when the crimes of the regime which killed millions of innocent people have been judged, the butchers named and the dead mourned, Irina Ratushinskaya's verse will certainly be sewn onto the banners of those who undertake this task:

*How long will it take us – on crosses and  
the executioner's blocks –  
Through the bonfire of maternal fears –  
To cleanse from shame and ashes  
Our hearts' desecrated image of Him?  
How long for us to wash this earth clean  
Of violence and lies?  
Do you heed us, O Lord? If you heed us,  
Give us strength to serve this land.*

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The poems are translated from texts in: Irina Ratushinskaya, *Vne limita* (Outside the Limit), Possev Verlag, V. Gorachek KG, Frankfurt am Main, 1986.

<sup>1</sup> For many years Amnesty International organised the sending of postcards to political prisoners in Soviet labour camps.

<sup>2</sup>Elabuga was the place of exile of Marina Tsvetaeva, where she committed suicide. Chernaya Rechka (Black Stream) is a place outside St Petersburg where the poet Alexander Pushkin fought a duel over his wife's honour and lost his life.

***Tatiana Voltskaya** is a prominent poet, essay writer and freelance journalist. She is the author of ten volumes of poetry and was co-editor of the literary journal Postscriptum. She is now a correspondent for Radio Liberty in St Petersburg.*

*Editorial Note: this issue has been edited by Dr Elisabeth Robson, who has undertaken the task while Xenia Dennen is on sabbatical and working with the Mercer's Company, where she is Upper Warden.*