

# Keston Newsletter

No. 29, 2019

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Photograph of a desecrated and vandalised church from *Religion in Communist Lands*, vol.16 no.3, Autumn 1988, taken to mark the Millennium of the Baptism of Kievan Rus'.



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## 50 Years

*The Editor of the Keston Newsletter writes:*

This year Keston College celebrates its fiftieth anniversary. Founded in response to a real and pressing need - “Be Our Voice” - for repressed believers of all faiths, suffering under Khrushchev’s attempt to wipe out religion in the secular Soviet Union, it has collected evidence and reported on the fate of believers not just in the Soviet Union, but also in Eastern Europe and China. Its journal, *Religion in Communist Lands*, was for many years the principal vehicle for reporting in depth and for making known cruelties and injustices that would otherwise have passed unnoticed in the rest of the world. Our cover photograph, taken from *Religion in Communist Lands*, reminds us of the desolation wrought by Soviet repression.

As the West increasingly lost faith in organised religion and turned to exotic faiths and none, there were many who could not see the point of an institution like Keston, and did not read its publications. Had they done so, they would have realised

that there were many millions of people who did have faith and who were still suffering for it, many years after the anti-religious campaigns of the Soviet Union had lost some of their virulence.

In this issue of the Newsletter our President, Michael Bourdeaux, illustrates this in his recollections of the many inspiring figures of the Russian Orthodox Church and other churches he met during his work. Approaching the subject from a different angle, Roland Smith demonstrates why diplomats should not ignore religion. There follow two historical pieces, on Soviet anti-religious propaganda posters and the influence of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s writings in the DDR, Czechoslovakia and Poland. We also have an important glimpse into Orthodox church life and politics in South Ossetia. Finally, there is an update on the tribulations of believers in Crimea, annexed illegally by Russia in 2014 and now subject to Russian “anti-extremism” laws.

Two major celebrations of Keston’s jubilee will take place this year: in June a plaque will be unveiled on the building in which Keston College worked from 1972 to 1992 ; in November the AGM will be addressed by Rowan Williams, who is one of our Patrons. We hope all members who can will attend these events:

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# Keston at Fifty – A Retrospective

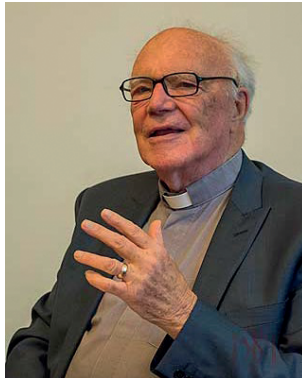
by Michael Bourdeaux

There is a widespread belief that the collapse of communism led to a religious revival in Russia. Although officially the Russian Orthodox Church, by and large, maintains this position, it is wrong. You cannot understand the Russian Orthodox Church today without considering the heroism of many who were inspired by their new-found faith for a quarter of a century after 1959, the beginning of Nikita Khrushchev's persecution.

I entered the fray at this point, being a member of the first-ever British student exchange with the USSR and spending the academic year 1959-60 at Moscow University. Only gradually did I become aware of the extent of the renewed persecution of the Church – indeed, of all religions – harking back to the worst days of Stalin. A prolonged series of experiences led to the founding, ten years later, of Keston College.

Once we established the reliability of our work, information (*samizdat* – unpublished documents) began to reach us in a flood. We read official sources, the Soviet press, as well as established original work by cross-referencing articles attacking individual believers to the documents which showed what they were really doing or saying. No one had ever done that before. We discovered that there was a two-pronged attack against believers, as well as a comprehensive condemnation of all religion.

First, the State forced the Baptist leadership to adopt new statutes in 1960, under which local pastors were instructed not to appeal for “conversions” in sermons and even to keep young people out of church. Gennadii Kryuchkov and Alexei Prokofiev (soon replaced by Georgii Vins) led a movement to summon a congress where state interference in church affairs would be condemned.



Second, the government Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs similarly enforced measures at a State-controlled “Synod of Bishops” in 1961: parish priests were banned from their own church councils, handing over their administration in many instances to atheists appointed by the local leader of the Communist Party. In 1965 two Moscow priests, Frs Nikolai

Eshliman and Gleb Yakunin, gathered copious information about the persecution and addressed strong and detailed appeals to the State and the Moscow Patriarchate, the latter begging Patriarch Alexii I to act more strongly in defence of the faith.

At this time, significant members of the intelligentsia began to show an interest in – sometimes a commitment to – the traditional faith. Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote a published essay, ‘Along the Oka’, in which he bewailed the desecration of village churches throughout the land. A religious revival was already underway in the 1960s.

The extent of this and the role of individuals in it became the main focus of Keston throughout the next twenty years. No overall Russian-based assessment of these events seems to have taken place and the archive of Keston, now being carefully maintained by Baylor University at Waco, Texas, is the sole repository of this key movement in twentieth-century church history.

Even in a recent study of the Russian Orthodox Church, an American academic, John Burgess, fails at this point, though he otherwise writes impressively. His *Holy Rus'* (2017) informs us, rather too blandly (p.3): "I had read that religion was coming back to life in this part of the world". He dismisses the Khrushchev purge in one paragraph (p.167), simply missing out all the "confessors" (those who suffered for their faith) for the next quarter of a century.

Much more serious is the way in which the Moscow Patriarchate skews its own history by passing directly from the fate of the tens of thousands of martyrs under Stalin to its freedom when communism collapsed. There is an elision here and a most serious one. What of its own role in justifying Stalin's policies after its creation near the end of World War II? What of its later attacks against those who reproduced the words of the persecuted? This omission, sadly, coloured its attitude to Keston, and this hostility to some extent persists even today.

The Russian Orthodox Church claimed that it enjoyed "freedom of religion" in such forums as the World Council of Churches (which it joined in 1961) and this, in turn and in some instances, affected Keston's own relations with the churches of the Western democracies. Rather too easily, the old ways of Orthodox Church, which always supported its government at a time of persecution, dovetailed into

political support for the Putin regime. There is room to spare for those who, resurrecting the Keston tradition, wish to study this devolution in detail.

There was, indeed, a short-lived attempt by the Russian Orthodox Church to examine its past. A former Keston researcher, Geraldine Fagan, has studied this and writes it up in Chapter 10 of Dominic Erdozain's book, *The Dangerous God* (2017).

She quotes the case of Bishop Khrizostom of Vilnius, known to be a good and faithful pastor. Even he admitted in 1992 that he had collaborated with the KGB and he publicly begged forgiveness. He also named Archbishop Mefodi of Voronezh as a "KGB officer". From his London cathedral, Metropolitan Anthony Bloom (who died in 2003) recommended that the Russian Church should follow the example of South Africa and set up a "Truth and Reconciliation Commission". In a way, this did happen and there was a response. Khrizostom challenged the Bishops' Council "to purify ourselves from all this". The response was to form a "Commission for Investigation into the Activities of the Security Services within the Russian Orthodox Church" (Erdozain, p.200). Over a period of eleven years, Fr Georgii Edelshtein, a friend of Keston from Kostroma, wrote to his bishop, Aleksandr, who was chair of the commission. He repeatedly asked for a report on its progress - but Fr Vsevolod Chaplin, spokesman for the Patriarchate, told Ms Fagan in 2000 that it had long ago completed its enquiry, but results would not be released. So ended that story.

The collapse of communism opened up new perspectives for Keston, despite dwindling financial support. We helped inaugurate Oxford's Theological Exchange Programme and funded the first Russian

Orthodox student to benefit from it. We established a small Moscow team which, joined by Xenia Dennen, our chairman, began travelling to all corners of Russia to record developments in religious life.

I had, for the first time, the opportunity to work for the BBC in Russia and to present something of the richness of the Russian Orthodox heritage to the Western and worldwide public. Between 1999 and 2000 I travelled to Russia seven times and made the same number of programmes for “Sunday Worship”, “Choral Evensong” and the World Service, two of which were repeated in later years. Working with the local church in various locations was both a pleasure and a privilege. At the invitation of Metropolitan Kirill (now Patriarch Kirill I), to inaugurate the new millennium, came from his diocese of Smolensk and he participated in it.

Today we often think further back and remember with gratitude those whose example stimulated us and inspired us in our task of spreading their “voice” to the world.

Fr Gleb Yakunin died in 2014, aged eighty, without ever being acknowledged by the Church as a pioneering reformer. He had been silenced for ten years by Patriarch Alexii I; then (first with Lev Regelson, later with Hierodeacon Varonofi Khaibulin and Viktor Kapitanchuk) he formed an ecumenical group, the Council for the Defence of Believers’ Rights. The founding document was perhaps the most important declaration on religious liberty ever to come out of USSR. The World Council of Churches failed to support this remarkable ecumenical initiative, for which Fr Yakunin received a sentence of ten years in the gulag, eventually to be released a year early after Gorbachev’s accession. Turning to politics, he was elected to Duma, which gave him access to KGB archives, but the

Moscow Patriarchate proclaimed that priests were debarred from political activity, and he was stripped of his priesthood.

A whole generation of “Confessors” was airbrushed out of official history. The Keston legacy, however, gives these men and women a continuing voice, having documented their activities with care and precision.

There were bishops who at various times tried to rectify – or at least refuse to endorse – the collaboration: Afanasii, Iov, Veniamin, Yermogen. There were heroes, mainly women, who defended – and managed to keep open – the Pochaev Lavra in Ukraine against Khrushchev’s attempts to close it in the 1960s: monks Andrei Shchur, Apellii Stankevich, Feodosia Varavva, Yevrosinia Shchur and many others.

There were priests who inspired revival and fought for freedom: Frs Vsevolod Shpillier, Dmitri Dudko, Sergii Zheludkov, Pavel Adelheim and Vasyi Romanuk (later Patriarch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Kiev). The heroism of each one deserves a biography (so far only Dudko has benefited from such detailed attention). There is a roll-call of lay educators and writers: Anatolii Levitin-Krasnov (who, after exile, died in a drowning accident in Switzerland which was never investigated), Vadim Shavrov, Igor Shafarevich, Gennadii Shimanov, Yevgenii Barabanov, Leonid Borodin, Sergei Markus, Vadim Shcheglov, the mathematician Boris Talantov, who died a martyr in prison.

There was a galaxy of intellectual women: Tatyana Goricheva, Zoya Krakhmalnikova, Irina Ratushinskaya. Even the last-named, who died in 2017 and received full obituaries in the West, had

disappeared, like the others, from the world picture. There was a whole group of activists, mainly students, who founded the “Christian Seminar” and sacrificed their careers for doing so: Aleksandr Ogorodnikov, Vladimir Poresh, Tatyana Shchipkova and many others.

Fr Aleksandr Men’ deserves a section all on his own. He, at least posthumously, has received attention in Russia and abroad. This outstanding scholar, author and preacher was murdered in 1990, but there was never a proper investigation into his death. He kept a low profile as a parish priest, though he was frequently hounded by the KGB. His books, now printed in Russia, were publicly burned by the Bishop of Yekaterinburg in 1995 (the accusation was that he was too positive about other religions). He has been receiving growing acceptance and there have been several biographies in the West, as well as translations of some of his rich collection of works.

Keston’s legacy, as we move into our second half century, is both popular and academic. Our Moscow team continues to travel to the corners of Russia, far and near. Up to now, the many parts of the resulting encyclopaedia have appeared in Russian only, but their remarkable findings are of course on record and will one day be accessible to the whole world. Baylor University, in collaboration with our British-based Council, continues to offer study opportunities in its archive at the Keston Center for Religion, Politics and Society, which offers rich opportunities for future study. Keston’s work is different from fifty years ago, but it is set for the foreseeable future.

*This article is adapted from the talk given at the Keston Open Day on 3 November 2018.*

*Michael Bourdeaux is the President and Founder of Keston College,  
now Keston Institute*

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# Diplomacy and the Importance of Religion: The Case of Ukraine

by Roland Smith

I want to talk today about the attention which diplomats should pay to religion, with particular reference to Ukraine, where I served as ambassador. For too long, Britain underestimated the importance of religious factors. That has changed since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, because it has been impossible to ignore the importance of Islam. But in Ukraine, Islam plays only a minor role. Of far greater importance are the different strands of the Christian faith.

For many Ukrainians religion is of no importance. That is not surprising – Ukraine was part of the former Soviet Union, whose rulers devoted considerable resources to suppressing religion. But in spite of that, in today's Ukraine, about 72% of people say they are believers, of whom most declare themselves Orthodox Christians.

When I arrived in Kiev, in 1999, one of the first things which showed me the reality of continuing Christian faith was the golden-domed monastery of St Michael, just up the road from our embassy. It dated from the twelfth century. In the mid-1930's, on Stalin's orders, it was blown up. It was intended to build a huge new government building on the site, but only a small section was ever completed. Instead, after Ukraine's independence, it was restored, and rapidly became again a fully working monastery.

I already knew of the historic importance of Orthodoxy for Ukraine. In 988 A.D. the ruler of Kievan Rus, Prince Volodymyr, decided that he and his people



*Roland Smith*

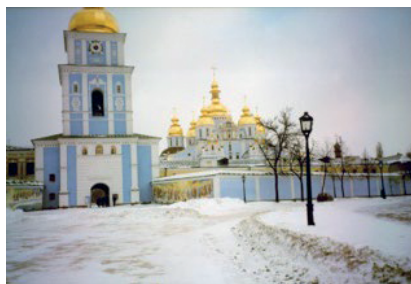
should be baptised as Orthodox Christians. While the Soviet Union existed, the fact that this crucial event took place in Kiev, not in Moscow (which did not exist in 988), seemed unimportant. But was Kievan Rus an antecedent of modern Russia? Views of the past can be changed by what is happening in the present. Independence has enabled Ukraine to claim its own past, and see Kievan Rus as the ancestor of Ukraine. After all, Kiev has not gone anywhere. But from a Russian perspective, things look very different.

Fast forward again to my arrival in Kiev. The Orthodox church was divided in three. During the Soviet period, and under the Czars, the Orthodox church in Ukraine came under the Patriarch of Moscow. This Moscow Patriarchate church, headed by a

Metropolitan, continues to exist. When I called on that Metropolitan soon after my arrival in Kiev, he emphasised that his church was the only one recognised by the Patriarch of Constantinople, and by all other Orthodox churches, and also that it had far more parishes in Ukraine than the other Orthodox churches.

The Metropolitan treated me correctly, but was not interested in regular contacts. A different attitude was shown by the Patriarch of the Kiev Patriarchate church, which split from Moscow soon after Ukraine became independent. Patriarch Filaret is a suspect character, widely rumoured to have worked for the KGB in Soviet times. But his defence of his church's independence was robust: he said the normal Orthodox principle was that an independent country should have an independent church. He frequently invited diplomats to events and services, and when I went, he was rather too liable to greet me with a kiss of peace - an uncomfortable experience, since he had a very bristly beard. St Michael's monastery belonged to the Kiev Patriarchate, as did Kiev's large 19<sup>th</sup> century cathedral, St Volodymyr's, but the most venerated site, the Monastery of the Caves, was the Ukrainian headquarters of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The Autocephalous church was much smaller than either of the other two, but its main church in Kiev was close to our embassy, and I was given a friendly reception there. It had declared independence from Moscow in 1921, during the short-lived period of Ukrainian independence after the First World War. It was persecuted throughout the Soviet period, but resurrected after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and through its adherents in the United States, it had a relationship with the Ecumenical Patriarch.



*St Michael's Monastery*

The three Orthodox churches did not recognise each other. But they would all attend meetings organised by the Ukrainian state. And when the Anglican Bishop of Europe visited Kiev, I found they would also all accept an invitation to lunch at the British Embassy - though I had to be careful about the seating plan!

To complete the picture, something about the Catholics. The Roman Catholic church in Ukraine is quite small, with under 1% of the population. Most Ukrainian Catholics belong to the Greek Catholic church. This follows the Orthodox rite, but accepts the authority of the Pope. It is much stronger in Western Ukraine than elsewhere in the country, that is basically in those parts of Ukraine which belonged to Poland or Czechoslovakia before the Second World War, and where the Ukrainian language is most widely spoken. When these areas became part of the Soviet Union after the war, it was forcibly incorporated into the Moscow Patriarchate church, but it re-emerged at the end of the Soviet period.

In 2001, Pope John Paul II visited Ukraine. The Moscow Patriarchate protested about the visit, saying Ukraine was part of its canonical territory, and so the Pope should have come only at its invitation. But the Pope's visit was enormously popular. I was one of the diplomats at the airport to greet him on

arrival, and also attended one of the huge open-air masses which he conducted – two in the Roman Catholic rite and two in the Greek Catholic rite, apparently the first time that he had ever celebrated according to that rite. When I reported to the Foreign Office on the visit, I ended by recalling Stalin's cynical question about how many divisions the Pope had, and saying that John Paul II had more divisions in Ukraine than Stalin dreamed of.

The religious divisions in Ukraine mirrored the arguments about the country's future. Did Ukraine want to become a European democracy, with a market economy and the rule of law? Or did it want to move back closer to Russia, and accept the likely political and economic consequences? This was the central question with which diplomats in Kiev wrestled, while trying to encourage movement in their preferred direction.

It is worth saying something about the story since my departure. Successive Ukrainian governments tacked back and forth. President Yanukovich, elected in 2010, tried to negotiate to join President Putin's Eurasian Economic Union and have an Association Agreement with the European Union, even though the two were incompatible. When, in November 2013, he abandoned the Association Agreement just when it was about to be signed, this provoked the demonstrations on Kiev's Maidan which led to his downfall. The churches were very active on the Maidan. Here is part of an eyewitness account: "The Orthodox Church of Kyiv is very active, but so are priests from the Autocephalous Church and the Moscow Patriarchate...All the priests are serving, especially praying at night....Every night from the stage you hear the national anthem, then a prayer, holy Scripture, a prayer". St Michael's Monastery became a

casualty station, to which wounded demonstrators were brought.

The crisis, and then the Russian annexation of Crimea and encouragement of secession in part of Eastern Ukraine, put a grave strain on the Moscow Patriarchate church. Between spring 2013 and spring 2014, Moscow Patriarchate adherents shrank from 28% to 25% of Ukrainians, while the numbers of the Kiev Patriarchate rose from 26% to 32%. In a number of Moscow Patriarchate parishes, prayers ceased to be said for the Patriarch of Moscow.

The latest chapter has been the schism between the Russian Orthodox Church and Constantinople, resulting from the decision of the Ecumenical Patriarch to grant autocephaly, or independence, to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Unlike previous schisms in Christian history, this has been entirely a political rather than a theological dispute. The political significance is demonstrated by the fact that the Ecumenical Patriarch's decision followed a formal request by President Poroshenko of Ukraine. People have suggested that President Poroshenko just wanted to improve his prospects in this year's presidential election. But even if that is true, it underlines the importance of the issue for Ukrainian voters.

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine was formally constituted on 15 December 2018, after a unification council between the Kiev Patriarchate Church, the Autocephalous Church, and two bishops from the Moscow Patriarchate Church. On 5 January, Patriarch Bartholomew signed the document recognising the independence of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Since then, some hundreds of Moscow Patriarchate parishes are reported to have transferred their allegiance. The Moscow Patriarchate church will continue

to exist in Ukraine; and in Crimea and the secessionist territories in the east, only the Moscow Patriarchate church can operate with any freedom. But overall, Russia is in the process of losing a very important non-military means of influence in Ukraine.

I cannot say that I foresaw all this when I was British ambassador in Kiev. What I

can say though is that it demonstrates very clearly why an embassy must keep track of religious developments.

*This paper was prepared for the Diplomatic Forum at Baylor University on Thursday 21 March 2019*

*Roland Smith is Acting Chairman of Keston Institute and a former British Ambassador to Ukraine.*

## ***Keston Institute***

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*Full details of life and corporate membership rates are listed on the website.*

*Full-time student membership: £5 per annum*

*Ordinary membership: minimum £25 per annum*

# Orthodoxy in South Ossetia

by **Mikhail Roshchin**

The historical circumstances surrounding the formation of South Ossetia or Dvaletiya, as it is known in Georgian sources, have been thoroughly analysed by the South Ossetian historian Yu.S. Gagloiti in his article 'Shida Kartli, Dvaletiya and South Ossetiya'.<sup>1</sup> The territory covers 3,900 sq.kms, but there are complex problems in calculating the real number of inhabitants. The figure I give is my own judgement based on personal observations, the questioning of specialists and local residents.

Pulling together the data from various Soviet census returns shows that the relative size of different ethnic communities of South Ossetia remained stable.<sup>2</sup> On the eve of the Six-Day War of 2008 the population was about 72,000, of which 64.3% Ossetians and 25% Georgians.<sup>3</sup> The war of 7-12 August led to major demographic changes and the mass flight of the Georgian population to Georgia. This particularly affected the villages of Tamaresheni, Achbeti, Kekhvi and Kurta, close to the capital Tskhinvali. In the Akhalkor (Leningor) District, Georgians are in the majority as they were before. According to the 2015 General Census of the Population of the Republic of South Ossetia (RSO), Georgians comprise 55.2% of the population of the District, Ossetians - 43.81%.<sup>4</sup>

On the website of the President of the Republic of South Ossetia the national languages are defined as: '... Ossetian and Russian. The Ossetian and Russian languages, and, in places where there are concentrated populations of citizens of South Ossetia of Georgian nationality, the Georgian language, are recognised as

official languages of the organs of state power, state administration and local self-government'.<sup>5</sup> According to my calculations approximately 60,000 people live in the territory. Today there are only two cities: the capital Tskhinvali where around half, or slightly more of the population lives, and Kvaisa, where, according to the 2015 census, there are 985 inhabitants.<sup>6</sup>

The religious life of South Ossetia has a number of unusual features. This article is largely based on the field research of the author. The only religious institution which survived from the Soviet era and had functioned throughout, was the Tskhinvali synagogue. The old synagogue, which later became a Jewish cultural centre, was badly damaged during the shelling by Georgian troops in 1991-92. The new synagogue building survived reasonably well, but the mass exodus of local Jews, mainly to Israel, means that it is now used by Ossetian Pentecostals. In addition in the republic there are Baptists, who as long ago as the end of 2009 officially filed papers in preparation for registration with the Tskhinvali city authorities, and also Adventists.

The only church officially registered in the republic is the Orthodox Alanian Eparchy (diocese), which was originally formed from the parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA), and later joined the Greek Old Calendar Orthodox Church of the Holy Synod in Resistance, under Metropolitan Kiprian Kutumbas. The official history of the Alanian Eparchy begins in 2005. In 2007 Metropolitan Kiprian (Kutumbas) fell seriously ill and was in a coma, as a result from October 2007 the Holy Synod in Resistance was

headed by Bishop Kiprian Giules. At the end of November and early December 2012 Metropolitan Kiprian's synod held discussions about unification with another Greek Old Calendar church – the synod of Metropolitan Khrizostom.<sup>7</sup> On 18 March 2014 the Alanian Diocese together with the synod of Metropolitan Kiprian joined the Old Style Greek church founded by the synod of Metropolitan Khrizostom,<sup>8</sup> since 5 October 2010 headed by Archbishop Kallinik Sarandopoulos.<sup>9</sup>

According to the constitution of the Republic of South Ossetia, Orthodoxy is the basis of the culture of the Ossetians. In South Ossetia the eparchy of the Georgian Orthodox Church continues to function. A large section of it is located within the Akh'algor District, and the town of Akh'algor contains the residence of the local Georgian Metropolitan of Nikoz and Tskhinvali, Isaiah Chanturia. In his earlier life Metropolitan Isaiah was a film director and animator. In January 2017 in the pages of the internet-publication 'Kavkaz (Caucasus) Online' he noted with satisfaction: 'Last autumn [2016 – M.R.] we put the roof on the refectory of the Khopa Monastery [otherwise known as Largvisi – M.R.],<sup>10</sup> also of the church of Saint Marine in Ikoti; last year we replaced roofs of the churches of Tskhavati and Kanchaeti. When we lack the means, we cover the church with tarpaulin until some means come to hand to repair it.'<sup>11</sup>

The revival of Orthodoxy among the south Ossetians is inextricably linked with the name of Father Georgii Pukhaete, who in 1999 signed an agreement with the government of the RSO on shared actions and mutual support. In 2005 he became the bishop of the Alanian Eparchy which today contains five parishes and the Monastery of the Birth of the Virgin in Dzhavi District. Services in the Alanian

Diocese are conducted in Old Church Slavonic and the native Ossetian.



*The author with Bishop Georgii Pukhaete*

On 5 June 2010 Bishop Georgii took annual leave and left South Ossetia (officially on health grounds, unofficially because of disagreements with the clergy). As the Ossetian scholar K.G.Dzugaev noted: 'After the August 2008 war it became ever more apparent that there were serious problems in the diocese. Tensions grew between Bishop Georgii and some of the priests, part of the clergy and congregation. There were attacks on the head of the church, at first secretly, but then publicly, spreading rumours besmirching his reputation. The situation was made worse by Bishop Georgii falling gravely ill and having major surgery, after which he needed a long period of treatment.'<sup>12</sup> Consequently Bishop Georgii left for Sochi to convalesce. After his departure for a time the Alanian Diocese was run by Father Yakov Khetagurov. On 19 May 2011 the Greek Holy Synod in Resistance named Bishop Mefonsky Amvrosii Baird as temporary

administrator. Amvrosii Baird (Bishop Ambrose Baird) is a native Briton, born in London on 14 August 1949. He has a deep knowledge of the Russian language. A professional art historian and specialist in icons, he converted to Orthodoxy and in 1973 he took monastic vows in the monastery of Saints Kiprian and Iustinian in Fili (Greece). Vladyka Amvrosii is well known as a serious theologian.<sup>13</sup>



*The author with Bishop Ambrose Baird*

I know Ambrose Baird very well, I have met him many times and am familiar with his untiring efforts to strengthen Orthodoxy in South Ossetia. I also know that he is respected and revered by his flock.

However, towards the end of 2017 the position of the Alanian Diocese in South Ossetia became more difficult. On 6 November 2017 the president of the RSO, Anatoly Bibilov, unexpectedly visited the cathedral of the Birth of the Virgin in

Tskhinvali and discussed with the council of the Bishopric the possibility of it moving to the Russian Orthodox Church. In this context, a new cathedral of John the Baptist is nearing completion in Tskhinvali, belonging to the ROC.<sup>14</sup> It was this church the president attended at Christmas early in 2017. How could the Alanian Diocese become part of the Russian Orthodox Church? The only possible way is through the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, which signed an Act on Canonical Communion with the ROC on 17 May 2007, after which the ROCA became an ‘inalienable self-governing part of the Local Russian Orthodox Church’ (article 1 of the Act).<sup>15</sup> This document enables a route for the Alanian Diocese to join the ROC without going into direct conflict with the Georgian Patriarchate. This is presumably what ROC Archbishop Vladikavkazsky and Alansky Leonid was alluding to when, during their meeting in Tskhinvali on 27 February 2018, he said to Anatoly Bibilov: ‘His Holiness the Patriarch [Kirill – M.R.] sends you his very best wishes, and, recalling the meeting which took place with you, wished blessed labours for the good of the people of RSO and hopes that all the agreements and plans, which were made, will be realised.’<sup>16</sup> It was in this way that in the winter of 2018 the existence of definite plans regarding the parishes of the Alanian Diocese was revealed. However, whether the diocese itself (its clerics and parishioners) which was officially constituted in 2005 and has its own, albeit short, history, is ready to fall in with these plans, remains pending, unanswered.

Irina Kelekhsaeva, correspondent of the internet-publication *Ekho Kavkaza* (‘Echo of the Caucasus’), met a number of members of the diocesan council and questioned them about this notable meeting with the president of the republic. According to their account, the conversation with Anatoly Bibilov was

difficult, because ‘he does not understand many questions of faith, and it was quite clear that all this was viewed by him purely from a political point of view.’<sup>17</sup>



*Bishop Ambrose officiating.*

In April 2018 when Vladyka Amvrosii was travelling out of South Ossetia, at the Verkhniy Rukh customs post his South Ossetian passport was confiscated, which meant he could no longer visit the Alanian Eparchy. Believers there were left in a difficult situation because at present Amvrosii is the only bishop to succour the Alanian parishes. Alan Pliyev, former head of the Tskhinvali district,

commented: ‘Questions of faith must always be approached with sensitivity, because otherwise the souls of parishioners may be deeply wounded by hasty decisions. A decision as complex as the transfer from one eparchy to another needs lengthy discussions which cannot be rushed, and certainly not decided straight from the shoulder. The opinion of the parishioners must be sought first.’<sup>18</sup>

According to my information, Bishop Amvrosii travelled to Moscow and Vladikavkaz, where he met representatives of the Alanian Eparchy, which continues to function as before. On 27 November 2018 Bishop Ambrose sent me a letter in which he set out his position on the latest action of the head of South Ossetia, Anatoly Bibilov, and briefly described his pastoral work with the believers of South Ossetia.

The following is the letter sent by Bishop Ambrose to the author:

## STATEMENT BY THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE ALANIAN EPARCHY



*Bishop Ambrose of Methoni and Alania*

I have visited the Republic of South Ossetia regularly since 1999, and in 2003 the then President, E.Dj. Kokoite personally awarded me South Ossetian citizenship. In 2006, the then Prime Minister, Yu. Morozov granted me one of the first (No. 25) newly-printed South Ossetian Passports, which I have held since then. During the entire 15 years that I have been a citizen of South Ossetia, no-one has ever challenged the legality of my status on the basis of the well-known fact that I am also a British citizen, indeed my contacts with the government and administration have always been extremely cordial.

In November 2017, I was summoned to South Ossetia for urgent talks with the new President, A.I. Bibilov. I came from

Greece as soon as I was able. In a long personal conversation, the President tried to persuade me that I should submit the Alanian Eparchy to the Moscow Patriarchate; I explained to him the canonical, dogmatic, and practical reasons why I could not do so, but invited him that same evening to come and speak to the members of our clergy, Diocesan Council, and faithful, as this was a question to be resolved not by the bishop alone, but by the people, assuring him the if they were willing to follow his advice, I would immediately stand down. The meeting took place, but none of the faithful, despite their respect for his office, were convinced by his arguments. The President sadly left in anger, stating that he would never again set foot in the churches of the Eparchy, a promise that he has kept.

Following a pastoral visit to South Ossetia in April 2018, as I was leaving for Russia, at the control-point of Verkhniy Rukh, my South Ossetian passport was confiscated by the border-guards. (I add that they behaved with great courtesy and were extremely apologetic) This was done with no written order, nor was any receipt given to me. Indeed, I was presented with a paper to sign which stated that I recognised that I was in future forbidden entry to South Ossetia; this I naturally refused to sign. This confiscation was

entirely illegal, as I have never been deprived of my citizenship, and had evidently been ordered the President of the Republic with the express intention of depriving the Alanian Eparchy of their bishop and forcing them into the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate against their will.

I protest most strongly against this illegal act, which is, in effect, an open attack by the State on the liberty of the Eparchy, which has over the years, not least in the persons of its two first bishops, Georgii Pukhaete, who laboured selflessly for the rebirth of the Ossetian Orthodox Church, and my humble self who, at his request, became his successor, shown itself to be an institution which promotes peace, goodwill and Christian love. We wish only for our liberty, and will then continue, as loyal citizens, to support and help the government which has been freely elected by the people of the Republic.

+ Ambrose, Bishop of  
Methoni and Alania

Since then, I have visited Russia, but have been obliged to meet my clergy in Vladikavkaz. The situation remains unchanged, but church life continues as normal in South Ossetia. +A.

- 
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  2. For more details, see my article 'Христианский ренессанс в Осетии' (The Renaissance of Christianity in Ossetia): <https://www.keston.org.uk/rr/72/01-Roschin-about-Alania-72.html>
  3. For a fuller account see: <http://www.ethno-kavkaz.narod.ru/rmsossetia.html> (accessed 12.11.2018).
  4. *Итоги всеобщей переписи населения Республики Южная Осетия 2015 года*. Цхинвал, 2016. (Results of the Census of the Population of the RSO in 2015, Tskhinvali, 2016).

5. <http://presidentruo.org/category/respublika/> Все права защищены © Официальный сайт Президента Республики Южная Осетия (All rights reserved © Official website of the President of ROS) (accessed 12.11.2018).
6. *Итоги всеобщей переписи РЮО 2016 года* (Results of the census of the population of the RSO in 2016).
7. For the text of the agreement between the two churches see: <https://www.hsir.org/pdfs/2012/12/RO20121207aAnakDial11-12.pdf> (accessed 25.11.2018).
8. See: <http://www.ecclesiagoc.gr/> (accessed 12.11.2018).
9. See: [http://www.parapolitikaargolida.gr/2010/10/blog-post\\_17.html](http://www.parapolitikaargolida.gr/2010/10/blog-post_17.html) (accessed 12.11.2018).
10. For a more detailed account of the Monastery of Khopa and Largvisi see: <http://kirill-anya.ru/2017/osetia/02.html> (accessed 12.11.2018).
11. Nino Dalakishvili, *Российская политика и христианское сопротивление* (Russian policies and Christian resistance), dated 9.01.2017: <http://kavkasia.net/Georgia/article/1484021463.php> (accessed 12.11.2018).
12. Дзугаев, К.Г. *Республика Южная Осетия//Этнополитическая ситуация в России и сопредельных государствах в 2010 году. Ежегодный доклад Сети этнологического мониторинга и раннего предупреждения EAWARN.* (Dzugaev, K.G., 'The Republic of South Ossetia' under 'The Ethnological Situation in Russia and Contiguous States in 2010' in *Annual Report of the Network of Ethnological Monitoring and Early Warning EAWARN*, Institute of Ethnography, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 2011, p.508.
13. Baird, Ambrose, *Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Greece*, 5th edn., Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline MA, 2009.
14. As the author of this article has described elsewhere, the construction of the ROC church in Tskhinvali was not universally welcomed by the orthodox believers of the city: <https://easaily.com/ru/news/2015/08/05/rpc-stroit-hram-v-centre-chinvala-chast-yuzhnyh-osetin-protiv> (accessed 25.11.2018).
15. The Act of Canonical Communion was published on the official site of the Moscow Patriarchate: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/155920.html> (accessed 17.11.2018).
16. See: [https://sputnik-ossetia.ru/South\\_Ossetia/20180227/5894206.html](https://sputnik-ossetia.ru/South_Ossetia/20180227/5894206.html) (accessed 17.11.2018).
17. Ирина Келехсаева. *Зачем Аланскую епархию подталкивают в лоно РПЦ? 7.07.2017* (Why is the Alanian Eparchy being pushed into the embrace of the Russian Orthodox Church?) <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/28840765.html> (accessed 12.11.2018).
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*Dr Mikhail Roshchin is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institut Vostokovedenia, Moscow.*

## ***Legacies***

*Keston's trustees are very grateful to all members for their continuing support for the Institute's work. We are, however, a dwindling band of enthusiasts so we would be delighted if you were able to recruit new members. If you are thinking of remembering Keston in your Will, the following suggested form of words, which can be copied directly into a Will, may be helpful:*

*'I give the sum of £..... [in figures and words] absolutely to Keston College, (otherwise known as Keston Institute), Company Registration No 991413 and Registered Charity Number 314103, hereinafter called "the Charity", such sum to be applied for the general purposes of the Charity. I direct that the receipt of the Chairman or other authorised officer for the time being of the Charity shall be a good and sufficient discharge to my Executors.'*

*With best wishes,  
Xenia Dennen (Chairman)*

### ***For your diaries:***

*Unveiling of the memorial plaque: Thursday 20 June 2019 at 16.00, Keston, Bromley, Kent.*

*Talk by Rowan Williams and AGM: Saturday 9 November 2019 at 12.00, the Royal Foundation of St Katharine, Limehouse, London.*

# In the Atheist Archives

by Roland Elliott Brown

When the Bolsheviks seized power from Russia's fragile post-revolutionary Provisional Government in Petrograd in November 1917–October by the old Julian calendar—they set themselves the heady task of turning Karl Marx's florid and nebulous Hegelian prose into policy. This proved particularly thorny where religious policy was concerned.

In his 1844 *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx had argued that religion was man-made, a product of the state and society, and an expression of the suffering caused by intolerable circumstances:

Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people...the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions.

But that was young Marx. The older Marx of *Capital* (1867) wrote that humanity's "religious reflex" would vanish only when:

... the practical relations of everyday life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellow men and to nature.<sup>1</sup>

What were the Bolsheviks to do? In January 1918, they separated church from

state, abolished the church's status as a legal person, forbade it to own property, and curtailed religious education. But how were they to "abolish" religion for the sake of man's happiness? Could they simply wait for religion to expire on the way to utopia?

In their 1918 constitution, they set the terms of a propaganda struggle with all religions, promising that,

the right of religious and anti-religious propaganda is accorded to every citizen.<sup>2</sup>

At the 8th Congress of the Communist Party in 1919, they laid out a propaganda strategy that pointed the way towards gradual abolition. The Party, they said, was:

... guided by the conviction that only conscious and deliberate planning of all the social and economic activities of the masses will cause religious prejudices to die out. The Party strives for the complete dissolution of the ties between the exploiting classes and the organisations of religious propaganda, facilitates the real emancipation of the working masses from religious prejudices and organises the widest possible scientific, educational, and anti-religious propaganda. At the same time, it is necessary carefully to avoid giving offence to the religious sentiments of believers, which only leads to the strengthening of religious fanaticism.<sup>3</sup>

When H.G. Wells visited Russia in 1920 to take stock of the revolution, he found

scant indication of a new godless order. As he wrote in *Russia in the Shadows*,

The ten thousand crosses of Moscow still glitter in the afternoon light...The churches are open, the kissing of ikons is a flourishing industry, and beggars still woo casual charity at the doors. The celebrated miraculous shrine of the Iberian Madonna outside the Redeemer Gate was particularly busy. There were many peasant women, unable to get into the little chapel, kissing the stones outside...Just opposite to it, on a plaster panel on a house front, is that now celebrated inscription put up by one of the early revolutionary administrations in Moscow: "Religion is the Opium of the People". The effect the inscription produces is greatly reduced by the fact that in Russia the people cannot read.'

One solution Bolshevik propagandists reached was to mass-produce printed illustrations that could tap into the kind of anti-clerical sentiment already evident in 19th-century prints of paintings like Vasily Perov's *Easter Procession in a Village* (1861) and Vasily Surikov's *The Unequal Marriage* (1862) and channel it toward Marxist conclusions.

Early Bolshevik anti-religious images such as Aleksandr Apsit's poster *Tsar, Priest and Rich Man on the Shoulders of Working People* (1918) showed Russian Orthodox clergy as stock villains from the tsarist rogues' gallery. Viktor Deni's 1920 poster, *Bourgeois, Priest, Kulak and Kolchak* showed Russian Orthodox priests as part of a troika of "class enemies" supporting the Bolsheviks' adversaries—in this case, Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak—in the post-revolutionary civil war between the Bolsheviks and their disparate opponents.

After the civil war, the Bolsheviks widened their propaganda focus and released new, visually-oriented anti-religious publications to hone the vision of the 1919 Party Programme. Among these were the Anti-Religious Commission's newspaper *Godless*, which appeared in December 1922, and the Moscow Party Organisation's colourful cartoon magazine, also titled *Godless*, which appeared in January 1923.

The cover to No1:



'We've dealt with earthly tsars, now we'll start on the heavenly ones: "Bless me, O Lord!"' [over a scene of a ruined church and new industrial might.]

The two publications' editors, Emelian Yaroslavsky and Maria Kostelovskaya, were rivals. After a standoff over the title, Kostelovskaya changed her magazine's title to *Godless at the Machine*. To confuse matters further, Yaroslavsky launched his own illustrated magazine, *Godless*, in 1925.

Cover of *Godless at the Machine*, No.4:



*'A thousand years ago Rus' received the light from Greece. It brought the gifts of Christ "to exchange for furs and girls".'*

All of these materials and many more besides now reside in collections of the State Museum of the History of Religion (GMIR) in St. Petersburg, which was first established in 1932 as an atheistic museum in the Kazan' Cathedral. It now occupies an ordinary building near St. Isaac's Square and pursues a non-ideological educational mission.

In August 2018, I wrote to Keston Institute about my book project, *Godless Utopia*, which I had begun developing with the Whitechapel-based art book publisher FUEL. I wrote that I saw a clear connection between the propaganda I was researching and the important work Keston College did to promote religious liberty in the USSR. Keston Institute kindly agreed to support a week's research in St. Petersburg.

The scholarship allowed me to delve deep into what has become almost an occult

subject in the West. While a few striking Soviet anti-religious images might sometimes appear in history books or museum exhibitions, most such imagery—especially the periodical illustrations and posters from the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras—remains almost unknown. Spending time in the GMIR library allowed me both to gather illustrations to show my publisher, and to begin to think seriously about how to present those images for an audience that might not be particularly familiar with Russian culture and history.

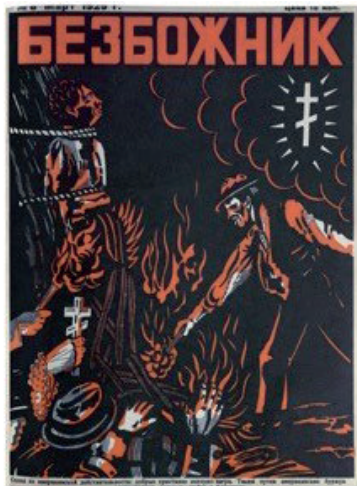
The sheer volume of early Soviet periodicals available in the museum's library is daunting. A researcher with suitable language skills could easily spend hours exploring obscure tomes of atheist propaganda in Georgian or Ukrainian, or combing through the fine print of all-text anti-religious journals like *Atheist* (1925). In my case, a full set of *Godless* (1925-1941) and *Godless at the Machine* (1923-1931), would occupy much of my time.

Turning the pages of these magazines is an uncanny experience. The reader can feel the darkness and bitterness of the revolutionary moment surging up violently through each page, filtered through the visual imaginations of talented and ideologically-committed illustrators.

Much of the early material is eerie and strange, the stuff of horror comics. In an early *Godless at the Machine* cartoon by the leading anti-religious illustrator Dmitri Moor, peasants gnaw at the guts and limbs of a dead Jesus in a grisly parody of communion.

In Yaroslavsky's *Godless*, the more learned and less jocose of the two publications, there is a pronounced focus on grotesque Americana, from the Ku Klux Klan's lynchings of black men to the

execution by electric chair of the murderer Ruth Snyder in 1928, which *Godless* describes as a “triumph of Christian culture”.



*Scene from American reality: good Christians lynching a Negro. This is how Americans obey the commandment “love thy neighbour”.*



*“The Electric Chair: a triumph of Christian culture.”*

Other examples of Soviet *Grand Guignol* include photos of Africans mutilated by (Christian) colonial administrations and the mummified corpses of Russian saints whose bodies the Bolsheviks cast from their tombs to contradict popular expectations that their earthly forms would not have decayed.

By examining these magazines, I was able to pick out images that resonated with the historical narrative I was honing, a story that begins with an account of how famous western observers saw Soviet atheism and goes on to examine how Soviet propagandists portrayed religious influence in the USSR and abroad. Among these were a satirical series on the baptism of ancient Rus’ by Prince Vladimir of Kiev in 988, items portraying the clergy as spies and saboteurs trying to wreck Stalin’s collectivisation of agriculture and industrialisation efforts in the 1930s, a piece ridiculing Pope Pius XI’s “Crusade for Prayer”, and numerous images depicting Nazi Germany as a crusading Christian power.

Some pieces bear out quite explicitly the criticism of Soviet anti-religious policy to be found in the work of Soviet dissidents. For example, in *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973), Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn describes Vladimir Ilyich Lenin’s infamous 1917 essay, *How to Organise the Competition?* which includes the Bolshevik leader’s chilling remark about

... purging the Russian land of all kinds of harmful insects.

While an “insect” in this context might be anyone hindering Lenin’s idea of progress, Solzhenitsyn wrote, this rhetoric hit church people particularly hard:

The church parish councils were made up almost exclusively of insects, and it

was insects, of course, who sang in the church choirs. All priests were insects—and monks and nuns even more so.<sup>5</sup>

It is one thing to see these words in black and white, quite another to see a 1931 image from *Godless at the Machine* depicting an icon corner overrun with priest-insects, ripe for extermination. In the real world, this extermination meant deportation to the gulag.



*"All this vermin and filth must be exterminated and mercilessly rooted out, in accordance with Soviet minimum sanitary standards. Atheists, light to achieve this minimum!"*

Under Stalin, lawmakers rescinded the constitutional right to "religious propaganda" in 1929. In the 1930s, the point of propaganda images—whether large-scale posters or colour pull-outs from magazines—was to make Stalin's total personal dominance felt in every "corner" of life. As the cartoonist Moor put it in 1935:

Everywhere the poster powerfully demands attention and speaks to the

topic of the day. It bristles, castigates, illuminates, carries to action, reveals both the task at hand and the widest horizons of socialist construction. The poster activates the builders of socialism and infuriates the class enemy.<sup>6</sup>

The museum's in-house experts were most helpful. At my request, the press office arranged an interview with Yevgeny Luchshev, author of the museum's substantial Russian language study, *Anti-Religious Propaganda in the USSR, 1917-1941*. It was Mr. Luchshev who illuminated for me the continuity between the pre-revolutionary anti-clerical paintings and prints described above and the material in *Godless* and *Godless at the Machine*.

He also helped me to understand the origins of post-war anti-religious posters from the Leningrad imprint "Fighting Pencil", whose images complemented the anti-religious policies of the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras. While there was a substantial interregnum in Soviet atheist propaganda between the German invasion of 1941 and the early 1950s, he explained, many Leningrad illustrators who began their careers making anti-fascist cartoons during the war moved on to anti-religious themes in later years. Their posters were sold in sets in bookshops, although as the prevalence of bookshops indicates, the new generation of illustrators was no longer preaching to an illiterate audience. In the Khrushchev years, the role of anti-religious illustration became more peripheral.

At my request, I was allowed to view poster collections stored in the museum's Orthodox Arts collection. These included both rare and valuable posters from the 1920s and 30s and poster sets of the kind Luchshev described. As one guardian of the printed sets pointed out to me, atheist posters were something of a "hard sell" for



*"Jehovah's Witness: 'Don't believe his meek demeanor, he's not looking after his soul. This Jehovah's Witness is a traitor to Russia, a spy!'" [His eyes are camera lenses, with 'made in USA' inscribed; his organisation "was sent to counter communism, is illegal and spies on the orders of America."]*



*Cultural Goods "A passing trader found himself a good pitch. These things are fashionable now and his trash sells well."*

foreign tourists during the Cold War, but museums did brisker business selling folders of pre-revolutionary anti-clerical prints as fine art. Some of them carried titles like "Art Against Religion" in Russian.



*The church bells toll, named 'Radio Free Europe' and 'Radio Voice of America'. "Looking into the anti-Soviet church calendar, all the bells ring out lies, slanders, diversions, provocations - and serve the darkest forces."*

She also drew my attention to a 1975 Fighting Pencil collection called *Without God, the Wider the Road*, some of whose images were particularly focused on the religious dimension of the Cold War. One shows a stout-looking tourist, who, when stopped at the border, turns out to be smuggling bibles under his coat.

Communist Party publishers continued to produce anti-religious poster sets right up until the mid 1980s, but over time, their work seemed ever more focused on stemming and ridiculing foreign influences, whether in the form of jeans-wearing Russian hipsters stocking up on icons and crosses, Jehovah's Witnesses bearing *The Watchtower*, or a shady CIA man ringing the church bells of American broadcasting (a clear reference to the "Freedom Bell" the United States gifted to Berlin as part of

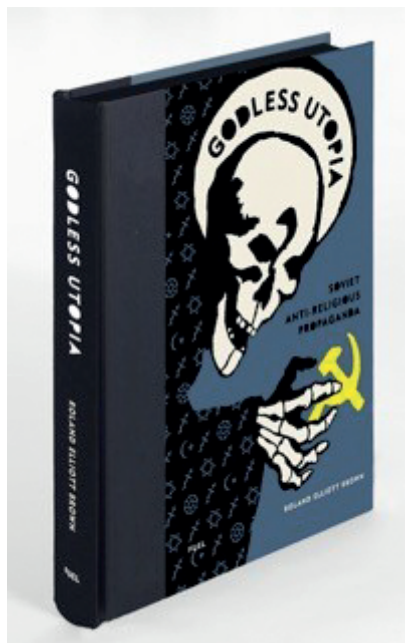
the CIA-backed Crusade for Freedom that helped establish Radio Free Europe in 1949 and Radio Liberty in 1951).

Most readers of my generation—I was born in 1980—now struggle to remember that East-West relations once constituted a quasi-religious standoff. Occasional press references to Ronald Reagan’s 1983 “Evil Empire” speech to the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida might jog our memories. But as Richard Pipes observed in his 1995 book *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, many historians have abandoned the theme:

In histories of the Russian Revolution religion receives little if any attention ... Such lack of interest can only be explained by the secularism of modern historians. And yet, even if historians are secular, the people with whom they deal are overwhelmingly religious: in this respect, the inhabitants of what became the Soviet Union—Christians, Jews, Muslims alike—may be said to have lived in the Middle Ages. For them, culture meant religion—religious belief, but especially religious rituals and festivals: baptism, circumcision, confirmation, confession, burial, Christmas and Easter, Passover and Yom Kippur, Ramadan. Their lives revolved around the ceremonies of the

religious calendar, because these not only glorified their hard and humdrum existences but gave the humblest of them a sense of dignity in the eyes of God, for whom all human beings are equal.<sup>7</sup>

*Godless Utopia* will be, in part, an answer to Richard Pipes’s challenge.



1. Howard Selsam and Harry Martel, editors, *Reader in Marxist Philosophy*, International Publishers, New York, 1963, pp. 226-227, 229.
2. Marxists Internet Archive, (accessed 28.2.2019)  
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4. H.G. Wells, *Russia in the Shadows*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1920 pp. 124-126.
5. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago Volume I*, HarperCollins, New York, 2007, pp. 27-28
6. My translation. E.M. Luchshev, *Soviet Antireligious Poster Collection of the State Museum of the History of Religion*, State Museum of the History of Religion, St. Petersburg, 2010, p.3.

7. Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, Vintage Books, New York, 1995, pp. 337.

*Roland Elliot Brown is an arts writer and journalist with an MA in Russian Studies, and several years' experience writing about Russia and conflicts between ideology and human rights in Iran. Godless Utopia will be published by FUEL in September 2019*

## ***Keston Institute***

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# After Martyrdom: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Journey Through Cold War Europe

by Keith Clements



*Rev Dr Keith Clements*

More than 70 years after his death under the Nazis, the Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer is widely regarded as one of the outstanding Christian figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: a stalwart figure in the German Confessing Church – that section of Protestantism which resisted the Nazification of the church – and a brilliant theologian; most remarkably of all, a pastor who not only objected to Nazism but during the last years of his life willingly participated in the conspiracy to overthrow Hitler, and for that complicity was executed in April 1945, just before the war in Europe ended. Relatively young, aged 39 at his death, he nevertheless left a rich legacy of writings that continue to inform, challenge, inspire – and puzzle. These include the volume *Discipleship*<sup>1</sup> with its rejection of cheap, easy-going Christianity; his *Ethics*,<sup>2</sup> which explores what faithful obedience means for responsible action in a world where the old ethical guidelines seem to be collapsing; and most striking of all, the letters and papers he wrote during his two-year imprisonment, with their startling ideas on a “religionless Christianity” in a “world come of age”

which does not need God in the traditional ways.<sup>3</sup>

Bonhoeffer died before the Cold War that succeeded the Second World War. But like others who have died yet still speak he has inspired many people, worldwide, who have had to endure oppressive regimes and who have campaigned for justice and human rights, from South Africa to Latin America to East Asia. What is surprising, however, is that relatively little has been said about Bonhoeffer's posthumous role nearer to home, in Cold War Europe. In part that is because it is bound up with the complexities of the churches' role under communism in Europe, and much of that story is still being told and is still under debate. The Bonhoeffer part of that story has its own complexities. All I try to do here is sketch his posthumous role in three countries of the Soviet Bloc: East Germany, or the German Democratic Republic (DDR); Czechoslovakia; and Poland. “Role” is of course an ambiguous word in such contexts. It can refer to the use made of his writings and his story – and perhaps their misuse too. Reactions to the posthumous Bonhoeffer can be illuminative of the outlook of the communist authorities, as well as of churches and Christians in those countries.

## The pre-Cold War Bonhoeffer

Bonhoeffer of course in his lifetime was preoccupied with his immediate context of Nazi totalitarianism. But he was aware of the dangers posed by Soviet tyranny. For instance, in the spring of 1939 he was in London seeking, among other matters, to secure a place for the Confessing Church



*Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

in the ecumenical fellowship represented by the new World Council of Churches (WCC) “in formation”. While there he wrote a long letter to his great friend George Bell, bishop of Chichester. He stresses the need for ecumenical solidarity with churches under oppression: “I think we failed in earlier years to give our full assistance in advice and fellowship to the Russian Christians”<sup>1</sup> – a clear reference to the persecutions particularly during the massive Stalinist purges of 1936-37. In September 1941 Bonhoeffer made one of his wartime visits to Geneva on behalf of the Confessing Church and the political resistance, for conversations with W. A. Visser’t Hooft, secretary of the WCC. In Geneva, Bonhoeffer and Visser’t Hooft prepared two memoranda in response to a book by William Paton, then an assistant general secretary for the WCC in London, on the shape of a post-war, post-Hitler Europe.<sup>2</sup> The second memorandum concludes with a paragraph on “The Russian Problem”.<sup>3</sup> This acknowledges the

great uncertainties about “the forces at work in Russia and its future role in the world.”. The German invasion of the Soviet Union had been launched three months earlier, bringing Russia into the warm embrace of the allies. “But as Christians”, say the authors, “we dare not let ourselves be carried away by momentary reactions. Even though we may consider the British-Russian alliance a justifiable and unavoidable political decision, we must not minimise the danger which Russia still represents for all that we hold dear. Unless the war calls forth very fundamental changes in the structure of the Russian state, Bolshevism may well become a tremendous menace to all countries which have been betting on the wrong horse and which will find their Fascist system discredited by a German defeat.”

### **1. The German Democratic Republic (DDR)**

Bonhoeffer is obviously nearest to home here. Though known only to relatively few even in Germany at the time of his death, his writings and story soon created an impression in both the Western and Eastern Zones, as they were first called, which later solidified as the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. At least as important, a number of Bonhoeffer’s Confessing Church colleagues and former students had survived the war and were very important in stimulating discussion of his ideas. These included his close friend Eberhard Bethge, the recipient of most of Bonhoeffer’s prison letters. A first edition of the *Ethics* edited by Bethge, appeared in 1949, and then the prison letters in 1951 under the German title *Widerstand und Ergebung* – “Resistance and Submission”. This would obviously ring bells with those now living under Soviet domination (as well as being a more provocative title than

the one by which we Anglophones know the book, *Letters and Papers from Prison*).

In the DDR, hard-line Marxism-Leninism was promulgated as official government doctrine and policy perhaps more rigorously than in any other eastern bloc country. That did not bode well for the churches. On the other hand, the state had to tread somewhat carefully here. The DDR wanted to be seen as an authentically *German* socialist state, and that could not be done if Martin Luther and the Reformation heritage were wholly excised from the country's history, nor if the churches were to be totally suppressed. There was also the awkward fact to consider, that while the DDR sought to justify so much of its aims by recalling the horrors of the Nazism which it had replaced, significant opposition to that fascism had come from within the churches and people imbued with Christian values. The Marxist jibe of religion being "the opium of the people" wouldn't quite wash. Containment, if not actual control, rather than abolition of the churches was to mark the DDR's church policy from the 1960s onwards, first under Walter Ulbricht and then his successor Erich Honecker. In addition to the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) there were several smaller parties sanctioned by the state, including the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), designed to allow some people from the church sector to have a semblance of participation in the organs of government. Not many inside or outside the churches had much regard for it. While visiting the DDR in 1978 I was in a group that met with some pastors in Weimar and we asked about the CDU. One pastor shook his head and said, "I never want to see the church in uniform again". His father had been a Confessing Church pastor and had experienced at first hand the havoc wrought by the so-called German Christian Movement, effectively a

Protestant wing of the Nazi party. That memory remained pertinent in the DDR.

What did the DDR authorities make of Bonhoeffer? In one way, quite a lot. By the 1960s his reputation was too great to be ignored. In fact, of all the people variously associated with the conspiracy which culminated in the 20 July 1944 plot, Bonhoeffer was about the only one to receive official praise from the DDR authorities. Most of the others being high-ranking military figures, academics or Junker types, were dismissed as "bourgeois reactionaries" and did not fit the desired socialist narrative of a people's movement. Bonhoeffer at least did not have "von" in front of his family name. But why was Bonhoeffer, who was in fact as upper-class bourgeois as they come, an acceptable exception? It was because in his *Ethics* he had written extensively on relations between church and state, and on the state itself. We find statements such as: "Government is the power set in place by God to exercise world rule with divine authority. Government is the vicarious representative action of God on earth".<sup>7</sup> A very top-down view, redolent of much traditional Lutheran reading of Romans chapter 13. While the authorities were hardly interested in the theological element of such statements, what Bonhoeffer seemed to be saying sat very well with the requirements of the totalitarian state. And in the DDR there were theologians who were happy to go along with this and much more. One extreme example was Hanfried Müller, professor in Berlin, who in 1961 brought out a book *Von der Kirche zur Welt* ("From the Church to the World") expounding Bonhoeffer's ideas in his prison writings, on religionless Christianity in a world come of age, as leading to "a new picture of history", "a rational and optimistic atheism which is founded upon the freedom of faith".<sup>8</sup> This of course was tailor-made to fit the official DDR

ideology. Few theologians in the DDR actually accepted this, but some did give the DDR state the benefit of the doubt, including certain Bonhoeffer scholars. (I remember well during the 1980 Congress of the International Bonhoeffer Society in Oxford, sitting at lunch with one such, who set out the cutlery and cruets on the table to construct a map of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, to explain the Soviet fear of encirclement and so justify the invasion of Afghanistan).

So, was Bonhoeffer an unwitting apologist for Soviet communism in the DDR? As so often happens, citations taken out of context are the propagandists' dream. Yes, Bonhoeffer in his *Ethics* had written about the authority of the state – but not as an end in itself, rather as a mandate from God and therefore accountable to God. Moreover, he wrote of government as one of several mandates of equal validity: family, work, culture – and church. Bonhoeffer's intention of portraying the *limitations* of the state and its relation to areas of life over which it did *not* have authority, had been written out of the picture for the sake of the totalitarian ideology. Professor Wolf Krötke who has studied and written extensively on this subject, says entertainingly that by drawing upon any of Bonhoeffer's writings the DDR authorities were in fact laying a cuckoo's egg in their own nest.<sup>9</sup> For Bonhoeffer had also written in a vein quite counter to that misleadingly selected citation about the state. At Christmas 1942, three months before his imprisonment, he had written for his friends and family in the resistance an essay, "After Ten years", reflecting on Hitler's decade of power and the experiences of life in resistance. One section is titled "Civil Courage". Here he acknowledges the bravery and self-sacrifice that the typical German has habitually shown in obedience to the commission of

service to country. That was moving to see. Bonhoeffer continues:

However, in doing so, [the German] misjudged the world; he did not reckon with the fact that the readiness to subordinate and commit his life to the commission could be misused in the service of evil. When such misuse occurred, exercise of the career itself became questionable, and all the basic moral concepts of the Germans were shaken. What became apparent was that Germans lacked still one decisive and fundamental idea: that of the need for the free, responsible action even against career and commission. In its place came the irresponsible lack of scruples, on the one hand, and self-tormenting scruples that never led to action, on the other. But civil courage can grow only from the free responsibility of the free man. Only today are Germans beginning to discover what free responsibility means. It is founded in a God who calls for the free venture of faith to responsible action, and who promises forgiveness and consolation to the one who on account of such action becomes a sinner.<sup>10</sup>

This and other thoughts found in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* were seized upon with zest by those who in the DDR were looking for a different kind of citizenship than that prescribed by or just allowed by the state, and who wanted to be actively involved in creating a more truly democratic society. Over the years many such groups found space and shelter in the churches. The influence of Bonhoeffer can also clearly be seen in those church leaders who sought to resist the marginalising of the churches to the private religious dimension of life, and heeded Bonhoeffer's call in his prison letters for the church, like God "the Beyond in the midst", to stand at the centre

of life and especially where people are suffering. One such was Heino Falcke, in the 1970s Principal of the Gnadau Theological College, and then Provost of Erfurt. At a Synod meeting in 1972, and in address to the Baptists, he publicly challenged the state view that socialism was in effect primitive Christianity put into practice and that specifically religious activity was for private life and leisure hours:

To this we must say ‘No’ . . . We cannot accept withdrawal from the secular world . . . Were we to settle for that we would be falsifying the Gospel of freedom into a spare-time Gospel . . . We would be conceding that man’s political maturity depends on his liberation from Christ rather than on his being liberated by Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

This stance thus refused either to withdraw totally from the socialist context, or to give socialism a carte blanche blessing. Rather, it sought a better kind of socialism than the state was capable of, and therewith appealed for dialogue with the state, and an opening up of public discussion on how people were actually faring in the present socialist society. There was little immediate response from the state to Falcke’s plea, but over the years there came a grudging respect for the churches’ social role, with frank exchanges on matters such as youth and education, the military education imposed on schools, care of the elderly, and opportunities for the church to extend its ministry on the airwaves. It is noteworthy that at this time and into the 1980s the Presiding Bishop of the Protestant church in the DDR was Albrecht Schönherr who had been one of Bonhoeffer’s most loyal students. He now proved himself a shrewd diplomat. Associated with him were phrases like “a church within socialism” and “critical solidarity” with the socialist state. These

were phrases that Schönherr did not invent but felt he could live with. He safeguarded space for the church – “a church without privileges” – while at the same time insisting that the church must not simply stay in that space away from the wider world, but be, as Bonhoeffer put it, “the church for others”. Some wished he had spoken out more strongly about conditions in the country – he himself wished he had been more outspoken about conditions in prisons. But when the time came for change at the end of the 1980s, it was evident that here was a church, notwithstanding the pressures upon it, including infiltration by the Stasi, (the secret police), that had not only retained its integrity as the church of Christ, but was now ready to help Germans in both East and West make the most momentous and, above all, peaceful transition to a unified democracy. In it all, the posthumous influence of Bonhoeffer was very evident.

## 2. Czechoslovakia

Today the very name Czechoslovakia is enough to evoke pictures of one of the harshest regimes of the communist era, which right through to the early ‘60s enforced the most unyielding Stalinist line. So much so, that when in 1956 Khrushchev denounced Stalin’s oppressive policies and initiated an attempt at de-Stalinisation, this was resisted by the Czechoslovak Communist party and not until 1963 was any relaxation permitted. Then came the hopes of the Prague Spring under the Dubcek government and the project of “socialism with a human face”, which was crushed by the invasion by Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces in 1968. A neo-Stalinist regime was installed by the Soviets, determined to repress every sign of independence. The churches were now destined to feel once more the full force of repression, and battled against odds as heavy as could be found anywhere in

Eastern Europe outside Albania and the Soviet Union itself.

The largest Czechoslovak church was the Roman Catholic, followed by the two main Protestant churches, the Hussite Church and the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren (formed mostly of former Lutheran and Reformed communities), plus the Slovak Lutherans, the Baptists and the Methodists. The Hussite Church is significant as bearing the name of Jan Hus, the 15<sup>th</sup> century proto-reformer, martyr, and the figurehead of much Czech nationalism. There was thus a significant Protestant constituency aligned with the historic Czech national identity, and there is no mistaking the appeal that the martyr-figure of Bonhoeffer made to those who saw themselves as the heirs of the martyr Jan Hus.

There were in fact two levels at which Bonhoeffer's appeal was felt. First, there were those high-level Protestant theologians who believed that Christian witness in socialist society required Christian dialogue with Marxism. Here a key and controversial figure was the Reformed theologian of Prague, and leading figure in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Josef Hromadka. In the late 1950s he with others founded the Christian Peace Conference (CPC) which first met in Prague in 1958, as an ecumenical forum bringing together eastern and western and nonaligned Christians from around the globe. Appeal was made to Bonhoeffer's own call in 1934 for the church at world level to witness for peace. Always there was suspicion in the West that while the CPC claimed political neutrality, it could only have been founded in the east with Soviet backing. Nevertheless, for a time it did provide an ecumenical meeting point in addition to the WCC, and people from both East and West found it a significant point of

dialogue. The CPC was shaken by the events of 1968, when it appeared that not only was it under Soviet behest, but that the Soviets believed it by now to be a tool of the West! Hromadka died two years later, somewhat broken and feeling betrayed by the socialist forces he had felt called to interpret to the wider world.

If that had been Bonhoeffer's sole impact in Czechoslovakia, it might have effectively disappeared after 1968. But there was a quite other level at which Bonhoeffer journeyed. The Bohemian tradition dating from Jan Hus and the other pioneers of the Bohemian reformation from which the later Czech Protestants emerged, stressed the importance of the local congregations and personal discipleship to Christ. During the 1950s and '60s, when the churches had lost so much of their institutional structures and power at national level, these local communities came into their own. Jan Milic Lochmann, another Prague theologian and much inspired by Bonhoeffer, wrote joyously of the vitality of these congregations which, he said gave strength to his work as a theologian: "Deprived of their institutional 'power', they got a new 'glory' of a free, spontaneous, meaningful community. Their institutional element became important; it was a base – in many respects the only base – for Christian organization and service."<sup>12</sup> It was only to be expected that Bonhoeffer, the author of *Discipleship* and *Life Together*, would be gladly received there. But there was more to it than even that. Jan Ligus, professor in the Hussite Theological Faculty in Prague, recalls that it was Bonhoeffer's prison letters that helped him and others meet the challenge of the Marxist ideology which bore down on every aspect of everyday life of that time.<sup>13</sup> Religion was officially declared to be the opium of the people, and atheism to be the only way forward to achieve a true and just society. Yet

Bonhoeffer in his prison writings had made his own attack on “religion”, religion as a way of thought which offered people a life out of this world, as distinct from the Gospel which calls us into the world to witness to God’s renewal of it. Bonhoeffer asked, “How do we go about being ‘religionless-worldly Christians ... those who are called out, without understanding ourselves religiously privileged, but instead seeing ourselves as belonging wholly to the world?’”<sup>14</sup> Such as Jan Milic Lochmann and Jan Ligus felt this to be a breakthrough in meeting the Marxist challenge. The Marxist attack on religion was way off as regards the Gospel, and so could be side-stepped by Christians. Their job was, as part of their discipleship to Christ, to work for just relations between people even in a godless atheistic world. (It is interesting that Lochmann was writing on this in 1955 – seven years before Bonhoeffer’s prison writings really hit the headlines in this country with Bishop John Robinson’s *Honest to God*. What became an interesting sort of intellectual discussion here, was behind the Iron Curtain already a decisive matter for everyday faith in the Marxist-Leninist society.)

“It is not the religious act which makes the Christian, rather the participation in the suffering of God in the worldly life”, wrote Bonhoeffer.<sup>15</sup> So Jan Ligus, following on from Lochmann, draws on Bonhoeffer to say that we meet the transcendent God not outside, but inside every human life-situation, God in the form of the incarnate, crucified, risen and glorified Christ. He writes:

As a good conclusion, we can say that Bonhoeffer’s *theologia crucis* combines the new life of the Christian and the participation in God’s suffering in the world. This combination lights up, like a lighthouse in the darkness, God’s hidden ways with the Christian

churches in the communist-atheistic society behind the Iron Curtain. This faith in the suffering almighty God in Christ was equally for Christians the greatest comfort in their daily cares and sicknesses, and the encouragement willingly to accept suffering and discrimination, and thereby to share in God’s suffering in Christ.<sup>16</sup>

Ligus speaks of a “latent operation” of Bonhoeffer’s influence: “a hidden, secret influence that did not show any public, revolutionary slogans and protests on the outside but worked deeply, long and hidden in the hearts of believers, Christians who encountered Bonhoeffer’s publications, which helped them in the long run to understand the socio-political situation and the life orientation of faith in communist-atheistic society in post-war Czechoslovakia.” Perhaps, we may say, there was maintained a continual tension between *Widerstand* and *Ergebung*.

### 3. Poland in transition to democracy

Poland, that most Catholic of countries, which in the 1980s led the way to the emancipation of Eastern Europe from Soviet rule, might seem an odd place to manifest a reception of the Protestant Bonhoeffer, notwithstanding the existence of very active Protestant minority churches there. Yet nowhere in Eastern Europe was the posthumous Bonhoeffer more warmly welcomed than in those circles which from the 1970s onwards were looking to re-shape the post-1945 Polish mind. The story of the liberation and democratisation of Poland was of course one in which figures like Lech Walesa and the Solidarity movement, and most notably the Catholic archbishop, Karol Wojtyla, later Pope John Paul II, were central. But that was not the whole story.

But first, there is a special and not wholly incidental reason why Bonhoeffer found a welcome in Poland, for in one sense it was a welcome home. Bonhoeffer was born in 1904 in what was then Breslau in Silesia, and today is Wrocław, part of Poland since the border changes of 1945. In the centre of Wrocław is the historic and beautiful Elisabeth Church, which by turns over the centuries has been Catholic and Protestant and today is Catholic again. Outside the church, embedded in the pavement, is a striking bronze memorial to this son of Wrocław, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. There are other Bonhoeffer links. Much of Bonhoeffer's activity from 1935 onwards was in what is now Poland, most notably the underground seminary he directed for the Confessing Church, at Finkenwalde, close to Stettin.

### **Bonhoeffer in Poland**

Bonhoeffer comes into the story of Poland's search for a post-communist future in the context of the long-running Polish debate about the nature of the authentic national identity and the ambiguity of its long-term development: was it to be a liberal, inclusivist and outward-looking understanding of the nation or a narrowing, exclusivist chauvinism armed with religion ("To be Polish is to be Catholic") and with ugly anti-Semitic features? Under Soviet communism, what room was there for the former, inclusivist type to develop, or what was there to prevent a reaction to the latter, chauvinist type once the Communist yoke was removed? In Communist Poland, crucial to the eventual development of a political movement which could be an alternative to the Soviet-imposed system, was the need for dialogue between Christians (overwhelmingly of course but not completely Roman Catholic) and the reformist, left-of-centre intellectuals. Finding common ground was not easy, as

there were suspicions on both sides. Catholics expected secular or humanist thinkers to be *ipso facto* anti-Church or anti-clerical, while the secular intellectuals in turn were apt to assume that theologians attended only to narrowly religious concerns and to safeguarding the interests of the Church. Had these entrenched positions been maintained there would have been little chance of a common humane language developing, which enabled Poland to develop a civil society, pluralist but with a widely shared respect for human rights, and encouraging citizens to active social responsibility.

Joel Burnell, who teaches in the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Wrocław, has impressively documented how important Bonhoeffer's writings, especially his *Ethics* with their emphasis on the freedom of the responsible person in society, and his prison writings on how to be Christian in a godless world, were for both the secular and theological Polish thinkers of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>17</sup> The role of the scholar Anna Morawska, associated with the Catholic journal *Więź* was especially important in the transmission of Bonhoeffer from 1968 onwards. But many secular intellectuals were also impressed. A notable example is Adam Michnik: historian, political activist and member of the "commandos" (students involved in the 1968 demonstrations), co-founder of the Committee for the Defence of Workers (KOR), adviser to Solidarity, member of Parliament 1989-91, and from 1989 editor of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland's largest daily newspaper. "Reading Bonhoeffer," he confessed, "was essential for me because he explained how to be an anti-totalitarian Christian". Under an officially atheist regime, Bonhoeffer's provocative ideas, written during the last year of his life in prison, on 'religionless Christianity' and 'living as if God is not given', made both secularists and religious people question

their easy assumptions about ‘belief’ and ‘unbelief’ – and to call every dogmatism to account in the name of what is truly human. Michnik argued that the Catholic Church and the left shared an anti-totalitarian view of the unity of human rights and human duties, as deeply rooted in both Christian and secular traditions, and they should talk to one another. He said how he had discovered from Bonhoeffer and his *Ethics* that truth, freedom, dignity and tolerance, social justice and human solidarity stem from Christ and his teaching. One cannot reject this tradition with impunity:

Belief in the divinity of Christ is a matter of grace, and in this sense is given only to a few. But belief in the hallowed nature of Christ’s commandments is the duty of all, because it is the light that protects human freedom and dignity against violence and debasement, against nihilism and the hell of solitude.<sup>18</sup>

Another leading intellectual activist from the 1970s onwards was Jacek Kuron, one-time Marxist but increasingly disenchanted with the socialist project. Expelled from the communist party in 1964, he became a leader of the opposition movement and with Adam Michnik a co-founder of the KOR. In 1989 he wrote of the effect of Bonhoeffer’s prison letters and his provocative statement that we must “live as if there were no God”:

This statement became another great discovery for me. Up until now . . . I suspected that Christian morality was based on the principle of the fear of punishment and the desire for reward. For I did not know how to imagine love for God, and only now did I learn that it might grow out of love for humanity.<sup>19</sup>

Bonhoeffer was thus a vital influence in the search for a common language and set of values– call it a Christian humanism or a humanist Christianity– that would be a unifying and not a divisive contribution to the making of post-communist Poland. The transition, it has to be said, is not over yet.

## Conclusion

On my first visit to the DDR, in November 1978, I made a train journey from Erfurt to Wittenberg, birthplace of the Lutheran Reformation. I fell into conversation with a lady sitting opposite me who, when I told her what I was and why I was there, turned out to be a member of the Moravian community at Herrnhut. As the train proceeded through the frost-laden fields, we talked *sotto voce* at length about being Christian in the DDR, and she gave me the name and address of the Provost of Wittenberg so that, having paid homage at the shrine of Luther, I could look him up (which I duly did). Sitting on the other side of the aisle, staring out of the window, was a huge Soviet army officer, resplendent in uniform and guarding his bulky briefcase, evidently on his way to some important meeting of the military. It was, I thought, a kind of parable of the Christian situation: under the nose of earthly power, a conversation was going on among people who seemingly had no power. In East Berlin the previous Sunday, with others from the UK, I had attended morning worship in the Marienkirche, a historic church dwarfed by the mighty television tower built as a symbol of the technological prowess of the socialist state. The preacher was Pastor Jürgen Henkys, and his text was from the Book of Daniel: Daniel, the apparently powerless exile who yet has the power born out of God’s wisdom to find the clue to what is really going on in history. History does not belong to the rulers who want power at all costs, but to the Lord of

grace, and this gives his people hope in what is true. It was a message preached just a few hundred yards from the palatial Soviet Embassy. Jürgen Henkys, like a number of pastors in the East, had been brought up in the West but had deliberately chosen to live and minister in the East. Another of the new, post-war generation deeply indebted to Bonhoeffer, he was no doubt inspired by Bonhoeffer's decision to return from the safety of America to Germany just before the war, to be in solidarity with his church and people there despite all the complications and risks. It was true, too, of a Baptist Pastor I knew in the East, Klaus Fuhrmann, a Westerner who was caught in the East when the Wall went up in 1961. He told

me that after some turmoil he eventually came to think of the Wall, in a strange way, as a blessing of God to him, because it removed all doubts as to where his ministry now had to be. Bonhoeffer here, as in Czechoslovakia and Poland and elsewhere in the East, was a powerful source of strength and guidance for those who wished neither to be unrealistic revolutionaries nor escapees from the situation, but to be with Christ in and for that situation, and so to live in hope and give hope to others. As Bonhoeffer himself said in that 1942 Christmas essay: "The ultimate responsible question is not how I extricate myself heroically from a situation but [how the] coming generation is to go on living".<sup>20</sup>

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1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Works, Vol. 4, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2001. The first English edition (revised 1959) was titled *The Cost of Discipleship*.
  2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Works, Vol. 6, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).
  3. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Vol. 8, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).
  4. *London, 1933–1935*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Vol.13 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 156.
  5. See *Conspiracy and Imprisonment 1940–1945*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Vol. 16 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 528–539.
  6. *Ibid.*, 539.
  7. *Ethics*, 504.
  8. Cf. Hanfried Müller, "Concerning the Reception and Interpretation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in R. Gregor Smith (Ed.), *World Come of Age. A Symposium on Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (London: Collins, 1967), 208.
  9. See W. Krötke, "Dietrich Bonhoeffers Verständnis des Staates, in K. Busch Nielsen *et al.* (Eds.), *Dem Rad in die Speichen fallen/A Spoke in the Wheel* (Gütersloh: Gütersloh Verlagshaus, 2013), 303–324.
  10. *Letters and Papers*, 41.
  11. Cited in Trevor Beeson, *Discretion and Valour. Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe* (London: Collins, 1974), 185.
  12. Cited in Beeson, 211.
  13. Ján Ligus, "Rezeption des Bonhoefferschen religiosen Christentums in der Tschechoslowakei nach dem Jahr 1948", in F. Schmitz and C. Tietz (Eds.), *Dietrich Bonhoeffers Christentum*, (Gütersloh: Gütersloh Verlagshaus, 2011), 381–385.
  14. *Letters and Papers*, 364.
  15. *Ibid.*, 480.
  16. Ligus, "Rezeption", 383. My translation.
  17. Joel Burnell, *Poetry, Providence, and Patriotism. Polish Messianism in Dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2009).

18. See Burnell, 136f.
19. See Burnell, 134.
20. *Letters and Papers*, 42.

*Rev Dr Keith Clements, Baptist minister and former General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches, is a member of the Keston Council of Management.*

Two major celebrations of Keston's jubilee will take place this year: in June a plaque will be unveiled on the building in which Keston College worked from 1972 to 1992 ; in November the AGM will be addressed by Rowan Williams, who is one of our Patrons. We hope all members who can will attend these events:

*Unveiling of the plaque:* Thursday 20 June 2019 at 16.00, Keston, Bromley, Kent.

*Talk by Rowan Williams and AGM:* Saturday 9 November 2019 at 12.00, the Royal Foundation of St Katharine, Limehouse, London.

# Trials for Religious “Extremism” in Crimea

by Felix Corley, Forum 18

## Annexation

Ukraine and the international community do not recognise Russia's March 2014 annexation of the Crimea. The peninsula is now divided between two Russian federal regions, the Republic of Crimea (with its capital in Simferopol) and the port city of Sevastopol.

Compared to the first year they were implemented, punishments in Russian-occupied Crimea for ill-defined "missionary activity" doubled in 2018. Of 23 prosecutions for sharing faith or holding worship at unapproved venues, 19 ended in punishment. Also, 17 cases were brought for communities not using their full legal name.

This represents a doubling of such cases in the Crimean peninsula since the first year such punishments for "missionary activity" were imposed. July 2016 to July 2017 saw 13 known cases of which 8 ended in punishment.<sup>1</sup>

"These punishments do have an impact," one member of a religious community in Crimea, who was earlier fined for sharing his faith on the street, told Forum 18 on 9 January 2019. "Believers go out to share their faith less often, and give out publications or invitations less openly. It is a question not just of fines – if you don't pay then fines are doubled, then if you still don't pay they impose compulsory labour."

Twelve of the people punished in Crimea in 2018 – all Russian citizens – were fined about 10 days' average local wages each (Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26,

Part 4 - "Russians conducting missionary activity").

A further seven people – all longtime residents who are Ukrainian citizens – were punished for participating in religious meetings of a community they belonged to. Six of the seven were given far higher fines of up to nearly two months' average local wages (Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 5 - "Foreigners conducting missionary activity"). These seven cases against Ukrainian citizens appear to be the first use in Russian-occupied Crimea of this Russian Administrative Code article, which is specifically aimed at non-Russians.

There were also 17 cases brought in Crimea in 2018 against 12 religious communities and 5 individuals to punish them for failing to use the full legal name of a registered religious community (Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 3 - "Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label").

Nine of these 17 cases ended with fines of 30,000 Russian roubles (nearly two months' average local wages) each and another with a warning. The communities known to have faced administrative cases are: 6 Pentecostal, 2 Baptist, 1 Lutheran, 1 Russian Orthodox, 1 Muslim and 1 Karaite. The others seven cases ended with no punishment.

Many religious communities have been raided, and many individuals have been fined for possessing books – such as the Muslim prayer collection "Fortress of a Muslim" - which have been banned as "extremist" in Russia.<sup>2</sup>

Religious communities and individuals continue to be fined for not displaying the full name of their registered religious organisation at their place of worship, for meeting for worship without Russian state permission or advertising their faith. Forty such administrative prosecutions are known to have been brought in 2018 of which 28 ended with punishment.<sup>3</sup>

### **"Extremist" organisations banned**

Russia's Supreme Court banned Tablighi Jamaat as "extremist" in 2009,<sup>4</sup> (and Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremist" in 2017.<sup>5</sup> Following Russia's occupation of Crimea, the Russian authorities granted re-registration to Jehovah's Witness communities in Crimea, only to ban them following the Russian Supreme Court ban. Prosecutors in Russia are investigating more than 90 individuals on "extremism"-related criminal charges. Of these, as of 1 January 2019, Jehovah's Witnesses reported, 25 were in pre-trial detention and 22 under house arrest.<sup>6</sup> Others have had to sign pledges not to leave their home town without permission.

### **October 2017 raids, arrests of Crimean Tatar Muslims**

The case began on 29 September 2017, when Russia's FSB security service launched criminal cases against four Crimean Tatar Muslims.

On 2 October 2017, masked FSB officers and OMON riot police raided Suleimanov's home in the village of

Molodezhnoe just north of Crimea's capital Simferopol. They arrived at 6 am with a search warrant as he was returning from early prayers at the mosque. Officers seized a computer, as well as five copies of three Muslim books. The books were by two members of the Kandahlawi family, key figures in the Tablighi Jamaat movement. Two of the three titles have been banned as "extremist" by Russian courts.<sup>7</sup> Suleimanov is married with three young daughters.

The same morning officers raided the homes of and detained three other Muslims. At 6 am, men in balaclavas raided the home of Abdurakhmanov in the village of Melnichnoe in central Crimea. Abdurakhmanov has difficulties with his hearing.

Also on 2 October 2017, officers raided the home of Kubedinov in Simferopol and detained him. Kubedinov is married with four children, the oldest of whom is now 11. Officers raided the home of Mustafaev in the village of Pionerskoe, south east of Simferopol, and detained him.

The day after the raid, a Simferopol court ordered that Suleimanov, Abdurakhmanov and Kubedinov be held in pre-trial detention. It ordered that Mustafaev be held under house arrest.<sup>8</sup> Abdurakhmanov and Kubedinov were later freed under a pledge not to leave their home towns. This left only Suleimanov in Simferopol's Investigation Prison. All his legal challenges to his long pre-trial detention were rejected.<sup>9</sup>

The criminal case was initially investigated by the FSB. It was then handed to Crimea's Prosecutor's Office, where it was assigned to Deputy Prosecutor Sergei Bulgakov. He refused to discuss the case with Forum 18 on 23 January 2019. "I'm not authorised to

talk to you," he told Forum 18 and put the phone down.

## Supreme Court verdicts

On 22 January 2019, Judge Sergei Pogrebnyak at Crimea's Supreme Court in the capital Simferopol convicted the four Muslims of involvement in "the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity" under Criminal Code Article 282.2. The four men were convicted of involvement in the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement, which Russia has banned.

Judge Pogrebnyak handed down the following sentences, Crimean Solidarity reported:

1) Renat Rustemovich Suleimanov (born 30 August 1969), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1, four years' imprisonment in an ordinary regime labour camp, followed by one year under restrictions.

2) Talyat Abdurakhmanov (born 1953), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2, two and a half years' suspended sentence, with a two year probation period, plus one year under restrictions.

3) Seiran Rizaevich Mustafaev (born 2 January 1969), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2, two and a half years' suspended sentence, with a two year probation period, plus one year under restrictions.

4) Arsen Shekirovich Kubedinov (born 6 August 1974), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2, two and a half years'

suspended sentence, with a two year probation period, plus one year under restrictions.

Prosecutors had originally brought the criminal case against the four men to court in September 2018, but the court rejected the case because it had been "completed with violations of the provisions of the Code" and sent it back. Prosecutors overturned this on appeal.<sup>10</sup>

Prosecutors resubmitted the case to the Supreme Court on 28 November 2018. The trial itself began on 17 December 2018, according to court records, with six further hearings. Court hearings were open, and relatives of the accused men were able to attend, Suleimanov's lawyer Aleksandr Lesovoi told Forum 18 on 24 January.<sup>11</sup>

## "I didn't engage in anti-Russian or anti-constitutional activity"

An officer of the Russian FSB security service – which had launched the criminal case in September 2017 – was questioned in court on 10 January as a prosecution "witness".

Suleimanov told the 10 January hearing that two meetings of Muslims had taken place in April and October 2016 but denied that they had been "conspiratorial". They had discussed Islam and missionary activity. He said he shared Tabligh Jamaat's views on calling people to Islam, but did not know anything about – and did not share – any calls to terrorist or extremist activity.

Suleimanov rejected a linguistic "expert analysis" of what he had said at the meetings (as secretly recorded by the Russian FSB) which he claimed was manipulative and often ignorant. He did not contest the

religious studies part of the "expert analysis" which he said had portrayed the religious movement accurately, the Crimean blogger Igor Vorotnikov wrote for RFE's Crimean Realities website on 12 January.

Abdurakhmanov told the 14 January 2019 hearing that he had been a member of Tabligh Jamaat, "but I didn't engage in anti-Russian or anti-constitutional activity", Crimean Solidarity noted. "At lessons we studied *ayats* [verses] from the Koran, the value of praying the *namaz*, and the *zikr* [reciting devotional phrases as a reminder of Allah]. These lessons were not conspiratorial and took place in mosques."

Abdurakhmanov added that he had learnt of the Russian ban on Tabligh Jamaat in 2016 after others had been arrested. By 2017 he had already left the group and no longer attended lessons. Asked by the Prosecutor if he had said that it was necessary to fight against people of other faiths, Abdurakhmanov told the court: "No."

Kubedinov, who was defended by the lawyer Jemil Temishev, similarly confirmed that he had been a member of the group, Crimean Solidarity noted, but insisted no extremist discussions had taken place.

Judge Pogrebnyak rejected a motion by Suleimanov's lawyer Lesovoi (supported by the Prosecutor) to summon the linguistics "expert" Fomina to examine whether statements contained any calls to fight and, if so, in what form.

During the trial the head of the Crimean Muslim Board, Chief Mufti Emirali Ablaev, appealed to the court not to jail the four Muslims, Kubedinov's lawyer Jemil Temishev noted after the verdict was

announced. He thanked the Chief Mufti on behalf of his clients.

At the 16 January 2019 hearing, the Prosecutor (Forum 18 was unable to find her name) called for Suleimanov to be jailed for five years in an ordinary regime labour camp, followed by two years of restricted freedom. She called for the other three each to be given four years' deprivation of freedom, with a three-year probation period.

On 16 April, Russia's Supreme Court was due to hear appeals by the four Muslims convicted in January of membership of the Muslim group Tabligh Jamaat. By this time Suleimanov has been held in pre-trial detention for eighteen months.

### **FSB investigating Jehovah's Witness, bank accounts blocked**

The Russian FSB security service in Crimea is still investigating the criminal case against Jehovah's Witness Sergei Filatov on the same "extremism"-related charges. The case - which the FSB launched on 10 November 2018 - is the first against Jehovah's Witnesses in occupied Crimea. The FSB investigator, Lieutenant Aleksandr Chumakin, refused to talk to Forum 18.

Sergei Viktorovich Filatov was born on 6 June 1972, and lives in the town of Dzhankoi. Chumakin launched the investigation on 10 November 2018.<sup>12</sup>

Filatov is the first individual to face "extremism"-related criminal charges linked to the Jehovah's Witnesses in Crimea. He headed the Sivash Jehovah's Witness community in Dzhankoi, one of two Jehovah's Witness communities in the town registered by the Russian authorities in April 2015. Both communities were

liquidated through the courts in May 2017 following the Russian Supreme Court ban.

Filatov faces up to 10 years' imprisonment if eventually convicted under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1, of leadership of "the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity".

On 17 January, and despite not having been convicted of any crime, Filatov was added to the Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose assets banks are obliged to freeze (although small transactions are permitted).<sup>13</sup>

On the evening of 15 November 2018, five days after the investigation had been opened, about 10 groups of FSB officers, OMON riot police and possibly officers of other agencies who had come from Simferopol, raided the homes of Filatov and seven other families in the northern Crimean town of Dzhankoi. They were members of the two local Jehovah's Witness communities before they were banned in 2017. During one raid, officers beat a 78-year-old man – deported to Siberia by the Soviet Union for his faith when he was 9 – then pushed him against a wall and handcuffed him.<sup>14</sup> He was taken to hospital for treatment afterwards.

During another raid a man was taken to hospital with a suspected stroke. One of those detained for questioning returned in the morning to find his home ransacked. His pregnant wife had to be rushed to hospital, where she suffered a miscarriage. Jehovah's Witnesses say this was caused by psychological stress. "The young couple do not have children and have taken this

tragedy very badly," Jehovah's Witnesses added.<sup>15</sup>

On 16 November 2018, Lieutenant Chumakin ordered Filatov to sign a pledge not to leave Dzhankoi without his specific permission.

Filatov said since the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses across Crimea, their Kingdom Halls lie empty. "We're not allowed to use them," he told Forum 18 in November 2018. "I read the Bible together with my family."<sup>16</sup>

The criminal case against him has had an intimidating effect. "I no longer meet my friends," Filatov added, "because it might cause them problems. We simply ask the authorities to respect our rights to meet together and read the Bible. We're not law-breakers and we're not against the government."

When, on 23 January 2019, Forum 18 attempted to reach FSB Lieutenant Chumakin, who is responsible for the investigation, the person who answered the phone repeatedly insisted it was a wrong number and put the phone down.

## **Further raids on Jehovah's Witnesses**

On 20 March 2019, armed Russian FSB security service officers raided at least eight Jehovah's Witness homes in the southern Crimean city of Yalta and the nearby suburbs of Alupka and Gursuf. At least one of the FSB officers was carrying what appeared to be an assault rifle over his shoulder, despite Jehovah's Witnesses being known for being pacifists. Officers seized religious literature, money and other documents, and took several people for interrogation.

FSB officers seized Jehovah's Witness literature, much of which has been banned as "extremist" in Russia. However, they also seized Bible translations and a Bible concordance used by Russian Orthodox, Protestants and others and which the Russian authorities have not banned (see below).

Five days before the raids, the Crimean branch of the Russian FSB launched a criminal case against 34-year-old Yalta resident Artem Gerasimov. If eventually tried and convicted, he faces up to ten years' imprisonment. He has had to sign a pledge not to leave his home town as the FSB investigates the case against him. One of the FSB investigators refused to discuss

the case against Gerasimov with Forum 18.

Gerasimov is the second Jehovah's Witness in Crimea facing investigation under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity").

The FSB has also identified another Jehovah's Witness from Yalta, 40-year-old Taraz Kuzio, as a suspect in the criminal case.<sup>17</sup>

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1. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2299](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2299)
  2. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2051](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2051)
  3. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2441](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2441)
  4. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1724](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1724)
  5. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2297](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2297)
  6. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2412](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2412)
  7. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2432](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2432)
  8. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2444](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2444)
  9. see footnote 7.
  10. *ibid*.
  11. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2444](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2444)
  12. see footnote 7.
  13. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2215](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2215)
  14. see footnote 11.
  15. see footnote 7.
  16. *ibid*.
  17. Forum 18 report by Felix Corley, 2 April 2019

*Felix Corley is the editor-in-chief of Forum 18 News Service, which reports on religious repression in Russia, the republics of the former Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe. He is the author of several books.*

Full reports on freedom of thought, conscience and belief in Crimea  
<http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?query=&region=all&country=86>)

For more background, see Forum 18's Crimea religious freedom survey  
([http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2051](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2051))

Forum 18's Reports and analyses on freedom of thought, conscience and belief in  
Russia within its internationally-recognised territory  
(<http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?query=&religion=all&country=10>)

Forum 18's compilation of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
(OSCE) freedom of religion or belief commitments  
([http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1351](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1351))

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## ***Patrons***

*The Rt Revd Lord Williams of Oystermouth*

*The Archbishop of Westminster*

*The Chief Rabbi of Great Britain*

*The Moderator of the Free Churches*

*The Archbishop of Glasgow*

*The Archbishop of Thyateira & Great Britain*

*Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia*

## Mavis Perris

Mavis Perris, who died last November, after a long illness, was with her daughter Fiona in Portugal. She was one of those building blocks without which the Keston edifice, near Bromley, would have remained at ground level. Apart from family friendship, which often helped us in difficult times, she was my first full-time secretary and remained at Keston throughout the twenty years that it was our base. Mavis was the perfect help and became an administrator, steady as a rock but always with more than a touch of warmth. Her judgement, especially when the going was hard, was faultless. After we moved to Oxford things could never be the same again and she could not be replaced, but it was good that she was then able to contribute her skills to our friends, Aid to the Church In Need. Her visit to the Keston reunion in July 2018 meant a great deal to all the fifty or so people who were there, as it did to her personally,

Michael Bourdeaux