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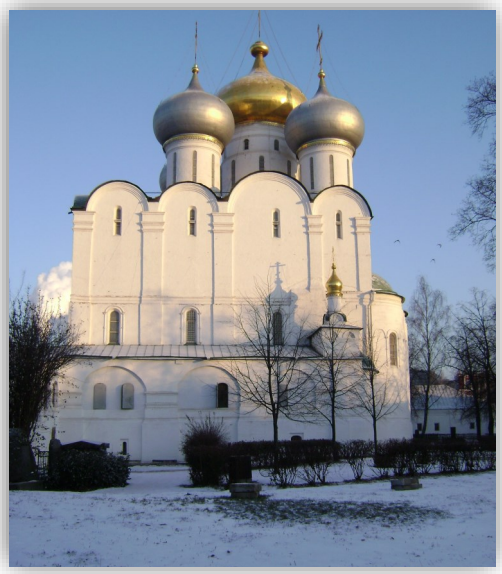
An Orthodox Awakening

by Sergei Filatov



Sun rise over the Cathedral of the Smolensk Mother of God Icon, Novodevichi Convent, Moscow

I do not have in my hands statistical data to prove that over the past 30 years there have been some basic changes in the life of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and I suspect that such figures to support this view cannot in principle be sourced. Nevertheless, I dare share the results of my observations garnered from my many conversations and interviews with Russian Orthodox believers, both laity, clergy and bishops between 1993-2020.

At the end of the 1980s when Communist Party policy towards religion was radically altered and the ROC received its freedom, the vast majority of clergy and laity had no interest at all in the text of the bible as an element in their ideology and worldview. What was most important to them? The focus of church-going people was on how to behave during church services, on the correct way to observe church rituals and traditions; there was much discussion about the rules governing fasting and the relationship of laity to clergy. Humble obedience was the dominating norm in church life. During the Soviet period the way church life was organised was seen as sacred in the minds of the majority of practicing believers, and in particular the use of Church Slavonic in church services was considered sacrosanct. The idea

Also in this issue:

From the Editor

Keston's Council of Management have decided that this year the Annual General Meeting will be held virtually because of the Covid-19 pandemic. I hope that many of you will be able to participate in this meeting which will be held on Saturday 7th November at 3pm. In due course we will send you the required link.

This issue of the *Keston Newsletter* begins with an article by my colleague from the Encyclopaedia team Sergei Filatov, who is a close observer of developments within the Russian Orthodox Church. He explores a recent phenomenon – the growth of interest in biblical studies within its ranks, which has led the church to look outwards and to get involved in social work.

Alexander Faludy, an Anglican priest who lives in Budapest, has contributed the second article which examines the background to current church-state relations in Hungary and to Viktor Orbán's political career (pp.11-23). The author does not use the term "fall of Communism" in relation to Hungary for the year 1989, but rather the term "democratic transition" as the situation there was different from some neighbouring countries. The reform wing of Hungary's Communist Party worked with nascent opposition groups to end one-party rule via a series of "round-table" dialogues starting in April 1989.

My other colleague on the Encyclopaedia team, Roman Lunkin, has contributed an article on Christianity in contemporary Kyrgyzstan (pp.24-27), which, he argues, is different from other Central Asian republics in that it is interested in European values and has allowed the missions of a number of churches to develop in what is a predominantly Muslim country. Christian groups have existed in the area since the Middle Ages, while Russian Orthodox missionaries were at work in the 19th century and some Protestant groups were established there during the Soviet period.

Since March Keston's Council have held their meetings virtually. As a result Kathy Hillman, Director of the Keston Center, has been able to join us and keep us informed about the situation at Baylor. She contributes a detailed report (pp.28-38) about the Center for the 2019-2020 academic year. Professor Jeffrey Hardy received a scholarship in 2019 to work in the Keston Archive and describes the nature of his research (pp.39-41) and the book he plans to publish entitled *Finding God in the Gulag*. As the final item I have included my summary of a report by Michael Bourdeaux which he recently discovered among his papers. He marked it "secret" as it described his visit with Sir John Lawrence to the family of the imprisoned Baptist pastor Georgi Vins in 1977.

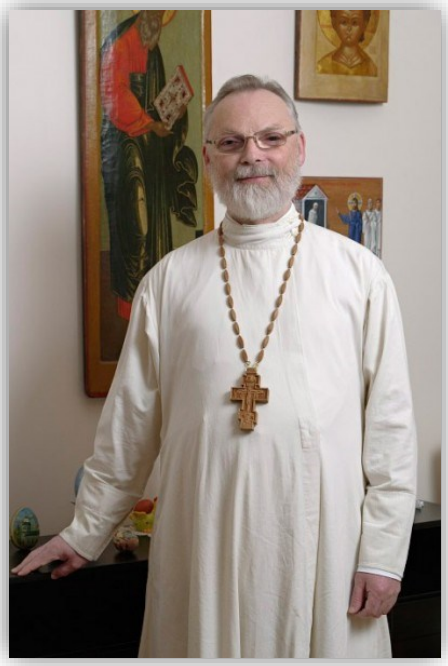
Xenia Dennen

of using ordinary Russian in church services was viewed as a dreadful heresy. The teaching that tradition was superior to the written word was popular, people thought that the history of the Russian church was just as important as biblical history, and the pronouncements of any church leader were considered to be above criticism. Interest in not only Russian church history but also in secular history, seen often as part of church history, was an important factor. In those days many thought of themselves simply as Russian Orthodox rather than as Christians; such a view is not one you see today.

Fr Alexander Men

There were of course exceptions: some people in fact did challenge this state of affairs in defiance of Soviet tradition and the dominating views held by the church and the Soviet authorities – particularly during the first years of perestroika. The most striking example of such a person was Fr Alexander Men (1935-1990). His writings were initially condemned by the majority of church members because of what were considered to be Fr Alexander's "liberalism" and "ecumenism". Until 2010 it was impossible to find any of his books in a church bookshop apart from a very few exceptions.

When the criticism against Fr Men is carefully examined the accusations all become unconvincing. His critics based their arguments on conjecture in an effort to appear serious. They described the study of other Christian confessions as ecumenism, and claimed his writings were liberal although he in fact rejected none of the ROC's dogmas. For some reason Deacon Andrei Kurayev called Fr Men a Catholic although he does not make clear what Fr Men rejected in Orthodox teaching in favour of Catholicism. Anger and irritation towards the writings of Men were evoked by their claim that the person of Christ and the bible formed the cornerstone of faith, rather than Orthodox tradition, the life of the saints and church custom. Significantly, it was people who were not connected to or distant from the ROC who read the books of Fr Men; perestroika was a period when many started to explore Christianity and found that Fr Men was just what they were looking for. His books were on sale in secular bookshops, and those who were converted through them and joined the church were often treated with coldness by churchgoers and criticised for reading what were considered to be "incorrect" books. It is interesting to note that the growth in the number of new Protestant congregations was



Fr Georgi Kochetkov

far higher than in other denominations during the first two decades after the collapse of the Soviet regime. This was probably partly because new converts found it difficult to live out their new-found faith and find a home within the kind of Orthodoxy prevalent at the time.

While Fr Alexander Men's printed sermons reached hundreds of thousands and possibly millions of readers, no less important in the life of the ROC was the pastoral work of a few clergy who were particularly admired, but who either did not write or whose writings were less influential than the words they spoke. For example, the Pskov priest, Fr Pavel Adelheim (1938-2013) had a great influence even before perestroika not only in Pskov but also in Moscow and especially in St Petersburg. His work as a pastor focused on the Gospel and on conversion to Christ. Today such evangelistic work is being continued by other Russian Orthodox priests who like Fr Adelheim began their ministry during the Soviet period: the most striking of these are Fr Georgi Kochetkov (b.1950) and Fr Gennadi Fast (b.1954).

Fr Georgi Kochetkov founded a movement called the Transfiguration Brotherhood, which today has many thousands of members. These brotherhoods emphasise regular reading and study of the bible, and nurture a Christian life which is based on continual reference to the words of the Gospel. The structure of these brotherhoods in particular aroused the fiercest opposition, while Fr Georgi's evangelism was also condemned: from 1990-2000 he was subjected to constant attacks from many among the Orthodox clergy; he was dismissed from his parish,

Fr Pavel Adelheim

banned from his ministry for many years, while the continual attacks on him from within the church made his life very difficult.

Fr Gennadi Fast was born (1954) in a Siberian village into a German family who were deeply committed Protestants. In 1938 his father was arrested and accused of forming a counter-revolutionary organisation; after ten years in the Gulag he was sent into "eternal exile" to the village of Chumakovo. After the Stalin cult was rejected by the Communist Party his father and family moved to Kazakhstan.

Fr Gennadi Fast

In 1978 Fr Gennadi was appointed to the Faculty of Theoretical Physics after graduating from the Physics Faculty of Tomsk University. Not long before graduation he had converted to Orthodoxy and was soon expelled for preaching the Gospel. In 1980 he was ordained. He completed a theological correspondence course from both the seminary and academy in Sergiev Posad and then served in a number of parishes in the Tuva Republic, the Kemerovo oblast, followed by his main ministry in parishes in the Krasnoyarsk krai. At periodic intervals he was persecuted by both the secular and church authorities, who both disliked his focus on scripture which was condemned as fanaticism, Protestant heresy and liberalism. Fr Gennadi expounded his theology in sermons, lectures, and in some particularly original theological texts – "An Interpretation of Solomon's Song of Songs" (2000); "An Interpretation of the Apocalypse" (2004); "Old Testament Studies" (vol.1, 2007 and vol.2, 2008). In 2010 Fr Gennadi was forced to leave the Krasnoyarsk krai following one of his many conflicts with his bishop, Metropolitan Antoni, who rejected Fr Gennadi's view that before someone could be baptised he or she must be taught about the Christian faith. Since then Fr Gennadi has served in Abakan (Khakassia), although he has not broken his ties with Krasnoyarsk and regularly lectures in the university and keeps in touch with his pupils.

Alexander Men, Pavel Adelheim, Georgi Kochetkov, Gennadi Fast and a few other Russian Orthodox priests, each in his own way, gave pride of place in their ministry to the study of scripture. The Gospel for them was the absolute source of the Truth. To a greater and lesser degree they used Russian rather than Church Slavonic in church services. From the 1980s until 2000 they were regarded as heretics (or almost heretics)

and subjected to varying forms of punishment by the church authorities. And it was not only the hierarchy but also the majority of clergy and laity who condemned their "reforming" ideas.

More recent history has shown that a negative attitude to "excessive involvement with the New Testament" is closely connected with a refusal to get involved in social work and philanthropy. In the 1880s and the first two decades after perestroika the majority of Orthodox believers looked upon social work as something from another world, something remote; both Russian Orthodox clergy and laity thought that social work was fundamentally alien and not Orthodox. A typical view expressed to me during my conversations with clergy was that the church's job was to pray, regularly worship, fast and to be humble and patriotic – these were the things which saved your soul. Social work was not really needed, and not really the job of the church. Concern about social work was considered to have been brought into the ROC by newly converted members of the intelligentsia under the influence of Western churches. Relatively recently in 2002 a not insignificant member of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, Roman Silant'ev, insisted that "The ROC doesn't have enough money for the really important things – the construction of new churches, mission, religious education. Social work is the silly preoccupation of the intelligentsia. The church's leadership has no time for such wasteful activity."

Such a quietist, contemplative and traditionalist mindset is the result of a number of factors which all reinforce each other. The strong and sometimes dominating influence of monasticism has been the fundamental characteristic of the Orthodox worldview. But possibly the most important factor, and more important than historical circumstances stretching back many centuries, was the Soviet period: existence under a total ban on intellectual life and on any social involvement imposed by the Soviet state, which was guided by the ideology of militant atheism, was the main cause.

Somewhere during the early 2000s there was a totally unexpected, indeed unconscious, change in the church's mindset. The most striking indication of this change was a new attitude towards the use of Russian in church services. More and more often it began to be used: in some churches only the readings from the New Testament were in Russian and occasionally in others certain prayers were also said in Russian. In churches where Russian was not used the conservatives stopped attacking those who did use it – no longer was it seen as heretical. Religious consciousness began to change; scripture was gradually becoming more important than tradition.

On 23 March 2019 in Tver an important historical event took place: Metropolitan Savva of Kashin, head of the ROC in that area, celebrated the liturgy in Russian. The service took place in the Church of the Icon of the Virgin "Joy of all who Suffer", in Tver's Avayev Medical Centre. Metropolitan Savva admitted after the liturgy that this was the first time he had celebrated in Russian, and that although he loved the liturgy in Church Slavonic he had discovered new meaning in the

service. This church uses a literary style of Russian which is thought suitable. When Metropolitan Savva's predecessor, Metropolitan Viktor, was in post a service in Russian had to be conducted in secret as Metropolitan Viktor did not approve of such liturgies and even banned scripture being read in Russian, while the priest-in-charge, Fr Vyacheslav Baskakov, of the Tver church mentioned above, was regularly denounced by people writing in to the diocesan authorities (see *Крестовский мост* No. 5, 2019).

Right to left: *Fr Dmitri Stepanov, Sergei Filatov, Roman Lunkin & Xenia Dennen with the Sharya clergy team during an Encyclopaedia field trip in 2015*

This liturgy celebrated in Russian by Metropolitan Savva only provoked some mild grumbling among the most traditional Orthodox believers; in fact the use of Russian has been accepted by the ROC without civil war. Furthermore, it was not only Russian which became acceptable. In recent years I increasingly often see the works of Fr Alexander Men in church bookshops, while today only those on the fringes of the church dare speak about Fr Pavel Adelheim as somehow irrelevant. A few years ago Fr Georgi Kochetkov began regularly serving in one of the churches in the Novodevichi Convent (Moscow) while his yearly gatherings called the Transfiguration Conferences, which meet in Moscow's Sokol'niki, attract thousands of participants.

During the Encyclopaedia field trips with Xenia Dennen and Roman Lunkin to Russian Orthodox dioceses, we have observed how interest in scripture is growing, how different ways of studying the bible are being used. Thirty years ago it was relatively rare to find youth clubs and other associations of active Orthodox believers studying the New Testament. It was considered to be of secondary importance, whereas in recent years it has now gradually moved from the periphery to the centre of church life.

A most striking and successful example of this new attitude of Orthodox believers towards scripture was evident to me in the work of the ROC in the town of Sharya, a railway junction in the east of the Kostroma oblast, established at the beginning of the 20th century in an isolated forested area. By 2014 the town had 24 thousand inhabitants with 40 thousand living in the region. Today in both the town and surrounding area there is much

Left to right: *Tatyana Volkova, in charge of medical aid, Natalia Skalkina, in charge of youth projects (both members of the Social Work Department in the Bryansk Diocese), Xenia Dennen & Sergei Filatov during a 2012 Encyclopaedia field trip.*

unemployment, people are on low wages, and life is hard. Since 2000 Fr Dmitri Stepanov (also area dean), brother of Archangel's bishop, Bishop Tikhon (1995-2010), has run the church. During his first ten years Fr Dmitri achieved a great deal in the fields of social work, religious education, and work with children and young people, so much so that after 2010 the ROC in Sharya became a shining example for others to follow. Its success stems partly from events in the Archangel Diocese: after the death of Archangel's Bishop Tikhon, the new bishop Daniil dismantled some of the most successful parishes in the diocese (see Keston's Encyclopaedia *Religion in Russia Today [Религиозно-общественная жизнь российских регионов]* Vol. I, Letni Sad, Moscow, 2014, pp. 160-162) leading a number of the most effective clergy and church workers, including Sunday school teachers, to find refuge in Sharya. As a result, this small industrial town with little cultural or intellectual life has become the focus for significant growth in church life which has brought with it culture, education and social involvement.

For adults the church's theological courses have become the most attractive part of the church's activity in Sharya. Hundreds of people, some educated and some with no higher education, have joined these courses in order to learn to understand the New Testament. Every Sunday after the liturgy people gather in the House of Culture: Fr Dmitri reads a bible passage and asks his listeners to say what they think it means; at the end he sums up the discussion. Reading scripture has in fact become a popular activity in the town, and Fr Dmitri observed: "the *babushki* express surprise that you can read and even understand the bible."

During the 2000s in parallel with this interest in scripture there was also a change of attitude towards social work. In literally just four to five years a number of interesting social projects have been developed in every diocese. Before my eyes philanthropy has become one of the most important activities for the church in the opinion of bishops and leading clergy.

I realised something important was happening in the church when I and my colleagues in the Encyclopaedia team in 2012 learned about the Bryansk Diocese under the leadership of Metropolitan Alexandr (Agrikov) who was appointed in 2011. Metropolitan Alexandr focused particularly on social work. During his first year in post he inaugurated four diocesan projects which earned him great respect within the oblast:

- Poor parishioners were provided with warm clothes during the winter (the Metropolitan's phrase "Who doesn't have warm winter boots?" with its surprise factor became a buzz word)
- Material support for families with many children was organised
- School children from poor families were supplied with the school uniforms and stationery items
- Material help was regularly supplied to prisons.

Philanthropy and social work were organised in a great variety of ways in Bryansk. Diocesan philanthropy and social work departments channelled material help and volunteers through the church organisation called "The Little White Crane" to seriously ill children both at home and in hospital. Another organisation called "Our Children" under Fr Leonid Kupriyanov offered similar help. Volunteers mostly worked with the children while the clergy focused on the parents.

This unconscious switch towards social work happened both quickly and simultaneously at all levels of the church's governing structure. When he was Metropolitan of Smolensk, the future Patriarch Kirill did not place any particular emphasis on social work. Under him the number of active churches and monasteries quickly grew, much attention was given to the development of seminaries and the teaching of young people, both in Sunday schools and state education. If philanthropy was mentioned it was certainly not obvious, while during Kirill's first months in post as Patriarch he said nothing at all on the subject.

Only in 2010 did the subject of social work get onto the agenda of church policy, a full year after the election of Metropolitan Kirill as Patriarch. Thanks to him the church began to talk about the needs of orphans, the sick, the homeless. The Patriarch did not initiate this social concern, but rather joined in what was a new church movement, and then encouraged it and took charge.

The ROC has its problems and deficiencies in the field of church social work, which is sometimes far from ideal. To this day it is not as developed as among the Protestants and Catholics. Yet it is remarkable that this new focus has been adopted by the ROC as a whole; there are already examples – the children's hospices founded by the St Petersburg priest Fr Alexandr Tkachenko are a most striking example – which have achieved the highest standards and in spheres where the state does nothing.

Social work and the new focus on the Gospel are not linked organisationally, but their simultaneous and parallel development shows that they originate from

the same source. The church is waking up after many years in confinement; the focus on the Gospel and involvement in social work are two aspects of this awakening.

The most surprising aspect of this change is that Orthodox believers are not aware that it is happening. You will very rarely hear from them anything about the significant changes in the Orthodox Church's consciousness. I recall the words of a priest (I will not name him as he could be subjected to serious repression from his Metropolitan; mention of him by me could cost him dear) who said: "During the perestroika years I was horrified to discover absurdities burgeoning in our church which had nothing to do with Christianity, whereas now I am startled to see these disappearing before my eyes."

Fr Pyotr Meshcherinov

While it is difficult to see any thoughtful reflection within the ROC about what has been happening, yet biblical thinking in Orthodox circles is making its mark. Although no well-formulated evangelical concepts exist within Orthodoxy (and nothing of the sort will emerge) yet various aspects of a biblical approach to faith are forming within the thinking of a number of theologians and writers. Of particular importance is the work of Fr Pyotr Meshcherinov. He has translated into Russian the writings of the famous German pietist Gerhard Tersteegen and has produced a new translation of the German Lutheran theologian Johann Arndt's work. Fr Pyotr in his articles and public statements questions the inherent value of what is seen as traditional ascetism by contemporary Orthodoxy, suggesting the relative nature of the liturgical canon as simply a reflection of Byzantine culture's aesthetic preferences which are no longer ideal in a contemporary church setting. He argues that it is essential to develop a Christian life which is not limited to attending the liturgy and observing church rituals. It is interesting to note the reaction within Orthodox church circles to his views: there are, on the one hand, some fierce attacks on him from some defenders of tradition, but at the same time, on the other hand, a substantial body of believers accept or at least do not totally reject his ideas.

Sergei Filatov *is a sociologist of religion at the Oriental Institute in Moscow and heads Keston's Encyclopaedia project which began in 1999. The first edition (in Russian) of* Religious Life in Russia Today *was completed in 2008 and a second edition is currently being produced.*

Viktor Orbán and the Hungarian Churches: "Post-Communist" Back Story, 1992-2010

by Alexander Faludy

Viktor Orbán (left) with Gyula Márfi, Archbishop of Veszprém (centre): the latter arrives to bless the Prime Minister's new office, January 2019 © MTI

Hardly any significant public event occurs in Hungary nowadays without a formal benediction from a church leader, or preferably several, on a crowd or a freshly completed structure. Whether the occasion is the dedication of a new office for the Prime Minister, the opening of a global "Demography Summit" attended by the international alt-Right or the inauguration of a new national football stadium, clerics are likely to appear as contractors depart.[1] Ministers of religion are now the seemingly indispensable attendants of ministers of state at major occasions.

Conversely, state representatives, especially military ones, are given prominent symbolic roles in liturgical events from which they were formerly absent. On 20th August each year it is now soldiers in dress uniform, not deacons in dalmatics, who carry the reputed right hand of the national patron St Stephen (King of Hungary 1001-1038) into the capital's basilica on his feast day. Meanwhile in provincial churches armed troops in combat fatigues, rifles positioned at the "present", can be spotted inside the sanctuary as the festal mass is celebrated.

These striking visual novelties, unknown in the two decades immediately following democratic transition,[2] are not outlying anomalies. The visual juxtaposition of piety and politics contrasts uncomfortably with the main churches' verbal silence on Hungary's deteriorating civil

rights' environment and the well documented promotion of anti-migrant (and antisemitic) messaging by the country's secular leadership.[3]

Following the 2015 refugee crisis Viktor Orbán's positioning as the "Defender of Christian-Europe" against perceived threats from Islamic migration and Western secularism has been much discussed in the public sphere. A more neglected topic is the developing interrelationship between Viktor Orbán, his political party Fidesz, and the principle Hungarian churches between 1992-2010.

Soldiers carrying St Stephen's right hand into Budapest's basilica, August 2017 © MTI

It is impossible to comprehend what has taken place during Orbán's period in government over the last decade without understanding the pre-history of Fidesz's project of achieving synergy with Hungary's ecclesiastical institutions: that is, the formation and development of a partnership over the two preceding decades mostly in the context of opposition. This article seeks to outline the distinctive nature of the present Hungarian situation and to offer a timeline for the evolution of the party-church relationship before 2010.

Fidesz and faith in a European perspective

It is useful to compare (and contrast) Fidesz's partnership with the churches both with the contemporary tendency towards superficial religiosity among populist-identitarians in Western Europe,[4] and United Russia's authoritarian co-option of Orthodox ecclesial structures in the Russian Federation and other territories of the former Soviet Union. West European right-populists who invoke Christianity usually have little or no institutional connection with the churches. Indeed the leaders of France's *National Rally* and Germany's *Alternative für Deutschland* have experienced an adversarial public relationship with official church leaders, who are usually hostile to the populists' underlying ethno-nationalist agenda.[5] Unlike Western right-populists Fidesz's relations with Hungary's two largest churches[6] (the Roman Catholic and Reformed) are built on deep institutional integration manifested in both state and party structures.[7]

In Russia Putin has belatedly, but efficaciously, co-opted the ROC from a position of strength, using his relationship with the Moscow Patriarchate to cement his hold on power rather than to achieve it. Conversely, strong personal bonds between Fidesz leaders and prominent clerics predated the party's rise to power. Indeed, it was this alliance that helped to

lift Fidesz into power during its first term in office (1998-2002). This partnership gelled slowly (1992-1998) during one extended period in opposition. It continued to develop through the first short period of Fidesz government (1998-2002) and a second long spell in opposition (2002-2010). Significantly, the partnership's genesis preceded Fidesz's public ideological shift to the right in 1993. It may even have part-catalysed it.

In principio

Despite the verbal similarity between "Fidesz" and "*fides*" the party's beginnings (1988) as a radical left-liberal student association (centred on the Bibó István Szakkollégium [Residence Hall] at Budapest's Eötvös Loránd University) were anything but religious. Fidesz is simply an acronym for *Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége* (Alliance of Young Democrats).[8] Most, if not quite all, its early luminaries came from families comprehensively de-churched under Communism. According to Orbán, although he was baptised in the Reformed Church, as a child "I didn't have a religious upbringing…I grew up in a world of unbelievers."[9]

Fidesz's early secularism was pronounced. Indeed, its rhetorical anti-clericalism was scarcely less notable than its anti-Communism. Fidesz held the leadership of the official churches in contempt. That hostility was certainly motivated by perceptions of the churches' pre-war alliance with authoritarian-conservatism. It may also have reflected some irritation at the official churches' passivity in the context of democratic transition, an inertia which stood in marked contrast with the part played by churches as incubators of peaceful dissent in the GDR.[10] Friendly relations were maintained by Fidesz, however, with some dissident Christian leaders from bodies harassed by the Communist authorities. The latter included Pastor Gábor Iványi of the Hungarian Evangelical Fellowship (*Magyarországi Evangéliumi Testvérközösség* /MET) who baptised the first two Orbán children.

Fidesz's ostentatious anti-clericalism continued into the early post transition years when, as a parliamentary opposition party, it defined itself against the governing coalition which had a Christian-conservative ideological flavour. The government was led by the moderate-conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum (*Magyar Demokrata Fórum*,/MDF led by Prime Minister József Antall) but included the agrarian-conservative Smallholders Party (*Független Kisgazdapárt*/FGKP) and the reactionary Christian Democratic People's Party (*Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt*/KDNP) as junior partners. All three governing parties were explicitly pro-church with KDNP exhibiting a more pronounced Catholic character.

In the immediate post-transition years (early 1990s) Fidesz firmly resisted any legislative moves which appeared to jeopardise the constitutional separation of church and state. They resisted the expansion of religious instruction opportunities in schools and even the restoration of church properties confiscated by the Communist authorities in the 1940s. Fidesz MPs heckled KDNP deputies in the parliamentary chamber with cat-calls of "kneel priests".

A new direction

The realignment of sympathies which made synergy between Fidesz and the churches appear desirable to both was a product of the highly fluid post-transition party politics of the 1990s. The idea of such an alliance seems to have begun to attract Orbán in 1992. This was the year he began a quiet process of broader reflection on, and reformulation of, Fidesz's political identity which was to break into the open at an acrimonious party congress in 1993.

Fidesz's ideological shifts from liberal to conservative on the one hand, and from secularist to Christian-nationalist on the other, can be distinguished, although, given the historical overlap between Christianity and politically conservative sentiment in Hungary, the two trajectories were also interlinked and mutually reinforcing.[11]

By the first democratic government's 1992 halfway mark it was obvious to friends and critics alike that József Antall's MDF had rendered itself incapable of re-election. The sharp social cost of unavoidable economic reforms was just too much for voters to forgive. Antall himself famously told cabinet colleagues "I am leading a Kamikaze government". Politically MDF was, like Antall himself (seriously ill with cancer and decreasingly able to guide his cabinet effectively), a dead man walking.[12]

Just as a vacant space seemed to be opening up on the right, Fidesz was finding itself squeezed on the left between the much larger Socialist and main Liberal parties and struggled to articulate a distinctive ideological and electoral brand. The temptation to move to the right and pick up conservatively inclined voters disillusioned with MDF was obvious.

Influencers and influences

Despite its official early anticlericalism Fidesz's move towards a form of "political Christianity" was not quite a creation *ex nihilo.* There were significant, if submerged foundations to build on.

Although ostensibly a radical liberal (and secularist) party Fidesz's "generational" character meant that from the beginning it attracted an ideologically heterodox supporter base. Its initial activists were tied together more by a mix of anti-Communism and shared social connections than by a common political vision. Early and committed, if not core, members included a few students/young-professionals who were children of Protestant clerical, and active lay, church families such as Zsolt Németh (Fidesz's deputy Foreign Minister 1998-2002 and 2010-2014) and Zsuzsanna Szelenyi (a Fidesz MP 1990-1994).[13] There were also some junior Protestant clergy like Reformed pastor Zoltán Balog (later Orbán's Minister of Human Resources 2012-2018) who were drawn into the party's orbit as informal supporters rather than official members. Such people were naturally not anticlerical *per se.* However, by the late 1980s they were often privately impatient with the older generation of Protestant church leaders and their cosy compromises with the regime. This background disposed them towards sympathy for, and identification with, Fidesz's strident and uncompromising anti-Communism.

According to Orbán's biographer Paul Lendvai, Zoltán Balog is "the person who (apart from his wife Anikó)…most influenced him [Orbán]."[14] It was Balog who in the early 1990s led Orbán to discover a personal faith (or at least to claim to have done so) and softened the stridency of Orbán's anticlericalism. This latter aim Balog pursued not only through personal influence but by introducing the future PM to persons of influence across Hungary's ecumenical spectrum whom the young pastor thought Orbán might find engaging. One such meeting in 1992 with the Rt Revd István Seregély (then Roman Catholic Archbishop of Eger and President of the Bishops Conference) seems to have been particularly formative. Speaking of it later to Balog, Orbán opined:

Dr Zoltán Balog as Minister of Human Resources, 2016 © MTI

> "[Previously] I was not aware that the Church is so important, such an important part of Hungarian life. I cannot talk to the people about politics if I don't understand that."[15]

It was from this point onwards that Orbán began seriously to evaluate the possibility of harnessing religious sentiment in support of Fidesz's political aspirations.

Religious and political re-alignment for Fidesz and its leader took time but proved comprehensive. A show-down with the party's committed left-centrist elements at Fidesz's 1993 convention led this group to abandon the party. Fidesz's youth-wing, launched in 1995, explicitly referenced Christianity in its name *Fidelitas.* The new 1996 policy document *A polgári Magyarországért* (*Towards a Civic Hungary*) invoked the intellectual register of classic "Christian-Democratic" thinking.

By 1998 the newly elected Hungarian premier would be careful to make one of his first overseas trips an expedition to the Vatican for a private audience with John Paul II. This trip offered a pointed symbolic mirror image to the scathing satire with which *Magyar Narancs* (then Fidesz's party organ) greeted John Paul's own visit to Hungary in 1991. Fidesz finally broke from Liberal-International (the global alliance of Social-Liberal political parties) in 2000. That same year, with Helmut Kohl's encouragement, it was received into the Christian Democrat fold as a member of the European People's Party.

Catholic and Reformed

The larger and more influential Roman Catholic Church in Hungary became the main object of Orbán's overtures. Yet, it was his family's own historic Reformed

identity within which Orbán enfolded himself before embracing Hungary's Catholic hierarchy institutionally. He was confirmed by Balog and celebrated a Reformed church wedding with his (Catholic) wife Anikó Lévai in 1996, a decade after the couple's civil registration.[16] Looking at the situation sceptically this development could be seen (and has been described thus to me by Hungarian church contacts) as a shrewd tactical move. Orbán had more plausibility speaking to Catholic Church leaders as it were "from one part of the Christian family to another" than as a politician seeking to engage prelates "cold". Ancestral ties and close contact with Reformed advisors like Balog and Németh made the development of a Reformed allegiance natural.[17] Paradoxically this trajectory had roots, even an embryonic manifestation, in Fidesz's ostensibly anticlerical phase.

From 1990 onwards Fidesz has held a cross border Summer University in Transylvania in the heart of western Romania's Hungarian speaking enclave. The Summer University was a project very much driven in its early years by Zsolt Németh. Thanks to Németh's own strong family background in the Reformed Church (his pastor father founded Budapest's Transylvanian-Calvinist congregation in the late 1980s) the local Hungarian Reformed Bishop László Tőkés (dissident hero of Romania's 1989 revolution) regularly featured as a guest of honour from an early date.[18] Association with Tőkés may have proved helpful to Orbán in winning the confidence of Reformed bishops in Hungary itself. Tőkés enjoyed a personally heroic international status (at the time stretching across the Atlantic). More broadly, Transylvania holds an elevated place in Hungarian Calvinism's historic imagination as its numerical and intellectual "centre of gravity": associations with it thus confer a heightened level of perceived symbolic legitimacy.

A Reformed orientation was perhaps especially inviting to Orbán given that, for complex historical reasons connected with its minority status, Hungary's Reformed Church has long assumed a prominent role in articulating national identity. Pre-1945, it also contributed a disproportionately high number of conservative leaders to the country's political class.[19]

For Orbán denominational and political realignment were entwined. A loose identification with Gábor Iványi's Hungarian Evangelical Fellowship, MET, and choice of it for the baptism of the two eldest Orbán children, was symbolically consonant with a left-liberal political alignment. That was especially so given Iványi's service as a Liberal Party (*Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége*/ SZDSZ)[20] MP from 1990-1994. For most of this time SZDSZ and Fidesz were closely associated, so much so that Fidesz sometimes found it hard to shake off the popular misconception that it was simply "SZDSZ's youth-wing".[21] Conversely a strong identification with the Reformed Church in Hungary (*Magyarországi Református Egyház*/ MRE) fitted a national-conservative/ Christian Democrat political orientation. Metanoia in politics and piety are hard to disentangle here.

A matter of give and take

In the mid 1990s partnership with the churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church, held obvious attractions for Fidesz. The first post-Communist census in 1992 had reported a surprisingly high level of Christian religious adherence (92.9%) despite 42 years of official state atheism. Identification with Christianity thus suggested one potentially fruitful means for Fidesz to break out from its stratified generational base and attract broader, cross-sectional, support in Hungarian society.[22] An institutional partnership with the churches would also give Fidesz informal access to a structurally robust, and geographically pervasive, national organisational network (the parish system) at a time when it had not yet developed a party machine of its own in the provinces.[23] This move would also make Fidesz more plausible to disillusioned MDF voters and assist "brand consolidation" following the party's re-orientation.

For the Catholic hierarchy the attractions of partnership with Fidesz were less immediately obvious as the decade moved into its middle years. For a start the church *de facto* had its own (highly biddable) political party, KDNP. In the early post-transition years KDNP was of roughly equal strength with Fidesz, gaining only one less seat than Orbán's party in 1990 and two more than it in 1994.[24] Furthermore, throughout much of Gyula Horn's left-liberal administration (1994-1998) delicate negotiations were underway between the bishops and the Hungarian government pursuant to a treaty between the latter and the Vatican on the status of the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary (concluded, 1997).[25] Horn hoped that by offering a generous settlement, he could assuage the reflexive antipathy of the Catholic hierarchy towards the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) as the perceived historical successor to the Communist Party. Horn thereby hoped to render the Catholic Church politically neutral.[26]

The bishops for their part angled for an enhanced *per capita* funding formula for pupils in church schools – one that would allow them to offer superior facilities and staffing ratios to those in institutions administered by municipal authorities. Such delicate bargaining naturally inhibited development of an open alliance between the church and Orbán, who was emerging rapidly as Horn's sharpest critic and most effective rival.

By the eve of the May 1998 elections things looked very different. Negotiations with Horn were now safely in the past and the bishops had got what they wanted – a funding scheme which benefitted children enrolled in parochial schools. Moreover, the Catholic Church's until now preferred political partners were in serious trouble. In the 12 months immediately before the 1998 election KDNP's viability as a party had become subject to doubt. Toxic internal friction caused its parliamentary caucus to dissolve in acrimony. The pro-church, but much weakened, MDF had already fractured in 1996, its moderate wing forming the short-lived Hungarian Democratic People's Party (*Magyar Demokrata Néppárt*/ MDNP). In short, the Catholic hierarchy needed a viable centre-right political partner, but by the turn of 1997-1998 there only seemed to be one serious candidate available – Fidesz.

The bishops belatedly acceded to Orbán's wooing. Just ahead of the May elections they circulated an Easter pastoral letter which, in barely coded language, steered the faithful away from KDNP and towards Fidesz, thereby suppressing KDNP's core (church-based) vote. In the subsequent poll KDNP fell below the representational threshold,

Cardinal Péter Erdő, Primate of Hungary, with Dr András Veres, President of the Bishops Conference, January 2020 © Magyar Kurir

while Fidesz rose to lead a new governing coalition (embracing the FGKP – agrarian-conservative Smallholders Party – and vestigial MDF). It was a coalition Hungary's Catholic bishops are rumoured to have played an important, if informal, role in stitching together, using their personal links with MDF and FGKP leaders to persuade established conservative politicians to overcome their doubts about partnering with a party (Fidesz) which had, in very recent memory, subjected right-leaning party representatives to scathing polemical assault.

The partnership between Fidesz politicians and church leaders established in the 1990s required a degree of "movement" on both sides. On the one hand Fidesz politicians dropped their anticlerical rhetoric, pledged themselves to "Christian-Democracy" and (at least nominally) embraced church membership. On the other, church leaders accepted that the rhetorical opprobrium previously directed towards them would not recur. They also learned to trust that Fidesz, once in office, would enhance the churches' institutional interests and Christianity's symbolic place in public life.

Government and Opposition 1998-2010

Following the 35-year-old Orbán's assumption of office in 1998 the churches were not to be disappointed. Both Catholic and Reformed bishops enjoyed ready personal access to the PM.[27] Senior clerics could be seen sitting in the front row not only at Hungarian state but also at Fidesz party events. Fidesz-allied political thinkers enjoyed personal contact with theologians through bodies like the Association of Christian Intellectuals (*Keresztény Értelmiségiek Szövetsége*/ KÉSZ). More significantly during its first term Fidesz authorised generous financial subsidies to the churches to support the stipends of clergy serving in small rural settlements, whose congregations would otherwise struggle to afford the cost of a minister. This assistance sat awkwardly in relation to the legal separation of church and state, specified in the Constitution as revised in 1990. The financing, however, was greatly appreciated in church circles and rapidly became known informally as "Orbán money".

Fidesz also found common ground with the churches in other areas. Perhaps the most important was concern for relations with the substantial ethnic-Hungarian kin communities in neighbouring states separated from Hungary by the 1920 Treaty of Trianon. Supporting the welfare and cultural identity of the "beyond the borders" Hungarians had been a significant concern for the churches during the inter-war and, to a more limited extent, Cold War periods. It returned to prominence once again after 1989. Ecclesiastical networks helped maintain matrices of shared identity across 20th century borders. Minority Hungarians in neighbouring states, denied means of explicit political organisation after 1945, also looked to their local church leaders to represent their interests to secular authorities. Clerics remained significant in the political life of such communities after the fall of Communism.[28] Thus, Fidesz's 2002 "Status Law" granting some state benefits (and a passport-like ID document) to ethnic Hungarians in adjoining countries was almost as popular in church circles at home as in Hungarian circles more generally in the near abroad. Again this built on the cross-border church (especially Reformed) connections which had been a consistent, if a background, feature of Fidesz's life from the early 1990s onwards.

Orbán's Reformed Church identity was of direct practical help to him during his first term in office. It bolstered a sense of common "wave length" with István Csurka, leader of the (far-right) Hungarian Justice and Life Party (*Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja*/MIÉP). Csurka, like Orbán, was both a member of the Reformed Church and a friend of some of its bishops. During the last few months of the 1998-2002 administration, coalition difficulties with the Smallholders caused Orbán to look to MIÉP repeatedly for informal support in key parliamentary votes.

Fidesz's electoral defeat in 2002, and the return of a Socialist-Liberal coalition, was a major set-back which made the churches feel themselves to be in opposition scarcely less than the dislodged conservative parties. It was to be a "long exile" lasting eight years, and continuing through a second electoral defeat in 2006.

It is hard to point to concrete hostile policy moves against the churches by the Socialist-Liberal governments of 2002-2010[29] although their basic tone was definitely secularist. However, the "culture war" type of antipathy between leftist publicists on the one hand and the Christian intelligentsia on the other was discernible.[30] In some cases sharp criticism betokened deep-seated hostility to faith (or at least institutional Christianity) *per se*. This is not, however, the whole story. Rhetorical acerbity towards the churches from the left also reflected irritation at the alliance formed between bishops and Fidesz, together with a sense of resentment that Horn's 1997 peace offering to the Catholic Church had been spurned.

Yet, the two governing parties did not seek to undo either their own earlier agreement on church school financing or Orbán's later one on subsidising rural ministry. Restraint on the latter is noteworthy. The Socialist-led coalition could have argued with real justification that the "Orbán money" breached constitutional norms on the separation of church and state and should be discontinued. MSZP's

hesitancy to do anything which might materially (as opposed to polemically) injure the churches probably reflected an enduring sensitivity to the charge of being "post-Communist". Church policy was (and remains) a morally sensitive area for the MSZP in a way loosely comparable to the NHS for Conservatives or defence for Labour in the UK.[31]

During this period Fidesz's partnership with the churches was maintained in intensity but evolved in shape. In 2006 KDNP, reorganised from 2003 onwards under Zsolt Semjén (Orbán's Secretary for Church Affairs 1998-2002) entered that year's election on a joint ticket with Fidesz. However, the Catholic bishops subsequently insisted on KDNP forming a separate parliamentary caucus.

This distinction between the parties inside parliament (if not at the ballot box) was partly a matter of symbolic prestige, but also a pragmatic calculation. Predominance of (at least nominal) lay Protestants in the Fidesz leadership occasioned unease among the Catholic hierarchy. The bishops thus sought and got a means by which they could exercise independent procedural leverage in the legislature if need be.

Catholic episcopal apprehension was perhaps fuelled by perceptions of Orbán's increasing psychological reliance on the Reformed pastor Zoltán Balog. In church circles the Protestant cleric is understood to have helped the conservative politician through a process of psychological reconstruction following the unexpected and profoundly dislocating 2002 election defeat. This recovery of inner confidence allegedly involved the fostering of a sense of specific personal vocation in the aspirant politician.

Dr Zsolt Semjén, Deputy PM, leader of KDNP, speaking in the Carmelite church, Budapest May 2016 © Magyar Kurir

Whatever the ideological origins of the formal distinction between the sister parties, the arrangement worked to Fidesz's advantage. While the interests of the two delegations were so overwhelmingly aligned as to be indistinguishable, their notional differentiation effectively allowed Fidesz to claim double the representation (and votes) on key parliamentary committees whose membership was allotted on a *per caucus* basis. In the 2010 election Fidesz-KDNP achieved a ⅔ majority, gaining 264 of the 386 seats in the national assembly. Thirty four seats were allotted to KDNP and its leader Zsolt Semjén became deputy PM. The scene was set for the enactment of a policy agenda that Orbán would later term the "*Keresztény-nemzeti eszme*", the Christian National Idea.

Conclusion

This article has set out the background against which the partnership-in-government between Fidesz and the churches, observable since 2010, emerged. When the facts are considered carefully (that is in their right chronological order and in true structural relationship) it becomes clear that Fidesz's "political Christianity" is very far from being a late or superficial development: it is a long-standing intricate thread in its ideological-institutional DNA.

Armed soldiers in the sanctuary at a St Stephen's Day mass in provincial Hungary, August 2019 © Magyar Kurir

The churches for their part do not enter the picture as naïve or purely reactive participants. Instead, we meet them as sophisticated, and purposeful political actors, aware of their bargaining power and adept at leveraging it. Across the 1990s and 2000s the Roman Catholic Church used its position adeptly to achieve significant institutional concessions from MSZP-SZDSZ in government (on church schools) and Fidesz in opposition (on KDNP's parliamentary status).

Cardinal Péter Erdő addressing a convention of the "Association of Christian Intellectuals" in the Hungarian parliament building, September 2019 © MTI

Both the Catholic and Reformed Churches extracted important subsidies for ministry costs from Fidesz in exchange for their electoral support. The Reformed Church could even be said to have influenced Fidesz's development informally through loyal individual members like Balog and Németh, both people with strong church-institutional ties who made important contributions to recalibrating Fidesz's corporate identity and public image.

Hungary's main churches did not just respond to Fidesz pragmatically and contingently once it achieved power. That is, they did not act as normal civil society bodies making routine adjustments to the turn of the electoral cycle, seeking to secure functional working relationships of broadly comparable character across successive administrations. Rather, the major churches both desired Fidesz's accession to power and (especially in 1998) worked actively to enable it. It is this pattern which needs to be remembered when assessing the relationship of Fidesz to Christianity since 2010, a subject which merits separate investigation.

1. Respectively 5 Jan, 5 Sept and 15 November 2019. For further information on the demography conference (which referenced an alleged conspiratorial project of a deliberate "Great Replacement" of Europe's indigenous Christian population by a Middle-Eastern and African Muslim one) see https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/06/viktor-orban-trumpets-far-right-procreation-anti-immigration-policy [accessed 3 September 2020].
2. "Democratic transition" is used deliberately in preference to "fall of Communism". Hungary's 1989/90 experience was atypical. Unlike neighbour states Hungarian Communism did not so much "fall" in 1989 as resign and work its notice. The reform-wing of the Communist Party (dominant from 1988) worked constructively, if sometimes awkwardly, with nascent opposition groups to end one-party rule via a series of "round-table" dialogues starting in April 1989. See A. Bozóki, *The roundtable talks of 1989: the genesis of Hungarian democracy*: *analysis and documents.* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2002).
3. https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2016/27-may/comment/opinion/the-bishops-who-could-learn-from-becket [accessed 14 August 2020]
4. Definition of "identitarian": "relating to or supporting the political interests of a particular racial, ethnic, or national group, typically one composed of Europeans or white people" (*OED*).
5. T. Cremer, "Defenders of the faith: why right-wing populists are embracing religion", *New Statesman* 30 May 2018 [accessed 26 August 2020].
6. According to the 2011 census religious adherence in Hungary breaks down as follows: Catholic (Latin rite) 37.1%, Catholic (Greek Rite) 1.8%; Reformed 11.6%; Lutheran 2.2%; Orthodox 0.1%; other Christians 1.3%; Judaism 0.1% Buddhism 0.1%; No religion 16.1%; Atheist 1.5%; Religion not stated 27.2%.
7. Fidesz's relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (*Magyarországi Evangélikus Egyház* /MEE) is more distant. Compared to the Reformed Church the MEE sits lightly to national identity, reflecting its historic diversity with "pure" Hungarians more evenly balanced with people of ethnic-German and Slovak descent.
8. In 1995 the Fidesz altered its official registered name to *Magyar Polgári Szövetség* (Hungarian Civic Alliance) and added it as a strapline. This name has not however entered common usage.
9. Paul Lendvai *Orbán: Europe's New Strongman,* p.51. (London, Hurst and Co., 2017).
10. This passivity reflected the *relatively* comfortable (albeit restricted) position the churches had been able to carve out for themselves under the semi-reformed/partially liberalised "Goulash-Communism" period (1963-88). This paradigm is sometimes termed "Kádárism" after its instigator János Kádár (Party General Secretary 1956-88). The holding of the LWF General Assembly in Budapest with government support in 1984 was symbolic of the consolidation of this *modus vivendi* between official church leaders and the state authorities.
11. Like most useful historical short hands this characterisation is subject to caveats. Árpád Göncz (1922-2015) first President of the new republic 1990-2000 was both a left-liberal (SZDSZ) and a quietly devout Catholic. The mass at his state funeral was celebrated by his friend Asztrik Várszegi OSB, Arch-abbot of Panonhalma.
12. József Antall died in office on 12 December 1993 aged 61 and was succeeded as PM by (MDF) Interior Minister Péter Boross.
13. Németh's background was Reformed, Szelenyi's Lutheran. Szelenyi broke from Fidesz following the 1993 lurch to the right. She remains a prominent critic of Orbán.
14. Lendvai, *Orbán: Europe's New Strongman,* p.50.
15. ibid., p.51.
16. Anikó Lévai 's Catholic family had not been as comprehensively de-churched as her husband's Reformed one. Lévai is understood to have maintained some (occasional) religious practice prior to her husband's embrace of a Reformed identity.

17. A residual sense of confessional loyalty often survives cross generationally in Hungarian families as a marker of cultural/group identity without metaphysical belief or ritual practice.
18. From 2007 László Tőkés sat as a MEP for Romania in the European Parliament, officially campaigning as (a Fidesz-supported) Independent. From 2014 he represented Hungary and enjoyed full membership of the Fidesz EP delegation.
19. https://hungarianspectrum.org/2015/12/29/how-did-calvinism-survive-in-hungary/ [accessed 27 August 2020].
20. SZDSZ (now defunct) had its origins principally in informal metropolitan left-wing (Social Democrat and Social-Liberal) anti-Communist samizdat publication groups during the 1970s and 1980s.
21. This very personal process of alienation arguably forms part of the background to Fidesz-KDNP's harsh legal and financial treatment of MET in government from 2011 onwards. See https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/15/world/europe/viktor-orban-hungary-ivanyi.html [accessed 27 August 2020].
22. Ironically in 2001, after a decade in which "Christian Democrat" parties predominated in government, declared religious adherence began to decline sharply (to 74.3%). By 2011 it stood at a narrow majority (54.2 %).
23. See B. Magyar, *Post-Communist Mafia State: The Case of Hungary* (Budapest, Central European University Press, 2016), p.47.
24. 1990: Fidesz 22 seats, KDNP 21; 1994: KDNP 22 seats, Fidesz 20.
25. Horn's government was a coalition between the Hungarian Socialist Party (*Magyar Szocialista Párt*/MSZP) and the (liberal) Alliance of Free Democrats (*Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége*/SZDSZ, also known as the Hungarian Liberal Party, *a Magyar Liberális Párt*).
26. MSZP was born from the reform (roughly "Democratic Socialist") wing of the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*/MSzMP) [Communists] in 1989. Conversely "orthodox" Communists formed the Hungarian Workers' Party (*Magyar Munkáspárt*/MMP) which has remained extra-parliamentary.
27. The Reformed Church in Hungary has a long a tradition of episcopal government.
28. The term is more readily appropriate for developments in neighbouring countries such as Czechoslovakia and Romania than it is for Hungary (see note 2 above).
29. The party composition was the same as given above for 1994-98.
30. https://hungarianspectrum.org/2013/12/21/the-risk-of-political-christianity-an-interview-with-tamas-fabiny-lutheran-bishop/ [accessed 27 August 2020].
31. Again, some qualifications are needed. Hungary lacks a robust organic "Christian-Socialist" tradition. Even so, between 1998 and 2010 MSZP's parliamentary group did contain a Lutheran pastor (László Donáth). In the 2002-10 MSZP led administrations another left-leaning Lutheran cleric (Pastor András Csepregi) headed the Church Affairs secretariat within the Ministry of Education and Culture (*Minisztérium Oktatási és Kulturális*/OKM).

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Christianity in Kyrgyzstan Today

by Roman Lunkin

Kyrgyz society is different from that of other Central Asian states as it has embraced both Islam and Christianity over many centuries. In the Middle Ages Christian communities were established, while Russian Orthodox missionaries began working among the Kyrgyz people in the 19th century and Protestant communities were founded during the Soviet period. Today Kyrgyzstan's openness to dialogue with Western countries, and the republic's democratic transition which proceeds with varying degrees of success, have allowed the mission of very different churches to develop.

Freedom of religious worship was officially recognised in 1991 when the Republic of Kyrgyzstan became independent after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Religious freedom was welcomed as even during the Soviet period the republic had retained a relatively high level of religiosity, despite religious schools and madrasas being closed and many mosques destroyed. By 1991 there were still 39 mosques (2,062 in 2019) under the authority of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Central Asia, as well as Baptist, Lutheran and Russian Orthodox congregations. During the Soviet period the Christian faith survived particularly among the Lutheran Russian ethnic Germans who formed tightly knit communities. Today there are many fewer of them as large numbers emigrated to Germany in the 1990s resulting in other religious groups becoming larger than the Lutherans. In 2019 there were a total of 401 non-Muslim religious groups, which included 45 Russian Orthodox parishes, 14 Lutheran congregations, some Pentecostal, Baptist, Catholic groups, 41 groups of Jehovah's Witnesses (banned by the Russian Federation in 2017) as well as one Buddhist community, one Jewish organisation, 12 Bahai communities, and some Hare Krishna groups which have not been granted registration.

In the 1990s the Law on Religion permitted a group of ten people to register a religious association whereas in 2008 it was amended and stipulated that 200 representatives were required. Then in 2019 the Law was amended again and banned the activity of any religious association which had not obtained registration. Proselytising was banned as well as the use of psychological pressure or of bribes on a potential convert. Missionaries were not permitted to visit private homes and imported religious literature was carefully checked by the authorities. Children could only attend religious meetings with parental consent, the illegal dissemination of religious literature was severely fined and students who wanted to go abroad for religious training had to notify the State Committee on Religious Affairs (SCRA) .

The head of SCRA, Zaiyrbek Ergeshov, emphasised that since 2014 state policy on religion had changed: now the government considered that it had been a

mistake in the 1990s not to take responsibility for religious matters. He explained that the government had to combine this responsibility with observing Article 7 of the Constitution on the separation of church and state, the secular nature of the state, and the equality of all faiths before the law irrespective of their size. All religions were now answerable to the government: religious educational institutions had to submit their programmes to state bodies; the SCRA coordinated the monitoring of religion and since 2015 had a representative in every district of the republic. The SCRA also ran a research centre which studied the religious situation: sociological surveys on, for example, radically-inclined young people were organised, questionnaires were issued to religious organisations, and the participation of clergy in electoral campaigns was carefully monitored. Islam and Russian Orthodoxy were recognised by the state as traditional religions which enabled the Spiritual Administration of Kyrgyz Republic Muslims and the Russian Orthodox Diocese of Bishkek (the capital of Kyrgyzstan) to work closely together. The Kyrgyz authorities also maintained contact with the Association of Churches of Evangelical Christians, while an Inter-Confessional Council with representatives from 16 religious associations encouraged at a local level interfaith dialogue and respect for all faiths.

Russian Orthodoxy was brought to this region in the 19th century by the Cossacks. An unwritten agreement was established between the Russian Orthodox clergy and the Muslim leaders that the Orthodox would not proselytise; however, it was accepted that if any Kyrgyz entered an Orthodox church of their own free will they could remain, and were a non-observing Muslim to convert to Orthodoxy this would not be seen as proselytism; the conversion of a committed Muslim to another faith, however, was condemned as apostasy. Today it is mostly the families of mixed Russian -Kyrgyz marriages who attend the ROC.

The Russian Orthodox Bishop Daniil of Bishkek and Kyrgyzstan has an important role in contemporary Kyrgyzstan: he encourages the ROC to maintain good relations with the state as well as to take part in the cultural life of the country and in Muslim-Christian dialogue. The head of the diocesan Information Department, Fr Alexei Syromyatnikov, stressed that the ROC was a missionary church which upheld morality and the spiritual life. In his words: “The best missionary is the one who holds a knife to his own throat, and not to the throat of the person he seeks to convert. Moral qualities should draw a person to convert.” His department provided the following figures: 5-7% of Kyrgyzstan’s population were Russian and 3% members of the ROC of whom 5-7% were regular churchgoers, allowing for the fact that some Russians were Protestants. The ROC had no seminary and only two Orthodox churches in Bishkek – the Cathedral of the Resurrection and the St Vladimir Cathedral. The diocese was actively involved in social work: a group at the St Vladimir Cathedral worked with alcoholics and drug addicts; the cathedral ran a medical centre supported by the German Embassy, and a soup kitchen. Members of the congregation organised fund-raising events and its wealthier members helped fund medical treatment for those who could not afford it.

Over the years the Diocese of Bishkek has kept in contact with various Cossack organisations, many members of which have Ukrainian roots. Most of today's Cossacks are from an older generation who were baptised as infants and do not participate in church life. The younger Cossacks, according to the diocese, were usually serious about their faith, though sometimes their motive for joining the Cossack community was in order to move to Russia or to get Russian grants. Relations with the Cossacks had sometimes been fraught: in 2016 during celebrations marking the 100th anniversary of a Muslim uprising, in what was then Russian Turkestan, against conscription into the Russian army fighting on the Eastern Front during WWI, some Cossack leaders issued inflammatory nationalistic proclamations, which were condemned by the diocese as dangerously radical. The diocese then tried to calm down the situation, and to avoid fights breaking out during the liturgy banned Cossacks from attending in uniform. In response the radical Cossacks filed a civil suit against the diocese which they won in 2018: the court ordered the diocese to issue an apology to the Cossacks.

The Roman Catholic Church in Kyrgyzstan is run by an Apostolic Administrator, Fr Anthony Corcoran, a Jesuit priest. He defined the work of his church as an "internal mission" focused on the Catholic faithful scattered over a wide area. In the 1990s and early 2000s 90% of the Catholics who were Russian ethnic Germans had left Kyrgyzstan for Russia or Germany (about ⅔ of Russian ethnic Germans were Lutherans and ⅓ were Catholics). Nevertheless, he said, there were still Catholic communities in Bishkek (with about 100 active parishioners) and in a number of other cities and small settlements. The priests who worked in these scattered congregations included Russian ethnic Germans, Poles and Slovaks. Fr Corcoran added that in addition to this "internal mission" he supported the distribution of humanitarian aid through the Catholic organisation "Caritas" and encouraged engagement in the intellectual life of the republic. He did not think his church should preach to the Muslim population: "We are not abrogating Christian mission, which has to be a genuine dialogue and not a monologue. There must be respect for others and for their experience, otherwise the work of mission can lead to negative results. Our aim is to serve the common good." Official Kyrgyz relations with the Roman Catholic Church, he continued, were positive: the SCRA regularly invited him to speak alongside other religious leaders within the framework of an educational programme, and his relations with other churches, both Russian Orthodox and Protestant, were friendly.

Protestantism in the republic is represented not just by Lutherans, but also by Baptists, Evangelical Christians and Pentecostals. According to Alexander Shumilin, head of the Association of Evangelical Christian Churches in Kyrgyzstan, today there are about 300 Protestant churches in the republic. The first Evangelical Christian community, he said, was established at about the same time as the Orthodox in the 1880s while the Baptist Church had been active since 1907. Shumilin argued that his church was open to all, and to the cultural heritage of the Kyrgyz people; about 40% of his church members were

Kyrgyz nationals. At the same time, he continued, Protestants rooted out idol worship, that is anything that did not conform to what was written in the bible, while making allowances for the national culture.

Unlike the Russian Orthodox-Muslim modus vivendi some Protestant groups have not achieved a similar amicable relationship. A prominent Pentecostal church called the Church of Jesus Christ which is headed by Pastor Vasily Kuzin became known for its active mission to Kyrgyz nationals and for its outspoken political position: Pastor Kuzin criticised Kyrgyzstan's President, supported the democratisation of the country, and periodically publicised cases of repression by the authorities. Some Evangelical Christian leaders have actively organised missions among Kyrgyz nationals, while trying at the same time to conceal this work, and now have a few Kyrgyz pastors among their ranks. According to the Russian Orthodox, they annoyed the Muslims by not being open about their missionary intentions and in the 1990s "actively bribed" groups of Kyrgyz with supplies of humanitarian aid. It is a serious matter for a Kyrgyz to convert to Christianity: often their family disowns them, they are not promoted at work and are effectively removed from the clan system. Some converts find themselves in a vacuum and leave the republic, while those who are converted while working in Russia keep their conversion secret when they return home.

Until now Lutheranism, Catholicism and Orthodoxy have seen their future as based on their appeal to the ethnic groups who practise these confessions – in the case of Kyrgyzstan, that is Russian ethnic Germans, Poles, Ukrainians and Russians – unlike some Protestants of an extreme evangelical persuasion who have aimed at a broad national mission among the local population and in the 1990s converted many Kyrgyz nationals. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church is beginning to emerge gradually from its ethnic boundaries and is becoming multinational, attracting the local population. The social and cultural mission of the ROC seems to be following the Catholic example and finding a response among the Kyrgyz people.

Despite the fears of Muslim leaders and the conflicts which have arisen in some areas, the growth of Christianity since the end of the Soviet period has not undermined Kyrgyz national culture or Islam. The majority of Kyrgyz have remained Muslim. There has nonetheless been a change in Kyrgyzstan's cultural-religious landscape – a social stratum has emerged which consciously embraces the Christian faith and is oriented towards European values. Although both Europe and Russia see Kyrgyzstan as homogenous without cultural variation, this republic has in fact emerged as one of the Central Asian republics which is the most open to European culture, and presents an alternative to the radicalisation of young people within certain political movements.

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Keston Center Report

2019-2020 highlights

Keston's Council of Management were delighted that Professor Kathy Hillman, Director of the Keston Center for Religion, Politics and Society at Baylor University, was able to join them at their virtual July meeting. She presented the following report focusing on the highlights of the past academic year.

Kathy Hillman

The Keston Center for Religion, Politics, and Society joins with the Keston Institute to achieve its mission and is committed to the preservation and utilisation of the library and archive held in the Michael Bourdeaux Research Center. The Keston Center at Baylor University seeks to promote research, teaching, and understanding of religion and politics in Communist, post-Communist, and other totalitarian societies.

A highlight of the 2019-2020 academic year was the publication of *Voices of the Voiceless: Religion, Communism, and the Keston Archive* and our commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism, later renamed Keston College.

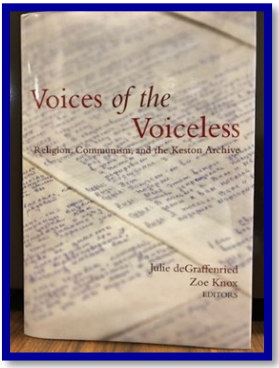
Unfortunately, the worldwide coronavirus pandemic forced the cancellation of Keston Council Chair Xenia Dennen's visit, the Keston Advisory Board meeting, and the Keston Spring Lecture. Baylor University's President, Linda Livingstone, extended Spring Break to prepare for two weeks of online instruction. However, Waco Mayor Kyle Deaver issued a shelter-in-place order effective 11:59 pm on Monday, 23 March through Tuesday, 7 April that resulted in the closure of Baylor University and thus the Libraries and the Keston Center. Eventually, online classes and the shut-down extended through to the end of the academic year on 31 May and negatively impacted Keston's plans and resulted in most staff teleworking into June.

Partners, co-sponsors, and donors

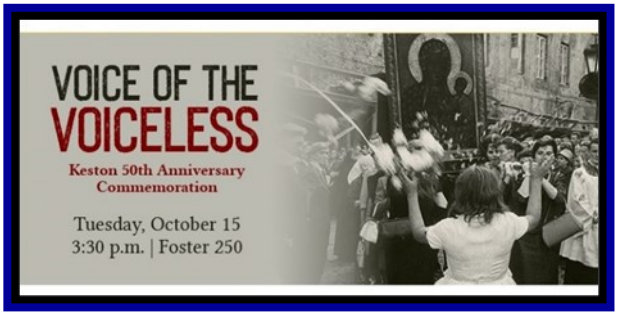
Generous partners and co-sponsors from inside and outside the University supplement the budget by covering expenditures that would not be otherwise possible. In addition to helping fund events,

publications, and activities, this year donations augmented a visiting scholar's resources to enable rental of an on-campus apartment rather than more distant off-campus housing. The Center also received gift materials about Lutherans in Russia from the Revd Leif Camp and several items from Dr Wallace Daniel.

Keston 50th Anniversary: lecture, book launch, and reception



On 15 October, faculty, students, supporters, and special guests gathered to honour the 50th Anniversary of Keston and to launch the book *Voices of the Voiceless: Religion, Communism, and the Keston Archive* edited by Julie deGraffenried and Zoe Knox (Baylor University Press, 2019). For the "Voice of the Voiceless" event, Keston founder Canon Michael Bourdeaux's remarks were streamed live from Iffley in the UK. Creative, engaging, high-energy speed panel presentations of 3-4 minutes introduced nine items from the Keston Archive (*samizdat,* photograph, book, poster, letter, document, or clipping) while an image was displayed on a large screen. A book signing and English-themed tea completed the occasion.



Topics and speed panelists included:

- *Trial Transcript of Aida Skripnikova, Russian Unregistered Baptist*: Julie deGraffenried, History
- *Woman & Russia: First Feminist Samizdat Introduced by Women in Eastern Europe Group*: Ivy Hamerly, International Studies
- *Anti-Islam Propaganda Poster*: Charley Ramsey, Truett Seminary and Religion
- *Yosyp and Olena Terelya: The Family of Ukrainian Dissidents vs the Soviet State*: Sergiy Kudelia, Political Science
- *Science over Folk Medicine and Religion Propaganda Poster*: Adrienne Harris, Modern Languages and Cultures
- *Fr Josef Kordík, Czech Charter 77 Signatory and Priest*: Susan Chandler, Director, Czech Heritage Museum, Temple
- *Pope John Paul II and his 1983 Visit to Poland*: Eva Hruska, Modern Languages and Cultures
- *Dana Němcová, Czech Catholic Psychologist and Dissident*: Michael Long, Modern Languages and Cultures

- *Correspondence: Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher & the Revd Canon Michael Bourdeaux*: Luke Sayers, PhD Candidate, English

On what proved to be a stormy day, overall attendance numbered about 90. The academic-focused event attracted several from outside the University, including some from the area's Czech community.

Keston 50th Anniversary exhibition

Graduate assistant Victoria Royal researched and mounted an exhibition in the Michael Bourdeaux Research Center

honouring the 50th Anniversary. Libraries Exhibitions Curator Erik Swanson and the Baylor Libraries Board of Advisors offered assistance and advice. The display naturally divided into three sections: Michael Bourdeaux and the Founding of Keston, Gathering and Disseminating Information, and Keston and the Future.

***Lecture by Barbara Martin, a visiting scholar: "Writing History in the Soviet Underground: Alexander Solzhenitsyn's* Gulag Archipelago"**

While researching in the Keston archives, Dr Barbara Martin offered a lecture sponsored by the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures and promoted by Keston. The engaging scholarly presentation attracted a number of students studying under Dr Adrienne Harris and her colleagues.

Spring lecture/panel: "The Once and Future Russia: Religion, Politics, and Society"

The Keston Center scheduled the annual spring lecture-panel "The Once and Future Russia: Religion, Politics, and Society" for 19 March in the Armstrong Browning Library.

Refreshments in the Garden of Contentment were to follow the conversation with five experts on Russia. The panelists were prepared to review Russia's past and examine the country's present with an eye to the future with each contributing a different and valuable point of view.

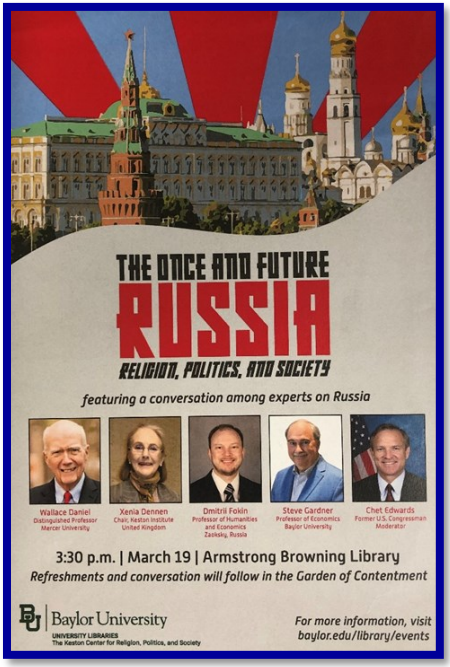
Former United States Congressman Chet Edwards was to serve as moderator and planned to introduce the following panelists:

- Mercer University distinguished professor and Soviet scholar Dr Wallace Daniel has written extensively on church-state relations in Russia as well as on the country's economic, social, and religious history.

• Keston Council's Chair Xenia Dennen holds degrees in Russian from Oxford and Russian politics from the London School of Economics. She frequently travels to Russia as part of Keston's research team preparing the *Encyclopaedia of Religious Life in Russia Today*.

• Fulbright Visiting Scholar Dr Dmitrii Fokin serves as a history professor and department head at Zaoksky Christian Institute of Humanities and Economics in Russia with specific research interests in the history of religious movements in the former Soviet Union, particularly Protestant subculture.

• Economics professor Dr Steve Gardner, who directs Baylor's McBride Center for International Business, holds degrees in economics and Russian Studies and has offered business education programmes in Russia, most recently for students in St Petersburg.



Co-sponsors of both the Fall and Spring Keston Lectures included the departments of English, History, Modern Languages and Cultures, Political Science, and Religion along with the Honors College, International Studies, the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, and the McBride Center for International Business. Additionally, Dr David G. Ondrich generously helped with the 50th Anniversary commemoration.

Keston Director Kathy Hillman and her husband John and Library Board of Advisors member Nancy James Jackson and her husband John had planned to host dinners in their homes honouring panelists and special Keston guests. Unfortunately, the world health crisis created by the coronavirus caused cancellation of the lecture and all related activities.

Keston Advisory Board meeting and visit by Keston Council Chair Xenia Dennen

The pandemic also triggered the indefinite postponement of the Keston Advisory Board meeting set for 20 March in conjunction with the visit by Keston Institute's Chair Xenia Dennen. A majority of members planned to attend. On the agenda were teaching fellows Adrienne Harris and Charley Ramsey, summer interns Luke Sayers and Hannah Camille Watson, graduate assistant Victoria Royal, undergraduate student assistant Julia Kovarovic, and Fulbright Scholar Dmitrii Fokin. Julie deGraffenried was to speak

about her book highlighting the Keston archive. An interactive experience with Soviet Union Seventh-Day Adventist materials in both Russian and English was planned.

Roland Smith, Keston's Vice-Chairman, addresses those who attended the plaque unveiling ceremony

Keston's Council of Management and plaque unveiling

As a member of Keston Institute's Council of Management, Director Kathy Hillman attended the 18 June, 2019, meeting in Iffley near Oxford at the home of Michael Bourdeaux. During the year, she read materials and participated in the Council's work through e-mail. On 20 June, she joined the group for the unveiling of the plaque marking the location of Keston College from 1972-1992 where she met many who served and supported Keston, as well as others whom Keston aided, and still more who were touched in a myriad of ways by Keston.

Kathy Hillman with former Keston archivist Malcolm Walker

Various embassies sent representatives to the event, and several individuals transmitted messages, including some from Russia. One letter read in part, "In the bitter years of our struggle against Communist oppression, you raised your voice in our defence, your work lightened our burden and your true compassion shaped our fates." Bromley Deputy Mayor Kira Gabbert spoke passionately about how the College's work affected her. The

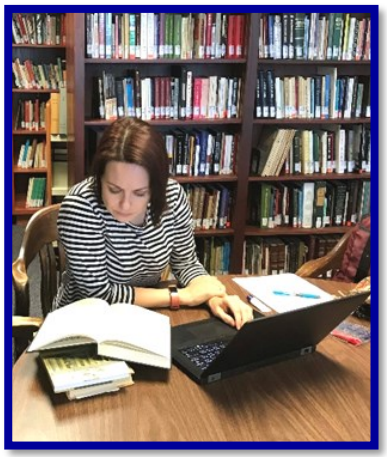
June 2019 meeting of Keston's Council of Management

founder Canon Michael Bourdeaux said in part before he unveiled the plaque, "There is now a permanent memorial to an organisation which, in its dedicated way, contributed 'One word of truth' (to quote Solzhenitsyn) to the triumph of freedom and democracy over the oppression by Communist atheism in its final two decades."

Research activities and visiting scholars

Keston received more than 350 reference requests with almost 70% virtual, and staff participated in over 100 consultations, approximately 60% of those virtually. Staff continued to provide research support for Michael Bourdeaux related to the publication of *One Word of Truth: The Cold War Memoir of Michael Bourdeaux and Keston College*. In addition to the individuals who attended presentations sponsored or co-sponsored by Keston or visited the Center, seven researchers and a Fulbright Scholar used the collection extensively. About 170 students, staff, and faculty physically entered the archives, and the Center has become a destination during library faculty interviews. Additionally, the Director reached an additional 150 students through participation in panels, orientations, and presentations involving Baylor's Special Libraries.

Teaching Fellow Charley Ramsey



Teaching Fellow Adrienne Harris

Jim and Lou James Summer Teaching Fellows: Adrienne Harris and Charles Ramsey

For the summer of 2019, two professors and one PhD candidate teacher of record applied for Keston's Summer Teaching Fellowships. A selection committee composed of the Director along with Keston Advisory Board members Steve Gardner and Julie deGraffenried chose two professors to be supported by the Jim and Lou James Endowed Fund provided by Nancy James Jackson: Adrienne Harris, Associate Professor of Russian in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures, and Charles Ramsey, Baptist Student Ministries Director and Part-time Lecturer in the Religion Department. Harris gathered visual materials for two courses taught in Spring and Fall 2020: Conflict and War in 20th Century Russian Literature

(Russian 4302) and Rus, Russia, and National Identity in Russian Literature before 1900 (Russian 4301). Ramsey prepared lessons for World Religions (Religion 3345 cross listed as Asian Studies 3345) and Religion and World Views (Truett Seminary 7881). In his application, he stated that "There is a gap in my knowledge pertaining to the beliefs and practice of religion in Central Asia, the borderlands of the former Soviet Union, and access to the Keston collection would be helpful to my work."

Professors Harris and Ramsey brought their classes to the Center, and Julie deGraffenried and Ivy Hamerly, 2016 Teaching Fellows, continue to engage their students with Keston.

Summer interns: Luke Sayers and Hannah Camille Watson

For the second time, the Keston Center offered summer internships. Hannah Camille Watson, whose mother and brother had previously worked in Keston, held the Nancy Newman Logan Internship. A heritage Russian speaker and sophomore University Scholar and Russian minor, Camille focused on Soviet Union Registered Baptists and Anna Chertkova. English PhD Candidate Luke Sayers received the Dunlap Internship. Luke previously taught English in Russia. He researched and prepared the Women's Collection entry for Zoya Krakhmalnikova and worked on the Michael Bourdeaux Papers. While sorting materials, he discovered correspondence between Canon Bourdeaux and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. After additional research, he featured the items as part of the 50th Anniversary speed panel. As teacher of record, Luke

Interns Luke Sayers & Camille Watson

brought his English 1310 Writing and Academic Inquiry class to the Center for an overview and hands-on experience.

Scholars and research topics

Fulbright Visiting Scholar

- Protestant culture in the Soviet Union (Dmitrii Fokin).

Dmitrii Fokin

Other Scholars and Student Researchers

- Russian 4301 and Russian 4302 (Adrienne Harris, Baylor University)
- Religion 3345 (Charley Ramsey, Baylor)
- Armenia (Artyom Tonoyan, University of Minnesota)
- National and Religious Revival in the Soviet Union (Barbara Martin, University of Basel, Switzerland)

Barbara Martin

- The Catholic Church in Lithuania and Ukraine (Christopher Zugger, Priest, Byzantine Catholic Church, Archdiocese of Santa Fe)

Christopher Zugger

- Registered Baptists (Alexis Mrachek, Georgetown University)
- Fr Aleksandr Men' and Fr Gleb Yakunin (Wallace Daniel, Mercer University)

Alexis Mrachek

- Keston News Service and Religion in Communist Dominated Areas for Julie deGraffenried's and Philip Jenkins' classes (Benjamin Leavitt, Baylor PhD candidate)

Wallace Daniel

- Hungary for Julie deGraffenried's class (Patrick Leech, Baylor PhD candidate)

Artyom Tonoyan

- Global Christianity: Vietnam for Philip Jenkins' class (Katherine Goodwin, Baylor PhD candidate)
- Two other graduate students selected books not available in other campus libraries for their research on liberalism and totalitarianism, and a senior English major wrote about the posters.

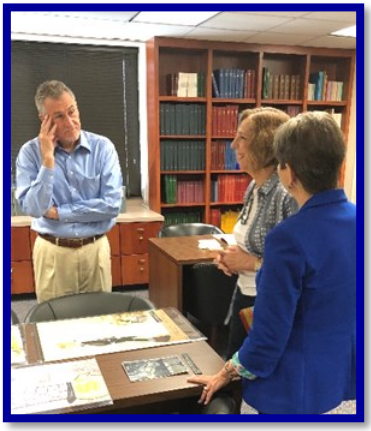
Other visitors

In early August, new Provost Nancy Brickhouse toured the facility and reviewed materials selected especially for the occasion. December brought three Baylor Dean of University Libraries candidates to Waco for interviews and tours of all of Baylor's libraries and collections, including the Keston Center. Director Kathy Hillman sat on the search committee, and ultimately, the position was offered to Jeffry Archer who became Dean on 1 June, 2020.

The Libraries Board of Advisors meets in Keston

Board of Advisors review potential exhibition content

Two groups of the Baylor Libraries Board of Advisors participated in a tour, introduction to Keston, and a hands-on experience that allowed them to help recommend specific items and information for the 50th Anniversary exhibition.



Interim Dean John Wilson, Provost Nancy Brickhouse with Keston Director Kathy Hillman

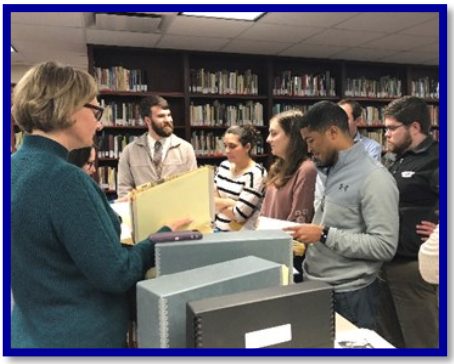
The Center also hosted scholars, individual students, classes, candidates for Baylor faculty positions, library colleagues, and other researchers. Kathy Hillman's University 1000 cohort, and five history, English, and political science classes met in the Michael Bourdeaux Research Center.

Processing, preservation, and access

In January of 2019, Baylor opened worldwide access to the Keston Digital Archive. However, 282 items remain closed due to copyright. In order to move Keston's photographs from Baylor's previous ContentDM platform to Quartex, Larisa Seago added metadata to 724 folders containing the previously digitised images, and Kathy Hillman wrote new landing page copy. Additionally, Keston shared approximately 1,481 other images and electronic files with eight researchers and two periodical editors. Topics included KGB records, Baptist sheet music, anti-religious posters, and copies of various articles. In some cases, these items will have metadata added so that they can be made available in the Keston Digital Archive. Processing continued in the Center with ongoing projects, and the goal of reducing

the quantity of unprocessed boxes. During the year, the number declined from 36 to 26. All materials reside in library space for easy access and climate-controlled housing.

The Libraries purchased a new Integrated Library System (ILS) in 2018-2019. Preparation for implementation resulted in a moratorium on most purchasing and processing that extended until March 2020. Nevertheless, Janice Losak pre-



Larisa Seago (left) shows students archive material

pared 355 issues from 85 titles to be bound. Although only nine periodical titles were cataloged, 74 bound volumes were added to the collection, and 169 volumes were bound. Some 209 books were placed in Ex Libris, and eight more were sent to be cataloged.

Finding aids opened in the Baylor Archival Repositories Database (BARD) include Soviet Union Registered Baptists Subject Files, Soviet Union and Russia Jehovah's Witnesses Subject Files, and the Michael Bourdeaux Papers. Currently, BARD contains 24 finding aids covering 15 countries. A listing and link to Keston materials continues to be active as part of the Prague Spring Archive portal. Keston staff and students added entries for Anna Vasilievna Chertkova, Jane Ellis, Zoya Krakhmalnikova, and Lydia Vins to the Women's Collections at Baylor website.

Staff

Keston retained Director Kathy Hillman and Library Information Specialists Larisa Seago and Janice Losak on staff. In addition to normal training and seminars, Texas Collection processing archivist Paul Fisher consulted on BARD. Tanya Clark, editorial assistant for Baylor's *Journal of Church and State,* continued processing Russian materials part-time.

For the sixth year, the Center and Museum Studies partnered to employ a graduate assistant, and Victoria Royal spent her second year with Keston. This rising museum professional received the Calvin and Sylvia Smith Award for Best Thesis whose work is "an innovative blending of her interest in museum ethics with issues in collections management." Victoria

Kathy Hillman, Victoria Royal, Janice Losak

recently began a position as Education Technician at National Parks of Boston. She earlier earned her undergraduate degree from Mansfield University where she majored in history and political science and studied in Bulgaria. She created the Keston 50th Anniversary exhibition, Keston's blog, women's collections entries, and worked extensively on the Bulgaria finding aid.

Sophomore Julia Kovarovic joined the Keston team in August as a student assistant. The Russian and International Relations major from Bryant, Arkansas, participates in Baylor's Interdisciplinary Core. She anticipated spending Fall 2020 studying at Voronezh State University in Central Russia but has temporarily put those plans on hold, so she will return to Keston.

Goals for 2020-2021 and beyond

Future goals focus on overcoming challenges created by the pandemic; strengthening partnerships; providing resources; hosting researchers; presenting lectures; exploring funding sources; and extending Keston's reach. A long-term goal is obtaining additional space for collections and staff.

Specific details include:

- Working with Baylor digitisation and processing staff to expand digitisation and metadata
- Reducing the number of Keston unprocessed boxes from 26 to 16
- Planning a Spring 2021 lecture, panel or another event given uncertainty in Fall 2020
- Conducting a meeting of the Keston Advisory Board
- Participating in a meeting of the Keston Institute's Council of Management in Oxford
- Partnering with the Keston Council to increase the number of Keston Scholars
- Adding at least three inventories in BARD and three entries to Women's Collections
- Extending campus outreach with Teaching Fellows, Summer Interns, class presentations, etc.
- Preparing funding proposals for audiovisual digitisation and conducting oral history interviews with individuals involved in the early years of Keston.

Janice Losak, Dianne Reyes, June Campbell, Tanya Clark, Larisa Seago, Kathy Hillman, Camille Watson

Keston Archive

Jeffrey Hardy is an Associate Professor in the Department of History at Brigham Young University in the USA who received a scholarship from Keston Institute to work in the archive at Baylor University last year. In the following article he explains the nature of his research and his plan to publish a book.

Finding God in the Gulag

by Jeffrey S. Hardy

In February 2019 I spent two weeks conducting research at the Keston Center archive and library for my current book project on religion in the Soviet Gulag. This was made possible by a generous scholarship from the Keston Institute and was facilitated by the capable archivists and staff at Baylor University, in particular Kathy Hillman (and her kind husband, John), Larisa Seago, and Joy Watson.

As a bit of background, I am a historian by profession. I come to the study of religion in the Soviet Gulag as a specialist of the Gulag – my first book examined how the infamous penal system was transformed under Nikita Khrushchev – not as a scholar of religion. I also only completed high school in 1996, which means that I have very few first-hand memories of the Soviet Union. Thus, although I identify as a man of faith who teaches at a religiously backed institution (Brigham Young University), I was previously ignorant of and therefore surprised at how much effort had been made by Michael Bourdeaux and others to collect and analyse the voluminous materials now held at the Keston Center. I was also fascinated to learn of the tenacious advocacy efforts made by Keston, both before the collapse of the Soviet Union and after. I was quite moved, in other words, by how the nexus of religion and scholarship resulted in a principled opposition rooted both in faith and in the language of human rights against Soviet and post-Soviet crimes against freedom of conscience.

For my work, the Keston Center contained an unsurpassed wealth of information. Newspaper clippings in several different languages, interview transcripts, personal correspondence with prisoners and former prisoners, petitions made by and on behalf of religious inmates, and various samizdat (underground press) publications about faith and imprisonment kept me busily typing, as did the vast collection of published books and memoirs. I was riveted to learn about the experiences of Alexander Ogorodnikov, Gleb Yakunin, Dmitri Dudko, Zoya Krakhmalnikova, Mikhail Khorev, Irina Ratushinskaya, Georgi Vins, and so many others. Although I had known about such people before this trip in a

very general sense, it was thrilling to begin to understand their beliefs and actions on a very personal basis.

One of the things that I gained a better appreciation for in the Keston Center was the amount of anti-religious pressure placed on religious believers. Having already completed research on Solovki in the 1920s, I of course knew of anti-religious propaganda, prohibitions against the celebration of Christian holidays, the confiscation of bibles and other literature, and other efforts to try to persuade inmates to abandon their beliefs. What I didn't expect to find for the late Soviet era were repeated cases of religious inmates being placed for days at a time in the penalty isolator, suffering abuse and humiliation from guards and camp administrators. I was also shocked by instances of the KGB placing religious believers in psychiatric hospitals and coercing a few of them to confess to crimes and renounce their faith on live Soviet television. Although the Soviet Gulag in the 1970s and 1980s was not as deadly a place as its Stalinist predecessor, it was clearly a perilous place for those who continued to profess faith in Jesus Christ. To many of you reading this newsletter such stories are nothing new, but to me they were a revelation.

In part to counter this abuse, religious believers in these last decades of the Soviet Union were tolerant and respectful of one another, regardless of confessional divisions. I have certainly encountered this sense of shared suffering already, but it seemed to be particularly pronounced in this era. As Irina Ratushinskaya related in her memoir, "What a mixed bunch we are: a Catholic, a Pentecostal, several Orthodox, an unbeliever … later we were to be joined by a Baptist. Yet we were always deeply respectful of one another's convictions. And God did not turn His face away from our small patch of Mordovian soil." Pentecostal prisoner Anatoli Vlasov likewise noted that in his tent with a Baptist, an Adventist, a Jehovah's Witness, and an Orthodox believer, "there was no hostility – only love. Nobody tried to 're-educate' the other, and everyone prayed according to his beliefs."

One of the most fascinating sources that I spent time with in the samizdat collection was the *Bulletin of the Council of Relatives of Evangelical Christian-Baptist Prisoners*. Issue after issue of this newsletter reproduced letters from Baptist inmates, chronicled the abuses they endured, and made strident appeals to the Soviet authorities on their behalf. It seems clear that this *Bulletin* played a key role in maintaining the bonds of faith among believers on both sides of the barbed wire. As one inmate's letter that was copied in issue no.25 of the *Bulletin* declared, "You are no doubt worried about me, but don't worry, because He in whose hands our lives are, He knows what each of us needs." She then shared an inspirational poem that admonished her fellow believers to "Know that with you along the path goes He, whom the whole world loves. Believe, He will lead you to your goal. Believe and you will be happy." The ability to find spiritual comfort and happiness in the Gulag was certainly an outstanding feature of so many imprisoned Christians.

Since my trip to the Keston Center I have presented my research on the Brezhnev

era at two venues: the annual convention of the Association of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, held in San Francisco in November 2019, and the Russian History Desert Workshop, held in Riverside in February 2020. Then in March 2020 I presented a portion of my research on the Khrushchev era at the European Social Science History Conference in Leiden, Netherlands. Finally, in August 2020 I presented material on the Gorbachev era at the World Congress of the International Council for Central and East European Studies in Montreal, Canada.

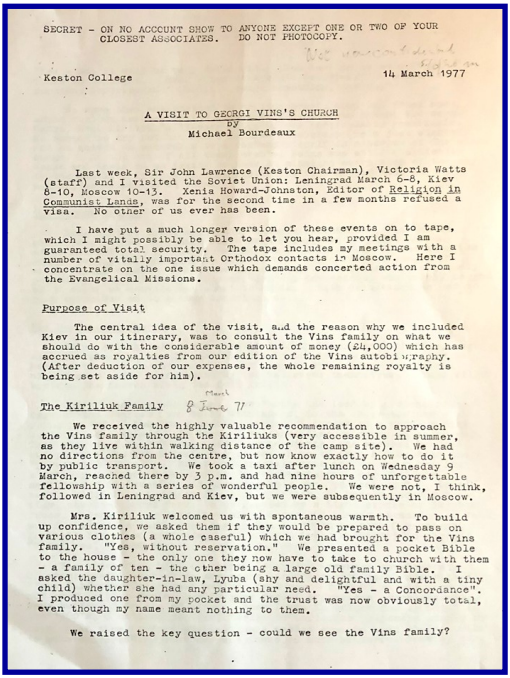
The end product of this research will be a book tentatively titled *Finding God in the Gulag: A Religious History of the Soviet Gulag, 1917-1991*. It will be organised chronologically into nine chapters, with three chapters each for the early Soviet period up to 1929, the Stalin era, and the post-Stalin era. The research materials accumulated at the Keston Center will provide a substantial portion of my evidence for the last three chapters. In other words, my forthcoming book would not be possible without the fruitful two weeks I spent at the Keston Center.

Top Secret Document

While Michael Bourdeaux, Keston's President, was recently sorting out his personal archive with a view to sending some of this material to the Keston Archive, he discovered a report he had written on 14th March 1977 about his visit with Keston's first chairman Sir John Lawrence to the family of the imprisoned Baptist pastor, Georgi Vins. The following is a summary of this document which Michael marked "Secret – on no account show to anyone except one or two of your closest associates. Do not photocopy."

Michael Bourdeaux, John Lawrence and Keston staff member Victoria Watts left for Leningrad on 6th March 1977 and two days later on 8th March travelled on to Kiev – their main goal as it was here they planned to meet the family of the imprisoned Baptist pastor, Georgi Vins. Xenia Dennen, then editor of Keston's journal *Religion in Communist Lands*, was refused a visa by the Soviet authorities for the second time and so could not join the party. In 1976 Keston had translated and published the autobiography of Pastor Vins and in so doing had collected the money from the royalties: "The central idea of the visit, and the reason why we included Kiev in our itinerary was to consult the Vins family on what we should do with the considerable amount of money (£4000) which had accrued as royalties from our edition of the Vins autobiography."

Michael, John and Victoria had been told to contact another Baptist family called the Kiriliuks who would be willing to take them to see Pastor Vins's wife and children. After lunch on 9th March,



SECRET - ON NO ACCOUNT SHOW TO ANYONE EXCEPT ONE OR TWO OF YOUR CLOSEST ASSOCIATES. DO NOT PHOTOCOPY.

Keston College 14 March 1977

A VISIT TO GEORGI VINS'S CHURCH
by
Michael Bourdeaux

Last week, Sir John Lawrence (Keston Chairman), Victoria Watts (staff) and I visited the Soviet Union: Leningrad March 6-8, Kiev 8-10, Moscow 10-13. Xenia Howard-Johnston, Editor of Religion in Communist Lands, was for the second time in a few months refused a visa. No other of us ever has been.

I have put a much longer version of these events on to tape, which I might possibly be able to let you hear, provided I am guaranteed total security. The tape includes my meetings with a number of vitally important Orthodox contacts in Moscow. Here I concentrate on the one issue which demands concerted action from the Evangelical Missions.

Purpose of Visit

The central idea of the visit, and the reason why we included Kiev in our itinerary, was to consult the Vins family on what we should do with the considerable amount of money (£4,000) which has accrued as royalties from our edition of the Vins autobiography. (After deduction of our expenses, the whole remaining royalty is being set aside for him).

The Kiriliuk Family 8 June 77

We received the highly valuable recommendation to approach the Vins family through the Kiriliuks (very accessible in summer, as they live within walking distance of the camp site). We had no directions from the centre, but now know exactly how to do it by public transport. We took a taxi after lunch on Wednesday 9 March, reached there by 3 p.m. and had nine hours of unforgettable fellowship with a series of wonderful people. We were not, I think, followed in Leningrad and Kiev, but we were subsequently in Moscow.

Mrs. Kiriliuk welcomed us with spontaneous warmth. To build up confidence, we asked them if they would be prepared to pass on various clothes (a whole caseful) which we had brought for the Vins family. "Yes, without reservation." We presented a pocket Bible to the house - the only one they now have to take to church with them - a family of ten - the other being a large old family Bible. I asked the daughter-in-law, Lyuba (shy and delightful and with a tiny child) whether she had any particular need. "Yes - a Concordance". I produced one from my pocket and the trust was now obviously total, even though my name meant nothing to them.

We raised the key question - could we see the Vins family?

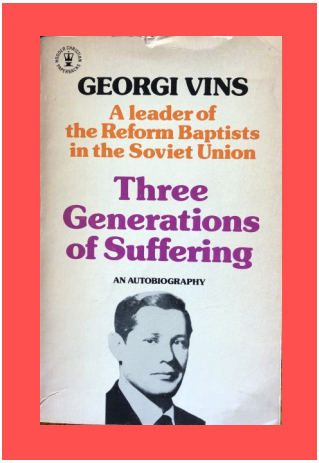
First page of Michael Bourdeaux's report

confident that they were not being followed, they took a taxi from the centre of Kiev to the Kiriliuks' home and arrived at 3pm. "Mrs Kiriliuk welcomed us with spontaneous warmth." Eventually they asked whether they could see the Vins family: "Yes – but it will be very difficult. You must on no account go there in daylight. Even after dark would be tricky, as there is constant observation. We'll arrange something, though."

The next day the Kiriliuks' son Victor, a dental technician, guided them on what was a long walk along a muddy path beside a railway line to the unregistered Baptist church which the Vins family attended. There choir practice had begun: "We asked them to carry on as normal. They were obviously too excited to concentrate, and several bubbled out phrases about how wonderful it was of us to come and be with the 'persecuted church'. Order was properly restored by our receiving a totally-unexpected summons to 'move downstairs – our children are meeting for instruction and they urgently want to meet you.' Immediately underneath the dais there is a cellar; we were ushered into a tiny, cement-floored room, to be greeted by a tight circle of 32 young faces, urgent at the same time with wonder and hungry attention. John and I conveyed a short greeting in Russian from British Christians. They all leaped to their feet and shouted (yes, shouted!) in chorus: 'Thank you! Send back our greetings, too.'

The teacher, a girl of 30, standing, resumed the lesson – 40 minutes of 'lecture' to teenagers listening with total absorption. 'Your Christian faith must radiate from you – it must stream from you not only in your words, but in your facial expression, your gestures, your habits, your way of life. When I was in prison for my faith in the 1960s I noticed you could tell the Christian prisoners simply by looking at them. They wouldn't have needed even to open their mouths to make converts.' Such was the theme of this wonderful lesson, now, I suppose, lost for all time, as no one was taping it."

After describing church life back in England and giving them examples of other persecuted churches in the world, Michael, John and Victoria had to suddenly rush away back to the Kiriliuks "with people literally clinging to us and trying to stop us going." It was already late in the evening.



Pastor Vins's autobiography translated & published by Keston

"Back at the Kiriliuks we were taken straight into a bedroom – the three of us alone with Nadezhda Ivanovna, Georgi's wife [...] Sadly, the atmosphere of my story must now change. We were still in the presence of the greatness of faith, but a faith pushed to the ultimate in terms of physical and mental suffering. Nadezhda is in desperate need."

She knew nothing about Keston College, Michael reports, nor about the books it had published including her husband's autobiography. Lidia, Georgi's mother, and his four eldest children had visited him in prison from 11th-13th February and found him very weak but somehow coping: "The children were undressed literally to nakedness to be inspected for 'contraband'. They could take nothing in with them at all. Sadly, Nadezhda told us there was no chance of getting to him any of the clothes we had brought, nor the vitamin tablets. Still, we explained how to use the latter, leaving one pack for Georgi to build him up quickly in the event of his being released, and the other for any other prisoner to whom they could be of use."

Because Nadezhda's mail was carefully controlled she had received no indication of the publicity about her family in the West except for the false news, engineered by the KGB, that her husband had been released: "'Write, write, write,' she begged us."

"We pressed Nadezhda on why she had not gone to see Georgi last month. Now came the most disturbing fresh news – she herself is ill, perhaps seriously. She was obviously embarrassed to give us details – we should have pressed harder and I regret not having done so. But she urgently needs surgery and will on no account go to a Soviet doctor. [...] Clearly, then, all those receiving this letter must take immediate council together [...]. My staff's suggestion is to send a doctor (possibly an oncologist?) to Nadezhda

Michael presents Georgi Vins, now in the West, with a copy of "Three Generations of Suffering"

urgently on a tourist visa through Thomson Holidays."

Would she, her husband and family be willing to emigrate? Michael reports that she and Georgi had discussed the matter but that he was "afraid" he would not be able to continue his "religious task". This then led to a discussion about the royalties: "Finally, we discussed the question of the fund. We had indeed brought it up earlier. Nadezhda had been clearly embarrassed at any idea of accepting 'charity'. But we came back to it and explained that this was money Georgi himself had earned. We had simply translated his book – and it had sold far better than anything else we had ever produced." Then Nadezhda said that she had a feeling that they would be expelled like Solzhenitsyn had been in 1974 and asked whether they might be able to live on the money collected by Keston. "'What a wonderful idea! you could live on this money for six months at least – much longer, if someone gives you a free house. You could be your own masters, not having to go cap in hand to anyone, taking a rest and deciding slowly exactly what you will do with your lives and where you will live.' For the only time in the meeting I saw Nadezhda's face lift. She seemed to receive a real psychological boost from this – the meeting ended on a note of hope, soon to be underlined with a wonderful few moments of prayer, together with the Kiriliuks, before Petya [the Kiriliuk's 13-year-old son] took us back."

Michael ends his report stressing that the Vins family had not decided to emigrate and that no one should agitate for this. All the books written in the West about the Russian Baptists should be taken to the Vins family, while a register of other reliable addresses in Kiev should be built up so as not to overburden the Kiriliuks, and to enable additional routes for encouraging letters to reach the Vins family. "They feel very isolated and this shows in all sorts of ways. I would like to see many more non-Evangelicals (like us!) declaring open fellowship for these people. The children need this especially. A tactful broadening of their horizons (by people more qualified than I) would, I am sure, be a task with which we should all be concerned."

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