

Keston Newsletter

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Michael Bourdeaux in Vilnius in 2007, when he returned the “The Memorandum of 17,054 signatures” (held in his left hand) to the Lithuanian Catholic Church

Keston College and the *Chronicle* of the Lithuanian Catholic Church

by Michael Bourdeaux

From the day that Keston College received the first issue of the clandestine *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* in late 1972 it was obvious that here was a document of an entirely different order from the general run of *samizdat* which we had been receiving. Only the unregistered Russian Baptists had attempted any systematic documentation of the situation of their church, and this was spread over a number of titles, not a single one, as the *Chronicle* was. The Russian Orthodox Church, too,

produced a wide variety of underground literature, but never anything remotely like the coordinated production which the *Chronicle* was to become over the next two decades. Indeed, it is almost a misnomer to call it “clandestine”. Those who produced it never intended it to be. They wanted to circulate it openly, so that there would be an official record of events in the Catholic Church, despite state censorship which attempted to prevent any such publication.

From the Editor

Keston's AGM will be held at 12 noon on Saturday 2nd November, at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine, Limehouse, London E14 8DS. In the afternoon, Dr Mykhailo Cherenkov will give a talk entitled "Ukrainian Churches in Wartime".

It was with great sadness that I learned of the death in July of Professor Peter Reddaway (obituary p.47). He was a close friend of Michael Bourdeaux and helped found Keston in 1969.

A central theme of this issue is the Lithuanian Catholic Church's struggle for religious freedom during the Communist period, and opens with an article by Michael Bourdeaux on the role of Keston in publicising the Catholic Church's predicament and its remarkable samizdat publication, the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*. Michael's article also highlights a unique Lithuanian document called the *Memorandum* (text on pp.14-15), which, with its thousands of signatures, was secretly brought out of the USSR and sent to Keston, where it was preserved for many years until, in 2007, it was returned to Lithuania and to the Archbishop of Kaunas, Sigitas Tamkevičius, who originally organised its circulation. In a talk given in 2008 (p.12), Michael relates how the *Memorandum* inspired him to write his book *Land of Crosses*; he also describes the important role played by Nijolė Sadūnaitė in Lithuania's struggle for religious freedom. Her defence speech at her trial in 1975 is printed on pp.7-11.

Sergei Filatov, head of Keston's Encyclopaedia project, contributes two articles: an

update (p.22) on his article about the Lutheran Church in Russia, published in issue No 39, and a fascinating account of his field trip to Russia's Far East, which describes the history and current activity of a variety of Christian denominations in this area. Most remarkable has been the contribution of many Protestant denominations and particularly that of the Lutheran Church, which, in Filatov's words, "has become something akin to a parallel ministry of culture".

A little known subject, Protestant culture in St Petersburg, is explored by Olesya Suchkova (p.16). She shows how the spiritual wealth of this great city is to be found "particularly among the Protestant religious minority, who have existed harmoniously within this city's cultural life for several centuries".

A recent report on the Keston Center at Baylor by its director, Kathy Hillman, is included in this issue on p.37. The Center is clearly flourishing with much activity focused on Keston's archive, which continues to attract many visitors and researchers.

Xenia Dennen

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As the successive issues appeared, it soon became obvious that here was a seminal work of church history, one anonymously produced (because the attachment of names would have immediately led to the arrest of the editors), but which carried the weight of the highest authority which a persecuted church could muster. What were its main characteristics? Primarily, the systematic detail and accuracy. Never, over the next 20 years (until official printing became possible after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power), did we at Keston College ever discover an inaccurate fact or statistic. Even less did the Soviet authorities infiltrate it and perpetrate a falsified document. They could arrest the editors and bring them to trial, as they did from time to time, but they could not break them and force them into “repentance”, as sometimes happened with other denominations elsewhere in the Soviet Union. So, to give something of the flavour of this immense and systematic production, let us look briefly at three issues of the *Chronicle*: the trial of Fr Juozas Zdebskis (No.1); the *Memorandum* (printed on pp.14-15 of this *Newsletter*) signed by over 17,000 people between December 1971 and January 1972 (No.2); “Case 345”, the trial of five lay editors (No.13).

Fr Juozas Zdebskis

The first-ever issue of the *Chronicle* set out its standards – and potential achievements – in the most astonishing detail. The basic “crime” of Fr Zdebskis in the large parish of Prienai was to teach religion to children and to prepare them for their First Communion. In 1971, as usual, some 300 children came forward for this.

On 16 July there was a rude interruption to the catechism class. A band of Soviet officials broke into it, rounded up the children, photographed them and forced them to reveal their names. Nine parents signed a document objecting to what had happened, but this did not prevent the arrest of Fr Zdebskis on 26 August, after being called in for interrogation. Now 350 people signed another document calling for his release and a further one followed, signed by 2,010 believers.

The date of the impending trial was kept secret, but it leaked out on 10 October: it would be the next day. Some supporters got into the courtroom, but were ejected, their places being filled by Communist officials. A huge crowd, probably 500-600, many carrying flowers, assembled outside the courtroom. The *Chronicle* names all the officials who conducted the trial in an atmosphere of terror. Astonishingly, though, despite the blanket of security, some supporters managed to remain inside and at least one of them made secret notes, which led to the writing-up of a transcript of the trial, reproduced in detail in the first 14 pages of the issue. Among a number of children interrogated in the courtroom, one said: “He taught us not to break windows, not to pick pockets, not to fight, not to steal and to obey our teachers and parents”. As each child was brought in, Fr Zdebskis stood in honour of the witness. Several pages reproduce his magnificent “final statement” (which every person on trial has the right to make), the core text of which was, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). He was indeed using the dock as though it were the pulpit of his church.

His sentence was relatively light, a mere 12 months, of which he had already served two in detention. We learn from later issues of the *Chronicle* that he was released a day early to prevent a demonstration outside the prison, but on the next Sunday (27 August 1972) children strewed flowers on his path all the way to the sacristy before he celebrated mass. This was, however, only the prelude to a life of harassment, further trials and eventual murder by the KGB in 1986 – one of their last acts of vengeance – as the Soviet noose was slackening after the election of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary of the CPSU.

The Memorandum of 17,054 signatures

The number of signatures on this remarkable document is in fact misleading: these are the surviving ones, many pages having been confiscated by the KGB and never recovered. The whole episode, recounted in the second issue of the *Chronicle*, occupies much less space than the trial of Fr Zdebskis in the first. This is because the document itself was deliberately kept short – a single side of type-written text – so that it could be easily circulated around the parishes and read aloud from the pulpit on Sunday. The present Archbishop of Kaunas, Mgr Sigitas Tamkevičius, SJ, described the process to me when I brought the original document back to Lithuania in 2007. The whole event took place openly in nearly every parish, so it was relatively easy for the KGB to intervene and they almost certainly confiscated the majority of the texts, some before any signatures could be appended. Nijolė Sadūnaitė, who herself suffered years of imprisonment for

her work on the *Chronicle*, told me, too, how she packed those signatures which could be salvaged in her briefcase and took them from Vilnius to Moscow in the hope – successful, as it turned out – of contacting a foreigner who would take it out of the USSR.

The text itself was addressed to Leonid Brezhnev. Its main point was to complain at the illegal suspension from office of the leading bishops, Steponavičius and Sladkevičius, the imprisonment of priests, the ban on the religious education of children, the limitation on the number of seminarians in training for the priesthood, the state control of clergy appointments and the difficulty of rebuilding the church. They demanded action, not “beautiful words in the press or on the radio”, assuring the world that believers enjoyed religious liberty.

In the whole history of Keston, this is the only document we ever released from our possession, but as it is a national treasure, we decided to donate it to the Lithuanian Catholic Church – and in return we received a splendid facsimile.

Case 345

As the number of issues of the *Chronicle* which reached the West increased (and they all did), one of its remarkable features was that many issues came in bilingual form, Lithuanian and Russian, which made it much more immediately accessible, though Keston had a splendid Mr Jonas Liūdžius in Bromley who translated for us when the only version available was in Lithuanian.



Michael Bourdeaux in 2007 presents Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius with the original copy of the Memorandum with its many signatures

The trial of five men accused of producing the *Chronicle* was the subject of the whole issue 13, 49 pages of text, and this was the most dramatic of the series so far. It recounts the trial in graphic detail, with many of the words spoken in the courtroom produced verbatim. It lasted from 2 to 24 December 1974.

A casual observer might have imagined that this was the trial of a group accused of high treason or armed rebellion, rather than of producing something on paper. Each accused was led in by an armed guard of three soldiers, two in front and one behind. During the trial itself there were never less than six guards with rifles at the ready alongside the accused. The courtroom itself was further patrolled by soldiers inside and outside the doors. The ages of the defendants ranged from 63 (Povilas Petronis), to 26 (Virgilijus Jaugelis, who would later die as a result of his maltreatment in prison). Again, at least one of the faithful managed to evade the

security and took notes, later turned into a transcript. The most astonishing moment came when Jaugelis – someone who had been refused entry to the one Catholic seminary, where his energies might have been absorbed in study for the priesthood – used his final statement to call for religious liberty: “What do you understand by the word ‘freedom’? Perhaps the



Keston's chairman, Xenia Dennen, is presented in London with a facsimile of the Memorandum by the President & Chairman of the British-Lithuanian Society

closure of Catholic churches and their conversion into warehouses and concert halls? Perhaps the fact that priests are being imprisoned for giving religious instruction to children? Everywhere there are lies, deceit, the use of physical force against innocent people... today our best hearts, our brightest minds are rotting in prison." He ended by quoting the banned Lithuanian national anthem: "Lithuania, land of our birth, our own dear country... How many times have the boots of foreigners trodden you down? But you have always had many noble hearts which have not feared to suffer and die for you. Such hearts will be found even now."

All five were naturally given lengthy prison sentences – up to seven years – and so the *Chronicle* was suppressed – except that almost immediately No 13, recounting the whole trial, began to circulate, produced by new editors waiting to fill the shoes of those who had been removed. This truly was an inspiring moment: the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* was beginning to be acknowledged around the world as a source not only of reliable information about a persecuted church, but also as a series of documents setting out acts of immense bravery rarely paralleled in Christian history.

Nijolė Sadūnaitė

On 31 March 2024, Nijolė Sadūnaitė died aged 85. She was born in Kaunas in 1938, graduated from the Jonas Biliūnas secondary school in Anykščiai, and completed a nursing training course in Vilnius in 1970. She had secretly taken vows as a nun and became a member of the Congregation of the Servants of the Blessed Immaculate Virgin Mary. In 1975 she was convicted by the Communist authorities for the reproduction and distribution of the Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church (CLCC) and sentenced to three years in a strict regime labour camp, followed by three years of exile. On returning to Lithuania after her imprisonment, Nijolė again became involved in the publication of CLCC, which led to further persecution by the Soviet authorities. Always a deeply humble person, she is recorded as having said: "I am 100-percent sure that the good God has not found a more ignorant, weak person in Lithuania, so He gave me the strength and sent me to do this work." On 23 August 1987 she organised a rally at the Adam Mickiewicz Monument in Vilnius to commemorate the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. This was the first rally directed against the Soviet regime after Mikhail Gorbachev loosened censorship under his glasnost policy. During the rally the Lithuanian national anthem was sung publicly after decades of oppression. In 2018, Nijolė was awarded the Freedom Prize, established by the Lithuanian parliament for people who had contributed to freedom, democracy, and human rights.

During her trial in 1975 she defended herself energetically. Her defence speech and final words (spoken the following day), reprinted below, were published by the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Priests' League of America in a booklet entitled No Greater Love: The Trial of a Christian in Soviet-Occupied Lithuania. Ed.

Nijolė Sadūnaitė's Defence Speech

"I would like to tell you all that I love you as if you were my brothers and sisters, and I would not hesitate to give my life for each one of you. Today you do not need my sacrifice, but you do need to hear the truth told to your faces. There is a saying that only he who loves has the right to reprimand. I make use of this right in addressing you. Every time you put anyone on trial for having contributed to the publication of the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*, these lines by the poet Putinas are appropriate:

Proudly from tribunals
Criminals condemn the innocent.
You spurn the altar,
And your laws now alter
Both good and evil.

You know very well that anyone contributing to the publication of the *Chronicle* loves his people and that is why he is fighting for their honour and liberty, for their right to freedom of conscience which is guaranteed to all citizens by the Constitution, by the laws of the land and by the Bill of Human Rights. These are not supposed to be just nice sounding words on paper or false propaganda. They must be enforced. The words of the Constitution and of the law are powerless if they are not enforced in real life where, right now, legalised



Nijolė Sadūnaitė (left) with Lorna Bourdeaux in 2005

discrimination against believing citizens is the order of the day.

The *Chronicle* is like a mirror which reflects all the criminal acts of atheists against those who believe in God. No evil act likes to look at its own horrible image, it hates its own reflection. That is why you hate everyone who tears off the veil of falsehood and hypocrisy behind which you are hiding. But the mirror does not lose its worth for all that! A thief takes a person's money, but you take away something even more valuable – a person's right to be faithful to his convictions and to hand them down to his children.

On 14-15 December 1960 the Convention Against discrimination in Education in the 5th chapter states that parents must be able to bring up their children according to their convictions. However, in the records concerning my case, the teacher Mrs Rinkauskienė, when questioned, replied: 'There is only one Soviet school system, so there is no need to confuse the children or teach them to be hypocrites.' Who is teaching the children to be hypocrites? Is it the teachers or those parents who are free to bring up their children according to their convictions? When a school has destroyed the authority of parents over their children, who then go off the rails, for some reason the teachers aren't held responsible but the parents are.

In high school No 10 at Klaipėda, the teacher Miss Keturakaitė writes in the record of her interrogation: 'As I am a history teacher, I have to explain religious matters to my students. In presenting the development of Christianity, I also explain about the myth of Christ...' How can this teacher talk about matters beyond her field of competence when even in her own field she doesn't show much competence by holding as true a lie perpetrated by atheists – that Christ is a legend. Such incompetent people are forming and teaching our young people and using their authority to make their students believe lies.

Colonel Petruškevičius, chief of the interrogation subdivision, Rimkus and Kažys, assistant to the chief of the interrogation division, often threatened to put me in a psychiatric hospital, because I refused to answer their questions, even

though I explained that my silence was a protest against this whole case. When I got tired of their threats, I wrote a protest letter to the prosecutor general, to the chief of security and to the chief of the interrogation division, whom I asked to file my letter with the rest of my case records. It was not filed and the prosecutor general's assistant, Bakučionis, who is sitting right there, replied in writing that they have the right to have psychiatric tests done, but that the members of the investigating committee had not recommended this. But I was not talking about that in my letter. I was protesting about the way the investigation was being conducted – threatening the person under investigation, forcing her to betray her conscience.

In that protest letter I wrote: 'Does an interrogator have the right to threaten a person under investigation with incarceration in a psychiatric hospital, or with psychiatric tests, when that person refuses to give up her own opinion and refuses to betray her conscience? During the interrogation, because I refused to answer his questions, Colonel Petruškevičius repeatedly threatened to put me in a psychiatric hospital where, he said, it would be much worse than prison. Kažys, the assistant to the chief of the interrogation division, on seeing me for the first time, immediately diagnosed me as schizophrenic, that my thinking was schizophrenic, and said that he would ensure that the committee which determines psychiatric cases, and of which he is a member, examined me.

The chief of the interrogation division, Major Rimkus, also repeatedly

threatened to have psychiatric tests done on me. Is the Soviet system of justice based only on fear? If I am a psychiatric patient, I need medical attention and not threats about my illness. Why threaten a sick person, what has such a person done wrong? But my interrogators don't believe this, because for five months now they have been threatening to put me in a psychiatric hospital because they want to break my will. This is the kind of behaviour that insults a person's dignity, and that is what I am protesting against.

After I had written this protest letter, Rimus, the chief of the interrogation subdivision, sarcastically remarked that my complaints show that I am not a normal person. I obviously am not aware of fine juridical distinctions. That is true. I am not only unaware of fine juridical distinctions, but I don't even know the obvious ones, because I have never studied them. I now clearly understand, however, that it is perfectly normal for Soviet interrogators to lie and to slander not only the person being investigated but also innocent bystanders. That is spiritual vandalism which ought to be punished, because the injuries inflicted on a person's spirit are more traumatic and take much longer to heal than any kind of physical damage.

You are not interested in having wrongs righted; on the contrary, you tolerate and condone them. This is easily proved by the fact that the witnesses who were called to testify in my case and who were aware that the information in the *Chronicle* was true, were asked such questions as: Who gave this information to the publishers of the *Chronicle*? Who

did they talk to? Who saw or heard them? etc. That is what you are afraid of – the truth! The interrogators did not summon any of those who, full of hatred for anyone with different convictions, fired the secondary school teacher Miss Stasė Jasiūnaitė of Kulautuva for wearing a cross. And not only that, they mocked and insulted her and would not even give her an ordinary kitchen job. Neither did they summon Markevičius, the chairman of the local Soviet's executive committee in Panevėžys, nor Indriūnas, head of the Soviet's financial section, for firing the typist Miss Mary Medišauskaitė because she went to church. She was fired although she had worked as a secretary for nine years. And yet, everywhere you declare that religion is the private affair of every citizen and that each has equal rights no matter what their personal convictions are. How noble is your propaganda and how ignoble is the reality! The interrogators were also not the least bit interested in what happened at the N. Akmenė school, where the principal Kuprys and the board of education fired a teacher who, during a field trip in the city of Kaunas, went to a toilet in the park where Romas Kalanta¹ died. What a crime! Is it so terrible that it makes a teacher unfit to work with children! It's funny that you are still frightened of Romas Kalanta's ghost.

In the newspaper *Kauno Tiesa* (*Kaunas Truth*) a teacher at Vilnius University

¹Romas Kalanta was a student at the University of Kaunas. He poured petrol over himself and died in May 1972, as a protest against Soviet oppression of Lithuania. His death provoked student riots in Kaunas.

published the grossest insults against Pope Paul VI, Bishop Bučys, Fr Laberža and Fr Račkūnas. When are these slanders going to be retracted? They haven't yet been retracted because lies and slander are your daily bread!

It was because you were afraid of Mindaugas Tanonis, an engineer in charge of the reconstruction of public monuments, that you took him to the psychiatric hospital in Vasara Street, hoping to 'cure' him of his convictions.

The interrogators have never reprimanded doctors who refused to allow their patients to have a priest at their deathbed, even if they and their relatives had requested one. Even criminals are granted a last request. But you dare to mock a person's most sacred beliefs at the most difficult moment in life – the hour of death. Like a gang of bandits you rob thousands of religious people of their moral and human rights. That is Communist morality and ethics!

Who gave you atheists the right to tell pastors which priests they can invite to lead retreats and missions for their parishioners? The traditional decree 'On the Separation of the Church from the State and of Schools from the Church' declares that the State does not interfere in religious activities within a country. In Lithuania the Church is not separated from the State; it is oppressed by the State. In the most illegal and insulting manner, government personnel dictate what is permitted in the religious sphere, including church law. They order priests about and punish them in accordance with their

own biased opinions. These and hundreds of other facts clearly show that you atheists are seeking to enslave people spiritually by forcing them to accept your opinions, and you justify any means – lies, slander, terrorist tactics – to attain this end.

And are you happy with your triumph? What have you triumphed over – over the moral ruin of the country, over millions of unborn children whom you have killed, over people robbed of their human dignity, poisoned by fear and evil. That is what you have achieved, these are the fruits of your labour. Jesus Christ spoke the truth: 'By their fruits shall ye know them!' Every day your crimes are bringing you closer to history's junk heap.

Thank God that not everyone has given in. We don't have the strength of numbers on our side, but we have quality. We are not afraid of your prisons and concentration camps, and we consider it our duty to denounce your actions, which discriminate, humiliate and oppress people. To fight for human rights is everyone's sacred duty. I am happy to have the privilege of suffering for the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*, for I am convinced of its truth and of its importance, and I will remain faithful to my convictions until my last breath. You may pass any laws you like, but keep them for yourselves. A person must discern what belongs to man and what belongs to God. Caesar can be given whatever is left over from what we owe to God. The most important thing in life is to free one's heart and mind from fear, as it is a great sin to let evil rage on unchecked."

Final Words

“This is the happiest day of my life. I am being tried for the *Chronicle*, which is a protest against the physical and spiritual tyranny to which my people are being subjected. This means that I am being tried because I love the people and want the truth. Loving people is the greatest love, and fighting for their rights is the most beautiful love song. May it echo in everyone’s heart and never stop! I am privileged, my fate is an honourable one: not only have I fought for human rights and for justice, but I am being punished for doing so. My sentence will be my triumph! I am sorry only for one thing – that I have not been able to do as much as I wanted for the people. I will gladly lose my freedom for the freedom of others, and I am willing to die so that others may live. Today I am standing on the side of Eternal Truth – Jesus Christ – and I recall his fourth Beatitude: ‘Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be satisfied!’ How can I not be happy when Almighty God has shown that light triumphs over darkness and truth over lies and falsehood! In order to bring this about, I am willing not only to be imprisoned, but also to die.

I want to remind you of some lines written by the Russian poet Lermontov: ‘And yet there is the just judgement of God. Grant O Lord, that that judgement may be kind to all of us!’ That is what I will pray for all of you during the rest of my life. And now I would like to end with a few verses that I wrote while in prison:

The harder the road you travel
The more alive you feel.
We must be aflame for justice,
Fighting evil at any cost.

Our days are not given to rest in,
But to fight for the happiness of many hearts.
And only he who gives his all
Will know that his road is right.

There is no greater happiness than this:
To lay down your life for others.
Within you, each day will be one of joy,
Which neither prison nor cold can destroy.

So let us love one another and we will be happy. Only he is unhappy who does not love. Yesterday you were surprised that I was in such good spirits at such a tragic hour of my life. This proves that my heart is burning with love for all people, since only love makes everything seem easy! We have to condemn evil as harshly as possible, but we must love a human being, even if he is wrong. And we can learn to do this in the school of Jesus Christ, who is our Way, our Truth, and our Life. May your kingdom, Jesus, come into every soul!

I have one last request of this court: free all prisoners and all those who have been put in psychiatric hospitals for fighting for human rights and for justice. You would thus show good will, and make a start towards a new and better life, so that your beautiful motto, ‘A man is a brother to his fellow man’ becomes reality.”

The Price of Freedom

**Michael Bourdeaux's Address to a Lithuanian prayer breakfast,
in the presence of the Lithuanian Ambassador,
London, 12 January 2008**

Two years ago a very senior Lithuanian priest, Fr Vytautas Brilius (head of the Salesian Order) visited Keston Institute in Oxford. We sat around a table and I spoke about the book I published in 1979, *Land of Crosses*. I said, "That's one of the names in my book" – and I read out part of a long passage referring to Mrs Ona Briliene, a teacher in Vilkaviškis. She was dismissed from her job as a school teacher in 1970. She appealed against her dismissal and the case came to court. Under cross-examination she said, "Yes, I'm a believer. I go openly to church – I've had enough of secrecy. I hid my beliefs for 21 years, but I see no reason to do so any longer... I told my pupils I'd been dismissed for believing in God." She was briefly reinstated after the hearing, but finally dismissed a few months later. Fr Brilius sat silently – tears in his eyes. "She's my mother," he said. "She brought up all the children as Christians, and many of those in her class became believers, too."

Mrs Briliene paid the price of freedom; for openly proclaiming her faith she lost her job and wasn't allowed to work in the school even as a cleaner.

In my nearly 40 years of association with Lithuania, I don't think any incident has ever brought home more strongly the way in which persecution of the church achieved precisely the opposite of what

the perpetrators intended. Dismiss one school teacher – and you get a class of believing children.

At last – early in the 21st century – the secular world is getting round to realising that religion isn't dying out: rather, it's a potent force – and, sadly, not always for good.

In the former Soviet Union – in the main still unrecognised by the world at large – religion was a force for good. It was, in many places, the most organised opposition to Communism. But it was in Lithuania that the cry for religious liberty became a national watchword. It coalesced with the eventual demands of *Sąjūdis* (opposition movement founded in 1988. Ed.) for political freedom.

Where did this all start? You could say it began with the deportations – there are so many stories about how Lithuanians in Siberia maintained their nationality and their faith – and your Ambassador has a moving story to tell of how he went on an expedition last summer to discover the relics of those deportations. My book was called *Land of Crosses* – but in truth that land extended to the most distant wastes of Siberia, populated by the crosses of those who died. You might also claim that this started with the freedom fighters, who survived many years in the forests at home, before betrayal and the

increased sophistication of the secret police eventually isolated and exterminated them. But their spirit never died.

In my own researches, the starting point was a document, simply entitled *Memo-randum* (text printed on pp.14-15. Ed), which saw the light of day in 1972. Its story is astonishing. It was a short document, produced by a determined group of young Lithuanian Catholics, and distributed clandestinely around the parishes. One of the originators was Sigitas Tamkevičius, now the Archbishop of Kaunas. The document was addressed to the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The one-page document set out the most basic complaints of the people against their oppressors. Two bishops, Steponavičius and Sladkevičius, had been under house arrest for ten years without trial. Frs Zdebskis and Bubnys had been imprisoned in 1971 simply for teaching religion to children. The theological seminary in Kaunas could train only ten new priests a year – hopelessly inadequate for the needs of the parishes. Several other examples were given, and the authors summed up: “We ask the Soviet Government to safeguard freedom of conscience for us, which is guaranteed by the Constitution of the USSR, but which until now has been absent in practice.”

The *Memorandum* said it was “From the Catholics of Lithuania”. And so it was! No less than 17,054 of them signed it! Archbishop Tamkevičius told me last summer that it wasn't possible to get the document to all the parishes: he chose those where he could identify activists. I said earlier that it was “clandestinely”

circulated – well, maybe, but try gathering mass signatures on a piece of paper clandestinely, while the KGB was watching virtually every church. The miracle is that many copies – about 200 – survived, most with signatures all over them.

The future archbishop was soon to go to prison for his activities, an inspiration to all with whom he came into contact. He was one of the last to be released under Gorbachev's *perestroika* – not until 1988.

Amazingly, those copies of the *Memo-randum*, which survived the depredations of the KGB, were bundled up in Vilnius and taken by hand to Moscow. Nijolė Sadūnaitė told me she couldn't remember taking that particular document to Moscow – she did this with so many documents so many times. But it was almost certainly her – and she, too, would shortly go to prison for her ceaseless activity on behalf of the persecuted church – she was one of those responsible for producing the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* – which would become a permanent record of the persecution, and circulated clandestinely: over 30 issues appeared in its first eight years alone. The bearer of the document – with divine inspiration – decided not to deliver it to the Communist Party headquarters. Instead there was a meeting with a British journalist, who didn't dare take it out, but handed it to a friend in the British Embassy. He, in turn, breaking diplomatic protocol, addressed it to me at Keston College in Kent and sent it through the diplomatic bag. I unpacked this treasure early in 1973 –

and from that moment I became determined to write a book about the Catholic Church in Lithuania. *Sąjūdis* progressed under Professor Landsbergis, whom I'm honoured to be addressing this morning. I visited Lithuania for the first time in February 1989 as the guest of Bishop Steponavičius for the re-consecration of Vilnius Cathedral – an unforgettable experience. By this time I had come to regard the precious *Memorandum* in our possession as the founding document of Lithuanian independence. A year ago the

Honorary Consul of Lithuania in Wales suggested that this document, by rights, should reside in Lithuania itself – and I had the honour of returning it in person last July (2007) to the person who had originated it, Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius.

I would like to end by thanking you for the honour and privilege of addressing you this morning – and to assure you that my work for Lithuania has been one of the key inspirations of my life.

MEMORANDUM

To the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union The Kremlin, Moscow from the Catholics of Lithuania, 1972

It is now many years since the end of the Second World War; the nations have restored the ruins, desiring permanent peace.

But the foundation of lasting peace is justice and respect for human rights. And so we, the Catholics of Lithuania, are deeply disturbed by the violation of these rights, since the believers of our nation are still deprived of freedom of conscience, and the Church is subject to persecution.

Our bishops, J. Steponavičius and V. Sladkevičius, have now been in exile for ten years without a trial and without a defined sentence, although they have committed no crime.

In November 1971 the priests J. Zdebskis and P. Bubnys were sentenced to deprivation of liberty because, fulfilling their duty, and at the request of the parents, they explained the basic elements of the Catholic faith to children. These priests helped the children prepare for First Communion, not in school, but in church, without using any kind of coercion – only those who wanted to took part.

By contrast, atheism is forcibly inculcated in the Soviet schools in Lithuania, believing Catholic children are forbidden to speak, write and act according to their conscience, and those who perpetrate this violence do not receive warnings and are not brought to trial.

Because of the lack of a sufficient number of priests, the requirements of believers remain unsatisfied. In many places one priest now has to serve two or three parishes. Even invalid and old priests are compelled to work. This situation has been created because it is not the bishops who order the affairs of the seminary, but representatives of the authorities. Every year the authorities decide to admit only up to ten students to the seminary. It is also the representatives of the authorities who assign the priests to parishes.

There is an article in the Penal Code of the Lithuanian SSR which stipulates punishment for persecuting believers, but in practice this article is never applied. In 1970 the department of public education of Vilkaviškis district dismissed the teacher O. Briliene from work solely because she was a believer. For the same reason, the district authorities will not allow this teacher to take up any work in the town of Vilkaviškis, not even as a cleaner. The perpetrators of such arbitrary action remain unpunished, although through no fault of their own representatives of the intelligentsia struggle to practise their faith openly.

Representatives of the authorities do not permit believers, even using their own resources, to restore the burned-down churches in, for example, the parishes of Batakiai, Gaure, and Sangruda. The faithful have to try with great difficulty to get permission from the authorities to hold services in any private home, but in not a single case is it permitted to fit out even a chapel in a former church-yard. At the same time, permission was given to build a dance-hall on the site of a former church in the parish of Andrievas.

We could point to many more facts of discrimination, which grieve us and compel us to become disillusioned with the Soviet Constitution and laws. Therefore we ask the Soviet Government to safe-guard freedom of conscience for us, which is guaranteed by the Constitution of the USSR, but which until now has been absent in practice. The fine words in the press and on the radio do not satisfy us, since we await from the Government such efforts as will help us Catholics to feel ourselves to be citizens of the Soviet Union enjoying equal rights.

Protestant Culture in St Petersburg

by Olesya Suchkova

St Petersburg is justly considered to be the cultural capital of Russia. It is home to more than 200 museums, over 70 theatres and several of the country's largest libraries, and has given the world numerous great scientists, writers, actors and composers. The Russian Orthodox Church is the dominant element within the city's religious life, but at the same time St Petersburg has always been open to inter-denominational and inter-faith dialogue: the traditions of other confessions are richly and broadly represented in the cultural life of St Petersburg.

Protestant religious culture has attracted the most diverse forms of creativity, expressed in dance, music and theatre. For example, several cinema and television studios, musical and dance projects, printed and electronic mass media publications, have been evidence of the cultural diversity of Lutherans, Evangelicals, Seventh Day Adventists and members of the United Methodist Church in St Petersburg. Many of these projects have developed as part of church services with the involvement of church members, while others have developed as a cooperative effort involving a number of denominations.

An example of an inter-denominational project, which began in 2003 and continued for almost ten years, was the annual Anichkov Ball, which was organised by the pastors of the "Union of Christians"

Church, Dmitri and Anna Polyakov. The aim of this event was to introduce Christians to the culture of past centuries and to help them experience the grandeur of St Petersburg balls from a bygone era; it aimed not only to bring young Christians together on an enjoyable night out, but to encourage relationships which resulted in marriage and a family. The Polyakovs did not keep any records, but said that they could remember examples of young couples who had met at such balls and eventually got married; and many St Petersburg Christians had preserved fond memories of this very attractive tradition. Dmitri wanted to help young men and woman to relate to one another, as he found they were unable to interact with the opposite sex: "The churches don't teach this; they may have principles on a theoretical level, but they don't apply these in practice. Young people learn from the world of Hollywood, from television and glossy magazines, none of which foster culture. That is why we want to give young people the opportunity to cultivate inner beauty and to treat the opposite sex with respect."

The Anichkov Ball was known mostly in Evangelical circles, among Pentecostals and Baptists, whereas certain larger events have been organised jointly by Catholics and more traditional Protestants: one example is the annual inter-confessional Festival of Christian Cinema called "The Neva's Clarion

Call” in which the Russian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic and the Roman Catholic Churches have taken part. The Protestant contribution to this festival has come from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia and the Church of Ingria. From the outset, this festival was seen as an inter-denominational project which was not concerned with dogma and theology; nor was it a competition – every year all participants received diplomas and souvenirs. The purpose of this film festival was to show how the Christian faith is revealed through people, how it teaches charity and transforms humanity. Some of the films also addressed problematic issues such as religious intolerance and attitudes towards those with different religious worldviews. According to the founder and director of “The Neva’s Clarion Call”, Raisa Evdokimova, “The aim of the festival is so broad that you can aim for it each year, and always fall short. New collisions, questions and difficulties arise each year. On the other hand, in recent years lots of people have wanted to come to our festival, almost all the seats have been taken, which shows that we’ve achieved our aim.”

Lutheran film directors often participated in the “The Neva’s Clarion Call”: for example, the 2011 film *Letters to Fr Jacob*, produced by the Finnish director Klaus Haro, was submitted by the Church of Ingria. It was one of the few live action films at the festival and was Finland’s 2009 entry for the Oscars. It told the story of a woman serving a life sentence who was amnestied, and when seeking work was cared for by a blind pastor to whom she read his parishion-

ers’ letters. This experience led to her spiritual transfiguration.

“The Neva’s Clarion Call” is a festival which has included events at various venues, where different programmes have been organised. Often organ and choral concerts have been given at the Church of Ingria’s Cathedral of St Mary, while at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of St Catherine films were combined with an exhibition entitled “World of the Organ” and an organ recital. The festival has also offered many creative evenings and has included an annual permanent exhibition called “German St Petersburg” which was organised by the German Evangelical Lutheran Church of St Peter (Peterskirche) and told the story of prominent Germans and the role of the Lutheran Church in Russian history.

While many “traditional” Protestants, i.e. the Lutherans, have taken part in this festival, Evangelical Christians and Seventh Day Adventists have not. According to some participants, the festival’s organising committee was against cooperating with such Protestants, considered “non-traditional” in the Russian context, or they thought that such cooperation was not possible within the framework of the festival. In this author’s opinion, if there had been someone from the Pentecostal Union or Baptist Union on the organising committee, these churches might have got involved; participation would have been encouraged by their church leaders, and church members would have enjoyed the creativity involved. However, such an approach would have required the organising committee to have seriously reappraised

their attitude to “non-traditional Protestants”, an attitude which in many cases was the result of theological disagreements. Thus, it emerged that this “festival of Christian cinema” involved a tacit understanding about which Christian denominations were “suitable” and which were to be excluded.

An example of a non-denominational Christian artistic project was the “Co-Creation” Theatre of Pantomime and Drama, which followed the tradition of classical pantomime and echoed the style of Marcel Marceau and the best traditions of the Parisian school. The “Co-Creation” theatre company brought together, among others, Christians from Evangelical churches, who saw their work as a way of doing good and reminding contemporary society about moral values. In his interview on the television channel “TBN-Russia”, the artistic director of “Co-Creation”, Kirill Kosov, related how, while at drama school, he had mastered pantomime. He brought together a group of actors who shared the same professional standards and professed similar moral and religious convictions, and were members of local Protestant churches. “Co-Creation” was a secular project; its actors used masks to express different human emotions, with the aim of enabling the audience to shed their own masks and to be honest about themselves. It staged a play called “The Gates of Heaven and the Fires of Hell” which involved members of local Protestant churches, who were not professionals and learned their parts with only two or three rehearsals. The stage set, props and costumes remained the same from one year to the next, but there were different

actors. The idea for this play came from abroad more than 35 years ago, when a Canadian pastor decided to stage a play based on a revelation received through a dream by a Christian believer. The premiere took place in Russia more than 30 years ago, thanks to the work of Vladimir Chmykhalo and his wife. The play lasted for about an hour and told the stories of people whose lives were depicted five minutes before death, and later as they stood before the gates of their future fate. Each person was interested in only one thing – whether their name was written in the Book of Life? For example, the play included the story of a young drug addict who poisoned himself and his girlfriend, wanting to “speed up” the process of his incurable illness and get to heaven; another story was that of a desperate woman – an alcoholic who committed suicide. The play also included the stories of families who were killed as the result of an accident, such as builders who were killed by a collapsing wall. It used multimedia techniques to portray events which were impossible to recreate on a moveable stage, such as a video showing the arrival of an emergency ambulance and doctors fighting for the life of a victim. The director and producer, Vladimir Chmykhalo, took his play to about a hundred Russian towns, while in St Petersburg it was performed many times in various Protestant churches such as “Hope Church”, the Christian Centre of All Nations, and the St Petersburg Church of Evangelical Christians-Baptists on Poklonnaya Hill, and involved the participation of these churches’ congregations. The play’s organisers considered it was their mission to spread the Good News to those who needed it most, and so

performed it also in drug rehab centres, in orphanages and regional penal colonies.

But words were not the only way to spread the Good News: the dance group called “Jesus Christ Gospel Power” (JCGP) showed that dance could also serve as a vehicle for preaching the Gospel. Dance as a form of Christian ministry came into being around 15 years ago at the “Gospel Power” church of St Petersburg within the framework of the youth movement called “Holy Remnant” (*Святой остаток*). The JCGP team not only put on stage performances, but also saw as their main aim to teach dance to children and adolescents. They called themselves a Christian dance group, so parents often asked whether their children would be expected to take part in bible study or some religious ritual, to which the dance teachers replied that the Christian faith was witnessed in the way they avoided all unacceptable language in the music played, and in the non-provocative nature of all the dance movements.

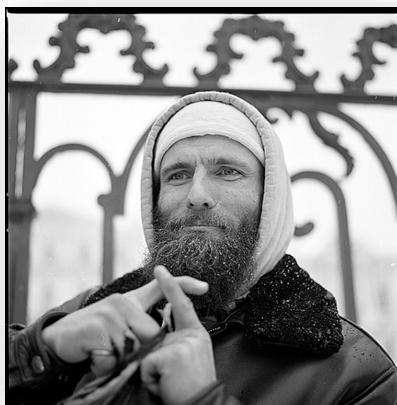
Another example of a Christian creative group is the theatrical studio “Every little bit helps” (*“С миру по нитке”*). This group of aspiring actors felt called to spread the news of salvation and, like the JCGP, reaches people outside the congregation of their own local church. The group was formed 15 years ago with the blessing of the pastor of the Evangelical church “Life in Christ” (*“Жизнь во Христе”*) and was joined later by members of other churches, such as the “Grace Church” (*“Благодать”*) and

members of the “Ark” (*“Ковчег”*) church. Seven people founded this theatre ministry, and soon were joined by many others, including some Russian Orthodox. The group has experienced inter-denominational cooperation through participating in performances organised by the Russian Orthodox organisation, the Alexander Nevsky Foundation. The group has also performed on the stage of the Russian Orthodox drama theatre called “Pilgrim” after the latter’s director, having seen them perform, invited them to work with his theatre, offered them rehearsal space, and even organised professional acting courses for them. According to the director of the “Every little bit helps” theatre, the two groups have had no disagreements on matters of faith and have been united in a common mission to transform people and the world.

Disabled people in St Petersburg have also not been starved of cultural experiences. For more than 20 years films and musical clips have been made for the hard of hearing thanks to the “Ark” film company. Its director, Dmitry Ovchinnikov, explained that everything began with church services attended by people with hearing problems. At the end of the 1990s, in the “Ark” church (legally known as “The Church of the Christian Community of the City of St Petersburg”) different forms of work with the deaf were already underway and required a professional operator and film editor. So, Pavel Sennikov, the pastor of the church at that time, suggested to Dmitri Ovchinnikov that he set up a film studio and work on videos. Thereafter, over the

next few years, the film studio produced recordings of children's songs, organised theatrical performances and made films adapted for the deaf and hard of hearing.

As Russia's rock capital, St Petersburg has kept up with the tastes of today's Protestant music fans, who like such groups as "Voice in the Wilderness" (*"Глас вопиющего"*),



M.S. Pokaisya

"Friends" (*"Друзьки"*) "Subkultura", "Scarves" (*"Шарфы"*), the singer Dmitry Schletthauer, "Sons of Thunder" (*"Сыны грома"*), "RIVERS", "Milk and Honey" (*"Молоко и мед"*) and many others. Some of these groups have left the stage but continue to inspire the spiritual life of the faithful. Other Christian music groups, which have existed in St Petersburg for several decades, have continued to write songs, albeit less frequently than in the past. Christian music also varies, rock being only one aspect of it: it includes classical organ concerts (usually in Lutheran churches), folk music, traditional Christian hymns (Konstantin Zhigulin's projects), choral

and orchestral performances (the "Hallelujah" choir, the chamber orchestra "Credo"). Natalia Shakunova, Marina Frolova, Olga Gasilova, Roman Litvinov, Taya Marmeladova, the "Victoria" group and others perform contemporary Christian music. Some Evangelical leaders have been opposed to their church members joining music groups or embarking on a solo career: this has depended on the history of a particular Protestant tradition and also on its attitude towards the influence of secular culture on church life.

A particularly striking example of St Petersburg's unique culture is a character called M.S. Pokaisya (this surname is the Russian word for "repent". Ed.), who is not a classical rap performer, but a street preacher who uses bit-box to bring the biblical message to passers-by in the streets of the city. In the past, such people would have been called "fools for Christ". He has often been seen standing outside the "Slovo" (Word) Christian bookshop, performing rap about Jesus Christ and calling on people to live righteously: "Repent, don't fool around, heal yourself, be blessed and saved..." According to interviews which he gave to St Peterburg publications, his name is Vyacheslav, he was converted when a schoolboy and began to spread the Good News to his friends. He earned a living by renovating orphanages and doing wall paintings. He is a Russian Orthodox believer and attends the liturgy at the Kazan Cathedral, but is also a well-known figure within Evangelical circles, among Pentecostals and Baptists. This type of street preaching, and the values

he promotes through his bit-box, fit well with a Protestant outlook.

Protestant creativity in St Petersburg consists of many colourful elements which form a complex picture. Creative groups which have developed from within a local church community have been dedicated to service and mission, even when they have reached well beyond the church walls. Most Protestant churches have been happy to cooperate with other denominations, even allowing them into their own congregations, while others, though happy to share the stage with other groups, have only allowed members of their church community, or denomination (for example, the “Hallelujah” choir which was composed of members of the Baptist church on Poklonnaya Hill) into their own creative groups. Many Protestant and Evangelical theatre groups have chosen not just biblical subjects for their work, but also subjects from classical literature, from Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Hans Christian Andersen and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, as the universal voice of these talented writers, many of whose views fit in with biblical themes, help Christians in their missionary work. Classical music has also been used by them: for example, the rock group “Subkultura” has used an arrangement of the “Hallelujah” chorus from Handel’s “Messiah”.

Creative work varies among different Protestant denominations. For example, that of Baptists is more conservative,

focused mainly on classical music, traditional hymns, video productions involving documentary research into the history of the Baptist movement or Protestantism in St Petersburg and Russia. It was the Baptists who organised various poetry readings and seminars for librarians (this was also done by Lutherans and Russian Orthodox believers). Pentecostals have been more free as regards self-expression; therefore they have set up more youth theatre groups, as well as musical and dance ensembles. It is hard to imagine a rock group composed of Russian Baptists, whereas many Pentecostals have been glad to join such groups, as they do not feel that they conflict with their religious beliefs.

Protestant St Petersburg is not wealthy, relying mainly on donations, but nevertheless creative projects have developed within almost every local church. The large number of classical and contemporary music groups is characteristic of St Petersburg churches. Protestants write, sing and dance, every creation aims to convey their religious vision of the world and their sincere desire to transform the world for the better. The spiritual wealth of this city on the Neva is especially great, and is to be found particularly among the Protestant religious minority, who have existed harmoniously within this city’s cultural life for several centuries.

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Lutherans in Russia

An update by Sergei Filatov

April 2024

An article by Sergei Filatov on Lutheranism in Russia was published in the last issue of the Keston Newsletter (No. 39). For the current issue, Filatov has contributed a second article with up-to-date information on developments within the various branches of the Lutheran Church in Russia. Ed.

Today, the russification process within the German (Evangelical Lutheran Church) and Finnish church (the Church of Ingria) has moved forward considerably. In the late 1980s Arvo Survo, a charismatic personality – an intellectual, artist, musician, and poet with Finnish



Pastor Arvo Survo

roots from St Petersburg – helped revive services in Finnish, and then encouraged the use of Russian in the church. As early as 1977, well before *perestroika*, he persuaded the Soviet authorities to register a Lutheran congregation of Ingermanlanders in Pushkin, outside St Petersburg, and to hand over the former Lutheran church building to them. He then trained in the Estonian Lutheran seminary and became the pastor of the Pushkin church. It was thanks to him that a revival movement was organised within the tight-knit

Ingermanland ethnic group, and led to the founding of many Ingermanland Lutheran congregations from 1987-1990 which now form the Church of Ingria.

According to the head of the Church of Ingria, Bishop Arre Kugappi, the Finnish-Ingermanland element accounted for no more than a third of its members (only in the Leningrad oblast were they in a majority).¹ Following the Church of Ingria,



Bishop Arre Kugappi & his wife

1. Interview with Bishop Arre Kugappi by Sergei Filatov, 12 March 2008 (Filatov's archive)

the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) in 1999 began using Russian in all its church services. While demanding that its members adhere to the basic dogmas of Lutheran teaching – belief in the divinely inspired nature of the Bible and support for traditional Christian moral values – the Church of Ingria accepted variety in its worship and were sensitive towards national feelings: some of its Russian congregations even used Church Slavonic in their services, and other services differed little from the Roman Catholic mass. Once again, ELC followed the example of the Church of Ingria.

Finnish-Ingermanlanders in the Church of Ingria and Russian-Germans in ELC today form only a minority, though a substantial and privileged one.

In churches with German or Finnish believers, even if there are few of them, services are conducted in their languages and not just in Russian, while cultural events focus on national identity. In addition, some Russians have a particular interest in the language of Luther, the language of the Reformation. The logical conclusion of the russification process within the two main Lutheran churches led to the appointment of Russians to leadership positions: in 2020, on the recommendation of Bishop Kugappi, Ivan Laptev was consecrated as a bishop of the Church of Ingria, and in 2022 Vladimir Provorov became the archbishop of ELC.



Archbishop Vladimir Provorov

A striking phenomenon within the religious life of Russia was the founding of national Lutheran parishes among different ethnic groups, all of which became part of the Church of Ingria. The Volga peoples were significant players in this process. These were basically Finnish pagan groups: the Mordovian ethnic groups – the Erzyan and Moksha – the Marii, the Komi, the Udmurts and the Turkish-speaking

Chuvash. Over a period of 20 years, Arvo Survo and the Finnish preacher Yuhka Veliakho led successful missions to these ethnic groups, whose churches grew out of national movements which resisted Russian assimilation and fought to preserve their national language, culture and identity.

The history of Lutheranism in Mordovia is indissolubly linked to the person of its founder, the Erzyan artist in Saransk, Andrei Alyoshkin, who was a believer from childhood and cared about the fate of his people. He was disillusioned with Russian Orthodoxy like many other members of the Mordovian intelligentsia: in his opinion, it had become “a force for russification”, which suppressed the language and culture of the Mordovian people. When studying at the Leningrad Academy of Arts, Andrei Alyoshkin got to know Pastor Arvo Survo and decided that Lutheranism, adapted to the national traditions of the Mordovian people, could

become the best foundation for a spiritual revival of the Erzyan and Moksha peoples. A “national revival” in Mordovia began in 1990-1991, and against this background Alyoshkin built up a group of supporters from among the artistic and literary circles within Saransk’s intelligentsia. In 1991 the first Lutheran congregation belonging to the Church of Ingria was registered in Saransk and received material support from the Finnish Lutheran Church and the US’s Missouri Synod. The founders of this congregation aimed from the outset to “mordovianise” the church and to form an independent Mordovian Lutheran church. In 2003 a church in Saransk was consecrated: it was built for an Erzyan congregation according to the architectural plans of Alyoshkin, who used striking national motifs in his work (he also designed the national flag) and integrated elements – colours and ornamentation – from traditional Mordovian dress.

A Lutheran congregation of the Komi people came into existence thanks to a party campaigning for national revival called “Protect Ourselves”. Komi nationalists long wavered between paganism and Christianity, held debates and round tables during which they discussed which religion best suited their people. They rejected paganism as outdated and dead, and turned to the religion of their ethnic brothers, the Finno-Ugrians, that is to Lutheranism. This came about particularly thanks to the missionary work of Arvo Survo and Yukha Veliakha: for example, in 1996, Nadezhda Mityusheva, the leader of “Protect Ourselves” was converted after a half hour conversation with Arvo Survo, and asked to be

baptised. By 2000, the Church of Ingria’s congregation in the Komi Republic’s capital, Syktyvkar, had grown to 200 members, had bought a building and appointed a Komi pastor, Sergei Elfimov, who came from an Old Believer family and had been baptised by a particularly strict branch of priestless Old Believers (the *skrytniki*). Nadezhda Mityusheva’s political movement “Protect Ourselves” was transformed into a religious group: it found that many Russians began to join the Syktyvkar congregation and so came to accept this “Russian element”, allowing services to be held using Russian. Gradually more Lutheran congregations began to appear in the towns of the Komi republic.

By 2020 Russian Lutheranism had taken the form of three churches (ELC, the Church of Ingria and the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church) which mutually accepted each other and were recognised by the World Lutheran Federation. However, relations between the three were complicated: from time to time attempts at cooperation ended in disagreement and joint projects collapsed; each church had its own activists who accused the other churches of not being sufficiently conservative, of depending on foreigners and of not being truly Lutheran. Nevertheless, with the passage of time these conflicts calmed down and it seemed that reconciliation was on the horizon. But this hoped for resolution was suddenly undermined in 2006 by the appearance of the *enfant terrible* of Russian Lutheranism, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession (ELCAC). This new group also stressed its Russian nature. A group of

dissatisfied members of ELC, plus a few dissidents from the Church of Ingria and other Protestant churches and organisations, announced the creation of ELCAC. Among its organisers were not only some difficult individuals, but also people of dubious moral standing. ELCAC organised a campaign demanding recognition and asked the secular authorities to hand over to them buildings which had belonged to the Lutheran Church since 1917. ELC and the Church of Ingria refused to have anything to do with ELCAC. The ELC clergy were particularly hostile to them: for example, one of them said to me, “they have nothing in common with Lutheranism; there’s nothing Christian about them.” ELCAC’s demagogic and adventurist behaviour made observers think that their pronouncements and speeches had little to do with matters of faith; furthermore, ELCAC’s leadership changed frequently and was often involved in scandals.

In 2022, ELCAC unexpectedly chose as its archbishop Pastor Aleksandr Franz, whose reputation was that of a practical man with the highest moral standards. He came from the Lutheran brotherhood tradition and from 2000-2010 had been the unofficial leader of all the German Lutheran brotherhoods in the Altai krai. A leader like Franz could turn ELCAC into a church with more of a future. It is ironic, however, that a Lutheran group which had loudly advertised its Russian identity should have selected a leader

who was deeply rooted in the traditions of Russian Germans.

Another paradox is associated with ELCAC: in 1997 a Karelian Lutheran church was founded in the town of Sortovala as part of a Karelian revival, which at first involved the Karelians in Finland who had escaped there from the Soviet Union. During the Civil War in Russia, the Soviet-Finnish war and WWII, the majority of ethnic Karelians (who are related to the Finns) escaped to Finland where the government’s policy was to assimilate them. In the 1980s a national movement for the preservation of Karelian culture developed and gradually spread across the Karelian territory within Russia. The Karelian Lutherans tried to join the Church of Ingria, but were rejected, and so as soon as ELCAC was established they opted to join this church.



Pastor Aleksandr Franz

Despite the continuous emigration of the original ethnic groups associated with Lutheranism in Russia – Russian Germans, Finns, Ingermanlanders, Estonians – the number of Lutherans grew during the 1990s and 2000s. In the last five to ten years, however, in connection with the general decline in the number of religious believers, this growth has halted, but by this point Lutheranism within Russia had already become well-established.

Sergei Filatov is a sociologist of religion and a member of Moscow’s Institute of Oriental Studies.

Vladivostok and Russia's Maritime Province

by Sergei Filatov

This report from Sergei Filatov, head of Keston's Encyclopaedia project, written following a field trip in November 2023 to Vladivostok and the Maritime Province (in Russia's Far East), describes the history and current activity of a variety of Christian denominations in this area. Most remarkable has been the contribution of many Protestant denominations, and particularly that of the Lutheran Church, which, in Filatov's words, "has become something akin to a parallel ministry of culture in the Maritime Province". Ed.

Russian Orthodox Church

Unlike the liberalism of public opinion in the Maritime Province, the Russian Orthodox Church in this area of Russia is quite different: long-serving Metropolitan (1992-2018) Veniamin and the leading clergy of this Orthodox diocese are nationalists, monarchists, isolationists and anti-ecumenism. According to Metropolitan Veniamin, "we want everything here to be as it was in the centre of Russia before the Revolution". He made his views clear in an interview with *Rus' pravoslavnaya* (Orthodox Russia): "We live in parlous times, when mighty global forces have launched a real war aimed at the total annihilation of the Russian people and the Orthodox Church. So-called 'globalization' is nothing other than the process of political, economic and spiritual preparation for the creation of a single global super state with a World Government at its head, in other words, from the Christian position



– it is preparing to enthrone the Antichrist." (*Rus' pravoslavnaya*, July 2004). No clergy have ever taken part in any events at which representatives of other faiths were present. The current leader of the Vladivostok diocese is Metropolitan Vladimir, who is reputed to be difficult, crude, cruel and uneducated, according to internet reports. However, so far, he has

made no obvious changes in the life of the diocese and has carried out no purges.

The head of the youth department, Fr Dmitri Vinokurov, is worth noting: he is devoted to Communist ideology and admires the Soviet period. When young he was a Komsomol leader, and in his current role tries to introduce Komsomol practices to the Orthodox youth movement. He likes to include political discussions in his work with young people: he focuses on two main themes – Soviet patriotism and local patriotism. He praises the feats of Russian revolutionaries, the achievements of the USSR, and the superiority of Communism over capitalism. He emphasises the achievements of the early explorers and pioneers who conquered Russia's Far East, and has promoted a cult about them, claiming that their feats and courage are typical of the people of the Maritime Province. He claims that the diocesan clergy and Christians of all denominations have inherited the heroic characteristics of these past heroes, and have produced in addition some outstanding missionaries, such as Metropolitan Innokenty (Veniaminov). Fr Dmitri's greatest administrative successes have been the ten-day Far Eastern forums for young people with initiative, the "Andreyevsky gorodok" ("Andrew's small town") held every summer in the 2010s (later the funding was lost). These forums were attended by 500-800 young people from all over the region, who had shown outstanding qualities in various fields. These gatherings included discussions, concerts, sporting events, as well as lectures and seminars, which were led by popular members of the local elite – politicians, businessmen, scientists, artists and sportsmen. The

organisers hoped that all this would produce a new Orthodox elite of Soviet-style conservatives and patriots.

The Arsenevsk diocese within the Maritime Province is particularly interesting. Its leader, Bishop Guri, a professional architect (from 17 April 1994 to 29 December 2000, he was a member of the working group overseeing the construction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow) organised the construction, in a neo-Russian style, of a Spiritual and Educational Centre in Arsenevsk, a delightful small town with a cathedral and a convent whose charm stands out amidst the grim Soviet-era buildings of a workers' settlement. The Centre provides social and information services, it houses the bishop's office, the diocesan administration, a department for religious education, a Sunday school for children and adults, a diocesan library and reading room, two museums (one devoted to folk art and the other to church culture), as well as icon painting studios. Diocesan meetings are held at this Centre, as well as bible study and Church Slavonic classes, Christmas and Easter celebrations, and rehearsals of the convent choir and church choirs. The main aim of the Centre is to promote spiritual and educational work with schools and other institutions within the diocese. It has become not just a spiritual force, but also the educational and cultural heart of the town and surrounding area.

Roman Catholic Church

The renaissance of the Roman Catholic Church in Russia began in 1991. The growth of Catholicism in Vladivostok (and the entire Far East) is connected with



Right to left: Sergei Filatov, Fr Myron Effing, Philip Walters & Sasha Styopina (back to camera), during a 1999 Encyclopaedia field trip. Fr Effing shows them round the Church of the Most Holy Mother of God in Vladivostok.

Lord Jesus, and run a Sunday school and catechism classes.

The Vladivostok parish, one of the largest in Russia, is based at the pre-revolutionary Catholic Church of the Most Holy Mother of God, which can hold over 600 people. The parish is multi-national: it is made up of Russians (the majority), Armenians, Koreans, Germans, Poles, Lithuanians as well as some Ukrainian Greek Catholics, and includes many who are highly educated. They are well respected by the general public

two American missionaries, Fr Myron Effing and Fr Daniel Maurer, who became the first Catholic priests to work in Russia's Far East. In Michigan, USA, Fr Effing and Fr Maurer were members of the Augustinian order, Regular Canons of the Holy Cross. Unhappy with the "excessive liberalism" of their order, they left it and organised a new Augustinian order, the Regular Canons of the Lord Jesus, which was founded in the Church of the Most Holy Mother of God in Vladivostok. This new order is involved in missionary work in the countries of South-East Asia – Vietnam, the Philippines – and has been particularly successful in Indonesia. Missionaries from Vietnam and the Philippines regularly visit Vladivostok and take part in communal prayer and share their learning and experience. Two nuns from the order Sisters in the Lord Jesus (from Minnesota, USA) have formed a sisterhood linked to the Regular Canons of the



Left to right: Fr Daniel Maurer & Sergei Filatov, November 2023

and the local authorities because of their charitable and cultural work. In the 1990s and 2010s the Catholic organisation Caritas ran orphanages, helped children from poor families, and organised a children's summer camp. This charitable work was so successful that it was frequently commended by the district and city authorities.

Five nuns from the Order of St Anna work in the Vladivostok parish. They look after the seriously sick, care for children, run Sunday schools and support parish charitable work in general. They organised the opening of a rehabilitation centre for children from large or dysfunctional families in the village of Romanovka; they also organised a youth club which became very popular, and held meetings for elderly parishioners. Fr Effing in his ministry focuses particularly on developing responsible citizens: in his words, “the church must, first and foremost, raise boys, who will become heads of families and form the back-



*Vladivostok's
Catholic Church of the
Most Holy Mother of
God*



bone of a civil society. Real citizens will not tolerate a new tyranny.”

Music has been at the centre of the parish from the outset. In 1992 work began on compiling a hymnal called *My soul doth magnify the Lord* which was published in 1994. It contains over 170 hymns and parts of the mass in Russian. On Fr Maurer's initiative, in 1994 a programme was drawn up to develop Russian liturgical music for the Catholic

mass. The “St Augustine” musical group was organised which helped create the hymnal, selected texts, and made recordings of its concerts. Part of the programme involved organising

a Christmas festival of Christian choirs in Vladivostok. Over the past ten years, the parish has organised 18 concerts each year, in which its professional music groups have taken part.

Protestantism

Vladivostok is one of the most “Protestant” cities in Russia with more practising Protestants than the total number of practising Orthodox Chris-

tians. In 2021 Protestant worshipping congregations comprised 53.93% (178 communities) of the total number. In addition, there are a significant number of Protestants (unregistered Baptists, Fedotov Pentecostals) who refuse to register as a matter of principle, and many groups have a number of unregistered branches. Some groups do not register simply because to them it is “more convenient”.

In the 1890s, Baptists established themselves in the Maritime Province despite all official restrictions, and subsequently their numbers increased rapidly thanks to Pyotr Stolypin's reforms (Russia's Prime Minister from 1906 until his assassination in 1911) which included a resettlement programme. From 1909, many other Evangelicals, including Adventists, moved to the area. The role of Koreans has been highly significant. From 1860, the Russian government invited many Koreans – mostly Buddhists or pagans – to settle in the Maritime Province; there was even an area in Vladivostok called the “Korean quarter”. In 1884 some American Evangelicals organised missions to the Koreans, leading to a dramatic religious revival in Korea, and the conversion of tens of thousands in the early 20th century, most of whom became Presbyterians, some Methodists and a few Pentecostals and Baptists. By 1910 there were some 400,000 Protestants in Korea. In 1909, Korean missionaries arrived in the Maritime Province and were highly successful in converting their fellow Koreans: one of the most influential of these early missionaries was called Tsoi Kwan Full and is greatly revered as “the Apostle of the Maritime Province”.

The political situation in the Maritime Province from 1917-1922 helped strengthen Protestantism in the area. The Bolsheviks only gained control of this part of Russia's Far East in 1922, while prior to that date, under a weak “White” administration, many Americans, who supported Protestant missions, remained in Vladivostok. The Soviet Union was formed in December 1922: during the first few years, the Soviet authorities tolerated the Protestants, but later in the mid-1920s restrictions were imposed leading to repression. By 1929, the Presbyterian and Methodist churches were banned, and in 1937 all Koreans were deported to Central Asia where they preserved their faith underground. The Baptists and Evangelicals were banned in 1938, and like the Koreans became secret Christian believers.

From 1944-1945, however, the Baptists, (including those who were not registered) were allowed to exist legally (the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, or AUCECB, was only registered in 1964). At the same time, at the end of the war, Pentecostals from the European part of the USSR moved to the Maritime Province. From the mid-1950s and during Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign (1959-1964) the Pentecostals and Baptists in this region showed great fortitude in standing up for their rights; many were persecuted and sent to prison. These years of resistance produced remarkably brave believers who had authority and firmly held to their beliefs. They became leaders of Protestant congregations, and, whenever “it became possible”, successfully developed their churches.

A new rapid growth of Protestantism occurred during Gorbachev's *perestroika* years and the following 10-15 years (the Communist Party changed its policy on religion in 1988). The Soviet authorities stopped persecuting Protestants and violating their rights, leading to a veritable boom in church building, religious education, charitable and cultural activity. Koreans returning from exile in Central Asia resurrected their churches – the Presbyterians ahead of the others, followed by the Methodists. Many missionaries from Ukraine, Belarus, South Korea, the USA and Australia headed for the Maritime Province, set up their own churches and strengthened the local ones. They enabled religious education to flourish, and supported many aspects of church life.

Before *perestroika* many Protestant churches in Russia's Far East had their headquarters in Khabarovsk, but by 2023 most of them had moved to Vladivostok. They supported cooperation, organised regular conferences of the Evangelical churches in the Maritime Province, which all the Protestant churches attended and even Catholics took part. The Alliance of Evangelical Christian Churches was founded in 2005 and helped coordinate joint projects. During those years the local authorities worked with the Protestants in solving social problems, and there are many offices of Protestant churches which still have on their walls the certificates recording the local authorities' gratitude for the work of these Christian communities. In contrast, by the end of the early 2000s, with legislation which restricted Evangelical church activity, the contribution to society of

Protestants was reduced dramatically: some churches stopped growing, then stabilised, while others declined, and most missionaries left the Maritime Province.

Evangelical Lutheran Church

Vladivostok's main Lutheran church is called St Paul's and is in the centre of the city. Its pastor is Vitali Mohr, who was born in Barnaul (Altai krai) and studied in a liberal German seminary.



*St Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
in Vladivostok*

The renaissance of the Lutheran parish began in 1992, when it was headed by Pastor Manfred Brockmann (d.2023) from Hamburg, who gathered round him activists from the German cultural centre. There are no communities of the Lutheran Brotherhood tradition (these are highly conservative) in the Maritime Province. The theology of Pastor Brockmann suited the small number of Germans in Vladivostok. By 2010 most ethnic Germans had left for West Germany and the arrival of Russians in the parish made it basically Russian. Pastor Brockmann married a Russian and became a Russian citizen.



Pastor Brockmann, photographed by Sergei Filatov in St Paul's during the 1999 Encyclopaedia field trip

He had a charismatic personality, was a professional musician and an original thinker. By 2023 his congregation had grown to 300, most of whom were from the Russian intelligentsia. He decided against using German in his church services, and believed that in another 15 years the congregation would be entirely Russian; he also believed that the rapid growth of his congregation was due to the spirit of freedom and liberalism characteristic of Lutheranism.

In 2021 Pastor Brockmann, after falling seriously ill, took on a junior role under a new pastor, Vitali Mohr. While Pastor Brockmann was in charge, there was much cultural activity and this has continued under Pastor Mohr: concerts and other cultural events take place, seminars and discussions have continued as well as the popular event, the regular

“Week of German Culture”, which was organised by St Paul's in collaboration with the German Cultural Society (this was terminated in 2022, most likely on orders from the state security service).

The Lutheran Church has been the clear “trail blazer” for cultural projects of a less evangelical nature. Education, creativity, humanitarian concern – these were the main focus of the events organised within the framework of the “Week of German Culture”. These “Weeks” were unique: they involved all sorts of artists, leading teachers of the humanities, star students, and attracted a wide section of Vladivostok society. Every year, a literary “patron” of the “Week of German Culture” was chosen from among leading German writers, e.g. Schiller, Hoffmann, Heine, Gunter Grass, Hauptmann, Böll or Hesse. In line with the chosen writer, literary or literary-musical events were held, the subjects of which differed widely, e.g. “The Poetry of Schiller and the Music of Beethoven”, “Students Discussing Heinrich Heine”, “In Memory of Heinrich Böll and Lev Kopelev”, “Hermann Hesse”, “The History



Pastor Vitali Mohr (left) with Sergei Filatov in 2023

of the Reunification of Germany in Verse, Prose and Film". Exhibitions held during one of these "Weeks" varied: they included "Russian Berlin 1918-1941", "Famous Russian Germans", "Famous Germans in Vladivostok",

the end of WWII) was discussed, and to which WWII veterans were invited. This was a meeting not only of two cultures, but of two generations, and proved to be a positive step towards mutual understanding and reconciliation.



Concert at St Paul's

Pastor Brockmann's cultural events during these "Weeks" involved local artists and foreign musicians. Vladivostok audiences were able to enjoy concerts given by leading organists from Germany, by a famous German pianist, and by soloists from the Stuttgart Opera. In 2009 a remarkable event took place: a joint German-Russian performance of Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*.

"From the Deutschmark to the Euro". From 2000 onwards information stands were erected covering such subjects as "Educational Opportunities in Germany", "The Work of the Stuttgart Opera", "The Magic of Alcina", "Dresden before and after its Destruction", "Life in Lutheran Deaneries of the Far East", "From Peaceful Revolution to the Reunification of Germany", "Literature about the Wall and its Fall". Another regular feature of these "Weeks" were meetings of students who were studying German: they read German literature and discussed such subjects as "Youth Culture in Germany", "Do you know Germany?", "German-Russian Relations in Vladivostok after the Reunification of Germany and the Opening of the City". The central event of the 2004 "Week" was a German-Russian evening at which Günter Grass's book *Trajectory 1521. Crabwalk* (about a torpedo attack by a Soviet submarine on a German ship filled with refugees at

Many Christian churches are engaged in cultural work, but the Lutheran parish in Vladivostok is probably the champion for the whole of Russia in this sphere. Catholics, Armenians and some of the other Protestants are also doing serious cultural work, but the Lutherans are far ahead of them all. Their parish has become something akin to a parallel ministry of culture in the Maritime Province.

Presbyterians

When the Koreans were forcibly exiled to Kazakhstan in Central Asia in 1937, the Presbyterian Church in the Maritime Province disappeared. After *perestroika* many Koreans returned to the area: by 2023 there were about 20,000 of them. In 1990, following the passing of a law "On Freedom of Worship", the Korean Mission was re-established, whereupon South Korean Protestants (Presbyterians in the lead), sent their missionaries to the



Sergei Filatov (centre) with Presbyterian pastors Vyacheslav Nogai & Vladimir Kim

Soviet Union on the eve of its collapse. They chose three areas – Moscow, St Peterburg and the countries of Central Asia – where descendants of Korean exiles still lived. They also came to the Maritime Province and established new churches with the primary aim of preparing local leaders as quickly as possible. They invited potential leaders to Korea for study and training in preparation for roles back in Vladivostok.

In 1991 the first Presbyterian church was opened in Nakhodka, a port to the East of Vladivostok. With financial support from fellow-believers in Korea, 24 prayer houses were built or refurbished in the 1990s. A seminary was founded in 1995, which moved to new premises in Vladivostok in 1998 and was called the Presbyterian Spiritual Seminary of Vladivostok. Presbyterians were not the only ones to study there; members from many other Protestant denominations also received training. In 1997, the Presbyterian churches joined together to form the

Union of Christian Presbyterian Churches of the Maritime Province.

By 2023 there were 30 Presbyterian churches and approximately the same number of groups. No missionaries from Korea remained and the local Koreans, being the third generation in Russia, felt that they had become Russian. Evidence of this cultural change has been their success as missionaries among ethnic Russians, large numbers of whom have joined the Presbyterian Church. Pastors estimate that some 50% of worshippers in their churches are Russian, and assert that “we do not need some kind of ethnic culture, but a Christian one. Elements of Korean and Russian culture must be employed as a means of strengthening the faith, not national consciousness.” Now the first pastors who are Russian have appeared; before 2022 the Chairman of the Union of Presbyterian Christian Churches in the Maritime Province was a Russian, Ruslan Moroz.

Methodists

A Methodist mission from South Korea was established in the Maritime Province in 1992. In 2020, the local Methodists moved from the South Korean mission into the Russian United Methodist Church (RUMC). There are two congregations in Vladivostok and one each in Ussuriysk and Artemovsk. The pastor of one of the Vladivostok churches, Anatoli Kim, is a professor of philology at the university. The church, built in the English neo-Gothic style, is considered to be one of the city’s architectural monuments and is frequently visited by tourists. In

the mid-1990s there was some serious conflict between the “Korean” Koreans and the “Russian” Koreans, and as a result, the church was closed for more than 18 months; the congregation had to be built up again practically from scratch.

Theologically the Methodists are more liberal than the Presbyterians (e.g. they accept women’s ordination). They are totally opposed to divorce and insist on a 9-month period of preparation for a wedding with instruction given to the bride and groom. There are usually about 50 at Sunday services, and include Russians, Koreans, Uzbeks and Buryats. The parish supports the Methodist mission in Central Asia. Their services are always in Russian, but the singing is in three languages – Russian, Korean and English. Many are interested in Orthodox theology and liturgy, resulting in some borrowings from both. Pastor Kim is particularly attracted to the Orthodox practice of prayer. According to him “about three quarters of our parishioners have a ‘good’ higher education” and are involved in theatre and music; they consider courtesy to be important. Only classical music is allowed in church services or “traditional” Orthodox liturgical music.

Pastor Kim, in his work with young people, believes it is not necessary to enter into a dialogue with contemporary youth subculture as it is totally antichristian and should be suppressed. An alternative should be offered. His church’s youth group holds heated debates on religious faith and other worldviews, as well as about books and films. The



Methodist Pastor Anatoli Kim (left) outside his church in Vladivostok with Sergei Filatov

church runs social projects, such as collecting and distributing humanitarian aid, which is free for all those in need, to the numerous Korean refugees from Ukraine. He also runs a healing service for those who have experienced trauma, and has involved the professional help of psychologists, psychotherapists and clergy.

Pentecostals

Nakhodka, on the coast East of Vladivostok, became the centre of Pentecostalism in the Russian Far East as from the 1950s. This came about in 1957 when the leaders of a Pentecostal community in Barnaul (Altai krai) believed in a prophesy which claimed that their people should move to the Maritime Province. This led to a mass migration of

Pentecostals from various parts of the Soviet Union. By 1957, over 1,166 Pentecostal families had arrived in Nakhodka from Kirgizia, Kazakhstan, and the Krasnoyarsk and Altai provinces. In the 1950s many Pentecostal communities lived an itinerant life in order to avoid persecution. Before 1950, the Barnaul community had lived in the town of Frunze in the Kirgiz SSR, and in 1950 moved to Kemerovo and then to Barnaul in 1952. From there they moved to Nakhodka. In September 1957, the leader of the Barnaul community, Bishop Nikolai Goretoi and his family, were the first to arrive, and in the course of the following months were joined by the rest of the community. Like most Pentecostal communities in the USSR, the Barnaul community rejected registration and wished to have nothing to do with the Soviet authorities. The authorities in Nakhodka tried to stop the influx of migrants, and to suppress any organised Pentecostal activity, imprisoning the leaders in 1961. By 1963, tired of the continuous relocation from place to place, the believers attempted to legalise their position and applied for registration to the local Nakhodka City Soviet but this was rejected. In 1984, they started a hunger strike and removed their children from school.

With the advent of *perestroika*, those wishing to leave the USSR received permission to emigrate. According to data from the official site of the Russian Union of Pentecostals, from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, over 25,000 Pentecostals left the country. A significant proportion, possibly the

majority of these emigrants, came from the Maritime Province.

The religious freedom that came during the *perestroika* years unleashed the energy of Maritime Pentecostalism. The Pentecostal churches which already existed in the area, and those established by missionaries arriving from all over the world, began to grow, developing various forms of activity, both internal (such as religious education, children's groups, young people's groups, women's groups, and musical activities) and external public service (such as caring for neglected children, the poor, the sick and handicapped). The churches united, split apart, created unions, some grew rapidly, others slowly, and some disappeared altogether. As a result, today there are dozens of separate churches, and religious groups. Churches established by foreign missionaries have fully assimilated and have lost practically everything that was foreign about them, except for some Korean Pentecostal churches which have retained "a Korean spirit". The most Pentecostal town in the Maritime Province (and in perhaps all of Russia), as in Soviet times, remains the port of Nakhodka.



Pastor Aleksandr Serebrennikov, leader of the Tree of Life Pentecostal group

Keston Center Report

from the Director, Professor Kathy Hillman,
September 2024



Left to right: Xenia Dennen, Vladimer Narsia, Joanne Cummings, George Njung, & David A. Smith at the Spring 2024 Keston Lecture “Seeking Peace in Times of War: Hope or Hopeless?”

On 22 February 2024, Keston presented the Spring Lecture “Seeking Peace in Times of War: Hope or Hopeless?” co-sponsored by the Baylor University Libraries; the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies; International Studies; and the Departments of History, Religion, and Modern Languages and Cultures. Panelists included Keston Council Chair Xenia Dennen from the United Kingdom; retired US State Department foreign service officer Joanne Held Cummings, who serves as Director of Middle East Studies, and lecturer in both Political Science and the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core, as well as on the Keston Advisory Board; Fulbright Scholar in Peace and Conflict Studies Vladimer Narsia, who holds the position of Assistant Professor of Theology and Canon Law at Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia;

and George Njung, Assistant Professor of African Studies. The Baylor Interdisciplinary Core History Professor David A. Smith moderated. Approximately 100 attended with others watching the livestream.

The *Baptist Standard* reported, “In the wide-ranging discussion – hosted by the Keston Center for Religion, Politics and Society – panelists not only talked about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but also war in the Middle East and armed conflict in several African nations.” Some panelists pointed to the challenge of thinking about war holistically, not just from the point of view of nations, but through the eyes of the people whose lives are directly impacted because, as Cummings stated, “As long as people remain afraid, any sort of political resolution or military

resolution is going to be – in the long run – unsuccessful.”



Kathy Hillman closes the discussion with a biblical verse from the Old Testament prophet Micah

Keston Director Kathy Hillman closed by quoting Micah 6:8 (NIV), “The Lord has shown you what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” During a reception following the presentation, meaningful conversations continued. A recording of the event can be viewed online at:

https://mediaspace.baylor.edu/media/2024+Keston+Spring+Panel+-+%22Seek-ing+Peace+in+Times+of+War+A+Hope+or+HopelessF%22/1_1i9p2rmf

The lecture intentionally coincided with the annual Keston Advisory Board Meeting and visit to Baylor by Xenia Dennen. Among her many activities while in Waco, Chair Dennen worked with Keston Curator Larisa Seago, talked to Darryl Stuhr, Riley Digitization Center Director, viewed the Institute for Oral History (IOH) operations, and had a meeting with IOH Director Dr Stephen Sloan. She also

met Truett Seminary Professor Revd Dr Rebecca Poe Hays, and heard about her plans for the 2025 Triennial Conference of the Inking Fellows in Oxford.

Xenia Dennen toured the Czech Heritage Museum in Temple and attended the McLennan Community College Theatre production of “Into the Woods” with three Czech exchange students from Masaryk University in Brno. Her visit concluded with the



Keston Advisory Board (left to right): Adrienne Harris, Michael Long, Julie deGraffenried, Kathy Hillman, Steve Gardner, Joanne Cummings, Xenia Dennen, Wallace Daniel, & Carl Flynn

Sunday worship service at First Baptist Church, Waco, followed by lunch with Pastor Revd Dr Matt Snowden, his wife Meredith, and Truett Seminary student Ksusha Bondarenko from Ukraine, who helped organise a visit to the Keston Center of a delegation from her country.

The Advisory Board heard reports from 2023 Nancy Newman Logan Intern and Truman Scholar Kaitlyn Vana; student



Karl Flynn leads the group through Keston's website

assistants Erika Rodriguez, Julia Ash, Josh Beuker, and Jonathan Pense; 2023 Summer Teaching Fellow Dr Adrienne Harris; and received updates on the audio

-visual digitisation project and facilities upgrade plans. The Board reviewed the Keston Collection Development Policy. Carl Flynn, Director of Communications and Marketing for Baylor's Libraries and Information Technology Services, led a hands-on experience

designed to review and receive input on Keston's website design, gather new ideas, and offer possible links. Advisory Board members attending included Dr Stephen Gardner (Chair), Dr Julie deGraffenried (Secretary), Professor Joanne Cummings, Dr Wallace Daniel, Dr Michael Long, Dr Doug Weaver, and Dr Taffey Hall, who joined remotely

from the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives in Nashville. Dr Dominic Erdozain sent apologies.

The Advisory Board enjoyed lunch hosted by International Studies, with several University guests, including Dr Ed-die Contreras, Vice Provost for Global Engage-ment; Dr Kimberly Kel-lison, Associate Dean for

Humanities and Social Sciences; and Dr Elizabeth Flowers, Director of the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Stud-ies. An informal supper that evening in



Keston's Council (UK) enjoying lunch before their June meeting

Kathy and John Hillman's home includ-ed representatives of Baylor's administra-tion, Student Life, and the School of Business.

In June, Keston Center Director Kathy Hillman attended the Keston Council meeting in London in person, when she had the opportunity to update the Council

on the Keston Center for Religion, Politics, and Society at Baylor, and to visit the Mercers' Company where the meeting was held. She also met with the outstanding supervising archivist, Liza Giffen, of the Mercers' Company.

The Keston Center for Religion, Politics, and Society welcomes researchers, scholars, students, and other visitors from across campus and around the world. This year these have included:

- Jacob Bennett, University of Texas Slavic and Eurasian Studies Graduate Student and Taiwan Embassy Employee, 11 January 2024
- Dr Andrew Bunnell, University College London, 22 January 2024, 22 February 2024, 10 April 2024



*Dr Gary Saul Morson &
Dr Michael Foley*

- Dr Gary Saul Morson, Northwestern University, Phi Beta Kappa Lecturer on "Faith in Russian Literature" and Dr Michael Foley, Great Texts Professor, 5 February 2024
- Will Franks, Baylor History PhD



Jacob Bennett

Candidate, 19 February 2024

- Fulbright Scholar Vladimer Narsia, Head of the Canon Law Centre at Ilia State University in Tbilisi, Georgia, 22 February 2024



Vladimer Narsia speaks to Russian language students

- Professor Andrew Hill, J.D., St. Philip's College, 22 February 2024



Faith VanVleet

- Faith VanVleet, University of Texas Slavic and Eurasian Studies Graduate Student, 22 March 2024
- Dr Liana Kirillova, Baylor History Lecturer, 25 March 2024
- Stephen Thomas, Baylor Political Science PhD Candidate, 27 March 2024
- Evelyn “Evie” Smith, Baylor Garland School of Social Work Masters Candidate and Student of Joanne Cummings, 15 April 2024
- Dr Robert Woodberry, Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, 1 May 2024

(propaganda posters), by individuals (Aida Skripnikova), and by denomination and country, or either or both (Lithuanian Memorandum and Lithuania Roman Catholics).

- On 18 March, Dr Adrienne Harris held her Russian 4302 Survey of Russian Literature class in Keston, and provided opportunities for students to examine nine posters and five photographs, giving them



History 5370 Advanced Graduate Research & Writing students examine the Keston archives

some experience with Soviet primary sources.

- The Russian Club, led by Keston student assistant Julia Ash, met regularly in the Michael Bourdeaux Research Center.

Several classes and various meetings were held in the Michael Bourdeaux Research Center within Keston during the Spring semester:

- On 29 January, Dr Elesha Coffman’s History 5370 Advanced Graduate Research and Writing class met in the Bourdeaux Research Center. After an orientation and tour, the students explored the various types of organisation of archival materials in Keston: by format

- During the Spring semester, ten non-Keston related classes were held in the James Wood Seminar Room within the Keston suite, posing significant challenges as regards oversight of the space, including staffing the entrance to the area. The proliferation of food and drinks which, like water, are a danger for archival materials, as well as the opening of the building and Keston for evening and Saturday final examinations, were also problematic. Dean of Libraries Jeffry Archer,



Russian Literature students enjoy discussing the Keston Center's library & archival holdings with Director Kathy Hillman (centre)

having reviewed the situation with the Provost's and Registrar's Offices, has now ensured that no regular classes will be scheduled in the facility beginning Fall 2024 without the express consent of the Director of the Keston Center, who will make exceptions only for classes or faculty members closely connected to the archive.

On 6 February 2024, a Ukraine Delegation led by Pastor Leonid Regheta and Truett Seminary student Ksusha Bondarenko, visited Keston. They also met with Baylor President Linda Livingstone as well as with faculty and students at the University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary. The group left several poignant comments in Keston's guest book, including:

"May God bless your ministry."

"It is a very personal story for my family."

"The blessed memory. Grateful for tremendous work."

"God history make cry; obedience to our father; let Him work."

The following were members of the delegation with about 14 visiting the Keston Center:

- Valeriy Antonuk, President of the Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine
- Pavel Unguryan, Member of Ukrainian Parliament, Coordinator of American-Ukrainian Partnership
- Ihor Bandura, Vice-President for International Affairs of the Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine
- Vadim Dashkevich, Leader of Ukrainian Diaspora in the USA and Senior Pastor of Spring of Life Church in Sacramento, California
- Rostyslav Koval, Head of the Ukrainian Galician Party



The Ukraine delegation visits the Michael Bourdeaux Research Center

- Roman Ivantsiv, Deputy of the Ukrainian Galician Party
- Korotenko Denys, Dnipro Regional Council
- Pavlo Poida, Vinnitsa Regional Council Deputy
- Iryna Kolesnyk, Vinnitsa Regional Council Deputy and Director of Regional Baptist Charity
- Valentin Siniy, Rector of Tavriski Christian Institute
- Leonid Regheta, Pastor of River of Life Church in Dallas, Texas
- Victor Ahterov, River of Life Church in Dallas, Texas
- Ksusha Bondarenko, Truett Seminary student from Ukraine
- Alan Lefever, Director of the Texas Baptist Historical Collection

Full-time Keston staff, and student graduate and undergraduate assistants, helped host the guests, several helping with interpreting.

The Center enjoys a stable staff, including Curator Larisa Seago, who began to work with the archive when it was moved to Baylor in 2007. Janice Losak joined the Keston family in 2012, but has been employed at Baylor for more than 40 years. Tanya Clark remains invaluable to the Center since she shares space in the suite as the Managing Editor of the *Journal of Church and State*.

Honors College junior Julia Ash, native of Ukraine but adopted aged 14, finished her third year as a student worker. Josh Beuker and Jonathan Pense worked through the Spring semester as did



Tanya Clark in conversation with Leonid Regheta



Larisa Seago, the Keston Curator, assists one of the Ukrainian visitors

Museum Studies graduate assistant Erika Rodriguez. Sadly, the Center said good-byes to Jonathan Pense who graduated in May, and Erika Rodriguez who completed her Keston experience, but Museum Graduate student Kealey Trevino will take her position in the Fall.

Working with the Keston staff, these students steadily make progress on processing materials and creating or updating finding aids. The Georgia Subject Files finding aid has been completed. In addition, 15 boxes of Soviet Union Subject Files and 9 boxes of Yugoslavia materials have been added to those finding aids. To date, 77 finding aids are accessible in Baylor's Archival Repositories Database (BARD).

Digitisation and preservation activities also continue:

- Student Assistant Jonathan Pense digitised 28 of the 35 titles identified in the

Keston Book Series, one of which has already been requested for use outside of Baylor. One additional volume is in progress, and five need digitisation.

- The first 250 audio cassettes were sent to commercial vendor George Blood for digitisation. Batch 1, consisting of 52 entries from 48 audiocassettes, has been returned, and metadata has been created that awaits editing.
- Metadata creation and review was completed for digitised video batch 5.
- On 14-15 May, 20 librarians, archivists, library staff, and summer interns visited Michal Peichl's Paper Restoration Studio. Keston Director Kathy Hillman arranged the meeting and tour. Peichl, a native of the Czech Republic, restores maps and other rare items from around the world, and is now working on some maps for Baylor's Texas Collection.

During the 2023-2024 academic year, approximately 750 people visited the Keston Center suite, while the Keston



Ksusha Bondarenko meets Julia Ash & Erika Rodriguez



Some of the Baylor Libraries visitors to Michal Peichl's Paper Restoration Studio

Center continued to receive numerous research and reference enquiries from across the world, as well as requests for interlibrary loan materials. Some notable topics have included religion under police surveillance in the USSR, the Romanian Orthodox Church, propaganda as an element of a state's grand strategy, the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, emergence of evangelical movements in Russia, foreign missions under Communist regimes in Africa and Latin America, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Adventists in the Soviet Union.

Interlibrary loan requests, consultations, and reference inquiries handled by the Keston Curator totalled more than 100, with approximately 70% of those virtual. In her various library roles, including with Baptist Collections and Library Advancement and other University responsibilities, the Center's Director answered more than 200 reference questions and was consulted by about 150 individuals and groups. About 140 of the total were virtual.

During the Fall 2024 semester, the Carroll Library elevator, which failed when water poured into the shaft during heavy rain on 23 May, leaving the third floor and the Keston Center with access only via the stairs, is due to be repaired.

On 29 October, Keston plans to sponsor a panel, "Baylor in Deeds: Interfaith and Intra-Faith Harmony: Strengthening Leadership for Women Globally through Sports," which will draw from the results of a US State Department grant and the Baylor School of Education participation in an experience in Pakistan, which interweaves strengthening women's leadership through sport, religion, politics, and society. James Teaching Fellows Liana Kirilova and Zachary Wingerd will report their summer research results. In addition, Nancy Newman Logan Summer Intern Heather Helton will present her exhibition on the "Refuseniks" and make her official, for-course-credit, internship presentation, which will include information from late summer Keston researcher Czarina Yuffa, whose Jewish grandparents emigrated from the Soviet Union in 1979.



Members of the Ukraine delegation view photographs & other archival items related to the Soviet Union, religious persecution, Baptists, & other topics connected to their country

When guests and classes visit the Keston Center, displays of archival treasures are organised, including, for example, Aida Skripnikova's trial transcript written in pen on strips of bed sheets; a legal document assessing a fine for being a believer; photographs of burnt churches and believers; prints of Vitali Linitsky's paintings; and other precious items, chosen to fit a particular visitor's interests.

A tiny, black St Mark's Gospel, which once belonged to the Russian Baptist pastor, Georgi Vins, sometimes seems lost among the larger items, but it was not lost to the Ukrainian visitors. One called several others over to share his story: when his father was conscripted into the Soviet army, he took with him a similar tiny Gospel and managed to hide it throughout his time as a soldier. With reverence, this visitor demonstrated how his father had carefully placed it inside his sock and concealed it in his instep. Another guest tearfully pointed to the tiny book, explaining that the item was similar to his first and only Bible when growing

up. One man gravitated to the photographs from Keston's Ukraine collection, and after searching, found familiar faces in many of them.

Testimonies of courage and faith in the past, have led these visitors and others to live lives of courage and faith today. For the Keston Center at Baylor, to preserve, share, and make available these testimonies, is considered to be a sacred trust and calling.



For the Center's visitors, Keston's photographic archive frequently yields pictures of precious faces & significant places

In Memoriam

Peter Reddaway, 1939-2024



Peter Reddaway, who died on 28th July, was an important figure in the history of Keston. It was he, in particular, who worked with Michael Bourdeaux on the idea of an organisation, which would study and publicise the religious situation in the USSR (this focus later grew to encompass religion in all the countries of Eastern and Central Europe), and whose colleague in the politics department of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), Professor Leonard Schapiro, also became, like Peter, one of the four founders of Keston in 1969. Sir John Lawrence was the fourth. All four understood how significant was the role of religious belief, officially banned but in fact very much alive, in Communist countries – a subject mostly ignored by academics and journalists before the collapse of Communism and

the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Peter was the son of a Cambridge professor of political economy, whose study of the Soviet economy inspired Peter to study Russian at Cambridge. This led eventually to a teaching post at the LSE, where he taught Russian politics. In the 1980s he moved to the United States and became director of the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute, and later a professor of political science at George Washington University, until he retired in 2004.

It was to a great extent thanks to Peter that the West learned about the Soviet dissident movement, which included a strong religious element: it was he who first publicised and stressed the importance of the *Chronicle of Current*

Events, this movement's main mouth-piece, and convinced Amnesty International to publish translations of all its 64 issues, before it was closed down by the Soviet authorities in 1982. He also publicised the horrors of the Soviet abuse of psychiatry, which was used to silence dissidents, and published a book with the psychiatrist Sidney Bloch in 1977 entitled *Russia's Political Hospital*. Another subject which concerned him was the fate of ethnic minorities in the USSR, and particularly that of the Crimean Tatars, who had been deported by Stalin in 1944. The Crimean Tatars began a campaign in 1956 to return to their homeland, and by 1966 had linked up with the dissident movement, which devoted an entire issue of the *Chronicle of Current Events* to their cause in 1973. Peter, like Michael Bourdeaux, was convinced that a combination of nationalism and religion would eventually bring down the Soviet system.

In 1969 the Russian historian and dissident, Andrew Amalrik, foretold in an uncanny way the collapse of the Soviet system in his book *Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?* published in Amsterdam. Many years before *perestroika*, Amalrik saw that the cultural opposition, the dissident movement, could not co-exist with a regime that was growing evermore decrepit and "immobile". In his view, the demand for freedom of thought,

and the regime's attempt to stop any liberalisation, would lead to the collapse of the Soviet system; the regime would die unless the system radically reformed itself. Peter was fascinated by Amalrik's prophecy, and convinced that he would be proved right. Peter himself also had an ability to foretell the future: he was able to see that Gorbachev's time in power would not last long, and as early as March 1987 testified before a committee of the US Congress, stating, "I think it is extremely possible that if Mr Gorbachev continues with his present policies, he will be removed within the next two to three years."

Peter was an important and effective member of Keston's governing body, the Council of Management, before he moved to the US, and continued to be a wise adviser to Michael Bourdeaux and to me, the chairman, throughout his life. He will be deeply missed.

Xenia Dennen

Patrons

The Rt Revd Lord Williams of Oystermouth

The Archbishop of Westminster

The Chief Rabbi of Great Britain

The Moderator of the Free Churches

The Archbishop of Glasgow

The Archbishop of Thyateira & Great Britain

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