

Dr. Gamsakhurdia Writes to RCL

Dr. Zviad Gamsakhurdia is a writer and scholar of English and American literature. In 1974 he with others formed an Initiative Group for the Defence of Human Rights in Tbilisi (Georgia). He was then dismissed from Tbilisi University and eventually threatened with arrest. As a lay member of the Georgian Orthodox Church he has shown deep concern for the situation which Peter Reddaway discussed in his article, "The Georgian Orthodox Church: Corruption and Renewal" (RCL Vol. 3, Nos. 4-5, pp. 14-23). RCL printed his Open Letter of 27 October, 1975 (see Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 49-50). Last July Keston College received another long letter (23 pp. in typescript) from Dr. Gamsakhurdia. It is entitled "The Controversy in the Western Press about the Situation in the Georgian Orthodox Church" (see for example the correspondence reprinted in RCL Vol. 3, No. 6, pp. 45-54) and is addressed to The Times and RCL. Some extracts are printed below.

Dr. Gamsakhurdia begins by welcoming the publication of material about the Georgian Church in The Times, RCL and Tribune de la Liberté. But the Western press, in his opinion, needs additional information which he hopes to provide.

It is difficult for foreigners to understand the situation, since they look on from a distance at what has happened, but nevertheless I shall try to shed some light on the questions in dispute.

Thanks to my father, Konstantin Gamsakhurdia, and his friend Patriarch Kalistrat of Georgia, I grew up closely involved in the life of the Church. Kalistrat baptized me in 1948, and thanks to him I embraced the Georgian Church and the Gospel of Christ.

From 1965 I became much more active in church affairs: I commenced an intensive study of theology and mysticism, attended almost every service at the Zion Cathedral and observed all the holy days. I frequently listened to the preaching of Efrem II, and have to admit that at first I was even impressed by some of his sermons. (I came to know Efrem II from 1962 onwards.)

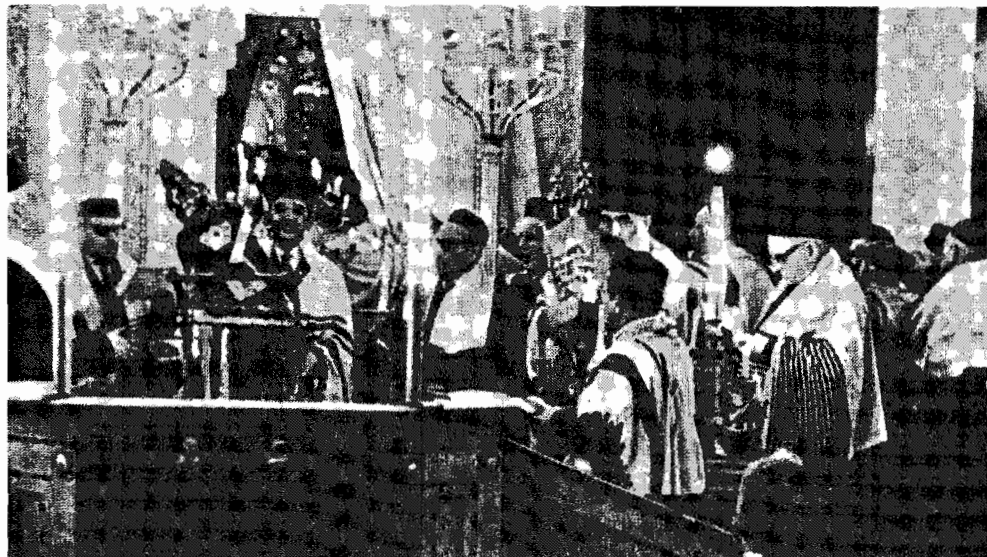
Between 1965 and 1969 I and my friends drew many young people towards an interest in religion. We gave them spiritual literature, explained the basic doctrines of religion, argued with atheists until gradually we attracted a significant number of Georgian young people to the Church. This was especially noticeable at Eastertide when all the churches overflowed. The income of the Church greatly increased, its bank balance grew, and so did the number of those applying to enter the seminary.

All this aroused a great deal of concern in government circles. As is well known, the Soviet government tries by all means to deflect young people from religion. This happened in Georgia too.

The authorities began by blackmailing and pressurizing Efrem II. Georgia was filled with damaging rumours about him. I shall not repeat any of them, but will only report what I know definitely and what I am personally convinced is the truth.

The pressure from the authorities alarmed Efrem II. He was not like those strong and high principled Patriarchs, Amvrosty Kalaya or Kalistrat Lintsadze. All this slowly affected the style and content of his preaching and his relationship with us, the young flock of the Georgian Church. If before Efrem had spoken boldly, expressing covert opposition to the Soviet regime (the newspapers even used to criticize his sermons), in his later years his preaching became empty, his appeals merely patriotic, so that it was hard to believe that it was a Christian pastor who spoke. The only bold appeal he made was to believing women to have large families. "Be fruitful and multiply!" was the chief theme of his preaching at that time. Naturally all this had a bad effect on the young laity, who expected much from a Patriarch. (In addition, a number of priests unworthy of the name caused abuses in the Church which repelled and disillusioned young people - as has happened in the West. I shall not describe their misdeeds here, as they do not bear on the case in hand.)

I once visited the Patriarch during this period, and asked him directly if he



Above: The Moscow synagogue, a centre of Jewish spiritual life (see article pp. 20-3).

Jews gather outside the Moscow synagogue. Police keep watch.

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Below: Moscow Jews who have trained themselves as teachers of Hebrew, a language which is not officially taught.





Alexander Ogorodnikov, a member of an unofficial religious seminar, is the author of the letter printed on pp. 45-7.

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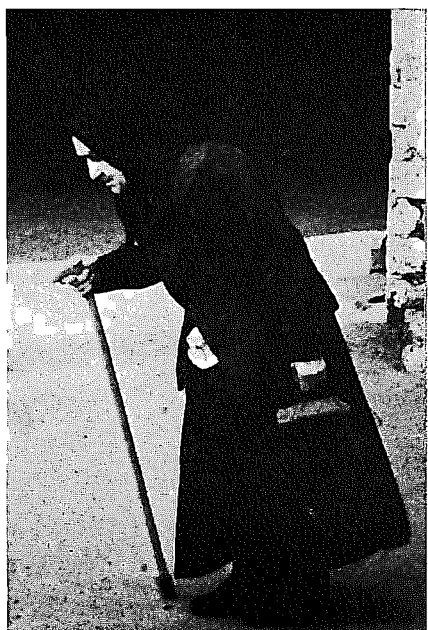
Alexander Argentov photographed by his friends in July 1976 during a walk in the grounds of Psychiatric Hospital no. 14 in Moscow (see pp. 45-7).

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The Holy Trinity Monastery of St. Sergius where Fr. Zachariah (see pp. 42-5) lived as a monk.

Pilgrims at the Holy Trinity Monastery of St. Sergius (Zagorsk), one of the great spiritual centres in Russia today. © Keston College





The late Patriarch Alexi officiating in the 15th century Cathedral of the Holy and Life-giving Trinity (Zagorsk) - the shrine of St. Sergius. © Keston College

A service (Whitsun, 1958) at the shrine of St. Sergius, the Russian saint who inspired Fr. Zachariah (see pp. 42-5). In the background stand members of an Anglican delegation. © Keston College



would open the small reading-room at the Patriarchate so that young believers might make use of the treasures of spiritual literature contained in the library of the Patriarchate. Efrem uncompromisingly refused. Then I requested him to lend us books one by one. I remember he lent us a single volume, and that only for a short time: it was Tabrum's *Religioznye verovaniya uchenykh* (*The Religious beliefs of the Learned*). We asked him for the *Dobrotolyubie*, but in vain. Efrem made no secret of the fact that it was the KGB who forbade him to lend books to the young believers. Once he even joked about it: "You know that when Moscow calls the tune, we must dance to it, or it will go ill with us".

A request for representation for the intelligentsia on the Synod was also turned down. Gamsakhurdia has no direct evidence that Efrem was an agent of the KGB. But his original nomination, many claim, was supported by the KGB in 1960. He was also involved in simony in ecclesiastical appointments. Envious of Metropolitan Ilya's abilities, he only named him as his successor because of widespread pressure from believers.

As for Bidzina Keratishvili (now Bishop Gaioz), the first impression he made was not a bad one. The laity saw in him a young believer who wanted to enter the priesthood. It is still not clear whether Efrem took him into the Patriarchate on his own initiative or as a result of pressure from the KGB.

Keratishvili was employed as a secretary at the Patriarchate. More than once he told me that he had to do menial work, but was forced to do the job because he had not the means to live since Ilya expelled him from the seminary. He painted a very dark picture of Efrem, as a man difficult to get on with – niggardly, despotic, cruel; he said that Efrem was sent on trips abroad by the KGB as a spy, that his rooms were bugged, and so on. Even at that time I had already realized that Keratishvili was obviously lying and exaggerating, and that his conflict with Efrem was clearly a pretence intended to deceive me and win my confidence. It seems that this was a task given him by Efrem himself and the KGB.

Keratishvili made other attempts to win the confidence of Gamsakhurdia and his friends, including tipping them off about supposed KGB surveillance. Efrem came to mistrust him, especially in financial matters, and did not want him to be made a bishop.

Gamsakhurdia then deals with the objections made by Western writers to David Koridze's report. Although he was a Soviet official, his patriotism made him want justice, and his information is wholly reliable. Gamsakhurdia was himself involved in the publication of the report: at the time he had contacts in government circles and put pressure on them to investigate the robbery of the Patriarchate and also to prevent Devdariani's candidature for the Patriarchate. But matters eventually came to a halt.

I approached David Koridze and asked him what were the real obstacles in the case. He told me that the affair had already been wound up and enough evidence collected to arrest Keratishvili and some of the other criminals, but the Procuracy of the Republic would not give permission. He thought that the main reason for this was that KGB workers Bakhtadze, Tvalchrelidze and others had been involved in the robbery. Koridze also told me that it would be a good thing if I went to the Central Committee, to Shevardnadze, [First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party – Ed.] and told him everything, and perhaps he would take action after all. Apart from this, Koridze wanted to see Shevardnadze himself and asked me to tell him so.

At that time many members of the Georgian intelligentsia were under the illusion that Shevardnadze was, as it were, acting on patriotic principles, and that the mask of communist and ruffian was a necessary cover-up for his activities. In addition, Shevardnadze himself claimed to be the Georgian intelligentsia's best friend. On 3 November 1972, for example, he visited my father, Konstantin Gamsakhurdia, on the occasion of his 80th birthday. He also visited L. Gudlashvili and others.

Consequently I too began to hope that Shevardnadze might help the Georgian Church. I approached his assistant, V. Alpenidze, and explained the situation.

He listened very "sympathetically" and promised to tell Shevardnadze all about it. Time passed. Shevardnadze declined to see me, would not even receive Koridze, although he did direct Alpenidze to tell Koridze to write a detailed report on the crimes committed at the Georgian Patriarchate.

Koridze wrote and presented to the Central Committee the account of the case about which the Western press now has so much to say. As I have said, some have marvelled at Koridze's boldness in his report, at the patriotic feeling in some places and even at his sympathy for the Church. So they ask, "Surely a Soviet official could not have such attitudes?"

Such people forget, in the first instance, that Koridze actually lost his job as a result of writing the report (on the pretext of "retirement") and to this day is in extreme material need and under persecution.

David Koridze is one of the best investigators in Georgia. Because of his honesty and integrity he suffered a good deal during the era of government corruption under Mzhavanadze [the former First Party Secretary, deposed for corruption - Ed.]. At first he worked as an investigator for the Procurator of the Georgian Republic on particularly important cases. He was demoted because he refused to take bribes and conceal the truth as other investigators did. Later Koridze was further degraded and sent as procurator's assistant to the Kirov region. (At that stage he showed such objectivity when investigating the murder of the Shiukashvili family that several official persons were "offended".)

In conversation with me Koridze more than once said, "I am a communist and an atheist, but I love my country and view with sadness the degeneration of the Georgian Church, which is one of the sources of our culture. My professional integrity does not allow me to stand by while criminals like Keratishvili run riot, and that is why I am fighting so hard." He also said, "The KGB is so hostile towards me over this case that I shall never recover."

Time passed. I kept on going to see Alpenidze. He kept raising my hopes, but in the end I realized that he was trying to "calm" me and the other believers, and that Shevardnadze had no

intention of acting. (Evidently someone higher up than Shevardnadze was involved, so that he had washed his hands of it.)

One day Alpenidze telephoned the head of Administrative Organs Department of the Central Committee in my presence, and asked him about the case. This was the actual reply: "The facts about the robbery of the Patriarchate have been confirmed by the Procuracy, the criminals are known, but the Procuracy officials cannot arrest them without the direct permission of the Central Committee." (The voice came loudly across the line and I could hear these words myself.) Then Alpenidze told me to wait a little longer, and perhaps the case would be raised in time. Koridze's report was read by Shevardnadze, Manelashvili, Alpenidze, Verishvili and others in the Central Committee; by Takidze and Dzhibladze at the Procuracy, and by Talakvadze and others at the City Procuracy. I am not sure who informed the KGB of the report, but they too knew about it. The report also rapidly became popular amongst the general population of the city, was translated into Russian and even published abroad, although the result of that was yet to be seen.

The KGB began to investigate how Koridze's report was distributed, and threatened to arrest Koridze and get him expelled from the Party. Koridze refused to give in and lost his job and pension. Foreign visitors were even convinced that Koridze did not exist. The case was finally hushed up by the KGB. Meanwhile Keratishvili's flat was burgled and many of the items, which had been taken from the Patriarchate, were stolen. The City Procuracy tracked down these thieves, ignoring the fact that the goods were stolen in the first place. Then the court referred the case back for further inquiries. The case has now been "frozen".

Gamsakhurdia goes on to describe the present Patriarch, David V, and puts forward evidence that he bribed government officials to back him for the office, for which he is quite unqualified. At the time of the WCC meeting in Nairobi in 1975, the Georgian government tried to appease Gamsakhurdia by promising to arrest Keratishvili, so that

no protest should be made to the WCC. Nothing, however, came of these promises, and Gamsakhurdia was at the time being continually harassed by the KGB.

In the Paris paper, *Tribune de la Liberté* (No. 4, 1974) we read: "Whilst the affair of the Church remains improperly investigated, we must express our full confidence in the present Patriarch of Georgia, David V." Had the authors of this statement been present in Mtskheta Cathedral at Svetitskhoveli on 14 October 1973, they would certainly have altered their opinion of David V.

On that day David V literally spoke thus: "The fact that there is so much unrest in the world stems from the fact that communism has not yet fully triumphed. In this world there will only be real peace when communism is victorious." When the Patriarch came out into the courtyard with his entourage after the liturgy, the choir director, Valentina Pailodze [see documents in RCL Vol. 3, pp. 34-36. *Ed.*], pushed herself forward and addressed him publicly: "You Judas, you utter traitor to the Georgian Church, instead of preaching Christianity you preach the victory of communism?!" Then she turned to the people, and, pointing to the Patriarch and Keratishvili, said: "There they are, robbers, traitors to their country and the Georgian Church", and told the full story of the robbery. A commotion began in the crowd, the police intervened, David V and Keratishvili barely escaped from the infuriated onlookers.

David V made no reply to Valentina Pailodze, but came to hate her and began actively to help the KGB to persecute her. We know from reliable sources that before Pailodze's arrest [on 23 March, 1974. *Ed.*] a document was sent from the Patriarchate to the KGB, written and signed by David V, demanding her arrest.

Gamsakhurdia met David V when the latter offered him a job at the Patriarchate. This was to placate him after a guest of his - a member of the Democratic Movement - from Moscow had been searched by the KGB. By drawing

him into the establishment David V hoped to silence him.

Now, after all I have recounted, I should like to draw some conclusions. The robbery of the Patriarchate in 1972 was not instigated by Mzhavanadze's wife, V. Tyriskevich, alone, nor by her henchmen. A directive about the robbery undoubtedly issued from people in higher places, whose tracks would lead us beyond the borders of Georgia. If it had merely been the initiative of Mzhavanadze's wife or even of Mzhavanadze himself, then Shevardnadze and his organization would undoubtedly have investigated the case and punished the offenders, so as to discredit Mzhavanadze and his circle still further. Shevardnadze's helplessness in the case arose from the fact that the "centre" was involved in this affair, and this explains the audacity of Keratishvili and his accomplices, who go about their affairs unpunished to this day. David's enthronement and Keratishvili's consecration as bishop were directives from Moscow, aimed at submitting the Georgian Church to tighter control. This is the opinion of those believers who carefully followed the events described above.

The campaign in the Western press about the Georgian Church's situation and the radio broadcasts on the subject have had the following results: Keratishvili and his friends have not been further advanced, they are being stopped from travelling abroad and forbidden contact with foreign clergy visiting the USSR, so that conversations with them should not confirm anything written about them in the Western press. Patriarch David V is also isolated from the West.

If the campaign of exposure continues abroad, the Georgian Church may be saved from the worst of perils: from nursing in its bosom "priests" such as Keratishvili. But it must be said that the position in the Georgian Church will not improve until the Church is separated from the State and receives the right to govern itself.

Please publish this.

ZVIAD GAMSAXHURDIA

28 January, 1976