

Editorial

The invasion of Afghanistan has been accompanied by a sharp increase in repression inside the Soviet Union. Religious believers suffer with the rest. Fr Dmitri Dudko, for example, was arrested on 15 January. Like so many Soviet Christians who bravely stand up for what they believe, he knew the risks he was running in the way he carried out his ministry. He once said during one of his “question and answer” sessions, organized in the Church of St Nicholas on Preobrazhenka (Moscow) in 1974: “Imagine what a joy it is to be on Golgotha with Christ! . . . Here in Russia at the moment a tremendous miracle is taking place – not only the crucifixion of Christ but also his rising from the dead”, for faith is reviving under persecution, and “children of convinced atheists, after being given an atheist upbringing, are now suddenly standing up for the Faith” (*O nashem upovanii*, YMCA, Paris, 1975, p. 103). Crowds of young people used to come to his “question and answer” sessions in 1974 (see “Fr Dudko: An Eye-Witness Account”, *RCL* Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 21-7). That year, too, a number of young people, who sought a deeper understanding of Christianity, decided to form a study group at which they could explore their faith. Alexander Ogorodnikov, who had been converted to Russian Orthodoxy, founded what has come to be called the “Christian Seminar on Problems of the Religious Renaissance”. The background to the formation of this seminar, and the subsequent fate of many of its members, are examined in an article by Jane Ellis in this issue of *RCL* (pp. 92-101).

But is this revival occurring in all parts of the Russian Orthodox Church? Fr Gleb Yakunin – himself arrested on 1 November 1979 – does not think so. He paints a gloomy picture of the Church in a report presented to the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers’ Rights (founded in December 1976). This report has circulated as a *samizdat* document and is entitled “On the Present Position of the Russian Orthodox Church and Prospects for a Religious Renaissance in Russia”. Fr Yakunin asserts that the Russian Orthodox Church’s priests are badly trained, preach poorly and provide little pastoral care; the parish councils are undermined by non-believers who have been imposed by the local government authorities;

the monasteries have become homes for semi-invalids and have divorced themselves from the problems facing the world; the theological colleges do not produce pastors capable of evangelizing the population, but only "servants of the cult".

In contrast to the official Church, Fr Yakunin sees signs of renewal among the newly converted young such as those who have joined Ogorodnikov's seminar. Among such zealous converts are many who could be genuine pastors willing to face any hardship without compromise. "A deep, living faith, zeal for the Church, capacity for sacrifice, fearlessness – these are their [the young converts'] qualities. To these young people belongs the future of the Church; they are the hope and guarantee of the Church's renaissance, of Russia's conversion."

Occasionally we catch glimpses of a secret life within the Russian Orthodox Church which is unpublicized and kept hidden like those pearls which should not be "cast before swine". The secret charismatic side of the Russian Orthodox Church, which, unlike the western churches, has always held together tradition and mysticism, church structures and the unpredictable effects of "Pentecostal fire", becomes visible in certain men and women. One such man was *starets* Tavrion (see the *samizdat* document in *Russia Cristiana* No. 6 (168), pp. 22-30) who died in August 1978 at the age of 80. He was called to a life of solitude like St Serafim of Sarov; he spent many years in the camps; in 1968 he became the spiritual guide of the Spaso-preobrazhenskaya Pustyn (Hermitage of the Transfiguration) which forms part of the Trinity-St Sergius Convent in Riga (Latvia). This hermitage became a place of pilgrimage; thousands went there each year: "Drawn by stories about the remarkable *starets*, as to the source of 'living water' came enfeebled old women, peasants, engineers, hippies, workers – all the suffering people from the spiritual wilderness of contemporary life." When he celebrated the Liturgy those present were aware of the power of his prayer, "the fire of the Spirit". He preached with authority: "Many experienced the charismatic effect of the *starets's* preaching as an answer to the most complicated personal problems, to many perplexities, doubts, to much going astray." *Starets* Tavrion asked that people should not talk much about what they saw and heard at the hermitage: "So we cannot relate the miracles which occurred here, the instances of the *starets's* evident discernment . . . It is also impossible to speak about the *starets's* inner life. All one can do is silently to contemplate his living, shining image . . ."

How many more such "shining images" exist within the Russian Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union, we cannot tell. But even one or two examples like Fr Dudko and *starets* Tavrion make us pause and wonder what further riches lie hidden beneath the surface.