

# Chronicle

## New Chronicle Section

*With this issue of RCL we begin a new Chronicle section which combines the old Chronicle and Sources sections. Sources has, of necessity, become increasingly selective in recent years, as we have begun to include summaries of the samizdat, secular and religious press of other countries besides the Soviet Union. We continue to provide surveys of press and samizdat as part of the Chronicle section's coverage of events and background information. In this issue we feature Yugoslav religious press, selected from AKSA.*

## Samizdat Bibliographies and Documents

*Keston College continues to publish a comprehensive listing of Soviet religious samizdat, which is updated periodically as new documents are received. Readers may request bibliographical summaries of all Soviet religious samizdat, or of specified denominations only. Photocopies of complete documents are also available. Summaries and texts ordered from Keston College cost 10p per page (plus VAT, UK only), plus postage.*

*Information about samizdat documents from other countries is available from the respective researchers at Keston College.*

## Father Bulányi's Church Order

The name of Fr György Bulányi often appears in the religious press. He has been a thorn in the side of both the Hungarian government and — to some extent for that very reason — of his own Roman Catholic hierarchy. In particular, Bulányi opposed what he saw to be the attempt of the late Cardinal Primate

of Hungary, László Lékai, to swing church support behind the government.

That policy did not commend itself to Rome either, so Rome and Bulányi should be on the same side. But they are not. The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, presided over by the formidable Cardinal

Josef Ratzinger, has expressed disquiet over what it knows of Bulányi's theological teaching. His writings are produced in typescript and circulated among his 2,000 or so followers in the federation of basis\* communities called "The Bush". One of them has now been translated into English at Keston College. It is a very curious document indeed.

It was completed in 1982, and is called "Church Order". It discusses how the church of the future should be structured, and the nature of the ministry by which it should be served. Bulányi raises a number of other issues in passing, and is not slow to criticise present church structures and ministers. No doubt there is much to criticise in Roman Catholicism, and some of the points he makes are interesting ones. But no matter how sympathetic one may feel to this much-persecuted and deeply devoted priest, it is difficult to take his proposals wholly seriously, even though the pattern which he is commending to the church as a whole may have worked well enough so far within Hungary.

He envisages the future polity of the church as follows: the world's 700 million Roman Catholics (Vatican statisticians, incidentally, put the figure at over 850 million) should belong to seventy million basis communities, led by seventy million "deacons". The "deacons" themselves belong, in addition to their membership of the first-level community, to seven million second-level communities led by "presbyters", who in turn form 700,000 communities led by "bishops", and so on up to level nine — at which point the members of this top group may take it in turns to be Pope.

To live either off the church's own funds, or off the state, will inevitably

lead, in Fr Bulányi's view, to corruption amongst the community leaders. Every member of one of these communities, therefore, must maintain him or herself, and that includes the community leaders. The injunction applies even to leaders of higher-level communities whose membership is necessarily scattered across countries, or across continents. Bulányi has a vision of these men or women translating as they commute in order to earn a living.

Central to this vision is the notion of "priest". In Bulányi's view, the chief function of leadership is that of creating communities. For this no expertise in theology is needed, and leaders may obviously be of either sex. The sacramental function of the clergy, it would seem, is quite secondary to that of community formation. Some of what he says about the clergy echoes the writing of Edward Schillebeeckx, and that Dutch Dominican theologian has already been summoned before the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to answer for his views on ministerial priesthood. I suspect, however, that the real problem with "Church Order" from a Roman Catholic point of view is more fundamental, and lies in the picture of "community" and community structure which it presents.

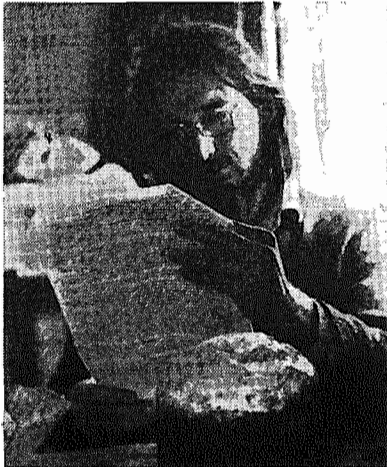
As is clear from the description given above, Bulányi does not envisage his basis grouping as consisting of more than ten, or at most 12, members. The cement of the community is love, and to love, one must know the loved one intimately. No-one, Bulányi insists, can really know more than a very few others sufficiently well to associate with them in this type of Christian community.

In the document under review here, at least, Bulányi does not discuss at length the meaning he

\*"Basis" communities are equivalent to "basic" communities.

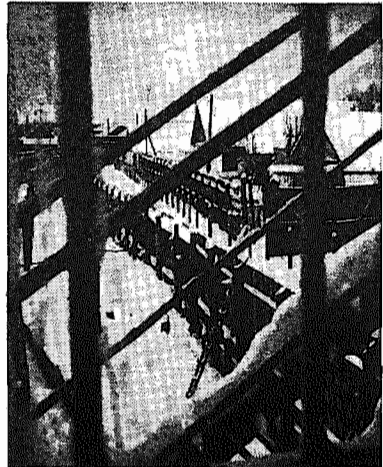


Alexander Ogorodnikov and Yelena Levashova at their wedding in Moscow in 1976. Behind Ogorodnikov is Vladimir Poresh, a founder member of the Christian Seminar.  
*(Photo courtesy Keston College.)*



Alexander Ogorodnikov at his home in Redkino (Easter 1978.)

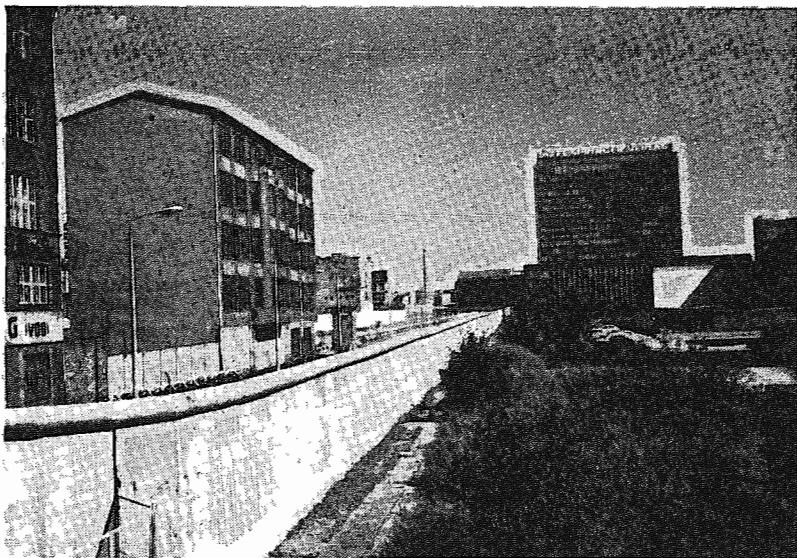
*(Photo © La Pensée Russe.)*



Perm strict regime camp 36 at Kuchino, where Alexander Ogorodnikov spent over five years.

*(Photo © Aid to Russian Christians.)*

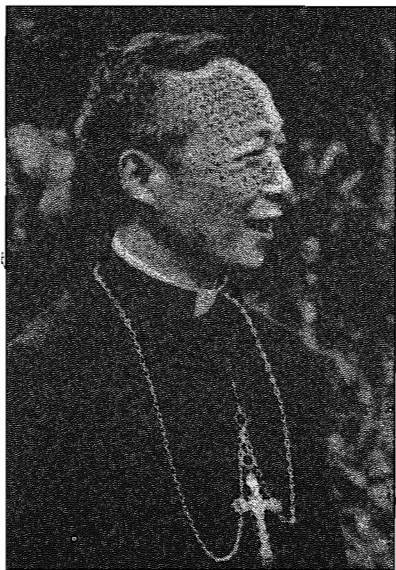
See Feature on pp. 69-78.



The Berlin Wall.

*(Photo courtesy Keston College.)*

See *Chronicle* item on pp. 87-90.



Bishop Gong Pin-Mei, the Vatican-approved Bishop of Shanghai, who is now under house-arrest after a long period of imprisonment.

*(Photo courtesy Keston College.)*

See article on pp. 4-21.



Fr Juozas Zdebskis, who was killed in a car "accident" last year.

*(Photo © Aid to Russian Christians.)*

See *Chronicle* item on pp. 90-91.

attaches either to "community" or to "love". One does not, for example, love oneself in the same manner that one loves one's family, or one's family like one's neighbours, or love neighbours in the same way one loves enemies. Within the traditional parish structure such variation can be handled. It is difficult to see how it can be managed in Bulányi's version, where the degree of love required is one founded on intimate knowledge and friendship. It seems to me that this would produce what ecclesiologists call a "gathered" community, typical of sectarianism, rather than the "catholic" community typical of most mainline Christianity.

Moreover, such a structure places too great a demand upon members. It requires an intensity of relationship which not everyone is prepared to give. Are they therefore to be excluded from Roman Catholicism — for Fr Bulányi can envisage a time ("within a generation, I would like to think") when the new structures will be in place? He does; of course, recognise that for a period new and old structures will have to coexist, his own version quite possibly without the authority to administer the sacraments. This does not alarm him:

*The prime concern of the basis community is not to gain the right to celebrate mass and administer the sacraments. However much it values these, it must assign a greater value to the love which is being formed amongst its members, and to the behaviour worthy of Jesus (italics in text).*

In the Roman Catholic tradition, the fundamental unit of the ecclesial structure — whether it be called a parish or a basis community — must be sacramental. The church exists to give glory to God through the celebration of the eucharist, and, as a missionary body, to bring others to the knowledge of Jesus that they,

too, may likewise give glory to God. Other types of community can of course exist. When Bulányi describes a basis community as one in which the members "can develop into true followers of Christ", he is describing the ideal which all religious orders set themselves.

In other words, it seems to me that Bulányi's description of church order assimilates the life of every Christian into that proper to members of religious orders, in effect denying the traditional distinction between counsels and precepts. Implicit in this denial is a rejection of the catholicity of the church, for the level of love and knowledge required by Bulányi's doctrine leaves no room for the spiritually weak. For him, the church is the church of the perfect, or the striving to be perfect, whereas in traditional ecclesiology it is the church of sinners. He has fallen into a pattern common in the history of the church — the doctrine of Donatists, Joachimites, Jansenists and others — which the church has consistently rejected.

Fr Bulányi's ecclesiology, it seems to me, diverges fundamentally from that of mainline Roman Catholicism. He remarks in the text of "Church Order" that he does not expect to be called a heretic, and it is perfectly true that, Cardinal Ratzinger notwithstanding, such charges are no longer made. Others in the past who have adopted positions similar to Bulányi's, however, have found themselves outside the church.

Whether this critique of his ecclesiology would worry him I rather doubt. Fr Bulányi has a somewhat cavalier attitude to theological niceties. He fails to see, for example, in his brief discussion of church unity, that theological differences which may seem small at first sight, can disguise fundamental disagreements about the nature of Christ. Moreover, since the church has no money

and no property in Bulányi's scheme of things, it is difficult to see how any theologians could be educated except at the expense of the state — a practical problem which he does not address. He appears to reject infant baptism (a long-standing tradition within Roman Catholicism), yet this practice, it seems to me, is one of the chief means by which the church overcomes the distinction between the natural, familial community, and the sacramental community within the parish.

There is much else in "Church Order" with which I could take issue. But they would be, as in the paragraph above, matters of detail. The fundamental problem, I would suggest, is that Fr Bulányi's vision as outlined in this document of about ninety pages is more Congregationalist than Roman Catholic. It is little wonder that his teaching worries Roman, as well as Hungarian, authorities.

MICHAEL J. WALSH

## Most Favoured Nation?

During 1986 a Romanian serving a five-year sentence for violent assault on a policeman, and another Romanian serving a 14-year sentence for large-scale embezzlement from his place of work were released from gaol, having served only a fraction of their sentences. Their release had more to do with decisions taken — or about to be taken — by the US government than with the policies of their own legal or governmental authorities. A blatant case of "interference" by one country in the affairs of another?

The Americans would readily admit it — though "influence" is the term they would be more inclined to use. The two prisoners in question were Constantin Sfatcu and Dorel Cataramă, at that time Romania's most prominent religious prisoners. There was little doubt that they had been arrested not for the alleged offences with which they were charged and on which they were convicted but, in reality, for "disapproved of" religious activities. Other human rights cases "resolved" at about the same time included that of Radu Filipescu, the young en-

gineer sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for distributing leaflets calling for a public demonstration against President Ceausescu, and that of Gheorghe Brasoveanu, one of the two founders of Romania's short-lived free trade union.

All this happened in the three months leading up to the renewal, by the USA, of Romania's "Most Favoured Nation" status. "Most Favoured Nation" (MFN) is a valuable — and in Romania's case, much needed — tariff concession. Romania received it in 1975, the year after the Jackson-Vanik amendment to the Trade Act defined the terms under which the Congress was permitted to grant the concession to "communist countries without free emigration". The Jackson-Vanik amendment determined that MFN can be granted to such countries only if it is held that such action would serve to promote freer emigration. In practice, other human rights considerations — besides freedom of emigration — have always been taken into account when deciding whether MFN is to be awarded. Thus the imposition of martial law in 1981 caused Poland to