

try to introduce the practice of referenda. We demand that a referendum be held on the current problems of the Georgian nation. This referendum, which should be carried out with the direct participation of UN representatives and other experts, would give the Georgian nation the opportunity to express its views as to whether Georgia should remain part of the USSR.

7. The NDP is fighting to unite the best national-democratic forces of the Society of Ilya Chavchavadze (Dasi IV) and to bring a chosen section of that society into the party's work.

8. The party must lead the national movement with the help of its fundamental mass organisation — the Society of Ilya Chavchavadze (Dasi IV).

9. Under no circumstances will the NDP give way to compromise with

the authorities.

10. The NDP recognises three forms of property: state, cooperative and private property. Decentralisation of the economy and provision for the interests of the market are a precondition for a healthy economy in the future Georgia.

11. The NDP is directly continuing the political policy followed by the NDP of Georgia — in the first quarter of this century, as the most nationally representative force of the time. So we consider that a new party has not been founded: the old one has been restored. As for the various differences in the fundamental statutes of the 'old' and 'new' parties, these are due to the passing of time and to the new political situation.

We recognise the NDP in the emigre community and ask that opportunities of coordinating our activities be explored.

Pastors and their Flock

Vladimir Zelinsky is a well known Orthodox lay theologian living in Moscow. The author of numerous books and articles, his Coming into the Church dealt with the 'religious renaissance' evident in the Russian Orthodox Church during the 1960s and 1970s. He takes up one aspect of this question in a recent article which appeared in the samizdat journal Vybor (No. 20). We reproduce this article below in an edited version.

Today people who do not go near a church are fond of saying that there are many young people there: just as often others say that the church is full of old women. This second assertion, although often made by those who are not exactly well disposed towards the church, does come from an actual experience of

being in a church. What, then, is the true picture?

At the beginning of the 1970s one very enterprising Moscow priest introduced a new and unexpected method of preaching: 'question and answer' sessions. Parishioners were invited to write down their questions on a piece of paper beforehand and the priest would give the answers at the end of the Saturday evening service. The questions were varied and the answers courageous and incisive. The priest stood at the altar and said what he thought. Although there was nothing particularly new in what he said, the very fact that a person, and a priest to boot, stood in church and spoke openly about things which people knew, but about which they remained silent, was so unusual that from the second ques-

tion and answer session the church was bursting with young people who flocked there every Saturday evening. The old women were simply lost in the midst of bearded young men in jeans.

This could not fail to please this courageous priest — so much so that he made the optimistic assertion that, 'the atheist powers have not succeeded in turning our Russian Orthodox Church into a church of old women!' The outcome of this most auspicious beginning was a sad one, but that story does not concern us here. A single priest attracted perhaps many hundreds of young people to the faith, although this activity did not last long because of circumstances beyond his control. However, one could scarcely say that such interest in the preaching of one priest provides the basis for an assessment of the overall state of the church. Even the claim that the authorities did not succeed implies that they had reaped certain success in their aim to ensure the church became one of old women. They did succeed, because the church in its present state is exactly that — a church of old women.

The word church means community, that is in the narrowest sense of the word it means those who gather together because they are united in Christ. If we look at the photographs of services published on the pages of the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, or go to any church, then it becomes obvious that the worshippers are almost without exception old women. There are hardly any middle-aged or younger people. People could say that circumstances at times make it difficult or even impossible for a person to go to church before retirement. But why are there no old men in church congregations — the husbands of these *babushki* who fill our churches? Not all of them are widowed or

single. It is simply because old men go to church as seldom as men of other ages. . .

The fact is that what happens in our churches suits the intellectual and psychological needs only of our *babushki* — the most humble, resilient and ill-educated section of the population. Some of them are quite simply illiterate. They are women with a particular psychology, the main characteristic of which is obedient submission to any authority, be it Soviet, ecclesiastical or divine. Incidentally this does not mean that these women are just as humble and forbearing in everyday life. It is often quite the opposite: submission to authority, however small, is 'compensated for' by aggressiveness and a petty sense of outrage directed against, for example, fellow worshippers in church and particularly against those who come slightly further down in the pecking order of regular worshippers. The same aggressiveness is directed towards any newcomer, especially towards young people. Here there is an obvious desire to underline that they belong in the church and know how to behave, while others 'do not belong' and do not understand anything. This contrasts greatly with the attitude of the Baptists. There a stranger to the church is more often than not greeted with a welcoming smile and is immediately handed a hymn book so that they can join in the singing. In an Orthodox church in the same town, a newcomer is regarded with suspicion and even hostility from the choir members — 'what are you doing standing here, you're just getting in the way' is the attitude. Although such behaviour seems to be characteristic of the Orthodox Church there are nevertheless many parishioners who are genuinely kind and welcoming. These people will try and say a kind word to encourage a newcomer but it is unfortunate that

often the first impression created is one of aggression.

Generally speaking these church *babushki* represent a particular section of our society. Most have lived a very hard life: uprooted from villages in their youth as a result of collectivisation, they have had a lifetime of hard work and now are enjoying a more or less tranquil old age. So the church, with its flickering candles, solemn melodies and lofty words is for them a real sanctuary which reminds them of their youth, of their home villages, of feast days and processions round the village church in the 1920s. Now these churches and many of the villages are no more, but the churches which remain in Moscow have become places where these old women can find solace after the base pleasures of this world and before passing on into the next. Their spiritual needs are so modest that the very presence of a priest performing the age-old rituals of the liturgy is enough to fill their hearts with a sense of peace, joy and a particular kind of satisfaction. If a priest pays them the slightest attention, it is considered to be an additional blessing and God forbid that anything should change in all this.

Twenty or 30 years ago many people no doubt believed that these old women, who had grown up in the pre-revolutionary era and who were strongly attached to the church, would die out and the churches would stand empty. However, as time passes their place is taken by 'Soviet' *babushki* who were born and grew up in the new era. Generally speaking these are women from the working class who after retirement start going to church. There are a few women from the intelligentsia among them. This constant stream of women to the church is probably explained by the fact that women have an acute sense of dependency on some higher power; they have a

greater need for comfort which they do not get from their immediate surroundings. The emphasis in our society is on the young, the healthy, the attractive, the successful. Where is there room for the forgotten, the old, the sick, whose lives have not been a success?

There is yet another religious-psychological reason for this return to the church which was pointed out to me by a friend. These religious feelings are based on the continuing sense of female maternal responsibility for the family, which now extends to grandchildren and great-grandchildren, as well as husband and children, and even to those who have died — a general religious responsibility for their kin. They do express this by attempting to preach Christianity to their relatives, but as their testimony is limited to church ritual it does not impress their better educated children and grandchildren. For this reason their religious responsibility is more often translated into practical deeds, such as organising baptisms and funerals and writing down prayer requests on slips of paper. What happens is a kind of distribution of roles: the young live in a society devoid of religion and the old (almost exclusively women) pray to the Almighty for themselves and their loved ones, like priestesses of their small tribe.

For this reason, I believe, our churches will never be empty. But Christianity is not just for old women who in their humility and selflessness want to include all their loved ones on lists of prayer requests. Jesus wants to give not only comfort to our lives, but life and 'life in abundance'. He wants the transformation of human hearts through coming to the Father in spirit and in truth.

Since such religious feeling and simplicity are not characteristic of the rest of the population, it is not surprising that people of a different

generation and character are not capable of standing for three to four hours in an overcrowded stuffy building where what is taking place is completely alien to them. Naturally they begin to worry over issues of 'secondary' importance: why do you kiss the icons, the priest's hand, why all this bowing and so on. More often than not they come to the conviction that although they believe in God they will not go to church: 'church leaves me cold'. It is true that it is almost impossible for a normal adult to be converted to Christianity simply through attending the liturgy — which appeals more to the converted than to the newcomer. This is possible for old women, for whom it is natural to have an entirely emotional perception of the service and whose needs are met by the singing and by the pronouncement of a few pious phrases. But for the overwhelming majority of people it is more natural to have a rational, reasoned understanding of the world rather than an emotional one. When these people enter the church they want to understand why believers have gathered together, what prayer is, what it means to believe in God, who or what is God. In other words, the majority want to ask questions and get intelligent answers. It is a great shame that this method of approach does not exist in our church and what is even more sad is that in a strictly Orthodox service this has been absent for many centuries.

A few years ago I asked one priest if many young people came to his church. Yes, they come, he answered, but what is the use. They are all schizophrenics. I remember that I was greatly surprised by his pessimism. However, later on observing the small numbers of believing young people I noticed one psychological peculiarity. If a young person starts to go to church because he is attracted purely by the liturgy rather

than, say, the sermons of a particular priest; if he is converted in the way old women are — through the service, and not in the way most young people are — through the reading of books and conversation with friends (then participation in the service is not the first step towards belief but rather its expression); if there is no 'educational' influence but merely an interest in Solemn Liturgies, *akafisti*, in the way services are conducted in a particular church, if there is a particular attraction for festivals and daily church life; then the sad fact is that this person, as a rule, displays the signs of some sort of potentially serious psychological disorder. It goes without saying that what is normal in elderly, ill-educated women cannot be considered so for a young person.

What we have said about religious young people who are 'a bit strange' explains another feature of our church life — almost a total absence of workers among the 'normal' young members of the church. This small but significant contingent of young people is almost entirely from the intelligentsia. At present the situation is such that to embrace orthodoxy one has to have the intellectual and psychological level of the *babushki*, or one has to come from an Orthodox family where the young have not rejected their roots, or one has to have a general level of awareness which is considerably higher than the average. Since young working class people display none of these features, they are completely outside the influence of the Orthodox Church.

In fact, for the intelligentsia, conversion to Orthodoxy comes about usually through conversation with friends and through private reading since as we have stated already, a person used to thinking rationally about the world cannot come to belief through one church

service. For this reason books play a formative role. Conversation with friends is only a stimulus, prompting questions about the validity of faith in God. Religious books to which people have access are either pre-revolutionary copies of the church fathers, *samizdat* editions or other *samizdat* material. It is clear that the working class, which in general reads less, does not read religious books at all — they simply do not know that they exist. There is practically no contact between young people from the working class and the believing Orthodox intelligentsia, as the latter are not involved in industry. As a result there are no conversations about the faith with the young working class, neither are there any influences which would stimulate such discussion. However, the majority of young working class families still have their babies baptised, unlike the intelligentsia who would do so only if they themselves were true believers.

Here it is interesting to note that in the Baptist churches quite a number of the congregation is working class. They have special services and youth activities. Conversion comes about not through lengthy discussion and learned books but by spoken testimony, personal Bible study and the prayer of faith.

As far as the young are concerned there is one more thing to note. Often when a young person from the intelligentsia is converted to Orthodoxy he rapidly becomes extremely ritualistic and conservative in his outlook. He pays far more attention to icon-painting, church singing, ascetic literature than he does to the Scriptures, which are the source and focus of the Christian life. What happens is that he gets 'bogged down' in the general features of Christianity. The impression given is that he has come not so much to the Christian faith but to Christian

culture, which is so much richer than what he has previously known. The Bible itself becomes merely a backdrop, and he devotes most of his time to the *Dobrotolyubiye*,* Feofan Zatvornik, Ignati Bryanchaninov,** icons and singing. He is taught not by the Scriptures, but by Tradition. The Scriptures appear too lofty and spiritual for him, a height to be attained by reading the aforementioned authors. In reality the Bible is left on the pedestal on which it has been placed and his spiritual life is built on Feofan Zatvornik and Ignati Bryanchaninov. It may be that he has read little or nothing of them, but for him their very names conjure up authority and mystique. One young man, from an extremely well educated family, when asked by the priest what had attracted him to Orthodoxy replied in exalted tones 'Conservatism!'

To avoid all possible confusion the following two points need to be made:

Firstly, the author does not want to create the impression that all Orthodox services are conducted purely for the sake of old women, nor that the service in essence will not suit a person seeking faith. That is not the case. The question is how these services are conducted, in what spirit — undoubtedly there are large parts of the liturgy that need to be reformed.

Secondly, one must not for a minute maintain the view that there is some kind of impossible divide between the sphere of religious interests of those who go to church, and those whom we have talked about who are forced to leave the church because of the incomprehensibility of what goes on there. In fact there is a point which

*An anthology of patristic quotations on prayer, *Ed.*

**Russian Orthodox bishops and renowned mystics of the 19th century, *Ed.*

can bring them together. *Babushki* are just as capable of making the distinction between good and bad singing, good and bad preaching, between a truly spiritual priest and one who simply goes through the motions as others in the church. These *babushki* simply have no choice, no other sphere of activity. They would be overjoyed to hear a living word from the Scriptures, but no-one offers it to them. They are, it is true, much more conservative than the rest of society and have a particular medieval perception of religious life. But both they and those who, because of the medieval nature of our church, remain outside it have the same thirst for the word of life brought by Jesus. Both they and the others are fields which are white unto harvest, waiting for the workers to come.

So we can see that one cannot agree with the bold priest's statement cited at the beginning of this article. Our church has become a church of old women. Christianity, however, has not been turned into an old people's religion. The attraction of Christianity is such that when people learn from its true source then their response to Christ and their desire to follow him cannot be suppressed even by the full weight of the oldwomanish features of our church.

It is obvious that the elderly profile of the church is not only its shame but its affliction. But in some respects it is obviously the Providence of God at work to preserve the Gospel when it was rejected in Russia by the 'wise and the reasonable'. There is no room for a condescending or judgmental attitude towards millions of our *babushki*, who have each made their small contribution to the preservation of the Gospel in our homeland, even if it is in a limited form. They deserve honour, praise and gratitude that they in all their weakness preserve our churches, fill them to capacity on feast days and daily give material support out of their often very limited means.

It must be stressed that the elderly character of the church has made it more resilient in the face of any kind of external pressure. Since they are more or less excluded from society these *babushki* are safe from persecution. They are like hardy perennials, able to withstand cold, heat and drought. However, it would be a mistake to think that such conditions represent a normal existence for the church.

VLADIMIR ZELINSKY

*Translated from Russian by
Suzanne Oliver*

Jewish Life in Czechoslovakia

Introduction

On 19 February this year a group of young Jews in Prague sent a letter of protest to the leadership of their community. They accused them of failing to ensure the community's survival and using autocratic methods to align it with the ruling communist party. 'Forty five years

after the end of the war,' they wrote, 'we are reaching a state when time could well complete what the Nazi genocide began — our Jewish life is in danger of extinction in the near future.' The appeal was signed by 25 people, including the wife of Prague's only rabbi. Interviewed by Reuters about the appeal, one of the organisers, 38-year-old Leo Pavlat,