

# USSR : The Christian Seminar

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The Christian Seminar\* was formed to meet a need among young, newly-converted Orthodox Christians in the USSR. Many of these young people with intellectual tastes needed a forum where they could discuss their faith. Alexander Ogorodnikov, a student who had recently become a member of the Russian Orthodox Church and who felt the need for a religious education and Christian fellowship, founded the Christian Seminar in Moscow in 1974:

Dissatisfied with the mere "performance of a religious cult", having no opportunity to receive a religious education, and in need of brotherly Christian relations, we began in October 1974 to hold a religio-philosophical seminar [. . .] We were [. . .] convinced that our problems were being raised neither in church sermons, which are the only means for the religious education of believers, nor in the pages of the church journal, the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, which, moreover, is inaccessible to the ordinary Christian. Most important of all, in the Russian Church the parish is not like a brotherly community where Christian love of one's neighbour becomes a reality. The State persecutes every manifestation of church life, except for the performance of a "religious cult". Our thirst for spiritual communion, religious education and missionary service runs up against all the might of the State's repressive machinery.<sup>1</sup>

In 1978 the Seminar changed its name to "Christian Seminar on Problems of the Religious Renaissance", a title which reflects the increasing numbers of young Soviet people who are entering the Orthodox Church. So far as is known, the Christian Seminar has confined its activities to discussing religious questions, usually verbally, but also in writing.

\*Information on the Christian Seminar is almost entirely based on *samizdat* documents written by its members and friends. No less than 56 of these have reached the West since 1976. A forthcoming *RCL* article will discuss the Seminar's ideas. *J.E.*

Subjects discussed have included the Church and the modern industrial world, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* by Bergson, Vladimir Solovoyov's concept of the God-Man, and the sermons of Billy Graham.<sup>2</sup> A further 27 subjects are listed by Ogorodnikov and Boris Razveyev in a letter to Dr Potter, the WCC Secretary-General.<sup>3</sup> According to undocumented reports, older and more knowledgeable Christians have attended the Christian Seminar as visiting lecturers to give papers in their area of expertise. In addition to its discussions, the Christian Seminar began to produce a journal, *Obshchina (Community)*, but, unfortunately, this attempt has been thwarted by the authorities. Only one issue of the journal (No. 2) has reached the West. Issue No. 1 was produced but then confiscated by the KGB during a house-search, and no further issues are known to exist.

Despite the harmlessness of its activity, the KGB have persecuted the Seminar's members in a manner more appropriate to an armed subversive cell which aims to overthrow the Soviet State. The members of the Seminar have met in private homes for their discussions. On many occasions they have faced police harassment and in March 1977 a typical raid took place:

On 8 March there were three visits altogether to our club [i.e. the Seminar. *Tr.*]. Documents of the Holy Church were confiscated, and also personal letters from young Christians to the West [ . . . ] On 9 March 1977 your people [i.e. the KGB. *Tr.*] again visited the club. They cut off the electricity supply, cut off the gas-taps, broke locks and even stole communion wine and a candle. They dragged mattresses out into the street, into the wet snow.<sup>4</sup>

What is the Seminar's position in relation to Soviet legislation on religion? The basic legislation, the Law on Religious Associations, which was adopted in 1929 and revised in 1975, states (Art. 2): "Religious associations of believers of all denominations shall be registered as religious societies or groups of believers". Art. 3 defines religious societies thus: "A religious society is a local association of believing citizens, 18 years or older, of the same cult, not less than 20 in number, who unite for a combined satisfaction of their religious needs". Religious groups have less than 20 members (though in practice their existence is shadowy and none are actually known to exist). However, the Law on Religious Associations does not specifically state that the forming of religious associations is to be the *only* means whereby people may fulfil their religious needs. Other aspects of religious life, for which there is no legal basis, continue to exist with the tacit complicity of the State. For example, the Russian Orthodox Church is allowed to maintain a number of monasteries and convents, to which foreign visitors are frequently taken, and continues to publish regularly the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. None of these are mentioned in the Law on Religious Associations or in other published legislation.

So far the Christian Seminar has not tried to register as a state-recognized religious society or group. Indeed it has not attempted to form itself into what the Soviet government (or western secular or ecclesiastical authorities) would necessarily recognize as a "religious association". It has no chairman or secretary, no treasurer or auditing commission, no funds at all, as far as we know; no formally prescribed membership, no election of officers, no structure of any kind. In what sense, then, can it be called a religious association which should seek registration under Soviet law? In practice, the Christian Seminar is a small group of people, probably not even with a constant membership, which meets informally in the homes of its members. There does not appear to be any legal basis for the Soviet government to take action against them. Furthermore, an Instruction on the implementation of the Law on Religious Associations makes it clear that activity by believers outside registered associations is countenanced under the law. Art. 22 (part 3) of this Instruction reads: "Believers who have not formed a society or group must notify the authorities regarding each prayer meeting separately".<sup>5</sup>

This view of the legality of the Christian Seminar's activity is strengthened by the fact that the nine members of the Seminar known to have been arrested have not been charged with participating in meetings of the Christian Seminar. A variety of other charges (described below) have been preferred.

A good deal of information is available about the members of the Seminar who have been arrested.\* But little or nothing is known about those who continue to participate in the Seminar's activities and have not so far attracted the attention of the KGB. To what extent the arrested members are typical of the whole membership of the Seminar is therefore difficult to judge. Evidently they are its leading spirits, possibly more dedicated, or more intellectually and spiritually gifted than the others.

Of those arrested Alexander Ogorodnikov (aged 28), the Seminar's founder, is well-known abroad. He is married with a two-year-old son. He is reported to have been an excellent student in the three educational institutes which he attended: Moscow State University, the Urals University (in their respective Philosophy Departments) and the All-Union State Cinematography Institute in Moscow. His interest in Christianity began when he saw Pasolini's film "The Gospel According to St Matthew" at the Cinematography Institute, and although he received a higher grant in recognition of his ability he was expelled after the Institute's authorities discovered that he was a Christian.<sup>6</sup> Ogorodnikov describes his spiritual quest and that of other members of the Seminar as follows:

\*Keston College has recently learned that another two members of the Seminar have been arrested, Viktor Popkov on 8 January and Vladimir Burtsev on 8 February this year. *J.E.*

My friends and I grew up in atheist families. Each of us has come along a complicated, sometimes agonizing, path of spiritual searching. From Marxist convictions, through nihilism and through the total rejection of any ideology at all, through attraction to the "hippy" lifestyle, we have come to the Church.<sup>7</sup>

The Orthodox writer Anatoli Levitin-Krasnov (who has lived in the West since 1974 and is referred to by the Seminar as its overseas representative) knew Ogorodnikov well and writes of him:

I remember him as a boy, the son of a provincial communist. He is modest and polite. He stutters when he gets excited. He's a Russian, Russian to the marrow of his bones. Of course, this is not a virtue or advantage, but perhaps it is a symptom. At the beginning of the century, youths like this went to the revolution, youths with burning hearts and inquisitive minds, selfless and undemanding youths from the heart of the simple people.<sup>8</sup>

In general, the Seminar's members appear to regard Ogorodnikov with respect and affection: all the documents from the Seminar to have reached the West since Ogorodnikov's arrest testify to this.

Ogorodnikov's "right-hand man" appears to be Vladimir Poesh who is described as the Seminar's representative in Leningrad and who was arrested in August 1979. After graduating from Leningrad University he worked in the Academy of Sciences Library and is a specialist in Romance philology, with published works in the subject. He is married to Tatyana Kupatadze, and they have two daughters.

Tatyana Shchipkova (aged 50), arrested in January 1980, is the only longstanding member of the Seminar known to be older than her twenties. She lived in Smolensk where she was a lecturer at the Pedagogical Institute for 17 years, and is a specialist in Romance languages—Latin, Old French and Old Romanian. Poesh was one of her students before he moved to Leningrad. It is unusual for a practising Christian to be a teacher in the Soviet Union (except in Lithuania<sup>9</sup>), since teachers are thought to be in a position to influence ideologically the minds of their students. Shchipkova, however, not only maintained her post for a considerable time, but also managed to give her students some unbiased knowledge of the Christian faith:

... I had a set class on the Latin language in the first year during which I have been accustomed for the last 13 or 14 years to familiarize the students not only with grammar but also with the culture and history of ancient Rome [ . . . ] I told the first-year students about the rise of Christianity, the person of Christ, His commandments, and the significance of Christianity for the subsequent fate of Rome, Europe and humanity.<sup>10</sup>

A more recent but better-known member of the Christian Seminar is Lev Regelson who was arrested in December 1979. He is reported to have

assumed leadership of the Seminar after Ogorodnikov's arrest, since, as a slightly older and more experienced Christian (b. 1940), he would be able to give them the basic teaching which they needed. Regelson was already well known as the author of a number of documents defending religious freedom in the USSR, in particular the appeal to delegates of the Fifth Assembly of the WCC in 1975,<sup>11</sup> which resulted in the WCC's first public discussion of religious persecution in the Soviet Union. He is also the author of *The Tragedy of the Russian Church 1917-1945*,<sup>12</sup> a substantial work on the Russian Orthodox Church's response to the 1917 Revolution. It contains a great deal of hitherto unknown documentation laboriously collected under the most difficult conditions. Regelson is a physicist who graduated from Moscow University and worked for a time in the Moscow Planetarium. He lost his job after he refused to make a secret of his new-found Christian faith.<sup>13</sup>

These brief biographies indicate that the Christian Seminar has been able to attract highly intelligent and gifted people who have gained entry to some of the highest educational institutes in the Soviet Union, and at least some of whom have held responsible positions in the Soviet academic world.

The names of other members of the Christian Seminar have been included in or appended to documents sent to the West: Sergei Yermolayev, Boris Razveyev, Alexander Argentov, Georgi Fedotov, Alexander Kuzkin, Alexander Pushkin, Gennadi Kurganov, Marina Timonina, Yelena Levasheva, Yelena Kashtanova, Oleg Tripolsky, Viktor Popkov, Vladimir Burtsev and others. Some names appear in early documents and then disappear, indicating that the Seminar probably has a fluctuating membership.

How widely the members of the Seminar are distributed is not clear, though most live in Moscow. Vladimir Poresh and Tatyana Shchipkova are referred to as the Seminar's representatives in Leningrad and Smolensk respectively, but there do not appear to be separate meetings of the Seminar in those cities. Seminar activity has also been reported in Chistopol (Tatar ASSR) and in Redkino (near Kalinin). However, these reports were connected with Ogorodnikov's presence in both places: at one point he was staying at his parents' home in Chistopol (a local headmaster lost his job after it was discovered that he belonged to the Seminar); later Ogorodnikov moved to Redkino and the Seminar met there. How many of those attending the Seminar lived locally and how many travelled from Moscow (two hours' train journey away) is not known.

The Christian Seminar has made contact with other young people's religious (mainly Orthodox) groups in the USSR, but these relations are difficult to describe because insufficient documentary evidence exists. As such groups depend for their continued existence on secrecy, this is no surprise. There continue to be verbal reports of numerous study groups for young people meeting in Moscow, of some in Leningrad, and of others

appearing from time to time in the provinces, making contact with Christian groups in Moscow or Leningrad, and then disappearing from view again. Fr Yakunin, a noted spokesman on the current situation of the Russian Orthodox Church, refers to the "activity of Orthodox communities, seminars and circles",<sup>14</sup> making it clear that the Christian Seminar is not an isolated phenomenon. Evidence for the Seminar's contact with the "37" group in Leningrad does, however, exist. Founded by Orthodox Christians, but not exclusively Christian in membership, the "37" group has attracted writers, artists, poets and other creative artists who meet to discuss Christianity from the point of view of those concerned with culture and philosophy. They do not have a great deal in common with Ogorodnikov's Seminar, either intellectually or philosophically, but they did welcome the attempt made by Vladimir Poresh to build bridges between the two groups in Leningrad:

Thanks to him contact has been established between our Seminars, an exchange of experience, ideas and people. Vladimir Poresh quickly won the sympathy of the participants in our Seminar. He is a fervent preacher of Orthodoxy, and, like us, he is excited by the ideas of the new Orthodox culture.<sup>15</sup>

The Christian Seminar did not seek to advertise its existence until it was persecuted. No documents about it arrived in the West until the summer of 1976, nearly two years after it was founded. These documents described the forcible committal to psychiatric hospital of two Seminar members, Alexander Argentov and Georgi Fedotov. The Seminar sees itself as a movement for Russian young people, operating within Russia—no members appear to live in non-Russian republics of the USSR—and it made no attempt to export its ideas to the West or to develop contacts abroad until its members began to be persecuted and support from the West was needed. But the Seminar did not shun contact with western Christians: for example, at least one foreign Christian student is known to have met Seminar members and been warmly welcomed to their meetings in 1974. Later the desire for contact with western Christians grew, or at any rate was more openly expressed. Several letters signed by Seminar members have been addressed to young Christians in different countries, and one or two letters refer to meetings which have taken place. One of the most expressive is a letter to American young people which states:

The time has come for us, living as we do on different continents and raised in different historical traditions, to open our hearts to each other and unite our efforts in creative searching. We feel your influence around us at every step [ . . . ] We are grateful to you for the spirit of liberation, which has filtered through the customs barriers and the infernal wailings of the radio-jammers [ . . . ] we turn to other people with our souls laid open. Open your hearts to us, as we are opening our own to you.<sup>16</sup>

State pressure against the Christian Seminar has taken many forms. A document entitled "A short history of repressions against the Seminar on Problems of the Religious Renaissance during the last year" (dated 15 August 1979), lists no less than 32 separate incidents. Since 1976 these have included personal searches, searches of homes, confiscation of Christian literature, beatings, interrogations, interrogations of members' parents, committal to psychiatric hospitals, arrests and labour camp sentences. Alexander Ogorodnikov was publicly slandered without the right of reply in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*.<sup>17</sup> Valentin Serov was attacked at night in a Moscow street by three unknown assailants who used professional methods. They broke his arm, and then kicked him brutally as he was lying on the ground. A 21-year-old girl connected with the Seminar was harassed in the street by two men who shoved her, trod on her feet, hit her, and then followed her home and tried to break into her flat. Yevgeni Nesterov was summoned for interrogation by the KGB: when he returned home he found that a KGB agent, S. Pavlenko, had forced his way in and was carrying out an illegal search of his flat. The next day Pavlenko returned and harassed Nesterov's bedridden mother, as a result of which she almost had a heart attack and had to go to hospital. Tatyana Shchipkova lost her job after it became known that she was a Christian. On 27 October 1978 the Academy of Sciences of the USSR stripped her of her doctorate because of alleged unsatisfactory conduct—despite her 17 years of uncriticized service as a teacher. Five members of the Christian Seminar have been forcibly interned in psychiatric hospitals, though none is known to have had any previous record of mental illness. One of them, Sergei Yermolayev, was taken for examination to the Serbsky Institute during pre-trial detention for an offence unconnected with the Christian Seminar. Alexander Pushkin was reported to have been committed at the end of 1978 or the beginning of 1979: there has been no further news of him. Alexander Argentov and Georgi Fedotov were detained in 1976-77, and Alexander Kuzkin in 1978-79; all were released after a few weeks. However, Argentov and Fedotov, and possibly the others, were forcibly given harmful drugs, and in Fedotov's case they have had a lasting effect:

In the course of three months, apart from neuroleptic drugs, Fedotov was given three injections of "Moditen Depo" without his consent, as a result of which his organism was severely intoxicated and he underwent a severe form of depression [. . .] The destructive actions of the neuroleptic drugs have produced an irreversible effect on Georgi: he has a serious form of vegetative dystonia [loss of muscle-tone. *Tr.*] and asthenia [debility. *Tr.*]. As before, the threat of hospitalization hanging over him is a real one.<sup>18\*</sup>

\*Keston College has just learned that Georgi Fedotov was re-committed to psychiatric hospital on 18 January 1980, after visiting western correspondents in Moscow to inform them of Fr Dimitri Dudko's arrest. *J.E.*

At present, five members of the Christian Seminar (in addition to Alexander Pushkin, whose status is uncertain) are in prison. Sergei Yermolayev's "crime"—shouting, "Down with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union!" in the Moscow Metro, in order to "test freedom of speech in practice"<sup>19</sup>—is not connected with the activities of the Christian Seminar. However, his sentence of four years in labour camp is out of all proportion to the offence, and it may be that his membership of the Seminar persuaded the Soviet authorities to give him a stiffer sentence. The young man arrested with him for the same crime was given a slightly shorter sentence, 3½ years, and was sent to the Gorky region, not far from Moscow, whereas Yermolayev has been sent to the Buryat Autonomous Republic in the Soviet Far East.

Alexander Ogorodnikov (arrested on 21 November 1978) was sentenced to one year in labour camp on a charge of "parasitism" (being unemployed). At the time of his arrest he was on his way to start a job for which he had already been accepted. At the end of his sentence in Siberia he was not released, but was taken to Leningrad where he is at present undergoing pre-trial interrogation. He is being charged under Art. 70 of the Russian Criminal Code, "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda", together with Vladimir Poresh, in what has become known as the "*Obshchina* case" (Ogorodnikov wrote four items for issue No. 2 of *Obshchina*).

Poresh (arrested on 1 August 1979) is being charged under the same article with helping to produce and circulate *Obshchina*. Twenty or more people in Leningrad and Moscow have been interrogated in this case, which is being conducted by a KGB special investigator, V. V. Cherkasovy.

Tatyana Shchipkova was arrested on 8 January 1980 when she appeared in court because of an incident in March 1979 during a meeting of the Seminar in Moscow. The flat where the meeting was being held was raided by the militia, who searched the premises and confiscated religious literature. One of the militia tried to take a notebook from Shchipkova and when she refused to hand it over, he twisted her arm. She slapped his face. For this she was charged with "malicious hooliganism" (Art. 206 of the Russian Criminal Code), and at her trial on 8 January 1980 was sentenced to three years in labour camp.

Finally, Lev Regelson was arrested on 24 December 1979, though it is probable, in view of his other activities, that this would have happened whether or not he had been a member of the Christian Seminar.

Why has the persecution of the Christian Seminar been so fierce? Why is the Christian Seminar being singled out when other groups of Christian young people appear to be relatively unmolested? The cruelty with which its members have been treated seems to be out of all proportion to the private and inoffensive nature of its activities. One possible explanation may be that Lieutenant-Colonel Andrei Dmitriyevich Shilkin of the Moscow KGB, a specialist in religious matters, is in charge of the case.



He has interrogated Ogorodnikov and other members of the Seminar on several occasions, sometimes using the pseudonym Sokolov. He may have been given the assignment of eliminating the Christian Seminar as early as 1976, and, having failed so far to do so, may now be resorting to stronger measures in the hope of avoiding an important failure in his career. But there is more to it than that. The Soviet authorities are genuinely afraid of a religious revival and that the "contagion" of religion will spread. According to Fr Gleb Yakunin, the authorities are well aware of the situation "and that is why their blows are directed against the true religious revival. Against a background of 'symphonic'\* gestures of 'well-meaning attention'† from the authorities towards the Moscow Patriarchate, persecution is being directed against religious young people. This persecution testifies that it is precisely here that a genuine meeting of Russia with Christ is taking place, a meeting which is provoking the fear of His enemies."<sup>20</sup>

\*A reference to the "symphony" between Church and State which existed in Tsarist times.

† The words are those of Patriarch Pimen (*Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, No. 5. 1979, p. 9).

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Dr Philip Potter, Secretary-General of the WCC, from Alexander Ogorodnikov, 27 July 1976; English translation in *RCL*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 45-7. A fuller statement on the formation of the Christian Seminar is given in a letter to Dr Potter from Ogorodnikov and Boris Razveyev, 5 August 1976; English translation in *RCL*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 49-50.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Dr Potter, 27 July 1976, in *RCL*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 45-7.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Dr Potter, 5 August 1976, in *RCL*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 49-50.

<sup>4</sup>Letter to A. D. Shilkin of the Moscow KBG from Georgi Fedotov and Gennadi Kurganov, undated but 1977.

<sup>5</sup>Instructions of the People's Commissariat of the Interior, 1 October 1929, amended 28 January 1932, Art. 22 (part 3).

<sup>6</sup>Ogorodnikov's marks at the Institute are known to have been excellent, all 4s and 5s (out of 5—the universal Soviet marking system). Ogorodnikov's claim that he was expelled from the All-Union State Cinematography Institute because he was discovered to<sup>7</sup> be a Christian is attacked in an article entitled "Freedom of Religion and the Slanderers" by Boris Roshchin, published in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* on 13 and 20 April 1977 (an abridged translation appeared in *RCL*, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 186-9). Ogorodnikov disproved Roshchin's accusations in an open letter to the editor of *Literaturnaya Gazeta* dated 27 April 1977. English translations are published in Fr Gleb Yakunin and Lev Regelson: *Letters from Moscow*, published by Keston College and H. S. Dakin Company, 1978, pp. 74-7 and 110-12.

<sup>7</sup>Letter to Dr. Potter, 27 July 1976.

<sup>8</sup>A. Levitin-Krasnov: "The Salt of the Earth (Young Russia)", *Russkaya Mysl*, 15 November 1979, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup>For a selection of documents on religious teachers in Lithuania, see Michael Bourdeaux: *Land of Crosses*, Augustine Publishing Company, 1979, pp. 219-22.

<sup>10</sup>"Has a Soviet teacher the right to freedom of conscience?", Tatyana Shchipkova, undated but July-September 1978, published in *Documents of the Christian Committee for the Defense of Believers' Rights in the USSR*, Washington Street Research Center, 3101 Washington Street, San Francisco, California 94115, USA, Vol. 4, pp. 497-506. Extract published in this issue of *RCL*, pp. 106-9.

<sup>11</sup>Dated 16 October 1975. English translation in *RCL*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 9-14.

<sup>12</sup>Published in Russian by YMCA-Press, Paris, 1978. It is hoped that an English

translation by Jane Ellis will be published shortly.

<sup>13</sup>An account of this is given by Anatoli Levitin-Krasnov in chapter 1 of *Letters from Moscow*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>14</sup>"Report of Fr Gleb Yakunin to the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights in the USSR on the present position of the Russian Orthodox Church and the prospects for a religious renaissance in Russia", 15 August 1979, p. 45 of the retyped text issued by *Arkhiv Samizdata*, No. 3751.

<sup>15</sup>Untitled statement issued after Poresh's arrest, signed by 11 members of the Leningrad religio-philosophical seminar, undated but after 1 August 1979.

<sup>16</sup>"Young Russia to Young America", members of the Christian Seminar on Problems of the Religious Renaissance, August (?) 1979.

<sup>17</sup>See note 6.

<sup>18</sup>Letter to Dr Potter from ten friends of Ogorodnikov and members of the Christian Seminar, 18 April 1977; English translation in *Letters from Moscow*, p. 106.

<sup>19</sup>This explanation is given in the report of the incident in the *Chronicle of Current Affairs*, No. 52, Khronika Press edition, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup>"Report of Fr Gleb Yakunin to the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights in the USSR on the present position of the Russian Orthodox Church . . .", 15 August 1979, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

## Appendix

### Spiritual Pilgrimage of Vladimir Poresh

*Vladimir Poresh, now aged 31, was baptized into the Russian Orthodox Church in 1974. He became a member of the Christian Seminar on Problems of the Religious Renaissance, founded in Moscow (1974) by Alexander Ogorodnikov. Tatyana Shchepkova, a lecturer at the Smolensk Pedagogical Institute, who compiled the following document on Poresh, is also a member of the Christian Seminar and was arrested on 8 January 1980 and, according to Anatoli Levitin (KNS No. 86), charged, under Art. 70 (anti-soviet agitation and propaganda) of the RSFSR Criminal Code. Vladimir Poresh himself was arrested on 1 August 1979 and having also been charged under Art. 70 is awaiting trial in Leningrad. Alexander Ogorodnikov, the founder of the Christian Seminar, was arrested on 21 November 1978 and sentenced on 10 January 1979 to one year's imprisonment for alleged "parasitism". Although he was due to be released in November 1979 his family have lost touch with him and, it is reported, he has been taken to Leningrad to be questioned as a witness in the Poresh case.*

In the autumn of 1966 my first-year French class was joined by Volodya Poresh, who was then 17 years old—a tall adolescent with large hands and honest,

kind eyes, a simple person without the faintest suspicion of the existence of the camps and convinced that religion developed as the result of fear of the forces of nature. He soon began to work in my group. After each lecture he would ask me questions, delighting me with the lack of banality of his vision and the accuracy of his argument. It was a pity to lose such a pupil, but I was glad when he was able to go on to Leningrad University.

He was very much alone in Leningrad. Thrown back on his own reflections, he at last came face to face with questions of universal significance. His anxiety found expression in his letters of that period. First of all he realized the senselessness of life without spirituality.

"All too often recently I have been faced with questions that have no answer, like a machine in perpetual motion. It is as if I have gone into a room where I have seen a mechanism—no one knows how it works or the reason it is there, or even why it was made. First of all, I saw that the world is senseless, like a cat running across the street. Everything is senseless from beginning to end . . . Then it suddenly seemed that the most senseless things have more sense than anything else. Art, literature, science, all sorts of

interests, hobbies, quite useless things—all this seemed more important than the rest. All spiritual life is senseless because it brings people nothing but suffering. But all the same it is the most important thing . . . It is senseless to keep searching, but I shall go on searching for this very reason" (24 December 1969).

And at last, after these meanderings, the crisis came in 1970: the total recognition of his own spiritual enslavement and that of everyone around him. He came to Smolensk for the winter holidays. He seemed so completely changed that I thought there had been some sort of catastrophe and fearfully asked him what had happened. He sat down without taking off his coat and said: "I understand everything!" "What do you mean, everything?" "Everything!" I understood of course because I, too, could not think of anything else at that time and had reached the same dead end. We were both heading towards the same conclusion in different ways, with an age difference of 19 years. These were not the sort of questions that each generation meets when its time comes, but those that time offers all her contemporaries, irrespective of their age when these questions overtake them. "I cannot live when people spit in my face every day." He admitted then that at that time he was close to suicide. He found the way out later. "I came to the conclusion that God exists. He cannot not exist, otherwise there would be no sense in anything." But faith was still a long way from this deduction. To become involved in life, discover its meaning and become its embodiment—this was what he was striving for. I forget which month it was in 1973 when he arrived in a joyful and enthusiastic mood, and told me: "I have begun a new phase of my life: I've got to know someone called Sasha Ogorodnikov. We have decided to create a culture within a culture." His search for a spiritual foundation for this culture led him to Russian religious philosophy: "Besides this, I am reading Russian philosophy now."

"I am discovering a number of very interesting things. I have read N. Berdyayev's essay on Khomyakov, a few things by V. Solovyov and some Dostoyevsky. And it seems that the climax of 20th century western philoso-

phy, existentialism, can also be seen in a more or less developed form in Khomyakov: i.e. not a philosophy of abstract concepts, but a philosophy of life. There is still a lot that I don't yet understand. I find it all fairly difficult. But it is still very important for me . . . I shall write to you in more detail, when I have sorted it all out" (February 1974).

Volodya was baptized on 20 October 1974. The slow, difficult process of involvement in the Church began. He was helped in this by his good qualities: intellectual versatility, the inability to stagnate, his constant striving towards a critical re-evaluation of what has already been established.

"Saying that every kind of group is unfree, Berdyayev denies the Church—the mystical body of Christ, the religious unity. Without the Church there is no Orthodox faith, just as there is no Catholicism. To deny the Church means Protestantism and sects" (January 1975).

Thus the idea of the church community was born: Volodya is with us, with the Seminar and with the community. He is linked to all of us by an indestructible thread which no detention or imprisonment can break. It is an indissoluble mystical bond. This is what he wrote this year to my son Alexander Shchipkov, who was serving in the army:

"Sanya, don't forget to pray at 10 o'clock in the morning or later. This has very great mystical significance . . . Despite the heavy blows we have borne, we are all stronger as never before. You would be very glad if you could see us. Prayers are a great help to those going through an ordeal. We pray for all of you when we gather together. Sanya, keep your spirits up! The inner conflict continues, we are sent these trials for our enlightenment and transformation. We must strive to take that step, which would be an inner continuation of something, one of the steps on the stairway to God. (Remember St John of the Ladder) . . .

. . . I have now come to see that one of the main features of the New Age that has been born and is now being realized, is the deep unity in man of the external and internal. The inner life of man, the very depths of his consciousness—and the situation in which he

finds himself . . . cannot be separated without force. It seems to me that here the meaning of the Incarnation is being partially revealed. The divinity and absolute sovereignty of Christ (the inner, unseen world of consciousness), and His service (the external, the circumstances of life)—can we separate these two sides of the One Being? Here we must solve the problem of our activities. For us spiritualization is impossible and unthinkable, i.e. severing or

separating the divinity of the Saviour (= our inner world, consciousness) from his humanity (= outward action, service). Through these two natures, divine and human, of Christ who is both Man and God, we also, who are created in the image and likeness of God, draw nearer to Christ . . . I have written all this to explain the idea that external circumstances have an inner significance for us" (28 February 1979).

TATYANA SHECHIPKOVA

## Secret Police Harass Poresh

*Before his arrest on 1 August 1979, Poresh had already been under police surveillance for some time. As early as July 1976, during a visit to Moscow (he lived in Leningrad), Poresh was closely followed by the secret police. In the following extracts from a document entitled "A Stroll through Moscow", Poresh vividly describes this experience. This document was included in the Christian Seminar's samizdat journal, Obshchina No. 2 (Moscow-Leningrad, 1978, pp. 149-56).*

On 14 July 1976, the anniversary of the French Revolution, I arrived at the Leningrad Station in Moscow where my friend Alexander Ogorodnikov met me. On 15 July I rang my acquaintance Zhenya N. and arranged to meet him at 6 p.m. at Kropotkinskaya metro station. The *chekisty* [i.e. secret policemen (KGB). *Tr.*] were looking for Sasha [i.e. Ogorodnikov. *Tr.*] but he also had to see Zhenya. But we were not sure whether Zhenya would have a "tail" when we met him at the metro station, so Sasha did not come with me to the meeting-place. He was to wait for us inside a courtyard not far away. From there he would be able to have a good view of the street which Zhenya and I were going to walk along, and if there was anyone following us, Sasha would see him.

I got to the metro station at about 5:55. Looking at the jostling crowds I noticed nothing in particular which was disturbing, because I suspected almost everyone of being connected with the Lubyanka—particularly, for some reason, well-dressed young men with short haircuts.

Zhenya appeared ten minutes later. He is a young man, 20 years old, with very long hair down to his shoulders and

threadbare jeans. I met him at Sasha's on one of my regular trips to Moscow—at No. 25 Prospekt Mira, where Sasha was employed as a janitor in a tuberculosis clinic and had been given a shed to live in—a tiny building with two rooms, a hall and a kitchen with a gas stove, a small table and a sink. It was not designed to be lived in: once it had been a carpenter's workshop. It was difficult to heat in winter, and there was only a small barred window to let in the light. But of course there are worse places than that one—all the more so because we loved that little flat for the spirit of freedom which filled it. It was there that we held our seminars on religion and philosophy—in other words, where we discussed the questions which were most important for us: questions of religion and life. The door of that house was open to all, and anyone could take part and speak. Newcomers were struck by the variety there: they might meet old men or 16-year-old hippies, scholars or speculators. Those conversations, that way of life, took hold of me completely: it was all so sound, so full of meaning and depth, so full of the warmth and genuine feeling which you cannot confuse with anything else; it was so different from vulgar Soviet life that I always hurried to Moscow, to Sasha, to that flat, with my whole being. It had become palpably obvious to us that it is very easy to live according to the truth. You just have to make a determined stand against the pressures of the frantic world, and God will help you and strengthen your convictions. [ . . . ]

At 6 p.m. I met Zhenya at Kropotkinskaya metro station. At first we did not notice anybody. I asked Zhenya: "Is anybody following you?" "It doesn't look

like it." But as we crossed the square I noticed a young man with close-cropped black hair. At first I just thought "Is that him?", but I did not dwell on the idea, and told Zhenya the number of the house where Sasha was waiting for us in the courtyard (No. 12, Sivtsev Vrazhek). The black-haired young man was standing next to us by now (we were waiting for the lights), and if I had not spoken so indistinctly (probably from excitement) so that even Zhenya did not catch what I said, the *chekist* would have heard and things would have gone badly for Sasha. I cursed myself bitterly for my stupidity and for losing my sense of reality, for next moment it became quite obvious that he was a *chekist*. I was not sure until the end of that day, until late that night, that he had not heard the address.

The black-haired *chekist* was short but well-built and broad-shouldered. He was holding a black executive briefcase and a light raincoat, and he was wearing a cap made of the same material. He was wearing a dark blue suit and a red woollen shirt. He had quite a pleasant, well-educated-looking face.

I told Zhenya we had a "tail". "We can't have, where?" By then we had crossed the square and were walking down a narrow side-street. (I had decided not to go to the rendezvous point because I was not feeling confident and was afraid I might give Sasha away by some false move or other. Afterwards it turned out that I had done the right thing.) The *chekist* disappeared somewhere for a few moments, but then re-appeared minus briefcase and raincoat. We turned into the next street and hurried into a dairy. Zhenya asked me "Where is he?" I looked for him through the window but could not see him. Then we saw him coming towards us inside the shop. We rushed for the exit. "There he is", I replied. The *chekist* obviously realized he had been discovered.

Leaving the shop we walked quickly, weaving through the back streets. I do not know Moscow at all, so I cannot say even which part of the city we were in. On the way I told Zhenya what Sasha and I had agreed to do: if we had not appeared in an hour he would wait for us between 7 and 7.30 at Kirovskaya metro station. We came onto a wide avenue and boarded a trolleybus. The *chekist* had been following

us relentlessly a few paces behind, and he got onto the trolleybus too. This was the first time I had had the experience of being followed and I was very upset. I told Zhenya that I was unlikely to get away from the *chekist* in an hour. I could not shake off paralysing fear. Here was a living man, quite a nice-looking man even, following me: but somehow he was not alive; he was a machine, bearing the full power of the State.

Zhenya said "We're coming up to a metro station. I'll get off, and let's see who they follow". I said it would be me of course: they knew Zhenya already, but I was a new face to them. And that is how it turned out. Zhenya got off, but the *chekist* stayed on the trolleybus. I sat down, and gradually, thinking over everything that had happened, I began to come to myself again. My thoughts were still confused, but this much became clear: it was unlikely that I would be able to get away since I did not know Moscow, its short cuts and back streets, but mainly because I did not know how to get away from them—who could teach you that!—and was not in firm enough control of myself. But I considered that it was a duty of honour to try to escape them. I got off the trolleybus at the first stop we came to and sat down on a bench on the pavement. Then I noticed that there were now two *chekists*. The second was tall and thin with a dark brown suit and a light-coloured shirt, tieless and open-necked. They were both about 30, and both had a pleasant appearance, but neither gave any signs of life: I did not see them talk to each other, and their expressions never changed. They sat down on a bench one away from me.

I had completely come to myself now. I realized that fate had thrown me into a duel with evil forces, and that if I allowed fear to possess my soul, they would have triumphed. (The philosopher Khoma Brut had a similar experience.) They had realized that I had seen them, but they were not trying to detain me, so they could only have one aim: to frighten me, to victimize me, to paralyse my will and to destroy my dignity through fear. From that moment I stopped being afraid; fear was replaced by a sense of steady spiritual exaltation.

I got up and set off along the street. The *chekists* got up too. The hunt began. In the centre of Moscow, in the world's greatest capital, with 8,000 journalists,

with its great university and other institutions, in the glorious patrimony of A. S. Khomyakov and I. V. Kireyevsky, the most powerful state machine in history, compared with which the Egyptian bureaucracy was mere child's play, began to hunt a human being. [ . . . ]

*[The chekists followed him all day, in various combinations, their number increasing all the time. Some were on foot; some followed him in a car. Poresch spoke to them, and they responded with threats. He felt isolated and vulnerable, but calmed himself with prayer. He was unable to seek refuge with any of his friends for fear that they would be drawn into the affair. He rang Zhenya, but he was not at home. At midnight he decided to return to Leningrad by train; but a final phone call found Zhenya in, and he went to his flat for the night, followed closely all the way. At 1.30 a.m. Sasha appeared at the rear window of the flat and they lowered documents to him in a briefcase. He left by taxi. Ed.]*  
[ . . . ]

We went to bed, and got up at 8 o'clock. We had done all our business, and I was intending to go and see my relatives in the provinces. But the *chekists* had not finished their business yet. When we went out into the entrance hall we saw them sitting calmly on a bench in front of the doorway, shivering in the chilly morning. I did not know the three men, but I had already met the girl: she had been in the car with the man in charge. These three were different from yesterday's *chekists*. Yesterday's had looked fairly civilized, but these were complete criminals, and soon proved it. Two of the three were about 30, and the other about 40. The latter was very likely in charge, since he was the most active of the trio. When we were approaching the escalator to the metro he tripped me up and said "That's just the beginning", then hurried off to get on to the escalator before us. As soon as we stepped on to the escalator they surrounded me, one of them twisted my arm backwards and the other pulled my glasses off. The man in charge said "Try to run and I'll knock your head off". (My head now!) "See my mug? Memorise it!" He presented me with his profile, trying to put a terrifying expression into his face, and started pointing to his "mug". This was all rather like a circus act, and I was not

in the least frightened: I was just stunned by the unexpectedness of it. "Why shouldn't I run away?" I said indignantly. "You've got your own work to do, and I've got mine. What do you get paid for?" All three shouted at once: "We'll show you what we get paid for! Just try to run away!" They were paying no attention at all to Zhenya, as if he did not exist. Meanwhile a police lieutenant in glasses was coming down the escalator. He stopped and asked "What's going on?" The man in charge waved his arm at him: "Clear off!" He saw the outraged and indignant expression on the policeman's face, and added coarsely and harshly: "I said clear off!" reaching into his side pocket (evidently for his identity card). I do not know whether the policeman suddenly realized who he was talking to, or whether he simply took fright, but he shambled off down the escalator. The bandits let me be, but watched my every step. While we were travelling along in the metro I looked the man in charge straight in the eyes, until he eventually looked away (when he got bored). Zhenya soon got out, encouraging me with a kind word, and I arrived at Belorussky Station. I was now mortally tired of *chekists*. I was so exhausted by the previous day and its sequel that morning that I bought a ticket to my home town for 2 p.m. When I went out into the station entrance hall with the ticket in my pocket, the man in charge, standing next to me and speaking into thin air, said in what seemed to me a regretful tone: "So you're off then?" I decided to go for a quiet stroll along Gorky Street. It was a vile oppressive feeling to have those repulsive shadows at one's back! Slowly, without turning round, just looking into shop windows from time to time, I reached the shop *Akademkniga* by the statue of Yuri Dolgoruky, and went inside, thinking: "Perhaps they'll find something to interest them here too". But they preferred to wait outside. I spent about half an hour in the shop. When I came out, my persecutors were nowhere to be seen. They had disappeared. At first I could not believe my eyes. I looked round: not a single familiar face. I went over to the statue on the square: nobody followed me. "They've gone!" I yelled to myself. And I was seized with a joy I cannot describe. Lord, how good it was without them!

So the first act of this story came to an

end. I have tried to narrate it accurately, for those for whom this is important. Possibly I have exaggerated in some places, and understated in others, but on the whole I have faithfully communicated the essential spirit of the thing, and my own state of mind. The *chekists* did not succeed in their main aim: to frighten me. So God was with me, then, gave me strength at difficult moments, and helped me to stand up to what was an unusual

onslaught even by *chekist* standards. Glory to God in the highest!

The KGB, and any secret organization, fills me with profound revulsion, and with my whole heart I would like to know nothing about it. But since it exists, since people are being tormented, I have no right to evade it, whatever the cost. One must accept responsibility, but only in order to see right prevail: right, and nothing else.

## Tatyana Shchipkova Silenced

*Tatyana Shchipkova describes below how she was hounded by the Soviet authorities from her post as a lecturer at the Pedagogical Institute in Smolensk, where she had taught for 17 years. This document, entitled "Has a Soviet Teacher the Right to Freedom of Conscience?", is undated but written between July and September 1978. The Russian text appears in Documents of the Christian Committee for the Defense of Believers' Rights in the USSR (Washington Street Research Center, 3101 Washington Street, San Francisco, California 94115, USA) Vol. 4, pp. 497-506 (pp. 497-502 are translated below).*

In 1974, when the Christian Seminar, formed by two young intellectuals, Alexander Ogorodnikov and Vladimir Poresh, was in its infancy, I started travelling to its meetings from Smolensk and gradually became a member. Little by little, my son, Alexander Shchipkov, who was studying at Smolensk Pedagogical Institute, Yelena Kąshanova, a fellow-student at the Institute and Viktor Popkov, who worked at the Smolensk Exhibition Hall, also became members.

These meetings of young Orthodox believers, their discussions, lectures and arguments gave me what I had been unable to find either at academic conferences or in the company of my respectable friends—warm Christian fellowship, completely untrammelled thinking, and total immersion in the spiritual realm. The natural result of this work was the journal [i.e. *Obshchina*. Ed.]—the distillation of the members' intellectual powers. I found the fact that both the Seminar and the journal were permeated with a religious spirit especially appealing; social questions were discussed only in connection with religious ones. Politics came outside the range of subjects

with which the Seminar was concerned. The journal is called *Obshchina* (*Community*); the first issue was published in 1977. On 21 May 1978, before the summer issue was due to appear, my flat was searched and seven copies of the journal, which was almost ready for publication, were taken, along with a considerable amount of religious literature belonging to me. Soon afterwards I was summoned to the KGB and given a caution concerning my allegedly anti-Soviet activities. I gathered that I might forfeit my career as a teacher. What is more, judging from the experiences of many others before me, a public smear-campaign was in store for me. I decided, therefore, to forestall it by telling my students the truth about myself.

On 7 June I was scheduled to give my usual first-year Latin class. For 13 or 14 years it had been my practice to teach the students about the culture and history of ancient Rome, as well as elementary Latin grammar. A week before I gave the first-year students preparatory lessons on the rise of Christianity, on Christ as a person, on His teachings and the part played by Christianity in the fate of Rome, Europe and mankind in my extra-curricular, optional class on antiquity. On 7 June I continued my account of Christianity and explained that the Christian religion was still alive—(the first time the students had been told such a thing), that it was attracting more and more educated people in the Soviet Union as well as other countries, and that I was a believer myself. I explained what it meant to be a Christian and how I had become one. Towards the end of the class I warned the students that, although I had done nothing illegal or immoral, I was not sure whether I would be allowed to continue working with them. We are not

in the habit of telling the truth about ourselves, and so the students were unaccustomed to hearing it. They were stunned by what I said, listened in total silence and did not ask a single question. No one, it seems, ran off to report on me.

Meanwhile, the investigation of my case was taking its course among the higher authorities in Smolensk. On 15 June, at a departmental meeting, I was issued with an official accusation. It contained two main charges: 1) religious propaganda among students; 2) deceiving the Institute's authorities and failing to observe the curriculum. This referred to the optional ancient culture class which all the authorities knew about and to which they had always, in the past, lent their approval. Our students, future teachers of the humanities, start their training with a minimal knowledge of culture. Only the odd individual has heard of Homer, Virgil or Cicero (I refer here to provincial pedagogical institutes). Ancient literature and culture are not included in the syllabus, while Latin grammar is. Each year I would offer the students a choice between a more thorough study of Latin grammar or a parallel course on ancient culture. Without exception they would choose the latter, and even agreed to having their knowledge checked in what we used to call "tests". One of the students who attended these lectures was the daughter of the head of the department, so he could not have had "no idea about them", as he now maintains.

The main charge was, of course, that of religious propaganda. Speaking in reply, I said that I was an Orthodox Christian and expressed regret that I had not carried out religious propaganda, or rather, given sermons, for fear of jeopardizing my career and position in general. I taught the students only about the rise of Christianity and its basic tenets. I did this once a year when in my lectures I reached the first century A.D. At this stage I would bring a New Testament to the class and read passages from it to the students in order to give them at least some notion of this enormous spiritual, and also cultural, force.

At the departmental meeting a unanimous decision was taken to request the administration to dismiss me.

That evening the faculty Dean and the department head organized a Komsomol meeting in the students' residential block: they needed the students' approval of the

decision taken by the department, and, naturally, they obtained it.

The next day, 16 June, two Academic Councils were appointed, one for the faculty and one for the Institute. The Faculty Council opened with a speech by the Dean about my religious beliefs and illegal optional classes:

It has come to our notice that T. N. Shchipkova believes in God. Furthermore, she herself has spoken to the students about her beliefs. Such views and actions are incompatible with the demands made of a Soviet teacher.

Apart from my being "guilty" of professing the Christian faith, the Dean's speech contained no other charges. His colleagues then made their speeches. All of them supported the charges to some extent. I know that I had some sympathizers in the room, but no one dared speak out in my defence, for this would have been tantamount to surrendering their jobs. The following are some quotations taken from the speeches.

A teacher from the pedagogics department:

Teachers simply do not have rights to a large number of things, for example, certain sorts of clothes or hairstyles, and even more so, certain beliefs.

The Secretary of the Institute's Party committee:

I cannot call you comrade Shchipkova or even T. N. For me you are now merely Shchipkova.

The Secretary of the faculty Party office:

You said, T. N., that Christianity means goodness. No, you have brought us evil.

A teacher of Communist Party (Soviet Union) history:

The way we carry out ideological work gives it a poor image with the students. Many of them think that we do not allow believers to work as teachers.

A representative of the politics and economics department:

T. N. Shchipkova has been carrying out propaganda against our Soviet motherland.

I denied this last accusation in my own speech and once again attempted to clarify my opinions. I spoke in a simple and comprehensible way about the essence of Christianity. The audience was attentive



and interested, albeit silent, while the authorities seemed annoyed and interrupted me repeatedly. As far as I could judge, what they and the others found most difficult was to take in the fact that the person standing before them actually held and acted upon beliefs, whatever they might be. Some found it hard to accept that it was possible to do this kind of thing, and others rejected the right to do so.

Some of those who spoke branded me as a hypocrite and liar. The latter accusation sounded strange, to say the least, considering that it came at the very moment that I had ceased lying.

I had hardly finished speaking when I was bombarded with interrogation-type questions concerning the search and the literature found in my possession. Either the Institute's authorities were making haste to carry out some mission or else they were simply unable to restrain their curiosity. I did not answer their questions and left the rostrum under a hail of malicious remarks and insults.

The Academic Council of the faculty passed the decision to dismiss me for anti-pedagogical activities and request the Higher Qualifications Commission to deprive me of my degree as candidate of philological sciences "for teaching of an anti-scientific nature". The Academic Council of the Institute endorsed this decision. In my work-book, however, I found a different formulation: "dismissed due to the unsuitability of the post held as a result of the person in question being underqualified". This note was entered immediately before three comments expressing gratitude for my excellent educational work with the students.

Nearly every teacher in a higher educational institute is personally responsible for a group of students. In pedagogical institutes this social responsibility is considered very important. The "tutor" is accountable for his students' academic results, discipline, ideological views and even their love affairs. For many years I was considered one of the best tutors in the faculty.

My other permanent social duty was to direct the students' academic studies in tutorial groups attached to the Scientific Students Society. I was commended on numerous occasions for this work. I was in charge of two groups—ancient culture (the above-mentioned optional course) and the history of French language and culture.

During the 16 years I had been working at the Institute almost all the most brilliant and thoughtful students came to my tutorial groups. In the curriculum I was responsible for two theory courses each year—grammar theory and the history of the French language (during their five years at the Institute the students attend six special theory courses in all, excluding the socio-economics and teaching methods courses). If information on Christianity is to be regarded as seditious, then so must all my courses, except the grammar one. The ignorance of our students about anything related to religion is scandalous. Many of them have never even heard of Adam and Eve, do not know the dictionary meanings of the words "altar", "communion", "bishop", or even "monk", do not know what the Bible is (many of them think it is a black magic manual or something of the sort) or who the figures portrayed in icons are, do not know that you do not have to pay money constantly in church or that Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants are all Christians etc. Taking classical and modern French literature as just one example out of many, most of it would remain a closed book were it not for efforts to overcome elementary illiteracy. I did this sort of work throughout my 16 years at the Institute. I tried to provide an incentive for study—the rest was up to the student himself, if he was capable of going further.

The process of dismissing me lasted one week altogether, from 15 to 22 June. The campaign of slander and psychological pressure started much earlier and ended later. Its aim was to blacken my name in the eyes of the students and teachers and also the names of Lena (Yelena) Kashtanova and my son Alexander, young members of the Seminar, and my daughter-in-law Lyuba Shchipkova, who was not connected with the Seminar in any way at all. This smear-campaign was necessary in order to justify the fact that for all intents and purposes they had been expelled from the Institute, and also to make us nervous and confused. Immediately after the search overt surveillance of our house was set up. Each morning two, three or even four cars would be waiting outside the entrance to the house. As soon as one of us or any friends visiting us left the house they would be followed by a detective either on foot or by car.

The slander campaign began with my

family. Towards the end of May KGB officers visited the Safonov childrens' hospital, where Lyuba's mother, L. V. Utenkova, had brought her sick seven-month-old grand-child. She was told that Lyuba had got involved with a dreadful family, that I was engaged, as they put it, in "virtual espionage", and that she, L. V. Utenkova, should help them to save Lyuba and expose us. This resulted in a family drama: L. V. Utenkova tried to separate her daughter and my son. There were a number of ugly scenes. The poor woman, who had become an obedient tool of the KGB, hurled abuse at us, such as "fascists", "spies" and "you should be hanged". She even attempted to abduct the baby in order to force Lyuba to return to her parents' home. KGB officers also talked to Lena Kashtanova's parents and told them the same thing, that I was "the head of a secret organization", that I "lured" inexperienced young people and "confused" them etc. They did not explain what exactly my dreadful activities were, but, unfortunately, people in our country are easily swayed by this sort of talk and do not ask for explanations.

Immediately after the departmental meeting the Institute's administrative organs began collaborating with the KGB in a campaign to influence public opinion. That evening a Komsomol meeting was held in the students' residential block. A number of first and second-year students said that I worked religion into my classes in the guise of mythology. Myths were

labelled as harmful, ideologically dangerous material. Ancient culture was declared seditious. Two students dared to speak out not so much in my defence as in that of ancient culture, but they were cut short. The meeting passed the decision which the authorities required.

I found out about this meeting from some fifth-year students who came to my flat the same evening to express their sympathy and respect for me. I was touched when they promised always to keep their lecture notes from the ancient culture courses. They told me that the fourth-year students, i.e. those in the same year as my son and daughter-in-law, had composed some sort of petition in my defence and had collected a couple of dozen signatures; they were going to send it off somewhere—Moscow, I think. The Dean heard about the petition the same day and an abhorrent investigation was set in motion. The students were summoned both individually and in groups in order to reveal the names of the ring-leaders. To the students' credit, as far as I know, their names were not given. Apparently, the students burned the petition and I do not know what it said. The administration deemed it necessary to punish the fourth-year and went about this in an unprecedented manner. The whole year was prohibited from going to East Germany on the trip which had been planned as part of their German studies. The inquiries and summonses to the Dean and the Party office continued throughout that month. [...]

## The Fate of Georgi Fedotov

*In 1976 the first documents on the Christian Seminar reached the West. These concerned the forcible committal to psychiatric hospital of two of the Seminar's members, Georgi Fedotov and Alexander Argentov. Georgi Fedotov, a spiritual son of Fr Dimitri Dudko, had joined the Seminar at the beginning of its existence. In 1976 while visiting a number of Russian monasteries, he heard about Argentov's committal in July, and so returned to Moscow to help. He was then himself committed in the autumn. As a result of the publicity given to these cases, Fedotov and Argentov were released a few weeks later.*

*In the following document (complete text) entitled "A. Ogorodnikov's Conversation with a Soviet Psychiatrist" (included in*

*Obschchina No. 2, Moscow-Leningrad, 1978, pp. 159-63), Alexander Ogorodnikov describes his attempt to visit Georgi (called here Eduard) Fedotov in hospital.*

*According to recent news received by Keston College, Fedotov was arrested on 18 January this year, and taken to Psychiatric Hospital No. 14 in Moscow. He had been seeing western correspondents in an effort to gain publicity abroad for Fr Dudko, arrested on 15 January this year.*

They did not allow Eduard [baptized Georgi. Ed.] to meet us. We saw him through a fine-grilled window. He was unshaven and looked paler. The first thing Eduard did was to open his pyjama jacket and show us his neck, which was unusually bare. "They took my cross off straight

away", he explained, "and took away my Gospels." We gave him some advice about how to behave, and some words of encouragement, and then went off to try to get an interview with the administrative head of the unit.

We had to wait about an hour in a dirty-green hospital corridor. Eduard was standing behind a door and we could hear him trying to persuade the orderlies to open the door just for a moment. From time to time we heard numerous locks clanking, and the door would open to admit a succession of men in white gowns. They were strong healthy men, hurrying busily past. Their prosaic faces bore the stamp of their cheerless occupation. They did not respond to our attempts to talk to them and gave sharp monosyllabic answers. One of them took pity on Eduard and allowed him to come into the doorway for a second where we hurriedly exchanged kisses.

An hour passed. We had decided that nobody was going to come out to us, when suddenly the locks clanked, the door opened a crack, and a man squeezed sideways through it. He stopped next to us, lit a cigarette and looked at us intently from under his eyebrows.

— "Who have you come to see?" he asked in a mumbling voice.

— "Fedotov", we replied amicably. He was silent for a moment, then said: "Who are you?" I indicated Marina. "This is Edik's fiancée, and I'm a friend of his. But tell us, how is he? We're very concerned for him. Sorry, but who are we talking to?"

— "Vladimir Yakovlevich Levitsky, administrative head of the unit. We discuss a patient's health only with his close relatives."

— "We're close to him too!"

L: "I said we only talk to relatives."

O: "What is Eduard's category of disability, please?"\*

Levitsky looked taken aback. He carefully tapped the ash from his cigarette and said uncertainly "Number 2..." (Eduard's category is Number 3. *Author's note.*)

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\*Soviet citizens with physical or mental disabilities are assigned to one of three categories, Number 1 being the most serious. The category determines whether a person needs to work and the amount of money to be paid as a compensatory pension. *Tr.*

O: "Is he going to be examined by a Medical Commission soon?"

L: "What? What Medical Commission?" he muttered.

O: "Can we see him?"

L: "In principle, but today's not a visiting day. Come on Wednesday or Sunday", he replied.

O: "May we give him some books?"

L: "What books?"

Marina took out of her bag a Gospel and a Prayer Book and put them into Vladimir Yakovlevich's shaking hands.

L: "What are these?" he frowned.

A young dark-haired woman doctor with bright raspberry-coloured lips and a smile which showed a mouthful of gleaming gold teeth had stopped next to us. The director gave her the books. "Here, have a look..." She took the books cautiously. "Oh, these are old, I can't make out the letters. The clasps are interesting. They'll get stolen here", she added immediately. "It's a pity, but old things..."

— "No, nothing will get stolen", we assured her, smiling.

— "Oh, I can't understand anything..."

O: "You can understand it all, you've just got to read a bit."

She repeated a few times "They'll get stolen, they'll get stolen", and then asked: "What is he, a Baptist, or a sectarian?"

O: "No, he's an Orthodox Christian, a member of the Russian Orthodox Church."

— "Oh, that's the best religion", she said respectfully. She stood for a moment, then went off.

Levitsky had the books again. Without taking his cigarette out of his mouth, he began to leaf attentively through the Gospels, evidently hoping to find a message. He read the notes pencilled on the flyleaf carefully. I began to try to persuade him.

— "You understand that these books are essential for him. When he was put forcibly into hospital he was torn out of the usual context of his life. His world is in these books—he lives organically in the body of the Church."

L: "You don't imagine he's a real believer, do you? His religion is an *idée fixe!*"

O: "By tearing him out of his normal life, out of his surroundings, out of the bosom of the Church, by disorientating

him spiritually, by putting him forcibly into the oppressive atmosphere of a psychiatric hospital among sick people, you have created a bridgehead to develop certain nervous tendencies in him. Eduard is a very impressionable person and these conditions could have a traumatic effect on his psyche."

L: "I'm not against belief. Belief is a matter for a man's conscience. But you're talking about him as if he were a healthy person, and I find that he's ill."

O: "Excuse me, but how does his illness express itself?"

L: "Religion for him is an obsessional *idée fixe*. There are believers who pray, take communion, and then go back to normal life. They don't stick their noses into things that don't concern them. They just get on with their jobs."

O: "The Church takes up a Christian's whole life. When we are baptized we enter the Body of the Church, and the Church becomes the deep centre of our life, the source of light, illuminating all aspects of our life. It becomes the conscious regulative principle in all our social relations. It's a bad Christian who goes to Church, then comes back to the secular world leaving his faith behind in Church, and allows himself to be entirely engulfed by worldly concerns."

L: "I'm not against belief, although I'm an atheist through and through. You won't succeed in converting me. Your Eduard is living in a world of illusions, and I want to bring him back to real life."

O: "The Church also talks about real life, and it has been put into the real world to bring about a real transfiguration. One of its basic principles is the principle of reality. Church activity is activity in the world. The realism of the Church is immeasurably more profound and real than the realism you're talking about—that's just illusory. Our reality is ontological: it is based on an absolute. You look at appearances, but we look through appearances, into the essence. Belief and the Church give realism an eternal dimension, remove chaos and chance from empirical existence and see the Word in its depths. The meaning of church realism is in the Word—in Christ, who came into the world to redeem it through sacrifice."

L: "Belief is a matter of conscience, but he's in a state of exaltation. Belief isn't helping him, but undermining his

health. And he's seriously ill anyway. I tell you this as a specialist."

O: "How is it undermining his health?"

L: "It takes him away from life, and that's having a bad effect on his health."

O: "But how can it undermine his health?! Belief is an open life and potentiality for good, which must be confirmed by concrete good deeds. Faith without works is dead. How can the good he has done have an adverse effect on his health?"

L: "Belief is connected with his illness. He doesn't just simply believe—he's a fanatic. He's isolated from life. But he's a fine lad, capable. There are often spiritually sensitive people amongst believers. We want the best for him."

O: "But we have already said that the Church doesn't divert people away from life in the world. It makes them morally stable so that they can put up with the adversities of life—simply, it makes them optimists."

L: "I'm an atheist to my bones. Religion says nothing to me. You can go into a church, pray, take communion—but why preach? His religiosity has turned into a fixation. But we wish him well; we want to return him to life. You know of course that the Church is allowed in this country, but . . ."

O: "You mean that the subject, or rather the cause, of his illness is belief?! You want to cure Eduard of belief?"

L: "We wish him well. We're talking about a concrete individual, Eduard. About helping him. We want to help him."

O: "But your help has consisted in tearing him away from the usual context of his life, from his family, from the Church; you've separated him from his spiritual father, from his fiancée; you've put him in a hospital with real madmen, and you've created an atmosphere of tension. You're consciously trying to set him against himself, to create conflict. To provoke him to action. Eduard's soul is easily wounded. He feels other people's troubles deeply. Putting him in a psychiatric hospital by force can only have a negative effect on his psychological balance. It will finish him off."

L: "You talk of him as if he were well. I'm a doctor, and I tell you he's ill. Seriously ill."

O: "What does his illness consist of?"

L: "Well, Eduard is a capable lad, even

gifted, but people like that are basically inclined to madness. Geniuses and madmen often go together. There are madmen of genius."

O: "Why have you put him in hospital?"

L: "Some people are a threat to society."

O: "How does Eduard threaten society?"

L: "He's socially dangerous."

O: "Interesting. What is this danger, how does it show itself?"

L: "He doesn't just simply believe, but his religion is an *idée fixe*. Why preach?"

O: "But the strength of belief is in preaching. A Christian doesn't leave the world, but on the contrary, he goes into the world to heal its suffering."

L: "He's in a state of exaltation. His faith is exalted."

O: "But the Church has a very important institution: confessors. Every Orthodox believer has a confessor who uses his universal spiritual and ecclesiastical experience to verify the religious intuitions of the believer."

L: "You say he's well, but I say he's ill. As for his world view, that's a matter for specialists. It's not our concern."

O: "Do you consider belief to be abnormal, pathological?"

L: "I'm an atheist and I believe in science and reason."

O: "The Church doesn't reject those—on the contrary, it includes them in itself and gives them a universal absolute significance. But all the same, is faith pathological?"

L: "As an atheist, I consider it an abnormality . . . even an illness. You are talking about him as a healthy person, and I as a sick person, and we won't find a common language."

O: "But we're trying to understand you. To find a common language, to reach mutual understanding."

L: "We wish him well. We want to bring him back to Soviet reality, so that he can work and live normally."

O: "Yes, but we don't disagree here, because it was Christianity which brought into the world a positive attitude to work. In Greece and Rome work was the job of slaves. But Christ in his parable of the vineyard and in others, raised work to the highest moral level."

L: "But he's not normal! You understand, he has to be treated, and we're going to do it."

O: "Even if we accept what you say, then the Church will play a positive role here too. In Orthodoxy there is the concept of *trezvylenie*\*, and it introduces into the consciousness the criteria of the reality of asceticism, of temperance, of a sober and healthy way of life."

L: "I consider that he is ill, and we shall treat him with medicine . . ."

O: "For belief? Because belief is pathological? Yes?!"

L: "Yes! As a doctor I want to protect him from your harmful influence. It's having a bad effect on him. Belief is harming him."

O: "I don't agree with you!"

L: "We are tearing Eduard's personality apart! You are pulling him towards God, and we . . . towards the devil . . . So I'm using my rights as a psychiatrist to deny you and your friends access to him. And I personally request you to leave Eduard altogether."

O: "What do you mean, altogether? Leave Eduard completely, forever? We can't accept your suggestion."

L: "Then I shall forbid you to visit Fedotov and I shall keep him in hospital as long as necessary."

O: "Until he's cured."

L: "Yes!?"

O: "Are you sure you'll cure him?"

L: "I'm not sure, but we shall treat him with . . . medication."

O: "How long will he be here?"

L: "Until he's cured."

O: "And if he doesn't get better, then he'll be here all his life?"

L: "We shall treat him." (evasively)

O: "Will you give him the books?"

L: "I might, but you can't come here." (pensively)

O: "Sorry, but I'm going to visit Eduard."

L: "I forbid you to visit him." Levitsky inclined his head slightly and went out. The conversation had lasted an hour and 20 minutes.

\**trezvylenie* = to make a sober assessment of yourself. *Ed.*