

same month, Rev. Roger Hayden, a member of our Council of Management and a Baptist minister, will be visiting the United States to talk about our work, mainly to the Southern Baptists in the Nashville, Tennessee, area.

Membership of Keston at £3 entitles people to receive *RCL* and use the facilities of the building. Those who have subscribed for 1975 are, of course, automatically members. We urgently need more members and congregations which will give us regular financial support. Please help us.

MICHAEL BOURDEAUX

Director's Visit to Russia

Only twice in my life have I felt impelled to kiss the tarmac of the runway in honour of the country in which I was about to set foot. Both times I resisted – in Israel I was younger and more easily embarrassed than now. Last February in Moscow I thought it would have been a little too demonstrative for the watching eyes of officialdom. I did, however, pick up a symbolic handful of snow and squeezed it tight.

I suppose that not many people would feel such an impulse on entering the land of the KGB, but for me it meant more than any other comparable experience of my life. Even more than Israel, Russia to me is the Holy Land.

This is not just because, if you go to the right places, talk to the right people in their own language, you still see the vision of and hear the words *Svyataya Rus* ("Holy Russia"); but, more personally, because I have found my life's vocation in serving the wonderful Russian people and because I believe that their *podvig*, their spiritual triumph over adversity, has carried the triumph of the suffering Church of the first three centuries right over into the twentieth.

When the last full stop is put to the Christian history of the modern age, the theme will be not how we have helped them in their desperate plight, but how they have helped us to re-establish priorities in a materialistic world full of confusion and temptation. If Keston College (Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism) does not maintain this priority above all others, it will have failed in the most essential of the many tasks to which it is called today.

And so my wife and I re-entered the Holy Land of Russia on 3 February; for me the first time in ten-and-a-half years, for her in almost 14.

I tried to make my too-brief visit of five days a balanced one, apportioning my time between contacts with more conservative official Church representatives and the younger, more flexible intellectuals; between the

Orthodox and Protestants; between Intourist's excellent official sight-seeing and the thrill of old, familiar, out-of-the-way places revisited.

For the work of Keston College the tour was a triumph in many ways which I shall indicate, but perhaps most of all in proving what we had all suspected – that to be associated with the honest study that we do, entailing the reporting sometimes of unpleasant facts, is, for the present at least, in no way a bar to the widest range of contacts. Rather the contrary.

I believe that this trip showed that real bridge-building, with those who matter most, can be done only where fearless honesty is present. Better relations with the East can be – and are already being – built only on a basis of truth and can never rest on a suppression of it. This is, of course, precisely the doctrine now proclaimed by the British Council of Churches with its trail-blazing book, *Discretion and Valour*, and³ the remarkable debate in the General Synod on 5 February.

I had expected a good reception from the circles of my own friends in the Orthodox Church, provided I had enough freedom to meet them – which I did. I approached my official contacts with slightly more trepidation. Had we not, after all, been brainwashed by Soviet Church officialdom into believing that my own work and that of Keston College was in part responsible for the deterioration of inter-Church relations?

In fact my visit to Zagorsk, the magnificent and ancient monastery and theological seminary 40 miles north-east of Moscow, provided the most unexpected and in some ways the most moving moment of the whole visit. I remember so well on previous visits 15 years ago the closed doors, the suspicion, the screening, the lack of contact with the students. Now all this was changed.

The visit, while my wife and I quite openly detached ourselves from an official Intourist excursion, was all too brief. But, in the hour available, we were received by two students with whom we talked without inhibition; we were shown round by a monk who was ready to talk freely on a variety of subjects; I was told I could meet anyone I wished, but in the event had time for an extended conversation only with the Rector, Archbishop Vladimir of Dmitrov.

The Archbishop knew full well who I was. He is connected with the Foreign Relations Department of the Moscow Patriarchate, and we had met previously in Geneva. He is a member of the executive committee of the Christian Peace Conference. He was informed to some extent about Keston College – but he was not forewarned of our visit.

He greeted us with total spontaneity and warmth. He questioned me closely about several aspects of our work, asking in detail about our financial support, our independence from the Churches, our staffing and our

future plans. I answered every question with total honesty, and received the unmistakable impression that the frankness was appreciated and was the best possible basis for the progress of relations. Over and over again the Archbishop expressed the warmest gratitude for the fact that we had bothered to come and see him.

I met the Baptists, too, in their single 'Moscow church; but there is more to a visit to the Soviet Union than official contacts. I moved with total freedom among the younger Christian intellectuals. They had given me friends in the early 1960s, but it was much easier now than in the past. There has been no change of heart by the State. The freedom these people have has been taken by them, not granted from above.

Certainly they live better now than in the past – more varied food, better clothes, much more extended living space. Politically, however, the situation has been static for years; independence of thought and action can still incur violent repression.

The day before I left news broke of the sentence of five years in prison followed by five years' exile on the Baptist leader, Georgi Vins. This was especially ironic, as I am his biographer. While I was in Moscow the friend of a friend, Lev Mikhailovich Turchinsky, was arrested on the usual trumped-up charges of "anti-Soviet activity".

Yet now, voluntary or forcible emigration from the Soviet Union may lie across the road of the dissenter. This makes a difference. The KGB is still powerful; there are not even the rudiments of democracy; yet there is a new feel in the atmosphere. Twenty-two years have passed since the death of Stalin. People are graduating from universities who were actually born after the worst of the terror had passed. Psychologically this makes a difference. I noticed it strongly.

"We live in a monastery here – or we live up to some of the monastic ideals, at least. We practise poverty, obedience and silence, but these bring their rewards. We're all poor; we've given up the prospects of excellent jobs because of our Christian faith. Some of us cannot work at all. We're all obedient – to God, to the truth. Our common integrity binds us as closely together as the best monastic communities in history. We're silent – not to each other, of course. But we don't intentionally become 'dissidents' or draw attention to ourselves. By making these sacrifices we lose much, but gain an intense inner freedom."

I heard these words within the warm circle of one of Moscow's groups of intellectuals, people close to the Orthodox Church. They are a tiny part of a growing church, just one element of commitment which will ensure its survival into the next century and beyond.

My circles – with some exceptions – could not be called those of the open dissidents (and the word is misleading, anyway: perhaps "democrats")

would be better). Nor would they even in fantasy be called an "underground Church". They were those people, young and some older, who were seeking after an ideal, having failed to find it in the officialese of the system. Some, though not all, were already finding it in the Orthodox Church. But nearly all looked to a wider concept – the "inter-confessional" approach, the seeking out of what was best in all traditions.

They did not use the word "ecumenical" but "inter-confessional," and I do not think I ever heard it before in all my previous time in the Soviet Union. Their ideas on unity are as yet too diffuse to set down here, but they came up in many conversations with quite unconnected people. The most lively aspect of this was help from West to East and vice versa, right across the confessional and political barriers.

I was especially concerned to find out whether the ideals of Keston College were right. I was gratified to find out how informed they were about us. Indeed, on one memorable day, my friends deplored our lack of financial support with incredulity. Being practical people, not dreamers, they suggested forming a Moscow branch of Keston and taking a rouble collection for it on the spot. Being perhaps more cautious by nature than they – quite apart from the impossibility of rouble conversion – I advised waiting a little. But it is an idea to which I shall revert.

Here is an example of the type of inter-confessional and international co-operation they had in mind. "You are better informed on religious events in our provinces than we are. We've heard of Georgi Vins and admire his integrity. But you know far more about him than we do. You must help us to learn more. We Orthodox need the inspiration of these wonderful Baptists."

From this was formed the idea of a Russian-language version of *RCL*, but fuller and with more documents from the Soviet Union. It was ironical to hear such a demand when the closure of even the English version was at that moment being threatened by continued failure of the Churches in this country to support the work of Keston.

From these Russian Christians has come the challenge to the Church of England's General Synod, the British and World Councils of Churches: "Follow up your wonderful resolutions, for which we shall be eternally grateful, by action. We need support in literature; we need infinitely better radio broadcasts than we have been receiving, except from Radio Liberty, which shines like a beacon through the jamming."

Keston College is now brimming with new ideas of practical as well as moral support for Russian Christians. The time has clearly arrived for a major new initiative. But, in the last analysis, the most important question will still probably be not "How can we help them?" but "How can they help us?" Keston College will be equally concerned with both.