

Georgian Writes to Professor Lang

RCL Vol. 3, No. 6, pp. 45-54 reprinted The Times correspondence and additional letters written in response to Peter Reddaway's article, "The Georgian Orthodox Church: Corruption and Renewal" (RCL Vol. 3, Nos. 4-5, pp. 14-23). We now print a letter from Dr. Zviad Gamsakhurdia addressed to Professor David Lang. Dr. Gamsakhurdia is a writer and scholar of English and American literature. In 1974 he with others formed an Initiative Group for the Defence of Human Rights in Tbilisi (Georgia). He was then dismissed from his post at Tbilisi University, interrogated, and threatened with arrest. Last September he and his family were subjected to mysterious gas attacks, from which he nearly died, and which he believes were organized by the KGB. In December further such attacks occurred, and his papers were rummaged through by intruders whom he almost caught. In recent months, too, many of his friends have been interrogated and threatened. In an Open Letter dated 27 October 1975, which has just reached the West, Dr. Gamsakhurdia provides the first contribution from Georgia to The Times controversy. His letter follows in slightly abridged form.

I have learned that the journalist Peter Reddaway recently published in *The Times* materials and documents concerning the burglary of the Georgian patriarchate in 1972 by the KGB agents Keratishvili (Keratiants), Terziev, Tvalchrelidze, Bakhtadze and others. I have also learned that you began to polemicize with Reddaway, that you declared these documents – among them the report on the burglary compiled by the Assistant Procurator of the Kirov district, D. Koridze – to be forgeries, and asserted that no such episode had ever taken place.

Recently I spoke to David Koridze, who is a good friend of mine, and informed him of all this. He was indignant at your behaviour and will tell you so in person if, on a future visit to Tbilisi, you should wish to meet him. In the meantime I would like to demonstrate the irresponsibility of your assertions by

listing the following facts.

(1) The investigation by the Procuracy of the Kirov district into the thefts at the patriarchate was begun in 1972 as a result of numerous complaints and protests by believers. David Koridze wrote a report on the burglary at the request of the First Secretary of the party's Central Committee, Eduard Shevardnadze. Koridze reported to Shevardnadze's assistant, V. Alpenidze. I put Koridze in touch with him, so that Koridze could tell him personally about the report's contents. The materials of the investigation conducted by the Procuracy of the Kirov district were sent in 1974 to the Tbilisi City Procuracy, where the investigation was taken over by N. Kadagishvili. But soon, as a result of the interference of certain influential persons, it was discontinued, and it has remained paralyzed to this day. In connection with this case I went several times to see V. Alpenidze at the Central Committee, acting in my capacity as a voluntary worker in the Ministry of Culture's department for the preservation of national treasures, and on one occasion Alpenidze telephoned in my presence to the head of the Administrative Organs department, Manelashvili. The latter answered him in precisely these words:

"The Procuracy has confirmed the facts of the burglary, but its officials won't take the step of reopening the case until they receive specific orders in writing from the Central Committee."

To which Alpenidze replied: "Let's wait a bit: perhaps in time they'll reopen the case."

I also had a talk about the case with T. Onoprishvili, the commissioner for religious affairs of the Georgian Council of Ministers. He encouraged me by saying that Moscow had intervened in the case, and that it would probably soon be investigated and the criminal "Bishop" Gaioz Keratishvili arrested.

(2) Father Illarion (Samkharadze) handed over to N. Kadagishvili, investigator of the City Procuracy, an incomplete list of the articles stolen from the patriarchate by the thieves Keratishvili,

Terziev and others. Father Illarion also gave one copy of the list to me. (Illarion himself witnessed the burglary and it was he who first sent a statement about it to the Council of Ministers.) Here is the list:

1. One church star, silver.
2. One large Bible in a beaten silver binding, 40 cm. × 30 cm.
3. One small Bible in a beaten silver binding 25 cm. × 20 cm.
4. One antique model of a church, silver, for dining table display.
5. One silver icon, 30 cm. × 20 cm., decorated with holy relics.
6. One church vessel with holy relics.
7. Four prelates' mitres.
8. One ivory staff, brought from India, 130 cm.
9. One crystal vase, a gift from de Gaulle.
10. One small beaten silver jug with tray.
11. One case full of silver knives and forks, dessert spoons and teaspoons.
12. Several locked and full suitcases.
13. One icon carved from bone, 35 cm. × 25 cm.
14. One icon painted on wood, showing the faces of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, 60 cm. × 40 cm.
15. Two sets of prelate's appurtenances, in solid silver.
16. Two icons decorated with precious stones, 50 cm. × 30 cm.
17. One valuable icon with four painted panels, 30 cm. × 25 cm.
18. One church vessel brought from abroad, with a picture.

Apart from these things a valuable panagia of Saint Nina, an object of his-

torical importance, was also stolen. When the Procuracy officially asked the Patriarch about this panagia, he replied that it had been lost. One year after the burglary, however, it was "found" by a cleaning-woman under a carpet in one of the rooms of the patriarchate. As though the rooms of the patriarchate had not been cleaned for a whole year!

(3) Assistant procurator D. Koridze was removed from his post in 1974 on the pretext that he had reached retirement age. Although he is 60, he is full of health and vigour, and feels perfectly fit. Many Procuracy officials are 70 or more and have not been retired. Why then was Koridze dismissed?

It should be borne in mind that if Koridze had compiled a falsified report on the burglary he would not merely have been dismissed, but also arrested. So here too everything is clear. You can find detailed information on the persecution of Koridze in issue No. 34 of the *Chronicle of Current Events* which is published in English.

I do not know if this is true or not, but it appears that you also maintain that the Tbilisi Opera House was not burned down, and that you saw it recently with your own eyes. Will you still refuse to blush if we send you a photograph of the burned-out building?

ZVIAD GMSAKHURDIA

P.S. The power of the KGB has now frightened into silence Metropolitan Ilya (Shiolashvili), one of the chief witnesses of the Church burglary. However, it will not be possible to intimidate all the witnesses.

Religious Minorities in the Soviet Union

This clear, concise report published by the Minority Rights Group is an excellent introduction to the subject. It can be used for Sixth Form studies.

Order your copy now from Keston College.

Price: 25p (reduced) plus postage (less for bulk orders).