

# OBITUARY

## Patriarch Pimen of Moscow and All Russia 1910-1990

His Holiness Patriarch Pimen of Moscow and all Russia died on 3 May 1990. He was 79.

Pimen was born Sergei Mikhailovich Izvekov on 23 July 1910 in Bogorodsk, Moscow region. He became a monk in 1927 and was ordained in 1932, but was unable to serve as a priest in those harsh years and worked instead as a choirmaster. There is a gap in his official biographies until the end of the Second World War, when he was a parish priest in Vladimir region. He then held various appointments in different parts of the Soviet Union, followed by a spell as superiors of the monasteries at Pskov (from 1949) and Zagorsk (1954-57). Pimen was consecrated bishop in 1957, and after having served as suffragan of first Odessa and then Moscow dioceses, became Chancellor (or administrator) of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1960. Later that year he was created archbishop, and in 1961 he was made a permanent member of the Holy Synod and appointed Metropolitan of Leningrad. In 1963 he became Metropolitan of Krutitsy and Kolomna, second in seniority to the patriarch. In 1971, 13 months after the death of his predecessor, Patriarch Alexi, Pimen was elected patriarch by the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Patriarch Pimen was widely believed by the faithful to have suffered greatly, and was revered for it. He was described by many as a devout and prayerful man. He had a reputation for taciturnity, and this was reinforced by the isolation in which he was kept. He attended hardly any public occasions within the Soviet Union, outside Moscow and Zagorsk, and travelled abroad, even to Eastern Europe, far less frequently than most other leading Orthodox hierarchs. Pimen reportedly confided to intimates that he was in a 'golden cage'. Independently-minded critics within the church asserted that he could have bent the cage bars had he chosen. However, it is likely that his election as patriarch, which could not have come about without the approval of the Soviet authorities, took place precisely because he was thought to be a person incapable of making any such assertion.

Patriarch Pimen consistently maintained a staunchly pro-Soviet line, notably at peace conferences, and also at a succession of audiences with foreign churchmen, as the already extensive contacts of the Russian Orthodox Church expanded in the 1970s and 1980s. At home Pimen was able to do nothing to improve the situation of his church substantially or to make it more independent of state control. He and other hierarchs were pressurised into helping to disown the church campaigners for greater freedom of religion. The church was given some concessions even under Brezhnev (more theological students, new premises etc.) which some western commentators mistakenly construed as signs of the increased 'power' of the church.

Patriarch Pimen presided over a church whose fortunes changed substantially and unexpectedly during the last five years of his life. The meeting with Mr Gorbachev in April 1988 opened the way for the celebrations of the church's millennium in June and July 1988 to be a far greater focus of public attention than had previously been anticipated.

The millennium celebrations marked the beginning of a period in which the church's role in public life became more and more frequently highlighted in sections of the Soviet press. Patriarch Pimen, along with two other leading Orthodox hierarchs, was elected to the Congress of Peoples' Deputies, the Soviet Parliament, in 1989, a major change following their previous exclusion from political life. The patriarch was unable to take an active part in the Congress's work himself, but his brother bishops have been making a contribution.

The public profile of the Russian Orthodox Church remains higher than that of any other religious body in the USSR, to the extent of its resuming some of its former trappings of a state church. The relaxation of Soviet policy on religion has however struck a blow at the Orthodox Church whose long-term effects cannot yet be assessed. Following Mr Gorbachev's meeting with Pope John Paul II on 1 December 1989, Ukrainian Greek Catholic churches in western Ukraine, outlawed since 1946, have been able to register officially. This has led to conflicts over property, since many former Ukrainian Catholic churches had been in the possession of the Orthodox.

Patriarch Pimen cannot be said to have played any part in stimulating or inaugurating the changes from which his church has begun to benefit. He was one of untold millions who, by their prayers and their perseverance in the faith, kept the flame of Orthodoxy alight during the long years of suppression and persecution, ready to become a beacon of hope to an ailing society whose leaders — for whatever reasons — have finally allowed its light to shine forth once more.

# Books Received

*Listing of a book here neither implies nor precludes review in a subsequent issue of RCL.*

**Broomhall, A. J.**, *Hudson Taylor and China's Open Century. Book Seven: It is not Death to Die!* Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989. 718 pp.

**Celmina, Helene**, *Women in Soviet Prisons*. New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1985. 238 pp.

**Cotterell, Peter**, *Cry Ethiopia*. Eastbourne: MARC, 1988. 160 pp.  
*Dictionary for Believers and Nonbelievers*. (First published in Russian under the title *Ateisticheskii slovar'*. Politizdat, 1985.) Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989. 622 pp.

**Frolov, I. T.**, (editor), *Ezhegodnik Filosofskogo obshchestva SSSR 1987-1988*. Moskva: Nauka, 1989. 330 pp.

**Funderburk, Davis B.**, *Pinstripes and Reds: an American ambassador caught between the State Department and the Romanian Communists, 1981-1985*. Washington, D. C.: Selous Foundation Press, 1987. 226 pp.

**Glomp, Jozef Cardinal**, *Let my call come to you: a selection of homilies and addresses 1981-1987*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Archidiecezji Warszawskiej, 1988. 160 pp.

**Granta 30**, *New Europe!* Cambridge: Granta, 1990. 251 pp.

**Harding, Georgina**, *In Another Europe: a journey to Romania*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990. 157 pp.

*Icons: Windows on Eternity: Theology and Spirituality in Colour*, (compiled by Gennadios Limouris). Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990. 228 pp.

**Ivanov, Father Vladimir**, *Russian Icons*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1987. 219 pp.

*Kirche und Glaube in Rumanien*, Munchen: Kirche in Not/Ostpriesterhilfe, 1990. 136 pp.

**Lamont, Stewart**, *Church and State: Uneasy Alliances*. London: The Bodley Head, 1989. 218 pp.

*L'autre Europe No. 21-22. Religion et politique*. Paris: L'Age d'Homme, 1989. 278 pp.

**Lochman, Jan Milic**, *Christ and Prometheus?: A Quest for Theological Identity*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988. 105 pp.

**MacInnes, Donald E.**, *Religion in China Today. Policy ó Practice*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989. 458 pp.

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