

round him, and he consoled, encouraged and drove out demons.

A grief-stricken person had only to talk to the elder for a few minutes and suddenly all his depression and grief would vanish, and tranquillity would be established in his heart; his mind saw God, and such a good, childishly clear and pure feeling came over his heart, as it does on Easter night to a happy child, surrounded by the love of all those near and dear to him, a child who has not tasted grief, who has not known passions and sins. The elder seemed to resurrect and renew the soul that turned to him.

It is impossible to describe the elder's prescience. He saw far ahead into the life of every man. He foretold the imminent death of some people, while to others, like a tender, solicitous mother, he said nothing, but prepared them to pass into eternity.

More than once we heard these words from the elder: "Sometimes I say something I didn't at all expect to say, which surprises me. I have yielded my lips, my heart and my soul to our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ, and I say and do what he inspires. I do not possess my own words or my own will". (Extract from Chapter IV)

## Unofficial Religious Seminar

*Young people in the Soviet Union are craving for a religious faith. To satisfy this hunger a small group of young believers began to meet to study the Christian faith. The fate of the participants is described by Alexander Ogorodnikov in a letter to Dr. Philip Potter, General Secretary of the WCC. This is printed below together with a covering letter from some well-known Soviet Christians.*

Dear Mr. Potter,

We beg you to give attention to a routine fact of the suppression of religious freedom in the USSR.

These facts are set forth in detail in a letter addressed to you by Alexander Ogorodnikov, who is well known to us as a sincere and zealous Christian and organizer of a Christian seminar.

This document testifies to the deep craving which young people in our country have for religion, for religious education and for building their lives on religious principles.

At the same time, the conversion of young people to faith in God, and especially their striving towards living forms of Christian community, meet with an intolerant attitude and provoke repressive measures on the part of the authorities. Matters have reached the point where psychiatrists diagnose a living religious faith as mental illness.

Evidence of this is the tragic fate of one of the participants in the young people's seminar, Alexander Argentov, a completely mentally healthy person,

who has been forcibly placed in a psychiatric hospital (no. 14, ul. Bekhtereva 15; the doctor treating him is S. M. Degtyarev).

We have no doubt that the religious revival in our country cannot be halted by repressions of any kind. At the same time, we hope that the unanimity and energetic action of the world Christian community will help this revival to proceed with the fewest possible sacrifices.

Moscow, 29 July 1976.

FR. GLEB YAKUNIN  
HIERO-DEACON VARSONOFI  
KHAIBULIN  
YEVGENI BARABANOV  
VIKTOR KAPITANCHUK  
LEV REGELSON  
TATYANA KHODOROVICH  
IGOR KHOKHLUSHKIN

\* \* \* \*

Dear Mr. Potter,

Extraordinary circumstances compel me to turn to you, and in your person, to the world Christian community. It is a question of the violent actions of the authorities, who are trying to stifle our religious freedom.

I am 26 years old. Three years ago I turned to God and became an Orthodox Christian. My friends made their way along the same path to the Church. 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 religious-philosophical seminar, where we discussed such subjects as: the Church and the modern industrial world; A. Bergson's book, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*; Vladimir Solov'ev's concept of the God-Man; the sermons of Billy Graham, and so on.

My friends and I grew up in atheist families. Each of us has undergone a complex, sometimes agonizing, path of spiritual questing. From Marxist convictions, via nihilism and the complete rejection of any ideology, via attraction to the "hippy" life-style, we have come to the Church.

We came to it with our questions and our hopes.

However, we were soon convinced that our problems were not being raised 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 to 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.

The persecution of myself and my friends by the organs of the KGB may serve as a vivid example of the authorities' attitude to believing young people. As long ago as 1973 I was expelled from the third year of the scenario-film faculty of the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography, although my progress was always excellent and I was given a higher grant because of it. From that time I have constantly been forced to change my place of residence, I have been turned out of flats where I have lived, and in 1974 I was dismissed from a job in a canteen where I was working as a table-clearer. My flat was constantly under strict surveillance by the KGB. Many of my friends are being persecuted for their religious convictions, expelled from institutes and sent to psy-

chiatric hospitals. Thus my brother, Boris Ogorodnikov, was expelled in 1973 from the Moscow Steel and Alloys Institute, and later from work. Today he is a priest-monk in the Monastery of the Caves in Pskov. Because of his religious convictions, my friend Boris Razveev was summoned to the KGB over a long period of time, and threatened, until at last he was purposely failed in the state examinations and deprived of his diploma, although he had graduated from the Law Faculty of the Bashkir University in Ufa. Serezha Shuvalov, a student at the same university, was also summoned to interrogations, harassed, and forced to give up his studies. This list could be continued for much longer, but I hold back for fear of endangering people whose names are not yet known.

This summer, repressive measures have been taken against myself and the members of our seminar. On 15 June this year, two lieutenants from the militia burst into my flat, which was tied to my job, and, peppering their words with threats, demanded to see my guests' documents. On the evening of the same day, a whole detail of eight men appeared at my flat, among them three people in civilian dress. The raid was led by a major of the militia, who refused to give his name; my guests (seven people) were taken to the police station. The three remaining participants in the "operation", headed by the major, began to carry out a search, not having produced (and evidently not in possession of) a search warrant, and taking no notice of my demands and protests. After the search I was taken to police station no. 22, where my friends already were. In the police station they insulted us, mocked us, threatened to shave us clean, and so on. One militia officer of station no. 22 with the rank of major, who wished to remain anonymous, told me, literally as follows: "All the priests were shot in the '20s, and the churches were closed; that's where you nits have crawled out from, and that's where your road leads, too . . ." The next day, 16 June, by order of the militia, I was dismissed from tuberculosis clinic no. 11 of the Dzerzhinsky district, where I had worked as a caretaker. After this they really began to hunt me. My flat, of which I had been deprived together with my work, was

surrounded by a militia detail, which tried to break down the door. I could not even fetch my books and belongings.

Soon many of my friends began to be summoned to the KGB, where they were accused of participating in an allegedly "anti-Soviet seminar". On 13 July, in my absence, another search was carried out in my former flat. On the same day S. Pavlenko, a KGB official, made his way into my friend's flat by deception, and, in his absence, organized an illegal search. Meanwhile, my friend was subjected to a KGB interrogation in the Lubyanka, where they demanded that he hand over my manuscripts, a part of which were being kept at his flat, calling them "anti-Soviet" and falsely accusing me of "preparing an anti-Soviet journal". On the next day, S. Pavlenko went to my friend's home and began to blackmail his gravely ill mother, almost causing her to have a fit, carried out a second illegal search and tried to seize part of the manuscripts. On 14 July two people in civilian dress began openly to harass a girl (aged 21) who had some connection with our seminar, whose name I shall withhold. In the street, in the metro and on the trolleybus they surrounded her closely, shoved her, trod on her feet and shouted: "Why are you treading on people's feet!" When she went out of the metro, one of them hit her abruptly and unexpectedly on the back, then in the street he hit her again. They went with her, breathing down her neck, to her flat, and tried to break in after her. It was impossible to resist, and she was forced to go up to a neighbour and spend about an hour with her. The same day she was summoned to inspector S. Pavlenko, where her mother was also taken later. On 15 July Alexander Belyakov, an Orthodox Christian and a former scientific worker at the Radio-Technical Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, now unemployed, was summoned to the KGB. He too was charged with participation in our conversations.

Apart from dismissal from work, illegal searches and blackmail – actions which usually presage arrests – measures of a more serious nature have been taken against some of us. On 13 June this year Valentin Serov, a participant in our seminar, was subjected to a cruel beating. He is a cameraman who gradu-

ated from the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in 1975, but because of his religious convictions he was not allowed to take one of the state examinations and therefore was deprived of his diploma. Recently Valentin Serov has been specializing in a photographic chronicle of dissident events in the cultural sphere. Two days before he was beaten up Serov had returned from Leningrad, where he had filmed the funeral of the avant-garde artist Rukhin, who had perished in mysterious circumstances during a fire in his studio. Serov was beaten up at 11 in the evening in Chertanovo district, while leaving a friend's flat, by three people who fell on him unexpectedly, using professional methods. They broke Serov's arm, and, as he was lying on the ground, kicked him brutally.

However, the most tragic fate befell my friend Alexander Argentov, a participant in our seminar. On 14 July he was given a summons to the military commission of Tushinsky district, from where, although he is a completely healthy person with a stable state of mind, and has never been registered in a psychiatric institute, he was sent for a psychiatric examination. A psychiatrist, who refused to give his name, told him: "We'll beat your religion out of you." After this Argentov, accompanied by two hospital orderlies, was taken to Moscow Psychiatric Hospital no. 14 (ul. Bekhtereva 15, in the charge of S. M. Degtyarev, head of department three). On 16 July he was forced to begin a course of neuroleptic drugs, with the threat that if he did not he would be injected with them.

I have written this letter to you in the hope that the world Christian community will be able to give help to its brothers who are suffering. I particularly beg Christians of the whole world to apply all force for the quickest possible release of Alexander Argentov from the psychiatric hospital, where *he is being treated for his Christian faith*.

I believe that the forces of evil will be vanquished by fervent general prayer and active Christian love.

ALEXANDER OGORODNIKOV

27 July, 1976