

express with great force is a tory conviction about the reality of original sin, which Chesterton defined as 'the permanent possibility of selfishness [that] comes from the mere fact of having a self'.<sup>6</sup> And it is this inner weakness that makes the Distributist dream of a free and equal society for all impossible. This contradiction in Chesterton's political thinking and feeling is never resolved. There are indeed occasional hints of what a solution would be in the scattered and moving allusions to the kind of divine grace that would heal and perfect man's wounded nature. But until a cure for man's perennial selfishness is found the Chestertonian common man will continue to be crushed by the hateful system Chesterton so movingly denounced :

Through the Gate of Treason, through the gate within,  
Cometh fear and greed of fame, cometh deadly sin;  
If a man grow faint, master, take him ere he kneels,  
Take him, break him, mend him, end him, roll him, crush him  
with the wheels.

## Russia's Don Quixote

by Janice A. Broun

'Who are you? Without waiting for a reply people answer for themselves. All Communists and atheists regard me as a militant reactionary. All reactionaries regard me as a Communist and almost an atheist. All churchmen think I am a sectarian; all sectarians regard me as a churchman. Every ignoramus thinks me an intellectual; every intellectual regards me as a social reject and member of the Proletariat. Every Russian thinks me a Jew; every Jew regards me as a Russian' (1966).<sup>1</sup>

'One (fellow prison) inmate called me Don Quixote . . . I am a Don Quixote because he is the prototype of all revolutionaries and friends of truth. Dostoevsky wrote: "If God in the Last Judgment calls on Humanity to render account of what good it has done, it could hand him with tears Cervantes' Don Quixote"' (1970).<sup>2</sup>

'Only people who do nothing make no mistakes' (1966).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Mr. H. G. Wells and the Giants', *Heretics* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1905), p. 79.

<sup>1</sup>The Lord is my Safe Stronghold, 1966.

<sup>2</sup>My Come-back, 1970 (written after release from Sochi prison).

<sup>3</sup>With Love and Anger, 1966.

These are the words of Anatol Levitin, pen-name Krasnov, spoken with typical irony. He has been the *Don Quixote* of Russian church life, tilting at windmills, putting tactless pen to paper on every burning issue. Born in Baku in 1915, his father a Jew baptised into Christianity, he became a school teacher. He was ordained deacon in the small 'Living Church' which co-operated with the regime, until in 1944 he joined the Patriarchal Church as a layman. Like thousands of others, he spent the years 1949-56 unjustly in a labour camp. After his release he wrote regularly for the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* and was co-author of a history of the Living Church, but because of his criticisms he lost his teaching job in 1966 and found work as a church caretaker. He was one of the most important founder-members of the now disintegrated Action Group for the Defence of Human Rights in 1968, providing the key link between Christians and Humanist idealists in their dignified protests against denial of human rights in the U.S.S.R.

Orthodox yet ecumenical, a democrat and a convinced Socialist, he sees with devastating clarity the errors of Communism in practice while seeking sincere dialogue with Marxists. Tactless, impetuous, humorous, he is both aware of the shortcomings of his beloved church and its hierarchy, utterly honest and refreshingly intelligent, yet also warm-hearted, longing to convert others to his own deep faith, and oblivious to the price he has to pay—formerly poverty, now prison.

The love and respect Levitin has engendered is shown by the number of appeals on his behalf, from non-Christians as well as Christians, and the number of young folk who have entered the Church with him as their godfather. But let Levitin speak for himself again. He writes as eloquently in Russian as he translates into English. First, on the lighter side, on Radio. 'In ordinary daily life I am a completely recalcitrant conservative. I have never had a radio in the house. I acquired a special distaste for it in the camps where, from 1951 on, as a token of liberal treatment, loudspeakers were installed in all the barracks, broadcasting all round the clock. So there is not a single one of the rights I recovered in 1956 of which I am so happy to take advantage of as the right not to listen . . .' (1966).<sup>4</sup>

Again, defending a Moscow University student in 1959 who was being persecuted for being an Old Believer: 'When arbitrariness begins, no one knows where it will stop. Propagation of the principle of religious discrimination is a clear call for the infringement of the Constitution and for the flouting of each and every legal norm. Respect the Soviet Constitution'.

Here he is on Socialism. 'From childhood I revolted against all kinds of barriers fabricated by people. My feeling of kinship was towards simple Russian people. I never had any love for intellectuals

<sup>4</sup>Listening to the Radio (Against Passivity in Defending the Faith), 1966.

of any kind. . . . I was a supporter of revolution, but always repelled by its atrocities. I had a feeling that my Friend would disapprove of them, and so it turned out. . . . It is impossible to abolish the State; it is however possible to confine it within its natural functions. There can be no socialism without democracy. Wherever there is no democracy there will be arbitrariness, lawlessness and misuse of power' (1966).<sup>5</sup>

Lawlessness of this type could hardly have been more clearly illustrated than in the prolonged attempts, in the early 1960s, to close the famous Pochaev Monastery, and the sufferings caused to devout monks and laity by local police permitted to flout the law. Levitin wrote a detailed account for the 1966 *Phoenix*, edited by his young Christian friend, Yuri Galanskov, poet and pacifist, who died a martyr to deliberate neglect of his chronic ill-health in Mordovia in 1972. The many appeals sent to the West finally drove the authorities to give up the projected closure. Levitin showed how many monks were simple healthy folk with excellent work records in their former secular posts, men who had received war decorations; anything but parasites. 'Culture is not being correctly dressed in jacket, trousers and braces. It is to know, to feel sensitively, to understand people's feelings and to respect them'.<sup>6</sup> Many of these 'antique-looking' monks had this closeness to the common people. He had leapt to defend the handful of monasteries left, when sixty had been closed, and to criticise the methods used in the closures. 'When it is permitted to instigate libel illegally against completely defenceless victims, to besmear them with curses and insults in the press, while being fully guaranteed against having to answer for it—what is this other than ideological gangsterism? . . . As the abbot hands over a lighted candle to a newly tonsured monk, he says: "Take this candle, brother, and see how yours must be a pure and virtuous life". These words define the social role of monasticism, and since "a pure and virtuous life" and exemplary morals cannot become obsolete, neither can monasticism. . . . Restraint and cleanliness show the profligate that debauchery is not a norm; renunciation and voluntary poverty teach scorn of riches; self-denial is the best weapon against egotism. . . . Monasticism is a holy mystery. By the action of the Holy Spirit human nature is endued with power over passion and lusts, and becomes superhuman and angelic. It is a betrothal to purity, an imitation of Christ. It is not something sombre, sad and depressing. It is joy and eternal Easter, as we see it in two great monks, St Seraphim of Sarov and St Francis of Assisi' (1963).<sup>7</sup>

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In 1965 his writings led to a remarkable personal dialogue with

<sup>5</sup>The Lord is my Safe Stronghold, 1966.

<sup>6</sup>Answer to Gennadi Gerodnik, 1966.

<sup>7</sup>Monasticism and the Modern World, 1963.

leading atheists. For genuine atheists he has great respect, but pointed out: 'The present situation of atheism strongly recalls the situation of the Orthodox Church in pre-revolution Russia. Atheism is not free here because it is under compulsion, obligatory and not open to discussion. . . . Long live free religion and free atheism'!<sup>8</sup>

Here and there voices were raised against illegal government interference in church affairs; Archbishop Yermogen, the young priests Eshliman and Yakunin, Boris Talantov an elderly layman who died under the rigours of prison sentence, and not least, Levitin. He and Talantov both stress that legality for believers involves an equal degree of legality for everyone else. They loathed the compromise practised by clergy from Patriarch Alexei and Metropolitans Nikodim and Pimen downwards. Levitin had the courageous example of his own priest, Schpilller, of St Nicholas in Kuznetzy, a church attracting many intellectuals and younger people—notable among them Solzhenitsyn. Fr Schpilller refused to have an atheist churchwarden and an atheist dominated parish council foisted upon him (as has happened to many churches). Indeed the status of church warden has been at the root of much trouble. 'He is not elected', wrote Levitin, 'but appointed by the district executive committee from people who are non-believers and of highly suspicious morals. The parish priest has to stand by helplessly. Not only is he not head of the community, he is not even a member of it. He is merely a hired servant, on the same level as caretaker or stoker. Parish priests are not authorised to take any kind of action against a churchwarden, for Pimen has forbidden them to "interfere in domestic affairs" even under penalty of dismissal from the diocese' (1966).<sup>9</sup>

Elsewhere he writes: 'The Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs compiles registers of unacceptable people. The registration of priests entails nothing less than their appointment by state authorities. . . . In the 20th Century the Popes of Rome listen calmly to criticism, while our Orthodox Patriarch replies to it with interdicts and threats. . . . All law represents a special agreement between the state and its citizens. The latter must obey the laws but the state must not abuse them. On these grounds Christian morality is based. Canon Law exists for the defence of the church; where it is utilised for clearly immoral purposes—in order to pervert and debase the church—it is a mortal sin to obey it' (1966).<sup>10</sup>

Despite this and much like it, Levitin must realise how many priests have to choose what they believe to be the lesser of two evils and compromise in order to safeguard the provisions of the sacraments for their flocks.

At the present time we are witnessing the apparently final suppression of the Civil Rights movement in the U.S.S.R.—the 'trial'

<sup>8</sup>Freedom of Belief and Atheism Face to Face, 1965.

<sup>9</sup>Listening to the Radio (as above), 1966.

<sup>10</sup>With Love and Anger, 1966.

of Yakir and Krasin, the banishment of others, the net closing on Sakharov. The late sixties saw its beginnings, led by General Grigorenko. It was inevitable that Levitin should get himself involved. In the 1968 trials he supported Galanskov and Ginsburg. When Grigorenko was incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital following his defence of the Crimean Tatars, Levitin wrote his *Light in a Little Window* knowing he might be signing his own death warrant. In it he says: 'Who will help those who suffer? The priests, perhaps? "I cannot think of politics without revulsion" one young priest told me recently in the carriage of an electric train. . . . They pass by . . . occupied with their daily work. . . . Today I see more of Christ's spirit in outsiders, in Samaritans . . . who have given their whole lives to others, leaving themselves nothing. Politics becomes a deeply moral phenomenon when a man takes on sufferings for its sake. The Church in Easter Week, speaking about Christ, wishing to underline the special grandeur of his deed, recites 'Christ, who freely went to his passion, is our true God'. All the people named above (the dissidents he was writing about) are freely going to their passion, and in this way resemble Christ; they become, regardless of their own convictions, partakers of his suffering, and I consider them my brothers in Christ' (1969).<sup>11</sup> How profoundly here does Levitin see the meaning of the terrible sufferings to be endured by these Civil Rights campaigners in lunatic asylum and labour camp! Levitin's turn came in September 1969; he was arrested. His pre-trial investigation at Sochi lasted several months. 'He holds a hostile, anti-Soviet position and should be imprisoned like some sectarians', the prosecution alleged. But the local court could not find sufficient evidence and the Supreme Court freed him, a thoroughly unprecedented event. That freedom didn't last. In May 1971 he was sentenced to three years' imprisonment in Smolensk gaol, unknown or forgotten by many Western admirers of dissidents. Before that, however, while all eyes were on the 'election' of the new patriarch, Levitin had written a letter to Pope Paul;<sup>12</sup> one which deserves far more publicity than it has received in the West for its fascinating picture of the contemporary Russian religious scene. He cannot accept papal infallibility but admires the independence of the Pope from the control of civil authorities.

In this letter he is optimistic about modern Russian youth. They want democratic socialism not capitalism. They have changed. 'In 1956 when I returned from seven years' imprisonment to the same school where I'd taught before my arrest, I didn't know the youth there. Since the death of Stalin they'd become so mature, understanding life, freedom-loving and ready to risk all.

'They hold a quite exceptional place in religious matters—the third

<sup>11</sup>A *Light in a Little Window*, 1969.

<sup>12</sup>Letter to Pope Paul, published in West early 1970.

post-revolution generation. As a rule they have no concept of religion, having received an anti-religious upbringing. But they don't know the negative aspects of pre-revolution Orthodoxy, which led to so much hatred and bitterness on the part of the people. They don't remember the times when religion was obligatory. . . . Modern youth is disturbed, seething, passionately seeking for something.

'Sons of Communists and even of old security police, and Jews, are baptised. There are sharp family collisions, loud quarrels, even complete alienation from parents. The official church here, as is well known, does not engage in missionary work; the higher clergy warn priests against it, and if individual priests lead persons to the faith, it is at their own risk'.

He emphasises the apostolate of the Laity. 'In most cases conversion to Christ takes place instinctively . . . the apostolate of the laity, of which so much was said at the Vatican Council, has actually been with us here for many years. Usually the role of the priest is only to baptise; conversion and catechising is done apart from them. Often a young believer converts his future spouse to Christ and so a Christian family is founded'.

The secrecy which must usually surround conversion, which may well lead to loss of one's job, is beautifully illustrated by Levitin's story of a young engineer who was instructed by Levitin himself. After two months he told his wife: 'You know, after long meditation I have decided to be baptised'. Much to his surprise his wife said 'But I was baptised a week ago, and our child too'.

Then there was Eugeni: 'He became quite well known because of his involvement in a political trial. This young man has always shown a burning interest in social questions. When I gave him a New Testament, I got a shock: he said of the Sermon on the Mount: "This is an extremely well written manifesto. The propagandist method is interesting; all the slogans are high-lighted". After this I stopped talking to him about religion, considering it to be absolutely pointless. But in a difficult moment of his personal life he said to me: "I tried to pray and it works. I felt better". More months went past, very difficult ones for Eugeni; he was persecuted, even put into a mental asylum (he was diagnosed as completely normal by the way). When he came out, he said to me: "I prayed the whole time. I want to be baptised as soon as possible". Today he is a believing Christian'.

From this, Levitin goes on to the Ecumenical scene. 'In Russia there is authentic ecumenism in living religious practice. For decades Orthodox and sectarians (i.e. Protestants) suffered together in Beria's camps, slept side by side in prison bunks, gulped the same prison soup out of the same rusty bowls. The old mistrust and bitterness is gone; rather there is mutual respect and sympathy<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>13</sup>Levitin has since been released from prison (Editor).

Here we must remember that one of the last acts of Patriarch Alexei was to legalise what had actually been practised for many years—intercommunion and interchange of sacraments between Orthodox, Catholics and Old Believers. This was a step of great pastoral necessity and was recently reciprocated by the Vatican.

Levitin's attitude towards his own church is that of a radical, who would like more inspired preaching, and liturgical reform, including the opening of the Royal Doors for most of the Liturgy and modern Russian to replace church Slavonic. Recent reports suggest that these reforms are now on the way. A growing number of younger Russian laymen, many of them personally influenced by Levitin, are in samizdat essays, exploring the problems of their church and faith, and its application to everyday life. There seems to be an increasing revival since Levitin wrote, though the Human Right's Movement is being mercilessly crushed.

Levitin's friends are much concerned about him. His health is not expected to stand up to the three years' imprisonment (remember conditions in Russian prisons are somewhat different from those in the West!).<sup>13</sup> His Faith however will stand up to it. The real roots of this hot-blooded, resilient old man lie in prayer and his deep relationship with God. This can be seen from this account of his days of pre-trial 'investigation' in Armavir prison in 1969-70, which will make a fitting conclusion to this portrait of Russia's Don Quixote.

' . . . in prison, I felt at ease and well, and I left it, strange as it may seem, with stronger nerves, even though conditions were often very bad. I'd be terribly ungrateful if I didn't say to what I owed my feelings of well-being. Just one word . . . prayer. It is enough to turn mentally to God, and at once I feel a force which mysteriously pours into me from somewhere, into my soul, into my whole being. What is it? It is not psychotherapy, for where would I, an insignificant old man, tired of life, get this strength that renews and saves me, elevating me above the earth? It is born outside of me and there is no force in the world which can resist it.

'By nature I'm not a mystic; supernatural phenomena and ecstasies are quite foreign to me and beyond me. But what I can reach is what is within the grasp of every man—prayer. Since I believe in, and was nurtured by, the Orthodox Church, my prayer is expressed in its forms (though I don't reject every other type). The foundation of all my spiritual life is the Orthodox Liturgy. When I found myself in prison, every day in my imagination I attended the Liturgy. At 8 a.m. I began to repeat the words of the Liturgy to myself, pacing up and down in my cell. From that moment I felt myself indivisibly linked with the whole Christian world; therefore during the Great Litany I always prayed for the Pope, for the Ecumenical Patriarch, and, while he was alive, our own Holy Patriarch Alexei, then for the acting Patriarch. Reaching the central point, I



would say the Eucharistic Canon, and after the words of consecration, standing before Our Lord, feeling almost the physical presence of his wounded, bleeding body, I would begin to pray in my own words and remember all my friends, those in prison and those who are free, living and dead, and my memory would keep on suggesting more and more names. . . . The walls of the prison opened and it became for me all the Universe, visible and invisible, the universe for which was offered in sacrifice this wounded and bleeding Body. Then the Our Father, and the prayer before communion, "I believe, O Lord, and confess . . .", were full of meaning for me. After the Liturgy, throughout the day, I felt an extraordinary uplifting of spirit in purity and clarity. And it was not only my prayer, not so much my prayer, which helped me, as that of many believers. I felt their prayer continually; it acted from a distance, held me up as if on wings, gave me living water and the bread of life, tranquility of soul, peace and love"<sup>14</sup>.

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#### POSTSCRIPT

Anatol Levitin Krasnov is back in circulation again, having been released from prison some months before his full sentence, possibly on health grounds. With four others he has issued a two-page document, from the 'Initiative Group for the Defence of Human Rights in the Soviet Union'. It says that Yakir and Krasin had made lying statements at their trial and Press Conference, but had had their personalities broken by police interrogators.

'It is tragic that these lies are affecting the fate and reputation of all the political prisoners in camps, prisons and mental hospitals in the Soviet Union'.

They said they had never tried to discredit the social order of the Government of the country as Yakir and Krasin had testified. They were only opposed to those actions of the authorities which would be considered as inadmissible under any social system and any government. The group hopes to continue individual and collective efforts aimed at broadening generally recognised opinions, such as freedom to express and disseminate opinions, and freedom from being brought to court to face hypocritical charges.

'We continue to assert that in a whole series of cases psychiatry is used in our country to deal with people the authorities do not like'.

<sup>14</sup>My Come-back, 1970.