

IN MEMORIAM
Archpriest Vitaly Borovoy (1916-2008)

Archpriest Vitaly Borovoy died on April 7, 2008, at the age of 93. He was a person well known to the leadership of Christians Associated for Relationships with Eastern Europe who held him in high esteem.

In 1944 he was ordained as a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church. He was first responsible for the rebuilding of the Theological Seminary in Minsk, Byelorussia, and then became professor of Church History at the Leningrad Theological Academy. In the 1950s he was assigned to the External Church Relations Department of the Moscow Patriarchate and served in the Patriarchal Cathedral of Theophany. He represented the Russian Orthodox Church in the World Council of Churches in Geneva (1962-66 and 1978-85), as member of the Faith and Order Commission and assistant director of the Secretariat for Faith and Order (1966-1972), and as Deputy Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate (1985-1995). He had also been an observer at the Second Vatican Council and a proponent of ecumenical dialogue between the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian (Eastern and Oriental Orthodox) churches. For his participation in ecumenical prayer services he was criticized by the anti-ecumenical forces in his own church. He also participated as a representative of his church in some of the sessions of the Prague Christian Peace Conference and in Christian-Marxist dialogues.

Those of us who had a chance to be present at one of his lectures were impressed by his dynamic vision of renewal and cooperation among Christians and other people of good will. His penetrating intellect, broad knowledge of church history, and witty conversational style made a positive impression on his environment. I recall when he shared an anecdote of traveling on a train from Poland with returning Soviet troops when, as a priest, he was trying to lay low in the compartment with the increasingly boisterous troops who, while in Poland had to be on good behavior. When they noticed him at first they mistook him for a Polish Catholic priest, but when they discovered that he was "*nash pop*" [our priest] they gladly welcomed him.

After hearing him speak candidly and with nuance analyzing the complicated and often painful situation of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union as well as his bold call for renewal, I began to think that if the Russian Orthodox Church had ten Borovoy's it would have revolutionized its ability to cope with the oppression to which it had been subjected. There were surely those who thought that he worked for the KGB but I saw him as a faithful Orthodox Christian who found ways of maximizing the elbow room for his beloved Church's mission and activities in the world. *Vyechna mu pamyat* [may his memory be eternal].

My memory [Charles West] of him was in several contexts, including CAREE. I first met him during the National Council of Churches delegation to the Soviet Union in 1962. He was clearly the theologian among the Russian delegation, the most

articulate in discussion, the clearest in explanation, and the one who was reaching out most for ecumenical ideas and contact. Metropolitan Nikodim was the diplomatic and political manager of course, but Borovoy was the intellectual and, I would say, spiritual leader as he led us into Orthodox faith and worship.

I remember especially an occasion during the 1966 World Council Conference on Church and Society in Geneva. The demand arose for more Christian-Marxist dialogue. The whole assembly was for it, except the Soviet delegation. Nikodim used all the diplomacy at his command, and others spoke too, to no avail. Finally Vitaly arose. "I will tell you," he said, "what is really concerning my colleagues." Then he explained, in words that bordered on the dangerous for him, that the church folk in the Soviet Union were unprepared for such dialogue. No such conversation about faith and Marxism-Leninism took place in his country. They would be at a great disadvantage were it to occur, because it would not happen on equal terms. Christians were in a better position just practicing their faith. Of course we understood, and a bond of community between us and our fellow Christians over there was deepened by his words.

Finally, when a Soviet Union churches' delegation came to the USA in 1974, they all came to Princeton Theological Seminary for theological conversations. I introduced the students to Borovoy and they invited him to their dorm where they talked for hours. What is it like to be a priest in Russia? What role does the liturgy play? How do you talk with atheists, and how do you live as a Christian in a Communist society? I think what happened there was more important than all the academic papers we read to each other.

During the Millennium celebrations of Russian Christianity in 1988, Borovoy gave the keynote address at a conference of ecumenical scholars hosted by a parish of the Orthodox Church in America (near Detroit) in September 1988. Here he gave tribute to the role of Orthodox intellectuals in the diaspora for having played an important role during the difficult years of Communist rule. Already projecting what was ahead, he cited ideas from such thinkers as Berdaev, Solov'ev, and Frank of the Vekhi movement, reform ideas from the decade preceding the Sobor of 1917, as well as dissident scholars within the Soviet Union. During discussions at coffee he expanded on the need to seek inspiration from those renewal movements of a century ago, but already drew attention to likely resistance from a new generation of conservative and anti-intellectual bishops. There was indeed a flurry of re-publications of the Vekhi movement, as well as books by Alexander Schmemmann and John Meyendorff, but very soon the conservatives were in the ascendancy.

Paul Mojzes, co-editor, with additional remarks by Charles West and Walter Sawatsky.