

Anatoly Krasikov, interview with Philip Boobbyer, Moscow, April 1998, summary in English

This is a condensed summary of some of the key points of the interview, in the first person, not an exact translation.

I was like most young people of my generation growing up. I was completely indifferent to religion. I was not militant atheist, but I did not ask any questions on these things, hence I did not get any answers. My encounter with the world of religion came when I went to Italy as a young journalist. There is the story of President Yeltsin, already as a mature person, visiting a supermarket in Houston. Even though he was in the upper echelons of the nomenklatura, he was amazed by what he saw. This is according to his assistant Sukhanov, He was stunned by what he saw and said that they had been deceived in claiming that the West was in decline.

My own first visit abroad to Italy was as a younger man in 1957. I was struck by the contrast to snowy Moscow and how people smiled and were open, and then I had my first encounter with religious life. I got to know some of the French journalists, this at the time when Pope John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council. I got to know Italian journalists too, and read about these questions, and found that they interested me personally. I had been born in 1931 and ended up at TASS because of my knowledge of languages. So if in the case of our President, it was the economic side of things that struck him, in my case it was the spiritual element, the religious freedom and religion itself. There is an essay which I have written on this. I met both John XXIII and Paul VI. In my work with TASS, I was involved with the celebration of the 1000-year anniversary of Christianity in Russia. I worked in TASS for 37 years.

Working abroad I had the chance to read things, like the lecture of Sakharov. His concept of convergence had a big impact on me. I realised the transition to a democratic society would have to be slow in the case of the USSR, unlike with Germany, Japan and Italy where it happened during a war. Because of the existence of nuclear weapons, such changes would only occur from within. I was not the only one who thought that way, and indeed it was from within the move towards freedom came to fruition in our country.

Three times I was invited to work in the Central Committee, and three times I refused. I instinctively and consciously realised that this would have drawn me into the system of power. Staying within TASS allowed me to work in a field that was primarily about information. I refused at one point to work for Zagladin's journal 'Novoe vremia'. I felt working for an information agency did not require of me, as far as this was possible, a twisting of the soul or deals with one's conscience. Our leaders primarily read the papers to see if their names were mentioned, out of vanity. TASS privately translated a lot of stuff from abroad.

There were moments of hesitation, but it was also a matter of my character, and my wife's character. We were very open with each other. I began to see that there were positive consequences when following the inner voice. I began following this voice more consciously at the end of the 1970s, when I used to go to church here, not regularly and I got even more from my reading. And this was accentuated when I was working on the 1000-year

anniversary of Christianity. There was the desire to expand the interest in religion in a wider public. I knew the church hierarchy well. I remember saying to a Metropolitan that we would have religious freedom and his looking at me with great irony. He did not believe this would happen, but I did. I did not believe you could live too long behind mirrors, as in the story of Alice in Wonderland. We had to come to living in a more normal society.

My approach to things was not to try to achieve things myself, but to talk to people from various circles. Working for the President helped with that. My influence was very limited, as it is with any person. If I talked with fifteen people, and each of them said the same thing to the President, it would have a greater effect than if I had spoken to him alone.

In relation to the inner voice, I did not always speak with my wife about things, it was often connected with personal reflection. As regards my reading I was in quite privileged position. I knew about Orwell's '1984' before it read it. From abroad, I sent myself books back home through the TASS post which I was not permitted to take personally, and then would take them home from TASS. There was Sakharov, Svetlana Alliluyeva's 'Twenty Letters to a Friend'. I did not have samizdat contacts. All this played a part in the formation of a correct outlook. TASS received reviews of dissident works published abroad with quotations from these books. I got to learn about the dissident world that way, even if I did not people like Gleb Yakunin until much later.

When there were moments connected with crossing a moral border, I would ask where this would lead, not so much from a personal point of view, but from society generally. Even big figures like Sakharov could not change the system it had to happen from within. You have got to remember to what extent this was a harsh, totalitarian system where everything was controlled. Figures like him were heroes who awakened our conscience, our consciousness.

A choice began to be possible after the 20th Party Congress. I joined the Party when I was at the Institute, honestly considering it a great honour. Its general slogans resonated with me, and I did not personally know about the Gulag. My mother knew or guessed, but she was a schoolteacher; she saw how people disappeared. When I heard about things, I wanted to leave, but she said that the Party itself was trying to correct things, asking me what I wanted to achieve. It would have been difficult if I had only lived in the USSR. In places like France it was not thought a contradiction to be a Christian and a member of the Party.

Lenin had said, prior to 1917, that it was possible for a believer to be a member of the Party. I thought that had come after had been a distortion of Leninism. I liked a quotation from Lenin, I am ashamed to say, to the effect that there is no point an atheist arguing with a believer about whether heaven exists, if both of them can work together on building heaven on earth. I did not know that a few years later, he wrote to the Politburo stating that there could be no accommodation with religious people. So I thought these things were compatible.

I agreed with Stalin when he wrote in 1952 in his book 'The Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR' when he said that the aim of socialism was the satisfaction of the needs of everyone, while capitalism was focussed on acquiring profits. There was no game here for

me, I agreed with this. It was sincere and it was a desire to help with changes. You can easily see that in my own publications.

There was a difficult moment under Khrushchev, and then another crisis in at the end of autumn 1990 under Gorbachev, with glasnost' underway, when I published an article in Komsomolskaia Pravda, after having had it refused by 'Pravda' and 'Izvestiia' and was told by the General Director that there had been a call from the Central Committee, and I would have to leave my job. I was then deputy General Director of TASS – after some hesitation I had taken that post in 1978 and was in it for fourteen years. I was given time to try to find something else, but when nothing came up, I was allowed to stay on as special correspondent, which was obviously a demotion. I had no choice but to accept, but while a visa was getting sorted out, the putsch occurred, and everything changed.

A month before the putsch, I had written an essay on the tenth anniversary of the Spanish coup stating that a putsch was no longer a possibility in Spain but it was in the USSR. At that time, I also wrote something saying that glasnost' was not freedom of expression, citing the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

I remember being in Spain, supposedly under a bloody dictatorship, and seeing the works of Lenin and Marx available for sale and seeing that this was a country that was in the process of evolving. I became interested in the transition from one system to another. I wrote something for 'Pravda' on the 10th anniversary of Brezhnev's ascent to power noting how Spain was in the process of moving to political pluralism. I met a lot of Spanish Christian democrats and interviewed people about how to move to a new system in a peaceful way without a civil war. I used quite a few of those contacts when I was preparing the President's visit. My articles on the putsch were for 'Za Rubezhom'.

I would call the inner voice a path to religion, a path to God. I would be able to compare my actions with Christian principles, with the Bible. I remember a difficult moment connected with the publication of Emelyan Yaroslavsky's book 'The Bible for Believers and Nonbelievers', which identified contradictions in the Bible and was designed to put people on a path to atheism. I read this with completely different eyes. This was at the beginning of the 1970s. I went to talk with a priest about it. There were tormenting hesitations over what to do about this.

I also had a kind of crisis when Yeltsin called me. I was not happy with the way the transition from Gorbachev to Yeltsin had happened. I was drawn to staying out of politics, and left TASS to work on 'Independent Newspaper'. I was worried that I could get drawn into not very moral matters. My inner voice raised questions about this. And there was a final crisis when I had doubts when the war in Chechnya started, and I asked myself whether I should issue a statement against the war. I thought that campaigning for religious freedom was my priority and what was achieved in that was a great success. But I was silent about the war, and this was very heavy. Then in 1996 when Yegorov was appointed I left my post, feeling I had done all that I could. I felt morally I had to leave. I was freed from the burden of the Chechen events. Then there was an issue of whether to make a fuss of my leaving, and here my inner voice told me to be quiet because Yeltsin was the only guarantee of the changes.