*Yuliya Voznesenskaya is the leader of the Frankfurt branch of the "Mariya" club: IGFM Frauenverein MARIA, Kaiserstrasse 72/IV, 6000 Frankfurt-am-Main 1, West Germany. Tel: 0611-236971/72.

Editor's Postscript

The KGB has continued its repressive activity against the women's movement throughout 1982. Natalya Lazareva was sentenced on 1 July to four years in strict régime camp and two years' internal exile on a charge of "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" (article 70 of the Criminal Code). The international MLF (Women's Liberation Movement) in Paris issued an appeal on her behalf, asking that telegrams of protest be sent to Soviet Embassies. Few if any active members of the women's movement are now known to be at liberty in the USSR.

The Moscow Peace Conference, May 1982

Man has always lived with the knowledge of his own individual death, but since 1945 the possibility of the extinction of the entire species has entered the world. The awareness that we have the capacity to incinerate ourselves in a global holocaust is still sinking into the collective imagination.

The interfaith conference held in Moscow from 10 to 14 May under the cumbersome title of "A World Conference of Religious Workers for Saving the Sacred Gift of Life from Nuclear Catastrophe" was a contribution to this growing awareness that mankind has come to a point of decision so grave that all other debates and disputes must be seen in relation to it. "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore, choose life that both thou and thy seed may live."

The conference was convened, however, in an atmosphere of suspicion that it would be a mere propaganda exercise in which the Russian Orthodox Church would serve as a compliant handmaid of Soviet foreign policy. The United States State Department tried, unsuccessfully in most cases, to persuade individual delegates not to attend and particularly strong appeals to stay away were made to the most notable American participant, Dr Billy Graham. The Vatican decided not to be directly represented at episcopal level and instead there were two observers from the Secretariat for Unity. In the end there were nearly six hundred participants — 401 Christians, 106 Muslims, 57 Buddhists and a number of Jews, Hindus, some admirable and articulate Sikhs, a Shintoist and a Zoroastrian. The interfaith dimension was rather disappointing. The only common worship was a rather perfunctory silence at the beginning of each day's work and language difficulties compounded the divide, especially between Christian and Muslim.

Any conference held in the Soviet Union has certain resemblances to an ancient Greek drama. The plot is known by most of the audience in advance. The interest comes in the artistry with which the old themes are treated in word and symbol. If you are listening with these expectations, changes in formulae and departures from the conventional course of events reverberate in a way which is hard to appreciate if you have been reared on less tightly orchestrated western productions. Like Aeschylus, the Soviet conference is highly stylized. We sat in a superb modern hall, dominated by a vertiginous podium on which the principal characters were ensconced and from which the lengthy rhetorical speeches were delivered. Most of us were in the body of the hall in the chorus of peace-loving workers, whose chief role was to endorse and to applaud. The really exciting and significant action happened off stage. This is not intended as mockery of a very different tradition. It does no good to seethe with the anger of incomprehension and to neglect the means that do exist to give the process some reality. In the hands of a master such dramas can achieve an impressive grandeur and generate powerful emotion, but they can also easily degenerate into tedious and prolix insincerity. Most of the participants in the Moscow conference submitted to the tradition cheerfully enough. Many of them knew very little in detail about nuclear weapons or disarmament negotiations and it was easy to fall under the spell of the size and complexity of everything.

Granted the stylized form, however, this was in many ways an unusual conference. It was an achievement to hold it at all at a time when uncertainties generated by the question of who is to succeed Mr Brezhnev naturally induce caution, but it was also an organizational triumph. One of the leading laymen of the Russian Orthodox Church, Dr Ruevsky,

occasionally had to come to the podium to make handsome apologies for minor administrative lapses and in particular the solitary Zoroastrian woman was always being omitted from lists or toasts, but the difficulty of working with six official languages and three scripts should not be underestimated. In every department, lodging, feeding, transport and translation the logistics were formidable and the organizers deserve congratulation.

From the very outset the host of the conference, Patriarch Pimen, and the other leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church made it clear that they wished to work by consensus and to avoid any descent into mere propaganda. The Patriarch's opening speech established a high level theologically, whilst the address of Metropolitan Philaret of Minsk was scrupulously free from name-calling or vulgar rhetoric. He has recently become the head of the Department of External Church Relations and the peace conference was obviously a test of his leadership. Friends of the Russian Orthodox Church everywhere will be heartened by the way in which he strove for balance during the conference and in the process added greatly to the credibility of the Church as a peace-maker.

Although the clearest signals were given on the first day, they were not heeded by all the participants. Dr Romesh Chandra of the World Peace Council, a familiar figure in Soviet-sponsored events, made his predictable assault on American foreign policy and there were also many others impervious to the call for balance. One French priest, Abbé René Laurentin, who has done some very good work on the theology of the Virgin Mary, made many Christian participants miserable by his threadbare treatment of the theme of peace in the Christian tradition and by his evident bias against the policies of the United States.

The delegation that did more than any other to assist the Russian Orthodox Church leadership in its search for a realistic consensus was the Lutheran group and especially the American Lutherans, who had taken the risk of participating in the conference as full delegates. Bishop David Preus, Presiding Bishop of one of the Lutheran churches in the United States, was a particularly impressive figure. Nobody could describe him as a naïve eccentric or a radical extremist. He accepted the Vice-Chairmanship of the conference with his eyes open, knowing that this could open him to censure at home, but knowing also that it would give him a strategic position on the steering committee from which to influence the evolution of the final documents. He also made one of the most effective interventions in the conference from the chair. After a number of tediously familiar speeches from the anti-American peace circus, he pleaded with delegates not to force anyone to go home to explain why they had not responded in anger when attacks were being made on their country.

The American group as a whole made an impressive and constructive contribution to the conference, never descending to abuse of the Soviet Union. Dr Billy Graham's speech was a good example, although he should perhaps learn to be more continent with his comments at airports. The evangelist submitted to being managed by his hosts. Although only an observer, he was seated on the platform among the honorary patrons and he was kept largely isolated from other participants in a different hotel. Nevertheless he made a powerful speech which attracted the most sustained and enthusiastic applause of the conference. Dr Graham did at least confront the problem of the intractability of evil "in a world that is distorted and warped by sin", whereas many of the other soft-boiled contributions were of the kind which give peace a bad name. Sitting through many of the prolix and repetitive speeches about how the peace-loving peoples of the world yearn for perfect harmony between nations, it was easy to be downcast by the lack of realism and theological depth shown by so many of the speakers. While the public ritual was being played out, however, the drafting committee worked feverishly to prepare the final documents. Canon Kenyon Wright, General Secretary of the Scottish Council of Churches, was a member of this body, which produced a series of statements light-years away from the frankly propagandist documents which emerged from the Moscow Peace Conference of 1977. The intellectual standard of the 1982 "Appeal to the Leaders and Followers of all Religions" and the "Appeal to all Governments of the World" and "to the Second Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament" was generally far superior to most of the material heard in plenary session. These documents contain material which very few of those present at the conference would be embarrassed to commend to their home churches for study. Whereas the "Appeal to Governments" in 1977 included passages like "we deplore the increase of imperialist influence and suppression of human

rights in some Latin American countries reinforcing oligarchal and oppressive régimes which co-operate with foreign capitalist forces in an alliance for exploitation", this time attempts from the floor to include some such denunciation were frustrated by the platform. The 1982 Appeal, as well as welcoming the Soviet decision to stop the deployment of new nuclear medium-range missiles in the European part of the USSR and to reduce the number of presently deployed missiles, also welcomed "the expressed readiness of the United States to conduct formal negotiations on the reduction of strategic nuclear arms". One American said "it would be difficult to get a statement that balanced through the Synod in the US".

In his introductory greeting to the conference the Archbishop of Canterbury warned that although the Moscow meeting was a moment of hope, the opportunity could be lost in a reversion to "the sterile abuse of one party by another which has poisoned the atmosphere between nations for so long and even invaded consultations of brother and sister Christians searching for the way to peace". The Moscow conference, perhaps surprisingly, proved not to be that kind of event and although it would be naïve to ignore the continuing constraints under which the Church in the Soviet Union operates, the conference did increase hope that some genuine bridge-building was possible between the leaders of the East and West. A Russian churchman said during the conference "please do not always be negative about the Church in Russia. There is much that is wrong here, but there are also some things to applaud".

RICHARD CHARTRES

The Church in Poland under Martial Law

Summer 1982

With the Solidarity union still suspended under martial law and any real public debate outlawed, the Catholic Church in Poland has once again become the only mediator between the people and the government. Over the last eight months the Church has displayed patience and goodwill when dealing with the authorities. Martial law has been prolonged, peaceful demonstrations broken up, harsh sentences praised at so-called political trials, the internment camps are full, Lech Wałęsa has been isolated and a gulf has opened between the people and the military rulers, yet the Church has not ceased its efforts to overcome the social and economic impasse, still believing that it is possible to bring about what it calls "social peace" and reconciliation.

Activities of the Social Council

Some time after martial law was declared, Archbishop Glemp, Primate of Poland, decided to entrust his advisory committee, the Social Council, with the task of preparing a church memorandum on the crisis. The Social Council, set up in November 1981, consists largely of lay experts. In April its first "political" document promoted the idea of a new "social contract" between the people and the authorities, which was to be worked out in tripartite talks involving the Church, Solidarity and the government. It emphasised that, though acceptance of Poland's international position within the Soviet bloc was one of the conditions for a successful and long-lasting accord, the democratization of political life was equally imperative and should be marked by increasing popular participation in the government of Poland, at least at local level. Moreover, the document stated that only an official promise to fulfil the agreements of August 1980 would make any dialogue credible in the eyes of the people. The April proposals met with Archbishop Glemp's approval as his covering letter to the Polish bishops, which was sent together with copies of the document, indicated.

General Jaruzelski, who also was presented with a copy of the proposals, rejected them out of hand as too far-reaching and unrealistic. Nevertheless, the Church was invited to continue its search for a way out of the crisis.

In May the Social Council produced two new documents which have only recently found their way to the West. In view of the