

that the Council for Religious Affairs is in the process of revising the 1929 Law on Religious Associations (revised, but not substantially, in 1975). In a recent *samizdat* appeal to Mr Gorbachev, a group of Russian Orthodox believers expressed the fear that the expected revisions would be only minor, and set forth their own view of the changes which would be necessary to bring about true religious freedom. It is possible that church leaders who denied that there had been changes in the law, after the publication of the article in *JMP* mentioned above, feared to give the impression that there had been substantial changes in case this undermined their chances of pressing for genuinely substantial changes at a later date. It is also possible that, in the present politically uncertain atmosphere, the CRA may feel itself to be between two stools: if it

publishes only minor changes there will be great disappointment among Soviet believers and, perhaps, negative reactions from the West, while if it publishes major changes it could run into future political problems if Gorbachev's policies, and even Gorbachev himself, were to disappear from the scene. Comments which seemed to reinforce the view that some changes may be in the offing, made by the CRA chairman, Konstantin Kharchev, on a visit to the USA last August, should therefore be viewed in this context.

In a recently-published interview in *Moscow News* (1987 No. 38), Metropolitan Alexi of Leningrad comments forthrightly that "church-state relations have overgrown their limits" — a strong hint that the Law on Religious Associations needs to be revised.

JANE ELLIS

## Gorbachev: Hopes and Fears

Who is Gorbachev and what does he stand for? Those questions have been agitating journalists, scholars, politicians and human rights activists for over two years now. A closet Dubček seeking to push the USSR in the direction of "communism with a human face", or a highly intelligent *apparatchik* using new slogans and clever propaganda in an attempt to lull the outside world into a false sense of security? Should he be encouraged in his efforts to reform the stagnating Soviet economy or should we fear, and therefore resist, real change in the Soviet Union? More importantly, what impact are his policies likely to have on the ordinary Soviet citizen, especially the religious believer?

Elected to head the Soviet Com-

munist Party in March 1985, the youthful and apparently dynamic Gorbachev has done much to change Western perceptions of the USSR. His speeches are free of many of the old clichés and are delivered in a style calculated to keep his audiences awake; he works hard and expects his colleagues — indeed, all Soviet citizens — to do likewise; he also appears to have reined in attempts to create a personality cult. In the international arena he has seized the propaganda initiative on the question of disarmament.

Almost immediately upon taking power, the new General Secretary launched a harsh attack on the failings of the Soviet economy, an attack which he has since refined and taken much further. In this, he was



*Above:* The Trinity-St Sergi Monastery at Zagorsk, where the Russian Orthodox Church plans to hold a *sobor* on 6-9 June 1988 as part of its celebration of the millennium.

*(Photos courtesy Keston College)*

*Below:* Zagorsk students carrying out the “obedience” of clearing the grounds.





Icon-painting class at the Trinity-St Sergi Monastery, Zagorsk.



The Monastery of the Caves, Kiev.



The Church of St Andrew, Kiev.

*(Photos courtesy Keston College)*

accepting, in essence, the analyses of Western economists who had diagnosed falling growth rates since the late 1970s, a tendency to try to solve problems by throwing money at them, and a grossly over-centralised planning system. Gorbachev's language may have been more "ideologically sound" than that of the Western analysts, but he repeatedly stressed, with them, that the Soviet economy was too reliant on a mechanism developed in the 1930s. Indeed, by June of this year he was speaking of the need for a "new economic mechanism", which would involve giving enterprises greater autonomy, increasing the role of material incentives, and reforming the pricing system. At the same time, he has followed Andropov in calling for greater discipline on the part of the workers and threatened the "social contract" of the Brezhnev years, a compact summed up in the well-known dictum "we pretend to work and you pretend to pay us!"

Gorbachev has also begun to tackle some of the social ills besetting Soviet society, notably alcoholism. Although many campaigns have been launched against drink in the past, this one seems to be having some effect. Westerners in Moscow have noted fewer drunks on the street, while official sources suggest that road accidents have fallen by 20 per cent and crime by 25 per cent. An assault has also been made on official corruption, with a large number of officials dismissed and tried for large-scale speculation. A few have been sentenced to death.

Since coming to power, Gorbachev has always described his aim as *perestroika* (restructuring), and it is perhaps unfortunate that the West has latched onto the word *glasnost*. *Glasnost*, usually translated as "openness", has often been written about as though Gorbachev's main aim were the creation of a freer

society. This may indeed be his long-term aim, but his own speeches refer to *perestroika* as the main target. By this he means making the system work better. Thus, speaking in Khabarovsk in July 1986, the General Secretary reassured his internal critics that his policies were not "a shaking of the foundations", but a move to fulfil "the potential and advantages of the socialist system".

Where does *glasnost* fit into this? Primarily, it would appear, as a means to an end. Real reform of the Soviet system requires open discussion — albeit generally within a Marxist-Leninist framework — of problems and possible remedies, and the winning-over of the various élites. To this end, the press has been allowed greater freedom to explore hitherto-undiscussed subjects: drug addiction, prostitution, AIDS, official privileges, abuses by senior political figures (though not yet Politburo members), events in Soviet history and previously-banned writers. A pledge has been made to publish Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, and his expulsion from the Writers' Union has been posthumously rescinded. In the cultural sphere, artists previously unable to exhibit their work have been allowed to do so, and controversial films such as *Pokayaniye* (Repentance) have shown to packed houses.

There remain, however, limits to the "openness". Some of the worst abuses of the 1930s have been discussed, but all too often the emphasis is on party members who died, as if the ordinary citizens did not count. Pasternak may be published but not Solzhenitsyn. The ruling ideology and political system can still not be directly challenged in print.

What impact has Gorbachev had on human rights and religion? Initially, his accession to power brought no changes. Arrests and

harassment continued; on various occasions he attacked human rights activists — admittedly in more moderate language than his predecessors — and counter-attacked by criticising the human rights record of Western governments. Yet in December 1986 Gorbachev authorised the return from exile of Andrei Sakharov, and over the next six months some 150 political prisoners were released before the end of their sentences. Of these, about seventy were religious believers. Others have had their sentences reduced under the amnesty announced to greet the 70th anniversary of the October revolution.\*

Many of those released from camps, exile and psychiatric hospital have once more taken up political or religious activism, but so far the regime has chosen to react only with petty harassment. Jews, hippies, anti-nuclear activists and, on the largest scale, Crimean Tatars, have been able to hold demonstrations in public places in Moscow without immediate and violent reaction.

All these developments have surprised experienced observers of the Soviet Union, though the more cynical have expressed the view that the "new look" is purely a public-relations exercise. Indeed, rejoicing should be restrained as long as the basic apparatus of repression remains in existence. After all, Khrushchev released thousands of prisoners but then launched a vicious attack on religion; dozens of Baptists were released soon after Brezhnev's accession, yet two years later nearly two hundred were incarcerated.

On the more specifically religious front there have been a few signs of easing pressure. Released prisoners have faced fewer problems than

might have been expected; in many places the authorities have operated more strictly within the law, using extra-legal injunctions more sparingly (for example, Moscow churches are no longer required to produce parents' passports before baptising children), and they are showing a willingness to discuss the registration of groups previously not deemed fit for recognition, such as the Hare Krishnas; it has been reported that the long dispute in Lithuania over the church at Klaipeda will be resolved in favour of the Catholics; the Pope has apparently been invited to Kiev during 1988. There has also been some interesting discussion of the religious question in the media, with the poet Yevtushenko calling for the free publication of the Bible, the reading of which he described as essential for the understanding of world literature. In the same article he argued that religion had often been a force for progress in the world. But he did not go unanswered, and there have been a number of attacks echoing Lenin's criticism of "flirting with god".

Of course, there have been debates over religion in the past — debates which made little impact on official ideological hostility towards religion. Yevtushenko may have gone further than his predecessors in implicitly challenging the enforced dominance of atheism, but there has as yet been no sign of this affecting attitudes within the regime. Party members are still required to struggle actively against "religious prejudices".

There has been no change in the wording of the laws affecting religion. Some believers have been released, but the articles of the Criminal Code under which they were sentenced could still, even if now in different political circumstances, be used against them. Other believers remain in camps and exile. Moreover, those released have not

\*Some believers will not, however, benefit under the amnesty. See *Chronicle* article on pp. 323-25.

been declared innocent of the charges brought against them. As Baptist Janis Rožkalns was told: "You have not been amnestied, you have not been pardoned. You were released on instructions from the top. When instructions come to imprison you again, we shall do so."

Despite persistent rumours of change, the civil laws affecting religion have not been amended either. Since 1929 the activities of religious associations have been regulated by the Law on Religious Associations (amended in 1975). This law makes it extremely difficult in practice to open new places of worship and yet facilitates the closure of existing ones — this despite the present shortage of places of worship in the USSR. Other activities traditionally undertaken by religious communities — charitable and educational work, for example — are expressly prohibited.

There have as yet been no signs of any readiness on the part of the régime to meet many of the demands made by religious activists over the last two decades: the amendment or abolition of much of existing legislation; the freedom to open churches as and where required; an end to discrimination in all spheres of social

life; the right to pass on one's faith freely and to give children organised religious instruction; the right to carry out charitable activities. These rights may come, but at the time of writing they have not been given any formal recognition in the USSR, and thus any "liberalisation" in the application of the laws can only be described as conditional.

We would conclude, then, by welcoming those changes which have taken place under Gorbachev, recognising that he may wish to go further in reducing the constraints on Soviet citizens but has to move cautiously if he is not to arouse political opposition. At the same time we would not overestimate the significance of these changes. Gorbachev is not a dictator and is not above the system. He might fall tomorrow and, as some Soviet citizens believe, his fall could be followed by a level of repression tougher than has been seen for many years. Should he survive and continue to push his policies forward, Gorbachev has made no secret of his aim: "We intend to make socialism stronger and not replace it with another system." For the time being we must take him at his word.

JOHN ANDERSON

## Amnesty to Mark the 70th Anniversary of the October Revolution.

On 18 June 1987, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet decreed an amnesty to mark the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution. The following day *Izvestiya* published the full text of the decree, which took effect from its date of publication and is to be executed within six months. The declaration of the amnesty more than four months

before the anniversary date which it is intended to mark is one of several innovative features of this amnesty decree. Previous practice has been to announce an amnesty on the day of celebration. The early execution of this decree may be an indication of a desire to accelerate the process of reducing the numbers of prisoners of conscience held in Soviet labour