The Rehabilitation of Christian Ethical Values in the Soviet Media

WILLIAM VAN DEN BERCKEN

Since Gorbachev came to power in March 1985, and especially in the last two years, Soviet journals have printed a number of articles treating Christianity with considerable sympathy. Paradoxically, after 70 years without any real printed expression of religious ideas, a section of the Soviet intelligentsia is pleading for a reassessment of Christian ethical values with a spontaneity rarely found amongst their western counterparts. This article seeks to illustrate this development by examining the way in which religious-ethical themes are dealt with in the journals *Literaturnaya gazeta, Novy mir* and *Ogonyok*.*

Ethical Discussion

In dealing with the sympathetic attitude of a section of the Soviet intelligentsia towards religion one must start by accepting that the official ideological attitude towards religion has yet to change. This is in no way intended to belittle the significance of change on the part of the intelligentsia — this only increases the paradox — but rather to avoid any idealisation of this fact. The party ideologists and professional *antireligiozniki* continue to publish but, thanks to *glasnost'*, other voices can also get a hearing in the Soviet media.

Since the mid-sixties the Soviet intelligentsia has displayed a growing cultural interest in the Russian Orthodox Church and its history. In recent years this cultural piety has acquired an extra dimension: the Russian Orthodox Church is no longer seen solely as a source of aesthetic values, but of moral values as well. What has happened is a reassessment of the church in reaction to the moral degeneration of Soviet society and the failure of communist ideology

*This article covers the period until mid-1988. A second article, covering the period May 1988-May 1989 will be published in *Exchange Bulletin of Ecumenical Research* No. 53 (1989), issued by the Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research of Utrecht University.

to offer a satisfactory philosophy of life. What makes both cultural and moral reassessments so special is that they do not spring from the active position taken by the church in society: they have grown spontaneously, counter to political oppression and despite the church's passivity. It appears that the emotionally and spiritually attractive powers of the Russian Orthodox Church are undiminished in spite of the church's decline as a socially active institution.

The rediscovery of religion as a source of universal human moral values has brought more difficulties for official Soviet ideology than has the higher cultural regard for the church. The state has absorbed the latter but continues to resist the former. The church as national-historical repository and source of patriotism is acceptable to the state; taking the church seriously as an alternative philosophy of life is tantamount to state recognition of its inability to provide existential meaning. And yet, one of the most significant aspects of current social renewal in the Soviet Union is the struggle of state and party to find a spiritual base and achieve moral reorientation. The government recognises that ideological education has had shortcomings and has offered little. On this there is no disagreement between government and intelligentsia. The media are united in expressing concern about the damage done to society by the nihilism of recent decades and the serious forms of moral disintegration which have followed. However, the search for solutions goes in different directions: some look for answers in an enrichment of original Leninist ideological values; others favour critical consideration of mistakenly jettisoned religious values; and both look for a link with 'universal human values'.

Universal Human Values

The very recognition of 'universal human values' and 'supra-class norms' represents a break with a past dominated by class morals and partisan ethics, to which even the individual conscience of the citizen was subordinated. Universal human values have been given heed under Gorbachev, who cites Lenin in defending this concept. Yet Lenin was second to none in his promotion of relative, functional and partisan ethics; universal ethical norms, whether Christian or humanist, were equally bourgeois and damaging to the class struggle. Even so, rather than criticism for inconsistency, Gorbachev deserves praise for his ethical reorientation. Moreover, there is a trace of logic in Gorbachev's use of Leninism for by citing Lenin he pulls the rug from under more and more dogmas. Gorbachev's emphasis on the 'human factor', the focus on man as individual, has also to be seen as

directly related to his rediscovery of universal human values. In collectivised Soviet society, where the individual citizen is inevitably sacrificed to planning norms and state interests, the late recognition of the intrinsic value of a human being is an important development. Among other things it has brought about discussion of capital punishment and the 'Pavlik Morozov-factor'.

Among radical statements on capital punishment is that in *Ogonyok* (1987, No. 33): 'Capital punishment legalises, as it were, murder. . . Human life is sacred and no one, not even the state, has the right to take it.' The importance attached to the controversy is clear from a later statement in *Ogonyok* (1988, No. 14): 'The fact that people are discussing capital punishment here represents the very highest form of moral reorientation for our entire spiritual culture.'

Also significant is the rejection of the cult based on Pavlik Morozov, a boy who informed on his father during the period of collectivisation and who was in turn killed by fellow villagers. For generations, 'Little Paul the Communist' was held up as a moral paragon for Soviet youth; the message being that love of country comes before that of parents. V. Amlinski had this to say on the subject in *Literaturnaya gazeta* (4 May 1988):

> We can no longer be silent about Pavlik Morozov. . . he was no hero but a terrible victim of his time. His downfall, like that of every human being, prompts horror and compassion, and not the feelings imposed for all these years past.

Amlinski writes of Morozov-as-example, and of 'that inhuman myth of Stalinist collectivisation', requiring 'that sons and daughters, heeding "infallible instincts", send their parents to slaughter'. According to Amlinski, preaching the priority of love for a leader, the party or country, leads to the creation of enemies and the degradation of people to the level of cattle.

As an extension of the above there is the current rejection in the Soviet Union of 'enemy-image' (*obraz vraga*) both in Soviet history ('enemy of the people') and in international politics. Within the framework of this discussion we must also consider the coverage given by the Soviet media to the innumerable anonymous victims of Stalin's terror (and not merely the party heavyweights) for whom a memorial is now planned.

What we have here is the rejection of class morality, the utilitarian ethic on which the Soviet perception of norms has always been based. What is being said in no uncertain terms is that the end may no longer be allowed to justify the means: that man does not exist for the economy but vice versa (*Ogonyok* 1988, No. 2). Or, as Valentin Rasputin — whose work constantly defends the human conscience —

says in his novel *The Fire* (*Pozhar*): annual plans should be calculated not in cubic metres but in human souls.

In current ethical discussions in the Soviet press, one can differentiate between the official party press, e.g. *Voprosy filosofii, Kommunist* and *Nauka i religiya* and articles in other party publications, and the general press, e.g. *Literaturnaya gazeta, Ogonyok* and *Novy mir*, as well as literary works. The first group looks to traditional Soviet ideas for answers to the new problems and writes about them in an equally traditional, irretrievably boring style — albeit with opportunistic use of fashionable expressions. In contrast, one finds the really new ideas in that section of the press with a genuine claim to the title 'progressive', and in *belles lettres*, which have always played a socially committed role in Russian society. And this is where we see a change in the attitude of the Soviet intelligentsia towards Christianity.

In their search for the source of universal human values many writers arrive at a point not far removed from Christianity. Some write openly of 'Christian principles, not their later deviations but values like "thou shalt not kill" and "thou shalt love thy neighbour"' (Yevtushenko), the suffering Christ (Aitmatov), the moral significance of the Russian Orthodox Church (D. Likhachev), the need for charity (Granin), repentance (Abuladze, the film- maker). It is remarkable how often three terms inspired by Christianity recur: spirituality (*dukhovnost'*), charity (*miloserdiye*) and repentance (*pokayaniye*), concepts which would rarely have appeared in the Soviet press in earlier days. Their use proves the extent of the change in attitude to matters spiritual in Soviet society. 'Repentance' could be taken as the slogan for moral *perestroika* in the Soviet Union, just as the biblical 'not by bread alone' symbolised the change of spiritual climate in the 1950s.

Even without pleading expressly for recognition of general Christian or biblical values, writers display a sympathetic attitude to church and religion. They do so by writing appreciatively of the role of the Orthodox tradition in the formation of Russian character; by calling for the publication of 19th- and early 20th-century Russian religious philosophers (including emigres) — and of the Bible; by expressing shame about the destruction of churches, and by defending the rights of the church. Against this background it can be no mere coincidence that full recognition has been granted to Boris Pasternak, perhaps the most religious writer in Soviet literature.

Naturally, official ideology rejects the religious or semi-religious route in the search for a new basis for morality. The traditional criticism of 'god-seeking' in Soviet-Russian literature is now supplemented with a critique of those who propagate 'biblical

morality', 'religious spirituality' and what is called 'ethism' or 'ethical theoretism': the latter being a non-religious based ethical absolutism. An article in *Voprosy filosofii* (1987, No. 3), headed 'Spirituality as a factor in restructuring', attempts a non-religious interpretation of the writers Rasputin and Aitmatov whilst rejecting the absolute status they give to ethical values:

> The way of sacrifice which repeats the experience of Christ and forms a basis for morality, cannot be the general means for the spiritual healing of society, neither can the way of words, of preaching and of ethical theoretism.

The article emphasises social and structural changes 'compared with which the "ethism" of literature and journalism comes over as one-sided' in that it ignores the historical materialistic conditioning of ethics.

This criticism of these writers by professional ideologists may not be unexpected but, weighed against the writers' popularity, it is irrelevant. Long before the party took up the cry, it was the writers who sounded the alarm on the spiritual malaise: the political cynicism, corruption, self-glorification, the informer syndrome, alcoholism, erosion of the work ethic and feeling of responsibility, consumerism (*veshchism*), nihilism among youth, the triviality of mass-culture, the infatuation with pop music, acceptance of the lie, the coarsening of social forms — in short, overall human badness, which now also appears to exist in Soviet society.

Appreciation of the Church

Since *glasnost'* appeared, the positive attitude of a large section of the Soviet intelligentsia towards church and Christianity has spread from literature to the Soviet press. Nowhere is this clearer than in a number of articles by Dmitri Likhachev, one of the foremost members of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and chairman of the Soviet Cultural Fund. In recent years Likhachev has regularly called for a drastic moral renewal of Soviet society. In so doing he referred directly to the moral significance of Christianity. This has made him a sort of conscience for Soviet society and won him considerable respect amongst both the intelligentsia and youth.

In an extensive interview marking the millennium of the Russian Orthodox Church published in *Ogonyok* (1988, No. 10), Likhachev praised the church's role in forming Russian spiritual culture. In accepting Christianity the Russians chose beauty as the criterion for truth; hence, church buildings were promoted as arguments for belief

in the spreading of the faith amongst the Eastern Slavs. And that, according to Likhachev, was the reason for the appearance of many splendid churches so soon in Kievan Rus', a remarkable phenomenon in a recently converted country. Ever since, the aesthetic has enjoyed primacy above philosophy and science in Russian culture. Likhachev rejects the official ideological interpretation of the church's role in Russian culture for its 'vulgar concept of economic laws'. But, Likhachev sees the significance of Christianity not only at the aesthetic but also at the ethical level, hence his criticism of the Russian Orthodox Church's political role in Russian society. He has this to say: 'Christianity is not an ideology — whether bourgeois or socialist. It is a *Weltanschauung* plus provider of ethical standards for every-day life.' He points to the shallowness of current interest in the church in Russian society: 'True, going to church is a display of protest against the official lie, but if one goes to church to be fashionable, that too is a lie.' Attachment to the church must also lead to a 'change in way of life and habits. . . Christianity requires deeds. Without deeds belief dies. And there are no deeds just now.'

Likhachev's religious approach to Christianity is also noticeable in the way he puts the millennium of the Russian Church into perspective:

> The official acceptance of Christianity by Kievan Rus' was an act of state, a unification of church and state which deprived the church of its freedom. That is why the present revival of the church must not lead to a reunification of church and state, that would be a disaster for Christianity. The contrary must happen with church and state quite separate so that the church serves only God.

The interview with Dmitri Likhachev is interesting for other reasons. To my knowledge this was the first time the Soviet press — excepting *Moskovskiye novosti* which is mainly aimed at foreign audiences — wrote positively about the millennium, which had always been used by atheist publications as a basis for savage attacks on Russian Orthodox Christianity.

Secondly, it is remarkable that Likhachev's appreciation of the church does not extend to its political stance and support for the state. This is not only flying in the face of standard Soviet propaganda but also of the traditional attitude of the church hierarchy. Likhachev defends the significance of a non-politically aligned concept of the church. He reiterates this explicitly in answer to the interviewer's question of whether a Christian can be a nationalist: 'Christianity is an ecumenical religion, it is for negroes and Chinese; it is international and that makes it a great religion.' And his call for the celebration of a

thousand years of Christianity in Russia to be the occasion for the ending of church dependence on the state dating from the days of Vladimir, rises above the neo-slavophile interpretation of Russian Orthodoxy. That sets him — and this is a third important element of the article — diametrically opposed to Alexander Solzhenitsyn who, otherwise, is as much a proponent of the moral values of Christianity and the cultural values of Orthodoxy.

A positive approach to the church is also more frequently heard in the official paper of the Soviet Writers' Union. On 13 April 1988 *Literaturnaya gazeta* published an article on the millennium which noted approvingly that for the first time Soviet and church scholars had come together in a conference which was not devoted to peace or even cultural matters. Several foreign participants are quoted at length — but not one Russian theologian. Three weeks later *Literaturnaya gazeta* (4 May 1988) contained a further plea for dialogue between atheists and believers, something which had not happened since the 1920s. Then came an atheist confession of guilt: we atheists have failed to recognize the contribution of Christianity to world culture and knowledge of the inner-man. And, although the article saw the failure to invite theologians to the conference as another missed opportunity, 'the aureole of scientific atheism's sinlessness has now diminished'. What the article fails to mention was that two submissive atheists (Zots and Proshin) had recently written some malicious books about the Russian Church. And indeed one is unlikely to be impressed by the openness and objectivity of scientific atheists in debate with believers. With all the hopeful developments in church-state relations, and despite calls by the Soviet press for the Bible to be published, the church would be an unequal partner in any dialogue given its lack of access to the media.

Precisely because the church is still unable to participate actively in Soviet society's present ethical debate, pro-church or crypto-Christian statements by the Soviet press, authors and scholars acquire an extra dimension: an ideological surplus value. They form, as it were, a religious barometer showing the attitude of the Soviet intelligentsia towards religion, this in contrast to massively distributed, unread — and unreadable — atheist propaganda. That some of Russia's greatest writers and most respected scholars speak up for the church is in itself an erosion of the atheist maxim that religion is for the stupid and intellectually immature.

We find another defence of the church in *Literaturnaya gazeta* (27 April 1988) under the heading 'Staying yourself'. Vladimir Soloukhin, the author of this nostalgic article prompted by the millennium, suggests that:

> Whatever one may think about it, one thing is certain: the state's consciousness, spritual life and culture developed under the influence of the Orthodox Church, or at least hand-in-hand with the church. The Russian took not a single step without making the sign of the cross: he neither ate nor lay down to rest, neither picked up tool nor weapon without crossing himself.

This is not meant jeeringly or pejoratively as is clear from Soloukhin's lyrical recall of the 'hundred thousand churches and belfries which marked the Russian landscape until the third decade of this century'. To Soloukhin's mind, rather than taking part in the millennium celebrations the state should perform some worthy deed such as returning the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev to the church.

Love for the Russian church-landscape is a recurring theme in the Soviet media and in literature. More is involved than mere romantic sentiment. There is outright bafflement and collective shame for the ideological foolishness of militant atheism which destroyed so much of the cultural-architectural heritage during the thirties. Certainly the general feeling among writers and journalists appears to be that the destruction of their own religious heritage is as tragic as the ecological devastation of the soil of Russia.

The search for new values is clear from a press article about Soviet young people restoring monastery buildings. The article headed 'Youth discovers history: the latest fashion or search for self?' in *Literaturnaya gazeta* (6 April 1988) gives an animated report on the restoration of a northern monastery by 20 young people. The correspondent writes that they are motivated neither by false romanticism nor by money. The motives of these youngsters

> cannot be expressed in words. . . this is a quite selfless, even idealistic — in the original sense of the word — movement. . . a search for a closer-knit basis than hedonism and vulgar consumerism. . . It is a search for one's roots, not romantic — rather pragmatic: save what remains.

The correspondent quotes an elderly local woman who remembers how her husband daubed the frescoes with the words: 'First we must paint over the most important god, Jesus the Pantocrator,' after which, she told him, 'everything was liquidated and the *kolkhoz* started.' The writer distances himself from the extremist movement *Pamyat'* which exploits the cultural feelings of the Russian people. In his opinion, the young restorers have other things on their minds: 'history as moral value, being in touch with the truth and the idea of beauty, a philosophy of life'.

Charity

As well as being occupied with a spiritual culture in which the church's values and universal philosophical concepts like truth and beauty come together, today's Soviet media also devotes attention to concrete ethical values with clear religious connotations — namely charity and repentance. The first of these was introduced by the writer Daniil Granin with a sensational article in *Literaturnaya gazeta* (18 March 1987). Granin had previously attracted attention with his novel *Bison* (*Zubr*) about the genetecist Timofeyev, a victim of Stalin's vilification. The book took up themes like immortality, suffering and 'the question of all questions', i.e. the source of the ethical imperative in man. Granin treats these in the concrete context of the Soviet intellectual: 'Bison was not inclined to philosophise. Biology compelled him to think about the eternal questions, about life and death, in other words — about belief. But, his ideas were not drawn from books, they came from experience.'

Granin is even more explicit in the *Literaturnaya gazeta* article. He rehabilitates a term which had been taboo for 60 years: charity. To realise the significance of this one has to appreciate that the Soviet view of charity has always been something typical of the church — and the capitalist church at that — a cover-up for structural injustice for which the church is partly to blame. However, systematic neglect of certain groups in Soviet society — the aged, the handicapped, people without families, the sick and the dying — is now admitted, even in official circles. Although the media refer increasingly to the degrading circumstances of these people, Daniil Granin stresses the need for a spiritual reorientation:

> Most people see the expression 'charity' as something old fashioned, unpopular, even strange. It's something which existed only in times gone by. Dictionaries classify terms like 'Sisters of Charity' and 'Brothers of Charity' as archaic. . . But in every day life people ask charity and compassion of each other.

Granin goes on to give a shocking account of the situation in a Leningrad hospital: one nurse to 90 patients, people dying ignored and without dignity in corridors. He calls the absence of any form of support for the dying a collective scandal in Soviet society. Care of the dying, according to Granin, is the yardstick of society's humanity; and this is where lessons can be learned from supposedly archaic forms of charity. Granin points respectfully to the Christian sacrament for the sick, confession and communion, which grant the believer a dignified death.

Granin sees the cause of Soviet society's harshness in Stalinism's

ban on any show of compassion for its victims or their families. He further points to the paradox that youthful idealism is encouraged for industrial projects like the *BAM* railway — but not for help to one's neighbour. Granin also contrasts 19th-century Russian literature's fondness for the social outcast with the mock heroics propagated by Soviet literature which ignores the victims' personal suffering:

> The suffering in our history, both pre- and post-war, still awaits honourable rehabilitation, not for revenge but for sympathy and recognition. . . Rehabilitation under the law is one thing, to return to those who suffered in all innocence that which they deserve is quite another. . . That is the meaning of charity to the dead. . .

And yet again, speaking of the current situation, Granin calls for non-state aid for the isolated, the sick, the poor in Soviet society. He states that the poor do indeed exist 'with us'.

Granin's article caused something of a furore in Soviet society; to say nothing of countless letters and discussions in the media, with the disgraceful state of hospitals to the fore. The absence of care and support for the dying and of any decent funeral arrangements were particularly hot subjects. Against this background the publication of Vladimir Soloukhin's novel *The Burial of Stepanida Ivanovna*, 20 years after it had been written (*Novy mir* 1987, No. 9) had added significance. In his novel, Soloukhin describes the difficulty he had in arranging a religious 'and thus humane' burial for his mother. The tale is a bitter complaint against 'the civilisation-mocking' regulations of the Soviet burial bureaucracy which make it impossible to honour the last wishes of the deceased.

A month later, in *Novy mir* (1987, No. 10) we find a general ethical-philosophic reflection prompted by the concept of *miloserdiye* (mercy, charity). The article in question — 'The Search for the Absolute' by Arseni Gulyga — contains a new approach to ethics and morals, and a positive evaluation of Christianity's role in morality:

> For centuries moral up-bringing has been promoted by — my hand trembles at writing the word here — religion. The trembling is not due to uncertainty but because I anticipate the fury of our 'scientific' atheists who smite every good word said for religion with an anathema.

The author then promptly wipes the floor with the dogmas of vulgar, pseudo-scientific atheism and he defends, whilst recognising the historical errors made by religion, Christianity's contribution to the cultural development of mankind. The humanistic values of Christianity are put on a level beside Lenin's and Gorbachev's

'universal human values'. The writer pleads strongly for publication of the Bible, 'one of the greatest fruits of world culture'. 'Why must our children learn of the god Zeus' philanderings, which have no bearing whatsoever on morality, but hear nothing of the temptations of Christ, his life and death?' Gulyga is equally surprised that Soviet citizens are deprived of a significant literary and religious work like 'Sermon on the Law and Grace', by the 11th-century Kievan Bishop Ilarion.

And, he wants to see other blank spots in Soviet ethical studies filled — with the publication of Lessing, Kant, Schopenhauer, and the Christian philosopher Vladimir Solov'yev in particular. Gulyga believes Solov'yev's excommunication by Soviet philosophy was totally unjust; indeed his criticism of positivism and rationalism makes him one of the greatest ethicists of all time according to Gulyga. His moral-philosophical works have lost nothing of their importance and deserve to be published in the Soviet Union, at long last. Taken as a whole, Gulyga's article endeavours to formulate a new ethic with absolute values but without a direct link to an image of God. That comes out in the aphorism: 'God does not exist, but we must all carry him in our hearts.' To be specific, the author rejects the 'uncharitableness' in Soviet ethics such as thinking in terms of enemy-images, the glorification of violence and 'the reduction of the mystery of death to a medical fact'.

The recognition in Soviet society of the need for charitable works is demonstrated by the invitation of Mother Teresa of Calcutta to Kiev, and the positive media reporting of her work internationally and among the victims of Chernobyl. There are also calls in the press for the church to be allowed to carry out charitable works; *Literaturnaya gazeta* (9 December 1987) took great care in couching just such a plea. The author suggests that economic savings for the state would compensate for any propaganda-goodwill accruing to the church, in that: 'believers are motivated more by moral than commercial considerations.' Charitable activity by the church would indeed solve a major problem for the state. Just how cynical is the attitude of some Soviet government officials in this connection, is illustrated by a *samizdat* report of a meeting at the Higher Party School in Moscow. Here Konstantin Kharchev, head of the Council for Religious Affairs, recognised that there was a 'catastrophic shortage of junior medical personnel in hospitals — 20,000 nurses in Moscow alone'. But, he is worried about the propaganda repercussions if the church starts 'to take around the urine bottles in hospitals. . . what is the political and moral image of the communist going to look like if a person dies with the thought that Soviet power cannot hand him the urine bottle?' (*Russkaya mysl'*, 20 May 1988). Kharchev also feared that Catholics and Protestants would be more active in this area than the Orthodox.

Even so, the discussion centred on Daniil Granin's article has had some results. The first 'Charity Association' was recently set up in Leningrad to coordinate volunteer work in hospitals and nursing homes (*Literaturnaya gazeta*, 4 May 1988). Granin himself was elected its president and called for the involvement of the church. He hoped that the legal ban on charitable activity by the church, dating from 1929, would be abolished as part of the current revision of religious legislation. Patriarch Pimen, on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church, had already offered to allow nuns to do hospital work in an interview published in *Izvestiya* (8 April 1988), at about the same time as Kharchev's comment about church-borne chamber pots.

Repentance and the Sense of Guilt

Another concept playing a prominent part in Soviet society's ethical discussion is 'repentance'. It is also the title of Tengiz Abuladze's impressive film on political dictatorship and spiritual tyranny, and the starting point for many an observation on the phenomenon of Stalinism. That the title has to be seen both as a metaphor and in a religious context is clear from the course of the film and its ending. In the closing sequence a woman is asked: 'Does this street lead to the church?'. The answer is 'No', to which the surprised questioner replies: 'Why is there a street if it does not lead to the church?'

Some critics, deeply disturbed by the religious implications of the closing words, and hence the film, picked on the question posed: for example, Igor' Klyamkin in his article 'Which street to the Church?' (*Novy mir* 1987, No. 11). This essay clearly shows the extent to which the religious and semi-religious dimensions dominate ethical discussion in the Soviet Union. Whatever the case, Klyamkin rejects the way to the church and concentrates his criticism on what he calls 'the first call to repentance' by the *Vekhi* philosophers including Nikolai Berdyaev and Sergei Bulgakov in 1909. In many ways these Christian thinkers had anticipated the ethical questions now confronting Soviet society. Their book *Vekhi* (*Landmarks*), a major blank spot in Russian intellectual history, is avidly read by today's intelligentsia. Klyamkin criticises the fact that it has not been published but quotes extensively from another work dating from 1921, *Smena vekh* (*Change of Landmarks*) which refutes *Vekhi*-ist concepts. This is not the place to go into this historical debate amongst Soviet intellectuals, but I firmly believe that the inevitable future publication of *Vekhi* in the Soviet Union will give a new direction to the ethical discussion.

Current talk of repentance in the Soviet media is linked to the consciousness of collective guilt for the crimes of the Stalinist era and

the lies of Brezhnev's time. The horrors of Soviet history are partly due to the collaboration of all. It is now being said that criticism of Stalin and Brezhnev must not be allowed to become a moral alibi for opportunism, cowardice and passivity. This is the message in many letters to the press. Those same letters express surprise that matters were ever allowed to reach such a state, and the conclusion is that the future will repeat itself unless people triumph over the Stalinist mentality within themselves.

Paradoxically, the very people who have always given free rein to their consciences, the dissidents, are only just beginning to make themselves heard via the media. However, there are others, whose moral integrity is equally unquestioned, who do have access to the media, in particular Dmitri Likhachev. In the article 'From Repentance to Deed' (*Literaturnaya gazeta*, 9 September 1987), he writes: 'No one can claim that he is without guilt: we all carry guilt for what has happened in the decades gone by. I say it again: everyone with no exceptions.' And he turns on the 'slavish psychology, the fear Stalin instilled in our flesh and blood and which still marks and maims our consciousness'. Speaking of the causes underlying the loss of ethical values in Soviet society, Likhachev refers to the moral significance of the church and the universality of her commandments 'thou shalt not kill' and 'thou shalt not bear false witness'. He reproaches atheist propaganda for not understanding religion, and he calls on the state to end the ban on publication of the Bible and religious literature.

We find a sense of guilt without religious motivation in the report of an editorial meeting at *Literaturnaya gazeta*, (17 February 1988). The report, entitled 'Foundations of a New Consciousness', does not give a ready-made philosophical alternative — Soviet philosophy is called 'the maidservant of social demagogy' — but those involved look for answers to the problem of good and evil in Russian literature. Any positive influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on ethical-philosophic thought in Russian literature is rejected, but the meeting recognised the value of 'reforming-religious' thought in, for instance, Lev Tolstoy, and the spiritual significance of modern authors like Aitmatov and Rasputin. Opinions differ on responsibility for the Stalinist past. One participant in the discussion rejects the collective sense of guilt as 'too reminiscent of original sin'. In his opinion an entire generation cannot be blamed for the evil committed by a few; that means the most scrupulous people accepting the guilt 'while the really guilty — there in hell — smile scornfully at the tortured consciences'. In answer he is told that everyone is guilty of contributing to Stalin's personality cult:

> The personality cult is not specific to the twenties and thirties, it is a situation, a behaviour model, a mechanism in consciousness and culture which remains active to this day. If we do not realise our guilt, if we reassure ourselves, events will repeat themselves.

In the course of this last argument a critical remark is made on Anatoli Rybakov's anti-Stalinist book *The Children of the Arbat* (*Deti Arbata*):

> The most important thing is not mentioned, that the heart of the matter did not die in the technology of power employed by Stalin but in the fact that those around him, the party leaders and revolutionaries of yesteryear were silent.

The Soviet intelligentsia faces a moral dilemma. If the long-time defenders of the lie under Stalin and Brezhnev are to be condemned, who shall do the condemning? For the Brezhnev era the question is more urgent; it is a period of which writers, journalists and scientists are deeply ashamed. This painful subject comes up in a discussion in *Ogonyok* (1988, No. 12). Someone has this to say about a senior academic who has become now deeply critical of economic science in the Soviet Union:

> But if I read this criticism, I think: all the time you were helping with the studies which everyone now vilifies. Did you ever disagree with any of it? No, apart from the fact that you didn't stick your neck out, you never even got into a conflict, they didn't fire you for objecting, you became a doctor, even finer — a professor!. . . Can I really believe you now that you start to criticise when it's allowed?!

And then the speaker turns to his partners in discussion: 'You think that people like that should be punished at the bar of public opinion. O.K., but who will judge them?. . . if we, sitting here, collaborated in creating these myths. . .' But there is resistance to this idea of collective responsibility. Someone calls it an easy option 'to shout where were you — from the highest moral tower', or to quote the Bible: 'Judge not lest ye be judged also.' He argues himself free of most guilt only to admit, towards the end of the discussion, that as far as moral responsibility is concerned, what is needed is not yesterday's simple solution — 'down with the enemy' — but a step in the direction of 'the moral renaissance of society'.

And so ends the exchange, indecisively. But one thing is quite clear from such discussions in the Soviet media: to Soviet man the problem of Stalinism and the Brezhnev-lie transcends party politics and historiography. Neither legal rehabilitation of the victims nor revision

of the history will be enough to overcome the legacy of the past. The Soviet Union under Gorbachev is undergoing a basic change of mentality. The significance of traditional Christian values in this reassessment process is that they arise not out of church involvement, but out of the independent search by Soviet intellectuals for ethical guarantees against the past repeating itself.