

Editorial

From the need to express in a formalized and memorable way important moments in human life have sprung rituals of various kinds. A birthday party with its symbols of cake and candles is an important ritual in a child's life, whilst, on a grander level, the festivities, celebrating the October Revolution, form a ritual which marks the passage of time in the life of Soviet society.

"Les sages" in Renaissance Italy, according to Voltaire in his *Essai sur les Moeurs*, enjoyed the pleasures of the mind and despised "les pratiques superstitieuses, de fausses traditions, des miracles supposés". The inhabitants of the Soviet Union seem not so enlightened: ceremonies, rituals and traditions are still popular. To satisfy the need to ritualize, the Soviet authorities have tried to create new rituals and traditions to replace the old, in particular to replace religious rituals. Arnold van Gennep's term "passage rites" (*Rites de Passage*, 1909) can be applied to some of these new creations. Denoting the passage over a threshold from one place to another, van Gennep applied the term also to the passage from one status to another, e.g. birth, marriage, initiation into adulthood, death.

New Soviet rituals should "reflect the beauty of the Soviet people's spiritual world and satisfy the growing aesthetic and ethical needs" (*Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* 27 Nov., 1968). The aim of such rituals is to replace existing religious rituals which "serve to strengthen the whole complex of religious feelings and prove to be the means by which there opens up a corner in the mind of some ostensibly unbelieving person where the seeds of religion can take root." (*Science and Religion* No. 2, 1969). A number of Soviet "passage rites" were listed in another press article (*Pravda Vostoka* 9 Sept., 1971): the celebration of retirement; initiation into a collective farm; entry into the Pioneers and Komsomol, enacted beside a war memorial in the light of burning torches; the registration of a birth; the receiving of a passport when sixteen; initiation into the army or into the working class (in the former ceremony the young man is seen off by friends, relatives and war veterans and told to serve his Homeland faithfully and truthfully, whereas in the latter he is handed the tools of his trade); weddings were to be made more memorable by the creation of Houses of Happiness. But it seems the gaieties of traditional weddings are more exciting. At weddings in Transbaikalia sheep are slaughtered and quantities of vodka consumed. *Pravda* complained (13 Jan., 1969) that in this area experts on such weddings were travelling from

one to another, acting as masters of ceremonies. At one wedding, apparently not untypical, "the relatives accompanied the bride for more than 200 kilometres to the Ulan-Ude collective farm". On arrival the groom generously invited the whole village to join in and "more than 300 people caroused without interruption for three days". Predictably *Pravda* bemoaned such laziness. To combat a traditional Georgian memorial ceremony for the dead, the local authorities selected some famous Georgians and created a new ritual at which they were commemorated : of course all "educated" Georgians went to this ceremony (*Izvestia* 3 Sept., 1967). Even the primitive rites of Slavs and Balts, the Party considered, might add spice to new Soviet memorial services : if eggs, wine, mead or beer were poured over graves, perhaps this would kindle the imagination (*Science and Religion* No. 2, 1969).

But these new rituals, unlike the national festivals of 1 May and 6 November, have not taken root. More must be done claims the press : "Only with an all-out effort to propagandize and introduce new habits, rituals and traditions will they firmly become part of the people's life" (*Pravda Vostoka* 9 Sept., 1971). Despite such efforts, parents are not satisfied with the Soviet ceremony for registering their offspring and still insist in many cases on having their child baptised : "Specialist investigations show that in some districts this is carried out on up to half of all new-born babies, and even more" (see document section p. 19). Houses of Happiness and their rituals do not have the profound meaning of an Orthodox wedding, and the Orthodox Liturgy, with its synthesis of poetry, painting, drama and music expressing the Christian gospel, has a power of attraction and contains the riches sought by many which new Soviet rituals cannot rival. The book *Heaven on Earth* (see document section pp. 20-21) is a symptom of the interest being shown in the Church by the educated. Written for the intelligent believer, it explains the structure of the Liturgy and the meaning of its symbolism, it explains the various stages of the Church's year and gives the reader an introduction to Biblical history. The demand for a higher standard of preaching is also evidence of such interest. Father Vsevolod Shpiller was asked to give a series of sermons in Lent by his parishioners, (see document section pp. 23-25) and in his introduction, as printed, he wrote :

"More and more frequently and unexpectedly you meet people of the most varied ages and situations who have gone through deep inner spiritual, mental and emotional crises, sometimes through tragic conflicts which they have found insoluble in a non-religious framework."

Such people are turning with many questions to the Church and reading avidly the work of religious thinkers.

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