

who observed religious rituals: according to his figures, in 1965 over 30 per cent of all children born were christened (or took part in corresponding rituals for the newly-born in other religions), while in 1975 only 19 per cent were; in 1975 only 2.5 per cent of marriages took place in church, while 40 per cent of funerals were religious.

About 10–15 per cent of all urban residents and 20–25 per cent of rural inhabitants were religious believers. The fading of religious consciousness was observable also in the prevalence of "Sunday religiosity" among those going to church.

There were 48 religions and religious tendencies in the USSR. Among these were sects which had arisen after the Revolution, such as the True Orthodox Christians, who were openly hostile to Soviet power. "There are now 16,000 congregations of all religious cults, but in print we make the number 20,000", said Furov, "so that the anti-Sovietists won't shout 'they're stamping out religion'."

Furov described the relations between Church and State as "normal", noting that modernist, reforming tendencies were penetrating ever deeper into parish life, actively supporting the home and foreign policy of the USSR. The clergy spoke to their flock not merely of patriotism, but of Soviet patriotism; they upheld Soviet power and called on the believers to observe strictly all legal norms. In this the moral and political unity of the Soviet people was revealed. The Soviet clergy of various denominations had links with 82 countries in the

world, to which they sent their representatives – and not one had failed to return, Furov remarked proudly. For this reason the government considered it possible to give the Church its political support, but, of course, it would not end its ideological struggles against it.

Furov complained that individual servants of the Church and believers allowed themselves to make anti-Soviet statements. Hiero-deacon Varsonofi Khaibulin had suggested that as the Church was separated from the State, atheism should also be separated from it. Active opposition to the church policy of the Soviet Government was being carried on by Regelson, and also by Shafarevich, who had published a book on religious legislation in the USSR.*

Among the 4,000 sectarian congregations which now existed, numbering some 400,000 people, only 60 per cent were loyal to Soviet power; 1,200 congregations of sectarians led an illegal existence, and the majority of these had "an anti-Soviet attitude" – these were the schismatic Baptists, the Adventists, the Innokentians (in Moldavia), the Murashkovites and the True Orthodox Christians.

At the conclusion of his lecture Furov emphasised that the Council was doing a great deal of work on strengthening legality in church-state relations and was disciplining over-zealous officials in the localities.

* I. R. Shafarevich: *Zakonodatelstvo o religii v SSSR*, YMCA-Press, Paris, 1973, 80 pp. Ed.

Committee to Defend Believers Founded

On 27 December 1976 the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights (CCDBR) in the USSR was founded by three members of the Russian Orthodox Church – Fr Gleb Yakunin, hiero-deacon Varsonofi Khaibulin and Viktor Kapitanchuk. The following Declaration, issued by the founding members of the CCDBR, describes the aims of this Committee.

It is the inalienable natural right of every man to believe in God and to live

in accordance with his belief. In principle, this right is acknowledged in the Basic Legislation of the USSR Soviet State Constitution. However, in practice, the principle of freedom of conscience proclaimed in the Constitution comes up against considerable difficulties as regards the attitude to religion of a government which is constructing a non-religious society. This attitude is expressed not only in the character of existing legislation, but also in the violation by the state administrative

authorities of even those rights which believers legally possess. Religious believers form a significant proportion of the population in our country, and a normalisation of their legal position is vitally necessary for the State, since it proclaims itself to be lawful and wholly representative.

Because of this, we considered it our Christian and civil duty to form the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights in the USSR.

At present, the bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church and the leaders of other religious organizations do not concern themselves with the defence of believers' rights, for a variety of reasons. In such circumstances, the Christian community has to make the legal defence of believers its own concern.

The Committee's aim is to help believers to exercise their right of living in accordance with their convictions. The Committee intends:

1. To collect, study and distribute information on the situation of religious believers in the USSR.
2. To give legal advice to believers when their civil rights are infringed.
3. To appeal to state institutions concerning the defence of believers' rights.
4. To conduct research, as far as this is possible, to clarify the legal and factual position of religion in the USSR.
5. To assist in putting Soviet legislation on religion into practice.

The Committee has no political aims.

It is loyal to Soviet laws. The Committee is ready to cooperate with social and state organizations, in so far as such cooperation can help in improving the position of believers in the USSR.

The Committee is made up of members of the Russian Orthodox Church. For centuries, Orthodoxy was the State religion in our country. Orthodox churchmen often allowed the State to use forcible methods to restrict the religious freedom of other denominations. As we acknowledge that any use of compulsion against people on the grounds that they are not Orthodox or belong to a different faith is contrary to the Christian spirit, we consider it our especial duty to take the initiative in defending the religious freedom of all believers in our country, regardless of denomination.

We ask our fellow Christians to pray that God may help us in our human frailty.

Members of the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights:

GLEB YAKUNIN,
priest

VARSONOFI KHAIBULIN,
hierodeacon

VIKTOR KAPITANCHUK,
secretary of the Committee

Address: V. A. Kapitanchuk,
Sevastopolsky Prospekt 61, kv. 4,
Moscow.

27 December 1976

Christian Critique of Soviet Draft Constitution

The following Appeal from members of the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights (CCDBR) in the USSR is dated 8 June 1977 and was addressed to L. I. Brezhnev, chairman of the Constitutional Commission which drew up the new Soviet Constitution. The Draft Constitution was unanimously passed by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on 7 October 1977.

Respected Chairman of the Constitutional Commission!

The Draft of the new Constitution of the USSR proclaims:

"A new historical community of people has been formed – the Soviet people. It is a society of high organizational capacity, ideological commitment and consciousness of the working people who are patriots and internationalists."

Nevertheless, this society includes people of greatly differing views, persuasions and beliefs. A significant part of it