

Editorial

“Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened.” Thus Alexander Solzhenitsyn describes the main cause of the revolution that cost some sixty million of his countrymen their lives. He believes that man’s abandonment of God is also the underlying reason for most of the evils of the twentieth century. Speaking in London’s Guildhall on 10 May, where he received this year’s Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, Solzhenitsyn concluded with this recommendation: “. . . we can only reach with determination for the warm hand of God, which we have so rashly and self-confidently pushed away. . . There is nothing else to cling to, in the landslide. . .”

Evidence of what can result when men and women do “reach . . . for the warm hand of God” is coming ever more strongly and persistently from Solzhenitsyn’s homeland of Russia and from other communist countries. This is regularly documented in the *Sources* section of *RCL*, and in this issue by far the richest material is found in the Soviet Religious Samizdat section (pp. 193-7). The courage and spiritual depth of believers, imprisoned or otherwise facing hardship, can both sober and inspire us: here is a rich quarry for those seeking material for sermons, talks and discussions, for public worship, and for private prayer and meditation. So is the story of the imprisoned Zoya Krakhmalnikova, movingly recorded by her husband, Felix Svetov (pp. 210-13): it captures not merely the fact of their conversion and new Christian lives as writers, but also much of the texture of their daily lives and the Moscow atmosphere. Many more such accounts appear in Michael Bourdeaux’s new book *Risen Indeed: Lessons in Faith from the USSR*, reviewed on pp. 222-3.

However, the lives of believers in communist countries are not characterised merely by spiritual discoveries and certainties, powerful though these are: there is also frequently controversy and conflict, often between churches and states, but sometimes within or between churches. In the Soviet Union Russian nationalism continues to be a significant theme in unofficial and, increasingly, official intellectual life and to play an important part in the life of the Russian Orthodox Church. The *samizdat* journal *Mnogaya leta*, discussed by John Dunlop on pp. 146-60, is one manifestation of this, and to many minds a disturbingly unhealthy one. The journal’s advocacy of a concordat between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Soviet State, and other views which put its authors far to

the right of Solzhenitsyn on the nationalist question, have attracted strong criticism from other non-conformist Orthodox intellectuals. In Yugoslavia there has been controversy between Catholic bishops and the self-managing Theological Association *Kršćanska Sadašnjost* (Contemporary Christianity) following the Vatican's ban on priests belonging to politicised bodies (pp. 200-2). Also in Yugoslavia, in 1978, a Slovenian professor of theology, Franc Rode, gave a lecture as part of a recognised theology course which could not be published because it included references to the restrictions on church life — a great loss, since it contains a number of fresh and thought-provoking ideas, and does not shrink from criticism of the Church as well as the State (pp. 217-21). In East Germany the fiftieth anniversary of Hitler's accession to power in January 1933 excited considerable interest in the press and prompted the churches as well as the party to ponder the painful events of the recent past (pp. 170-77).

However, the churches can have a positive role to play in situations of conflict. As the troubles in Poland continue, a commitment to non-violence is being developed in the Catholic Church which may act as a restraining influence at moments of tension (pp. 161-69). And a review of the selected writings of the Hungarian Lutheran bishop Lajos Ordass shows how one church leader coped with political controversy.

Two articles observe shifts in religious policy in both the Soviet Union and China recently. The new Chinese Constitution contains revised articles on religion which reflect some new official thinking and also the mushrooming of religious life which has taken place recently (pp. 130-34). And an article describing the Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism in Leningrad notes that there has been a considerable muting of its formerly crude anti-religious exhibitions (pp. 124-29).

In North Korea, by contrast, there appears to be no change at all, and even fragmentary news of Christians there is virtually unobtainable. Kenneth Wells's article provides valuable background to the present situation by describing the dynamic Protestant movement which began at the end of the last century and which played an important role in national life (pp. 135-45). Since about 1950, though, there has been almost total silence. Our knowledge of this country is even less than our knowledge of Albania.

Solzhenitsyn included a note of hope in his Templeton Prize address: ". . . no matter how formidably communism bristles with tanks and rockets, no matter what success it attains in seizing the planet, it is doomed never to vanquish Christianity". In most of the countries of Eastern Europe today, and now in China too, the truth of this can be seen. For North Korea, at present, it is a matter for faith and prayer.