

1985. It does not yet, however, appear to have been given the status of party orthodoxy. An article which appeared earlier in 1985 in *Guangming Ribao* (the daily paper in Guangming) emphasises the view of the so-called "leftists", representing the other end of the Chinese political spectrum:

In the socialist society, although certain changes have taken place in the form and content of religion, its nature as a drug for the people has not changed. The main evidence for this is that the traditional ideas of religion (such as "Heaven", "Hell", and "Samsara" [transmigration of souls —

*Ed.*) have remained unchanged. Without these religion cannot be called religion . . . . . This is entirely different from the communist world outlook . . . . .

It is necessary to unite with the broad masses of religious believers, so that they can make concerted efforts with us to accelerate the construction of the four modernisations . . . . . A society without God will surely come.

There are, however, clear signs that Zhao's views are gaining ground at the expense of the "leftists".

ARVAN GORDON

## Bibles and New Testaments Printed in China

During 1986 more than 250,000 Chinese New Testaments and half a million complete Chinese Bibles will have been printed in the People's Republic of China on paper supplied by the United Bible Societies. Hymnbooks and other literature will also be printed.

The actual work of printing and distribution is in the hands of the Amity Foundation (a non-government and non-church organisation devoted to various aspects of social service). The general secretary of the Amity Foundation, Mr Han Wenzao (a prominent Protestant leader) writes:

The aims of the foundation are to contribute to China's social development and efforts towards modernisation, to make Christian involvement and participation more widely known to the Chinese people, and to serve as a channel for the international sharing of resources and people-to-people relationships.

The venture involves an agreement between the Amity Foundation and Nanjing Normal University; the latter will provide

the premises for the new printing press on which the work is to be carried out. It is hoped that the new supply of Scriptures will go some way towards satisfying the immense need among Christians in the People's Republic. An appeal for 6.7 million US dollars has been launched by the United Bible Societies to finance the necessary equipment.

During 1985 more than 60,000 Chinese New Testaments and 100,000 Chinese Bibles were printed on paper supplied by the United Bible Societies. The one hundred tons of thin Bible paper made possible the early delivery of Bibles of better quality than had earlier been obtainable. Mr Han Wenzao expressed his thanks, saying, "Owing to the good quality of the paper, these Bibles are thinner and more handy."

It should be emphasised, all the same, that the printing of Bibles and other religious literature represents no more than a minor aspect of the work of the Amity Foundation. The Foundation's main purpose is seen as the general social betterment of the Chinese people.

ARVAN GORDON

## New Leaders for the Protestant Church in the GDR

On 2 February 1986 Dr Werner Leich, Bishop of Thuringia, was elected as the new

Chairman of the Conference of Protestant Church leaderships. He succeeds Dr Johan-

nes Hempel, Bishop of Dresden, who (it is believed) had indicated his desire to stand down owing to pressure of work; Dr Hempel is a President of the World Council of Churches in addition to his other duties. Dr Leich is 59, and has been Bishop of Thuringia since 1978; he has the reputation of being a "conservative Lutheran". Dr Leich brings a rich experience to his new post. He was appointed to the Chairmanship of the Church Committee which was set up in 1978 to organise the Luther quincentenary celebrations of 1983; he also headed the four-man liaison group which represented the church at meetings of the State Luther Committee. In this latter capacity he stoutly defended the view of Luther as first and foremost a disciple of Jesus Christ, rather than a 16th century socialist. Frank and outspoken on other occasions, Leich has often

shown himself to be a faithful witness to the Christian Gospel.

Dr Leich's two deputies will be Dr Christoph Demke, Bishop of Magdeburg (who takes the place of Bishop Gienke of Greifswald), and the church lawyer Manfred Stolpe, who is responsible for church administration in the province of Berlin-Brandenburg. Stolpe, who is 49, is said to have good contacts with party members at the highest level, and has good experience of dealing with representatives of the state.

The lay President is to be Dr Rainer Gaebler (47), an engineer who works at a Leipzig research institute. He has been a member of the Synod of the Church Province of Saxony since 1972, and has served as its President.

ARVAN GORDON

## The "Islamic Factor" in the Soviet Union

At five-yearly intervals the Communist Party of the Soviet Union holds a Congress to discuss the achievements and failings of the party since the last such gathering and to set the course for future developments in Soviet society. Earlier this year (25 February-6 March) the 27th Congress was held in Moscow attended by delegates from throughout the USSR as well as from foreign communist parties. For once this gathering was eagerly awaited and seen by many commentators as the occasion at which the new General Secretary Gorbachov would set his mark upon the Soviet polity. In one sense outside observers were not disappointed, for Gorbachov initiated fairly sweeping criticisms of the running of the Soviet Union under Brezhnev. Yet simultaneously he made it clear that his goal was not to change the system but to make it work better.

Addressing the previous Congress in 1981 the then General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev had made explicit reference to Islam. Noting that communists respected the religious beliefs of others, he had nevertheless warned that Islamic slogans could be used for reactionary as well as progressive ends. At the time it was clear that he had in mind recent events in Iran and Afghanistan.

Gorbachov's speech in 1986 made no such reference. Instead he left the issue of

Islam to be dealt with, albeit briefly, by I. B. Usmankhodzhayev, First Secretary of the Uzbekistan Republic Communist Party. For the latter "old prejudices and harmful customs" — favourite Soviet code words for religion — were amongst various undesirable tendencies still to be found in Soviet society. Moving on to his real target, Usmankhodzhayev attacked "our class enemies" who utilised the so-called "Islamic factor" in their efforts to undermine Soviet power. Implicit in his remarks was the idea that Islam was no longer of any great significance in Soviet society but rather was a feudal "survival" kept alive by "dark forces" at home and the external stimulus of foreign foes.

Ironically only a month earlier the same speaker had given a speech to the Uzbek republican congress in which he devoted considerable attention to the continued strength of Islam in Soviet Central Asia. Concentrating his attention on the Namangan *oblast* (region) Usmankhodzhayev had noted the increasing activism of unregistered religious associations which were providing illegal religious instruction for women and young people.

That Namangan region should be singled out by the Uzbek First Secretary was not entirely surprising, for it has recently been under frequent attack for the weakness of its atheist work. Soviet press accounts have