

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

also documented the existence of religious schools in the area and two Muslims from the Samarkand region arrested in early 1985 for the illegal distribution of religious literature were found to have obtained the material from Zakir Tadzhibayev, an unregistered mullah who had opened an illegal school in his Namangan home. In the same province was to be found the *mazar* (tomb) of Khojami Kabri, closed down and transformed into an atheist museum in 1963 but still an object of pilgrimage for many Central Asians.

Further evidence that Islam was far from dying out could be found in speeches delivered at other Central Asian party congresses during January and February of this year. In Tadzhikistan it appeared that the number of those participating in religious rites was increasing; in Kirghizia "Islamic preachers were strengthening their influence on women, young people and children" and over the last five years the income of religious organisations had risen by 16 per cent; in Kazakhstan the younger generation were increasingly influenced by religious beliefs, according to First Secretary Kunayev.

From the Kremlin's perspective the more open participation in religious activity by Central Asians had a political aspect, for it was seen as closely connected with local nationalism. This was hinted at in Gorbachov's speech to the 27th Congress when he attacked those works of art coming from the national republics which "under the guise of national originality" sought to idealise "reactionary nationalist and religious survivals". A similar theme was taken up by Usmankhodzhayev at the Uzbek Congress when he warned that religious prejudices often encouraged nationalism and chauvinism and thus were detrimental to the well-being of Soviet society.

This attack on nationalist tendencies has been closely linked over recent years with the attempt to isolate Soviet Muslims from events in the wider *Umma* (community of the faithful — *Ed.*). A speaker at the Tadzhik party congress pointed out that the reactivation of Islam in the USSR "had been fostered to some degree by recent events in certain countries of the surrounding region". Over recent years, however, concern over events on the Soviet southern border has been most apparent in the republic of Turkmenistan. A particular target here

has been Iran's Radio Gorgan which has been accused of stirring up anti-Russian feeling against the non-believing Russians. That this radio station had a Turkmen audience was made plain by press accounts of believers gathering in the home of an unregistered mullah in Ashkhabad — where there are no mosques — to listen to, discuss and record Gorgan broadcasts. It is hard to believe that the Soviet authorities are unaware of the role of the cassette in spreading Khomeini's teachings in Iran during the 1970s.

What was clear from the speeches of the Central Asian leaders was the fact that many local party committees failed to take atheist work seriously. Usmankhodzhayev reminded his listeners that anti-religious work needed to be treated as an essential part of ideological work and that party organisations should cease to turn a blind eye to those communists participating in religious rites. Worse still many ignored the fact that state enterprises and resources were used for the illegal manufacture of souvenirs embellished with religious sayings or the likenesses of religious leaders.

In the spring of 1985 the Azerbaidzhan Russian-language daily *Bakinsky rabochi* (Baku Worker) published a report on the trial of a group involved in the illegal production of religious literature. Interesting here was the fact that these Baku print workers had used the presses and resources of the Azerbaidzhan Oil Ministry to produce books in Arabic script. Usmankhodzhayev's comments suggest that the use of state institutions for such purposes is a not uncommon phenomenon.

Though the speeches of the Central Asian leaders clearly indicate that Islam is alive and well in the Soviet Union, we must exercise caution in using terms such as "Islamic revival" for this implies that Soviet Muslims had ceased to believe at some time in the recent past. Nevertheless the level of commitment to the faith, particularly amongst the younger generation, does appear to have risen over the last decade or so, and whilst Soviet leaders have always complained about the continuing existence of "religious survivals", speeches appearing in recent years do reveal a greater concern.

In explaining the renewed Central Asian interest in their Islamic heritage and faith a number of factors need to be taken into account. Firstly, the rising birth rate in the Muslim areas of the Soviet Union with

something like four Muslims being born for every single Russian. This has implications for both the Soviet economy — with the prospect of extensive labour surpluses in Central Asia — and for the military — with some commentators suggesting that up to a third of the Red Army could be from the Muslim population by the end of the century. Thus it was interesting to find a member of the officially-recognised Muslim establishment noting the occasional opening of mosques in recent years in terms of the growing number of Muslims.

Perhaps more important has been the influence of greater Muslim self-awareness and assertiveness in the wider world, with events in Iran and Afghanistan of particular significance. Of course the differing conditions prevailing in the USSR should caution us against making predictions about the possibility of some sort of Islamic upheaval in that country. Rather events in the *Umma* should be seen as giving Soviet Muslims a greater self confidence in their relations with Russian rulers.

JOHN ANDERSON

Recantations by Religious Prisoners in the Soviet Union

In November 1985, the Soviet press published reports of recantations by Christian prisoners of conscience Sergei Markus and Harri Mõtsnik, both serving three-year sentences for, respectively, "slandering the Soviet state" and "anti-Soviet propaganda". In January 1986, Markus appeared on Soviet television to back up his renunciation with a public act of penitence which he made in an apparently normal voice and without notes. Also in November 1985, at the trial of Christian rock musicians Valeri Barinov and Sergei Timokhin, Timokhin declared that he had done wrong by playing Christian music and preaching. He too later gave a television interview to Soviet journalists in which he denounced his friend Barinov's contacts abroad.*

In April 1986, the Soviet news agency TASS reported the recantation of Boris Razveyev, a Russian Orthodox prisoner sentenced to three years in 1984, who had been associated with the unofficial Christian Seminar in the 1970s.** The Seminar had held discussion groups on religion, history and philosophy in Moscow. Razveyev likewise appeared on Soviet television at peak evening viewing time to read out his recantation.

The public act of confession is not new to

Soviet life. In the 1930s, Stalin forced his political opponents to stand up in court and admit that they had conspired with foreign powers to bring down the Soviet system. More recently, the case of Father Dimitri Dudko received widespread attention from the western press. Father Dimitri became well known in the 1970s for his thought-provoking sermons which helped to bring hundreds if not thousands into the church. As a result he came under increasing pressure from the KGB, and in January 1980 he was arrested.

In June 1980 he appeared on television and expressed regret that he had crossed the line between religion and politics. Since then there have been a number of recantations by Orthodox believers. In September 1980, Lev Regelson, who was standing trial for "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda", repented of his past actions during his hearing, and vowed henceforth to devote himself to strictly religious activity. He was given a five-year suspended sentence. In October 1980, Viktor Kapitanchuk, a founder-member of the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights in the USSR, pleaded guilty to a similar charge and declared that he had supplied foreign contacts with "defamatory fabrications against the Soviet state and social system". He likewise received a suspended sentence of five years. In March 1980, Valeri Repin, a journalist and Orthodox believer from Leningrad, made a televised confession in which he said that he had been manipulated by US Intelligence.

*For background information, see *RCL* Vol. 13 No. 2, 1985, pp. 211-13 — *Ed.*

**For articles on the Christian Seminar, see *RCL* Vol. 8 No. 2, 1980, pp. 92-112, and Vol. 9 Nos. 3-4, 1981, pp. 111-26 — *Ed.*