

Editorial

The last issue of *RCL* was overtaken by events. Only days after Vol. 14, No. 3 went to press, Irina Ratushinskaya, who, we reported in a *Chronicle* item, had 3½ years of camp and five years' internal exile still to serve, was released from detention. Two months later she and her husband arrived in the West.

Events in the Soviet Union are still moving swiftly, and we may well be — indeed, we would be glad to be — overtaken by them once again. As this issue of *RCL* goes to press, the Soviet leadership have announced the release of many more whose crimes were in the “anti-state” category. Just how many will in fact emerge from the camps, and under what conditions, remains to be seen. It remains to be seen also whether Alexander Ogorodnikov (see the *Feature* on pp. 69-78) will be among their number.

Western responses to the new *glasnost*, the liberalisation process, and the latest releases of dissidents are, of course, varied. A step in the right direction cannot but be welcomed; and even if the more sceptical commentators dismiss the latest moves as a mere gesture to Western public opinion, the effects on Soviet society of the new style of government are far from inconsequential.

What concerns us here, of course, is the prospect, in this new atmosphere, for religious believers. Will liberalisation be accompanied by any relaxation in the state's fundamental hostility towards religion? At this point we must turn our attention to the question of ideology. Most totalitarian regimes are concerned simply with the preservation of the rulers and their privileges; ideology, where it exists at all, serves primarily to justify the established order. In communist states, in general, it is accorded rather more importance, and we find ideology woven into the entire fabric of society, with all citizens exposed to political propaganda from their earliest years at school. The question now being asked is how far the process of liberalisation and democratisation can go before the whole ideological basis of the system is called into question and the system itself thereby placed in

jeopardy. The problem with religions — from a communist state's perspective — is that they offer an alternative world-view, on which an alternative society might be built, and it is for this reason that they are perceived as a threat. Furthermore, it is commonly held that religion and communism are fundamentally opposed.

But do religion and communism *necessarily* stand opposed? Might it not be possible, in a cultural setting quite different from that of the Soviet Union and its European satellites, for religion and communism to prosper together? Consider for example some of the newer, non-European communist countries. In some, such as Ethiopia (featured in *RCL* Vol. 14, No. 2), there is strong evidence of an incompatibility. With Nicaragua the situation is less clear, and there are many who see in that country an example of a society where Christianity and communism can enjoy a genuinely harmonious coexistence. That is, however, very much a matter of controversy, controversy compounded by the American interest in the country and by the contention, by some, that Nicaragua is not in fact a Marxist state at all (see the two reviews of Humberto Belli's *Breaking Faith*, pp. 105-108).

The compatibility — or otherwise — of religion and communism raises interesting questions in the fields of theology and political philosophy. But questions of these kinds can be raised quite outside the realm of church-state relations with which *RCL* is, necessarily, preoccupied. In this issue Michael Walsh examines (pp. 79-82) the theological implications of the ideas on church order advanced by the Hungarian piarist György Bulányi. Bulányi and his "Basis" groups have not escaped conflict with state authorities (notably on the matter of conscientious objection — see the *Documents* section of this issue, pp. 96-101), but on this occasion the matter under discussion has little to do with the state or with human rights.

Just suppose — ludicrously optimistically — that the Kremlin's latest moves were to result in the release of *all* religious prisoners. Just suppose the other Eastern European countries were to follow suit. Would *RCL* cease publication? Would Keston College go out of business? Certainly not. However the situation develops in the Soviet Union and its satellites — and elsewhere in the world — the existence and coexistence, harmonious or otherwise, of these different world-views will continue to raise questions which deserve to be addressed; and the church leaders, theologians and believers of those countries will themselves raise questions which deserve to be addressed. *RCL* hopes to provide a forum in which some of the answers can be put forward, and subjected to critical scrutiny.