

section of the decree.

Provided that the charge of "violation of camp regulations" is not brought against them, 28 of the 298 religious prisoners of conscience known by name to Keston College should be released. This figure includes most of the known women prisoners with the exception of Lidiya Tsiorka, a Baptist who has not yet served one-third of her sentence, and two women serving exile sentences (Yelena Sannikova and Tat'yana Velikanova), who were charged under article 70 of the Russian Criminal Code. Most of the other religious prisoners should be transferred to compulsory labour or have their sentences reduced.

In early August 1987, Keston College knew of one prisoner whose early release is thought to have been a result of this amnesty. Zinaida Vil'chinskaya, a prominent member of the Council of Prisoners' Relatives (an organ of the Council of Evangelical Christian-Baptists), was released from labour camp on 30 June. She is 56.

A number of religious prisoners will not benefit in any way under the terms of the amnesty. They include exiles over retirement age who have two or more previous convictions (for example Baptist

pastor Ivan Antonov), and those who have not yet completed one-third of their terms. Several Baptists arrested within the last year fall into this category, as does Orthodox deacon Vladimir Rusak. A number of prisoners under retirement age who have completed their camp sentences and are now in exile (for example Pentecostal Pavel Pavlyuk and Lithuanian Catholics Balys Gajauskas, Gintautas Iešmantas, and Povilas Pečeliunas) will not have their sentences reduced. One sizeable group of religious prisoners unaffected by the amnesty are those in psychiatric hospital. Under Soviet law these prisoners are not serving sentences, but undergoing treatment until they are fit to be released.

Although this amnesty should affect far more prisoners of conscience than did the two decrees of February 1987, it will not bring about nearly so many releases. By August 1987 the February decrees had resulted in the release of over sixty religious prisoners of conscience, whereas no more than thirty such releases are expected under the new decree. The benefits of this amnesty lie more in transfer to compulsory labour or in reduction of sentence.

*Compiled by members of
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Atheism in the Eighties: A New Look

Since the early 1980s, atheist propaganda in the Soviet Union has been undergoing a facelift. Atheist doctrine is being freshened up, and promotional methods are being closely scrutinised: the emphasis is on getting the message across in a way which is undogmatic, persuasive, inoffensive, and, above all, effective.

Although *glasnost*' has undoubt-

edly helped to rejuvenate the faded image of Soviet atheism, change was in the air even before Yuri Andropov came to power in November 1982. A seminar on the role played by the media in propagating atheism was held in September 1982 as a follow-up to the 26th Communist Party Congress. A report on it, published in the journal *Nauka i religiya*

(Science and Religion), indicated with unusual candour that authors entrusted with the promotion of atheism were often incompetent, aggressive, and insufficiently well-informed about religious issues. Earlier, the Soviet press had also expressed concern over an increasing level of popular interest in religion, mysticism and the occult (*Kommunist*, June 1982), as well as over a fashion for religious artefacts which, although apparently unconnected with any deeper search for religious faith, might suggest "flaws . . . in atheist upbringing" (*Nauka i religiya*, April 1982). Since then, the papers have emphasised that atheist propaganda must be systematic, constant, and conducted not only in schools, but through organised social activities. Appropriate regional emphasis is said to be important, and particular attention is to be paid to people at times of personal crisis, when religion can seem to offer a comforting answer to life's insoluble problems (e.g. *Sovetskaya Kirgiziya*, 11 November 1984 or *Pravda*, 18 October 1984).

Over the last two years, the campaign to present atheism to the public in a more palatable form has made considerable headway. In the Soviet Russian press, for instance, there have been relatively few overt attacks on religious tradition, and in particular on Orthodox Christianity. Instead, pressure has been directed at primitive superstition, "foreign ideology and morality", and at any attempt to manipulate religious cult "to the detriment of the interests of society and the individual". The incompatibility of principle between religion and Soviet state ideology has been played down in favour of an emphasis on the conflict between the state and any reactionary forces masquerading as a religious cult. It has been acknowledged also that a loss of the social and ritualistic

aspects of religious commitment can create a vacuum in people's lives, and that this vacuum should be filled with ceremonies or rituals of a secular kind, designed both to glorify Soviet identity and to mark personal events such as births, marriages and deaths. This idea is not new — it was already in the air in the 1920s — but it is intriguing to see, in Gorbachev's time, that ritual continues to be considered important in helping to consolidate collective thinking and in diverting the attention of the population away from religion towards a cult in which the Soviet state is, effectively, the focus of veneration.

Since Gorbachev's accession to the position of General Secretary two and a half years ago, the press has worked hard to expose vestiges of superstition or "primitive" religion in Soviet life, and also any alleged disreputable behaviour on the part of the shamans and wandering mullahs of Soviet Central Asia. There have been revelations about the lucrative dealings of charlatan healers and fortune-tellers (*Komsomolets Turkmenistana*, 18 April 1985), and of prophets and "gurus" (*Sovetskaya Kirgiziya*, 10 October 1986). There have been articles and television programmes about the activities of Eastern cult leaders and sects, warning of their endeavours to infiltrate the Soviet bloc with support from anti-Soviet centres in the West (*Argumenty i fakty*, 23-29 December 1986 and 24-30 January 1986). It is alleged that bourgeois ideology frequently encourages this kind of religious activity as part of its campaign of psychological warfare so that religion is lent an anti-Soviet or dangerously nationalist colouring.

The dual threat of religion and nationalism has become a special issue in the Soviet Central Asian press, where state propaganda has increased in intensity — particularly towards the end of 1986. It was in

November 1986, in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, that Gorbachev made his sharpest denunciation of religion. Speaking to senior party and government officials, he severely criticised the participation of party members in religious ceremonies, and spoke sternly of the necessity to wage war against all religious phenomena (*Pravda Vostoka*, 25 November 1986).

Soviet Central Asian newspapers emphasise, however, that reactionary religious prejudice must not be confused with the positive qualities of national tradition. The atheist's task, they say, must be to support genuine national custom, but liberate people from anything which runs contrary to socialist morality and communist ideals (*Pravda Vostoka*, 2 September 1986). Writers have expressed concern about the ill effects of religious upbringing on children, and one leading article in the Kazakh paper *Sotsialistik Kazakhstana* (12 October 1986) suggested that churches and mosques, faced with a population whose mentality is changing as a result of socialist education, are seeking new methods for poisoning the minds of the young.

One point to note is the delicate balance which the Soviet media must maintain between ostensible support for national cultural tradition — with an increasingly tactful approach towards feelings of national identity — and criticism of the nationalism and separationist tendencies which, they argue, are likely to lurk behind a religious front (*Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 3 September 1986). Earlier this year, *Pravda* published an article emphasising that the variety of flourishing national cultures in the Soviet Union today disproves the view that there is any link between culture and religion. The same article also called for a closer examination of the relationship between behavioural ethics and religious beliefs,

suggesting that religion was more likely to be associated with a low level of education than with any higher level of social morality (*Pravda*, 16 January 1987).

The question of the relationship between religious belief and social morality is particularly fashionable in Soviet literary circles. A number of stories and novels published within the last ten or fifteen years have suggested a correlation between religious and moral values, and writers of high repute such as Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Chingiz Aitmatov and Vasil' Bykov have made it explicitly their view that religion has offered, and can offer, a sound moral foundation for society.

This is the growing feeling which contemporary atheist writers must convincingly counter if they are to recapture the serious attention of their readers. Their efforts to do so in recent months have produced some polemical writing which is considerably more sophisticated than has been the norm hitherto.

Last year, *Argumenty i fakty* published an article by Vladimir Shinkaruk, who argued that the notions of "faith" and "the sacred" are not exclusively religious. They are, Shinkaruk holds, psychological phenomena independent of the religious impulse and of religious tradition. Today, he urges, "the sacred" is a term which should be applied to the "cultural phenomena of ordinary human life" and to Soviet society's new system of moral values. A form of "unreligious" faith in the inevitability of the communist future, he writes, bolstered by the system of symbolic rituals which are an integral part of socialist culture, would facilitate the formation and teaching of the Marxist-Leninist world-view (*Argumenty i fakty*, 1986).

The main journal devoted to the promotion of anti-religious ideas, *Nauka i religiya*, recently published a

series of articles by the novelist Vladimir Tendryakov, originally written in the 1970s, but now made available to the public for the first time. Tendryakov argues fluently against the view that religion and morality are inseparably linked. While acknowledging any historical contribution which religious culture may have made to the maintenance of social order and to social development, he insists that in the end religious faith interferes with man's intellectual independence and his capacity for personal growth (*Nauka i religiya*, February-July 1987).

Writing in the prestigious literary journal *Novy mir* (4/87), Andrei Nuikin asserts that it is a poor kind of atheism which rejects religion out of hand or tackles it in a superficial and biased way, and fiercely attacks two of the more hard-line and intellectually crude atheist articles published in recent months. He contends that it is essential for any writer who tackles religion to be well versed in his subject. True atheism, he says, must have a sound philosophical basis; and unless mature creative thinking is encouraged and crude indoctrination avoided, Soviet society will produce not atheists, but "mere godless men".

Nuikin's article is a good example of Soviet atheism's new broad-minded and well-read approach to religion. In the end, however, this does little more than lend a new philosophical and cultural gloss to the traditional ideological framework. The new ploy is to tackle religious phenomena from within — as is shown by another recent article in *Nauka i religiya* (4/87 and 5/87). Written by a Soviet Christian, it gives an insider's view of life in Pentecostal communities. For the first time in this journal, and in recognition of the author's convictions, the word "God" appears with an initial capital, but the article actually serves to expose the corruption of sectarian life — a phenomenon which the Soviet press has previously sought to publicise by more straightforward and didactic means.

The atheist propaganda which *glasnost*' has brought with it is more subtle, intelligent, and far-reaching perhaps than ever before. Its purpose is to expose flaws and weaknesses in religious life and thought convincingly while at the same time making use of their strengths in the drive to consolidate the moral and spiritual power of the Soviet collective.

IRENA KORBA

Warsaw and the Vatican

There has been considerable speculation in the first half of 1987 that the Polish government is on the verge of establishing diplomatic relations with the Vatican. Since April there has been a succession of meetings involving dignitaries from the Vatican, the Polish government and the Polish hierarchy. A special commission was set up in May to examine Vatican-Polish government relations. The

220th Plenary Conference of the Polish episcopate (1-2 May) dealt with the matter at length. The Pope, addressing the episcopate on the last day of his Polish tour, stressed that "in the case of a so-called Catholic country, the Holy See considers relations with the given state as a normal and right thing", and called upon the Polish episcopate for their "collective co-operation on this