

# Editorial

As we go to press Mr Gorbachev continues to consolidate his power, moving his rivals and assuming the title of President. The relative ease with which he achieved the latest bout of "restructuring" seems to indicate that while his opponents even at the highest level may have serious misgivings about the march of *glasnost*, they have no coherent policies to propose as an alternative to *perestroika*. In this issue of *RCL* we conclude our millennial coverage with an exhaustive assessment of the church celebrations and of what has been achieved so far. As a journal of record *RCL* thus presents the current balance sheet, so that developments in church-state relations in the USSR over the coming years can readily be measured against it.

It is time now for us to take more account of the fact that events in the Soviet Union are not necessarily reflected in similar developments elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Countries where the leadership has been seriously wrong-footed by *glasnost* include Czechoslovakia and, more surprisingly, East Germany.

In Czechoslovakia the unreconstructed leadership has had to deal with exciting developments on the religious scene. Evidence of popular support for the church on an unexpected scale came with a 31-point petition calling *inter alia* for more bishops and an end to state interference in church affairs. It was drawn up by layman Augustin Navratil and in five months achieved half a million signatures, making it the largest civil rights petition seen so far in that country. The Vatican, for its part, seems to have won a victory in that three new bishops who are not members of the state-sponsored clergy association *Pacem in Terris* have been reluctantly accepted by the authorities (See the *Chronicle* item on pp. 352-54). State pressure in Czechoslovakia continues to have a stifling effect, however, on the witness of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, according to pastor Miloš Rejchrt (See the *Document* on pp. 365-67).

Meanwhile in East Germany the increasing readiness of groups of citizens to get involved in debate and action in the spirit of *glasnost*

has led to a definite reaction by the authorities, and this is evident most clearly in church-state relations. The point is that it is the Protestant churches which have been making their premises available to citizens who are concerned with social issues such as human rights, women's rights, peace, the environment, the rights of conscientious objectors; moreover, the Protestant leaders have been increasingly outspoken in their comments on these and other matters of public interest. The result has been an actual *deterioration* in the relatively healthy conditions of church-state relations in the GDR since the end of last year. On 25 November 1987 the environmental library in the East Berlin Protestant Zionskirche was raided, documents seized and several people arrested: nothing like this has happened since Stalinist times in the 1950s. The *Chronicle* item on pp. 355-56 of this issue of *RCL* describes the *Kirchentage* held in June this year, and notes that while these meetings "witnessed to the existence of an active and vigorous Christian community", the church press experienced real difficulties with the authorities when it came to reporting on what had happened: "perhaps as much as a quarter of the material which the church wanted to print had to be withdrawn — on the grounds that the church was concerning itself with the state's business."

The last issue of *RCL* contained material on the growing tension between reformist Hungary and Stalinist Romania, and this issue contains more (pp. 360-65). While ordinary believers and church leaders in Hungary speak out critically of Ceausescu, the churches within Romania remain silent, apart from a protest against the planned demolition of villages voiced by pastors of the Arad Deanery of the Reformed Church. The Romanian Orthodox Church has raised no protest. The article on relations between the Anglican and Romanian Orthodox Churches (pp. 329-44) shows that these relations are long-standing and although interrupted in the 1950s were renewed again from the mid-sixties. We have never yet succeeded in publishing in *RCL* a thorough analysis of the important subject of the contemporary life of the Romanian Orthodox Church. It would be good if the article in this issue of *RCL* were to prompt further contributions on this neglected subject.

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