

Every one of the four was described as Protestant (*Evangelisch*). Although the main initiatives came from the provincial Protestant churches, the Roman Catholic Church always played a considerable part, providing buildings in which impressive ecumenical services were held. Thus thousands of Protestant visitors gained valuable experience of liturgical worship; Catholics swelled the crowds at other events.

It is thought that a total of between 80,000 and 100,000 participated in the *Kirchentage* in one way or another, with some 8,000 people taking part in the more formal consultations and workshops.

Last year the East Berlin *Kirchentag* was bedevilled by friction between the church leadership and the members of the *Kirche von Unten* (the "church from below", — or grass-roots church). This year all did not run smoothly in this respect, but in general suitable opportunities were found for the younger and less conformist elements, however much they might upset more conservative church people. For example, at Rostock premises were set aside for a group of Christian homosexuals to make their standpoint known.

Every *Kirchentag* required most careful planning, and as a general rule, the visitor could not but admire the painstaking work that had been done — largely by voluntary labour. One could, for example, be served with a nourishing lunch in the open air within a few minutes of joining a queue a quarter of a mile long.

The practical arrangements for the *Kirchentage* shed light on the relationship between church and state at more than one level. The church leadership had to undertake lengthy and complex negotiations with the relevant local authorities to arrange such things as special trains, the feeding of visitors, and the holding of *Kirchentag* events on land belonging to the state. In such matters cooperation, if awkward, was nearly always possible. Many guests were astounded by the ease with which the *Kirchentag* proceeded in a largish city — and, even more, by the frank speaking on sensitive topics: for example criminality, alcoholism, mental illness, the problems of those released from gaol as well as support for the state of Israel. On the other hand, the security forces in plain clothes were very much in evidence at big open-air assemblies. During the weeks after the *Kirchentage*, the church press experienced great difficulties with the state in attempting to print objective reports for a wider public. 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.

There is no doubt that the *Kirchentage* made an impact on the life of the four centres in which they took place, and that they witnessed to the existence of an active and vigorous Christian community.

ARVAN GORDON

Religion and the 19th Conference of the CPSU

At the end of June delegates to an extraordinary conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet

Union gathered in Moscow. Their brief was to examine the successes and failures of *perestroika* and to

discuss the economic and political changes necessary in order to take the process of restructuring a stage further. Ultimately the conference fulfilled expectations, for whilst Gorbachev had problems getting some of his allies chosen as delegates, and whilst a large percentage of those present clearly had reservations about the direction in which the country was heading, the reform process does appear to have taken a further step.

After a cautious start many delegates began to speak quite openly, and some were prepared to criticise Politburo members, up to and including Gorbachev. Although the spectacular naming of Gromyko and other "guilty men" of the past was probably stage managed, many of the speakers were clearly expressing their own opinions. Nowhere was this more evident than in the bitter exchange between the sacked Moscow Party boss Boris Yeltsin and leading "conservative" Yegor Ligachev.

On a more practical level, the conference endorsed a number of political and economic changes which included: a reform of central government leading to the creation of a more powerful Parliament (Supreme Soviet), headed by a President, which would take over the day-to-day running of the country from the Politburo and Central Committee apparatus; a restriction on the holding of office to two five-year terms for all party officials, including Politburo members; a reform of local government that will give local soviets more control over regional development; and an acceptance of the principle of popular competitive elections by secret ballot. It remains to be seen what these changes will mean in practice and, as one speaker pointed out, it is not clear how some of them can be reconciled with a one-party system. Nonetheless, they clearly

have the potential for bringing about substantial change in the Soviet political structure.

What did the conference have to say about religion and human rights? Gorbachev's speech was somewhat ambiguous on this question. He spoke of the "ultimate aim" of political reform as "the all-round enrichment of human rights and the enhancement of the social activism of the Soviet people", denied the traditional Soviet affirmation that human rights were a "gift of the state" and stressed the need for a "law-governed state". Turning to religion he said:

I also want to touch on the fundamental issue of freedom of conscience. Increased attention is now being paid to it in connection with the millennium of the introduction of Christianity to Rus'. We do not conceal our attitude to the religious worldview as an unmaterialistic and unscientific one, but this is no reason for a disrespectful attitude to the spiritual world of people who believe and, even less, for the use of administrative methods to assert materialistic views. The Leninist decree on the separation of church from state and school from church, adopted seventy years ago, created new conditions for relations between them. It is well known that these relations have not always developed normally, but life itself and history have united believers and unbelievers as citizens of the Soviet country and as patriots. . . All believers, regardless of the religion they profess, are citizens of the USSR with full rights. The overwhelming majority of them are participating actively in our economic and public life and in the solution of the tasks of restructuring. The draft Law on Freedom of Conscience which is now being prepared is based on Leninist

principles and takes account of all present realities. . .

Despite the rhetorical appeal to "Leninist principles" — Lenin's policies left thousands of believers in graves or labour camps — and the considerable understatement of the declaration that relations between believers and the state "have not always developed normally", most believers must have been pleased with the more positive approach adopted towards them. Yet some expressed concern that the Communist Party, which remains the ruling body in the USSR, retains its commitment to the view that religion is somehow "unscientific". Moreover, however "liberal" Gorbachev's intentions, all those concerned with human rights must be worried that the only section of the General Secretary's comments on human rights to draw applause from the conference delegates was that which warned against "irresponsibility" in the use of democracy, e.g. the creation of opposition parties and

the attempt to redraw national boundaries.

Summing up the conference, it seems clear that *perestroika* has been taken a stage further and that its opponents are unable to present any coherent alternative. It also appears (at the time of writing) that religion is to operate within wider parameters than for many years. Yet the considerable limitations that still affect religious believers cannot be ignored. Likewise the danger signals for the churches to be found in Gorbachev's recent and brief pronouncement on religion should not be disregarded. Like all political leaders — of right or of left, of democracies or authoritarian regimes — Gorbachev has little time for turbulent priests. Hence the conditional nature of the "new deal" for religion implicit in his speech — we give you more space if you support our policies. Herein lies cause for hope and concern.

JOHN ANDERSON

Students at the Riga Seminary

At present there are only two Roman Catholic seminaries in the USSR — one in Kaunas, Lithuania, and the other in the Latvian capital, Riga. The Lithuanian seminary caters primarily for Lithuania and its seminarists are almost entirely Lithuanian. In the absence of any seminary in Ukraine or Belorussia, the Catholic Church has to use the Riga seminary to train priests for other parts of the USSR as well as for Latvia.

A document recently received from the Riga diocese, which gives detailed statistics on the seminarists and clergy attached to the diocese, shows clearly that native Latvians are now

outnumbered five to one at the Riga seminary. A list of seminarists (1987-88), giving their national identity and place of birth, reveals that only 16 out of eighty are Latvians. Twenty-four are Poles, mostly from Ukraine and Belorussia. There are also 16 Ukrainians, 11 Germans from the Central Asian republics (where their families were undoubtedly deported under Stalin), and ten Belorussians. In addition one Estonian, one Russian and one Lithuanian are studying for the priesthood at Riga. The eighty seminarists listed are divided into six years, including the final year which is made up of