

Documents

Same Homeland, Different Future

In June 1988 the millennium of Christianity in Kievan Rus' was celebrated with great pomp and ceremony in the USSR. To the surprise of many the Soviet authorities permitted numerous public events, though the large expenses involved were borne by ordinary believers. Writing shortly after the celebrations an Orthodox believer, writing under the pseudonym of Kirill Golovin, penned the following document. His concern was twofold: did what actually happen justify the cost and effort, and to what extent was the Orthodox Church prepared to make use of the new spiritual opportunities presenting themselves at the end of the 1980s.

How quickly the jubilee celebrations pass! . . . So much preparation, so much fuss, so much effort, and then, suddenly, everything is over in a flash, like a short dream. And all that remains are memories, photos, souvenirs, discussions and the wistful knowledge that the long-awaited celebration has passed forever, and will recur only a long, long time hence, and without us.

The millennium is a unique anniversary: the next milestone of comparable significance is 500 years away. But what will the fate of Russia and her people be by that time? Shall a mighty empire be split

into warring factions? Shall the Russian people still be one of the most influential and respected in the international arena, or will this nation, like Byzantium and Spain, become isolated and emasculated, retaining a memory of the millennium as a faded reminder of former glory?

To the surprise of many — especially those of a sceptical turn of mind — the celebrations have been conducted with an unexpected degree of pomp and ceremony. As recently as a year ago, not even the wildest flight of fancy could have foreseen that an atheistic regime, an implacable foe and relentless persecutor of Christianity, would allow the jubilee to become, to some extent, a state celebration, or allow it to assume such proportions and accord it such wide publicity which would be, in some degree detrimental, to state interests — that is, contribute to the growth of the social significance of Orthodoxy. Just a year ago, hostile articles were still appearing in the Soviet press. Just a year ago none of our hierarchs could have dreamed that they would be giving lengthy interviews to the papers and appearing on television screens — media which had hitherto relayed only slander and scorn concerning religion and religious believers.

This state of affairs changed practically overnight in the spring of this

year, when the party instructed all its executive bodies to cooperate in marking the jubilee as an event of national importance. Naturally, there were excuses and caveats — that the jubilee was a celebration of Russian culture, literary heritage, music and so forth, but these were drowned out by an unprecedented, albeit limited, willingness to assist. Those very Soviet bosses who had feared, heretofore, to so much as set eyes upon a priest suddenly began, as if on command (come to think of it, it was on command!) to praise all that related to the Church, from icons to the saints. What a tribute to the obedience of the minions of the party apparatus — no sooner said than done! The persecutors switched roles to become custodians.

And how thoroughly they carried out their orders! While the Church Council (*Sobor*) was in session, Zagorsk was almost like a town under siege, entry being restricted to local residents and those with special passes. Believers wanting access to the Patriarchal cathedral in Moscow and the Danilov monastery came up against triple cordons of militia. The numbers of militiamen deployed around the cathedrals exceeded by far the numbers to be seen around football grounds at premier league finals. On top of that, there was transportation laid on by the militia for guests, the provision of the best banquet halls, theatres and other facilities for meetings and concerts. How much rejoicing there was in the hearts of priests — all of whom are more accustomed to constant denigration — when they saw this unprecedented demonstration of the respect of the authorities for the Church! Admittedly, all this cost the Patriarchate about a million roubles a day, money which came, naturally, from the pockets of the faithful.

What was financed by the state, was the publicity. Central television

showed the film *Khram (The Church)* which, for the first time, gave a positive, although slightly embroidered, account of Orthodoxy; there were a number of objective interviews with representatives of the clergy; evening newscasts carried reports on that day's festivities. However, on the first channel this lasted only for the first three days, and invariably included an interview with an atheist functionary, such as the notorious Gordienko. The highlight in all three cities (Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev) was a concert of spiritual music, broadcast nationwide, at which banners of St Vladimir decorated the stage and archbishops occupied the former royal boxes. It was as though we had gone back in time to the imperial Russia of the previous century. Characteristically, though, all this 'religious propaganda' was switched off as soon as the celebrations were over and the guests had departed for home.

While following the celebrations, it was impossible not to notice, amid all the pomp and ceremony, how few ordinary believers were present. In the Yelokhovskiy (Patriarchal) cathedral they made up barely a quarter of the congregation, at the Danilov monastery they crowded around outside, and even half of these were merely curious bystanders, who would not even know how to cross themselves. When ordinary churchgoers came to the St Vladimir's cathedral in Kiev at 6am, they were unable to enter — only those with special permits were allowed to go inside. This happened in many places because, as it turned out, the main 'participants' of the festivities were numerous foreign guests. Although our people were gratified by the foreigners' interest in and respect for our Church, and uncomplainingly, as usual, allowed themselves to be relegated to the background, some

feeling of hurt was inevitable. I personally heard the occasional complaint such as: 'For whom are these millennial celebrations? For us, or for the benefit of these non-Orthodox foreigners?' Alas, to a great extent the celebrations were, indeed, for 'these foreigners', so that when they returned home, they would spread the word about the 'total well-being' of the Russian Orthodox Church.

It was also clearly noticeable that the authorities went to great pains to isolate the various events of the celebrations from the mass of ordinary Soviet citizens. For example, there was not a single open-air procession (Kharchev, the Chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs, maintained that no requests had been made), not a single open-air church service, with the exception of one at the Smolensk cemetery in Leningrad and one at the Danilov monastery in Moscow. The Danilov monastery is surrounded by high walls, and entry was allowed only to those with permits, and at the Smolensk cemetery the service marking the glorification of the Blessed Xenia of St Petersburg was shortened to the barest minimum, 40 minutes in all. The only concession made to the faithful on that occasion was the broadcast of this service within the church surround for the benefit of those standing outside. So it is fair to say that the authorities and the Church collaborated in this instance to keep the celebration confined to the immediate vicinity of the church.

Nevertheless, owing to media exposure and the general feeling of joy concerning the millennium, the jubilee made a noticeable impression on the populace at large. Bombarded by anti-religious propaganda from birth, the average Soviet citizen suddenly realised that this propaganda was a tissue of lies, and learned, to his amazement, that Orthodoxy is

not only a museum piece, but a vital, deeply national faith, on the basis of which Russia grew and flourished. Seeing Soviet officials sitting side by side with archbishops, and hearing their words of approval, the average Soviet citizen understood — though not without difficulty — that it is not dangerous to go to church, and that believers are not unenlightened and anti-social elements, who are better avoided. A direct result was a sharp upsurge in christenings in just about every church. The future will show whether the state atheists will retaliate against these 'excesses' of the millennium, or whether they will write them off as an inevitable side-effect of new policies.

What was the reason for such a sharp reversal of traditional state policy? Of course, it was not just a desire to amass propaganda capital in the eyes of the West and at home: 'You keep shouting that the Orthodox Church here is persecuted and exists in a state akin to Babylonian captivity, yet in reality it is not so. The church is respected and free, it flourishes under the protection of the state.' The key reason lies in the fact that the party had to acknowledge that the country was teetering on the brink of an economic and, especially, moral precipice, and remembered again — as it had done at a critical point in the last world war — that it could draw on a despised but enormous reserve: millions of believers, firm in their patriotism and moral standards.

And again, just as it had done in the fateful year of 1943, the party began to make overtures to believers and the church hierarchy, which it had spurned with fastidious contempt for so long. *Perestroika* was just the thing here: an inevitable turnabout in state policy was easily explained not by the political situation which was its basis, but by fine-sounding phrases about a basic

review of church-state relations, acknowledgement of past errors and mutual (yes, mutual!) endeavour in the name of common aims. The latter assertion, as it happens, was also put forward at the time of Stalin's concordat with the church, but nobody pointed this out when, fifteen years later, state officials closed up to a hundred churches a day.

Feeling the chill dread of imminent chaos and disorder throughout the land, the atheists, for the second time in half a century, turned for support not just to Christians, but to the Russian Orthodox Church, hoping that the church could help stave off, at least for a time, the moral degradation to which they had brought the nation with their godless ideology. That is the reason for the officials' beaming smiles and willingness to please during the jubilee celebrations, their unconcealed sycophancy toward the repressed church! The apogee of this was Gorbachev's now-famous claim: 'We have a common history, a common motherland and a common future,' pronounced on 29 April 1988 at a meeting with the Patriarch and the members of the Synod. It seemed that just a moment more, and a new Edict of Milan would be signed, according to which the state, admitting its errors and impotence, would free Christians from all the prohibitions and limitations, allowing the emergence of a new 'symphony', laying the foundations for peaceful coexistence and cooperation between former persecutors and their erstwhile victims.

Great was the rejoicing in the hearts of some of the 'custodians': not for nothing did the church cringe in subservience before the godless, not for nothing did she bear in silence all the slights and humiliations, not for nothing did she turn her face away from all 'mischievous' calls to be more independent. At last, the

long-awaited hour was at hand, and the authorities had, of their own accord and without any struggle, approached the church and showered her with gifts, returning a small part of that which had been shamelessly expropriated earlier: three monasteries, 68 churches, some surviving relics. As for the outlook for the future — well! — they are promising humane legislation, lots of new churches, permission for charitable activity, and suchlike. Enough, indeed, to turn some heads and bring about a belief in 'common destiny and common aims'!

Although the initiative to set about changing relations came from the state, the church, in the form of her independent members, was quite active in trying to break the stranglehold of the state atheists by such means as protests, petitions, publications and exposures, reminding the state that there was a willingness to resist. It is also no secret that the atheists were not able to bring all the hierarchs to heel, despite the thorough efforts made in their selection, to say nothing of the parish priesthood and laity, who, taken in sum, formed islands of steadfastness in the church and made it impossible for the secular authorities to bend the church to their will on each and every occasion.

This, too, played its part in the state's decision to review relations with the church, a move which should not only be considered as a strategic retreat, but also as a temporary tactical adjustment which has had no effect on the key Marxist dogma that socialism must be forged without God. However, as it became quite clear that God could not be driven out of people's hearts, the state must, willy-nilly, accept a compromise which, judging by the experience of other 'people's democracies' may complicate the life of the party to some extent, but will pose no



1986: Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk gives communion at the Zarvanytsia shrine, Ivano-Frankivsk region.

The Greek-Catholic Church in Ukraine

See *Chronicle* item on pp. 152-56.
(Photos © *Ukrainian Catholic Church*)

17 July 1988: millennium celebrations at Zarvanytsia.



1988 in Czechoslovakia

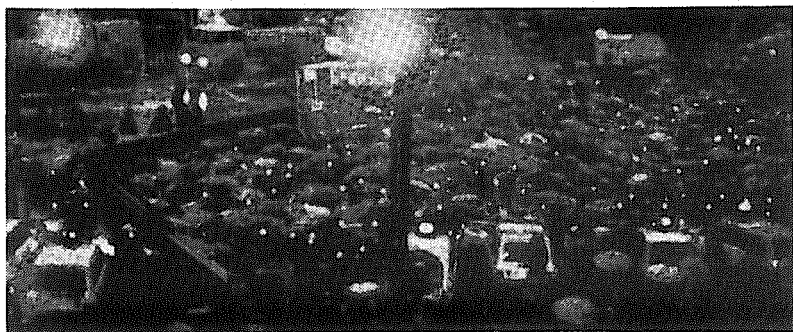
See *Chronicle* item on pp. 148-50, and *Documents* on pp. 165-69.



11 June 1988:

two new Catholic bishops are consecrated in St Vitus' Cathedral, Prague.

(Photo © Keston College)



25 March 1988: a demonstration for religious freedom in Bratislava.

Participants gather to light candles and sing hymns.

(Photo © Aid to the Church in Need)



14 August 1988: pilgrims leave the Marian shrine at Nitra.

(Photo © Keston College)

threat to its monopoly of power. It seems most likely that the Soviet authorities will settle for a limited 'Bulgarian version', which combines strong state control with a degree of church autonomy.

At the moment, this is hindered by the existing judicial norms, which were devised mainly to combat religion rather than to coexist with it, making them differ sharply from the norms of any civilised society. They must, therefore, be brought into line with the new policy, and it would seem logical to do so in the new legislation currently being drafted, even though it would not do to expect that this legislation will satisfy believers totally. While the state remains committed to atheism, and atheism is not a purely personal matter but an obligation for all the *nomenklatura* and the scientific-cultural establishment, believers in Russia need not expect equality, nor their just place in society. They can achieve this only despite state policy, that is, by bringing people from all strata of society to the faith, until such time as the authorities would, one fine day, find themselves surrounded by Christians on all sides. The more overt and covert conversions there are, and, thereby, the more saved souls, the more influential shall be the voice of the church.

Conditions for evangelisation at present are very auspicious. The godless mass seeks a way out of the moral dead-end in which it finds itself, thinking more and more with pain about the faith it has lost, looking with dismay and grief at its desecrated past, and asking: why and for what? Why was it necessary to renounce the saving faith of one's forebears and, spurred on by fanatical commissars in leather jackets and loud-mouthed propagandists to destroy churches, burn icons, kill priests and cast aside age-old ideals? All that resulted in nothing but

spiritual desolation, cynicism and bitterness! What brought about this terrible blindness? There is only one answer — godless Marxism, in which some believed, others were forced to believe, and still others allowed to pass unchallenged. The experiment is over, and its result is unequivocally negative.

Now, when the popular mass is beginning to see clearly again, it is prepared — at least, the better part of it is prepared — to repent and return to Christ. It is probable that the new legislation will enable the church to go at least part of the way to meet such people, for even if catechism is not permitted in as many words, it is unlikely that it will be categorically forbidden. Consequently, parish priests in cities and villages will no longer have to stick to just paraphrasing the Bible reading for the day, but will be able to teach without fear, to take up the mantle of the apostles and exhort their parishioners to go forth and preach the Word of God to all people. Both the church and the world needs people of an apostolic cast in our times, ardent preachers and fearless instructors. Their time has come, praise be to God!

Yet how shall the Russian Orthodox Church respond to this challenge? Is she ready for a new evangelisation? Alas, it must be admitted that at the moment, the church is unprepared. Many years under the aegis of atheists and blind obedience have emasculated and almost eradicated Christian zeal in our church. And when it manifests itself, it meets opposition from the hierarchs and self-censoring priests alike, the majority of whom are like disinterested yet cautious mercenaries. Whence, then, shall come the new Pauls and Andrews? In the first instance, from the ranks of that 'small remnant' which has miraculously survived in our priesthood

(about a quarter to a third of the overall number), and from among those who are as yet weak and discouraged in spirit, but who may find strength and courage in a new atmosphere. This has already occurred in secular social life under *perestroika* — all of a sudden, as if from nowhere, emerged many courageous champions and brave critics. Pressure from the grass roots may well change the current super-cautious stance of the church hierarchy toward greater initiative and action.

Such initiative and action are particularly needed in the vital task of evangelisation, which, in turn, needs churches and the possibility to preach the Word of God in them. It must be stressed that it is still a very difficult task to achieve the opening of a church — the atheistic bureaucracy resists all such attempts with every means at its disposal. Last year, only 16 Orthodox churches were opened, in the first five months of this year — 68, and a further 22 by the time of the millennial celebrations: most likely, though, these figures do not mean physical church buildings, but in many cases denote the registration of a community of believers. It must also be remembered that even if a community receives a half-ruined church, it takes from several months to a year to carry out the more urgent repairs to render it useable as a place of worship, whereas proper rebuilding and restoration can take years.

If the current trend of reopening churches (or, rather, registering communities) continues — which is still open to doubt! — then there will be an additional 200 houses of worship in the country by the end of 1988. That sounds quite impressive, especially by comparison with the past. Let us not forget, however, that under Khrushchev, 10,000 churches were closed, and a further 1,500 in

succeeding years.

Therefore it would take 60 (!) years to restore the number of churches to the post-war numbers, when there were no fewer Orthodox faithful than there are today. Furthermore, it would take at least six years — at the present rate — to satisfy all the recently filed requests for new churches. That's *perestroika* in facts and figures!

The need for churches is especially acute in the Great Russian region, for at present around two thirds of functioning churches (4,000) are in Ukraine, mainly its western part, which was not subjected to the darkest years of atheist onslaught. Thousands and thousands of churches need to be opened, restored or built in Russian cities and villages, whose residents must travel not dozens, but hundreds (!) of miles to attend church. In turn, all these churches will need priests, ritual articles, icons, which necessitates the establishment of new seminaries, icon painting and other workshops. The church will have to engage in intensive activity if the latest 'thaw' is not halted by another 'freeze' ensuing from a faltering of *perestroika*.

Such a reversal is a possibility, especially as state thinking about religion is notably dogmatic because religion is seen as an ideological issue, a sphere in which experimentation is not encouraged. That is why religion, to date, has been the least affected by the slow and controversial process of democratisation — for instance, none of the so-called 'professionals of *perestroika*' have called for a stop to the compulsory teaching of atheism or that it be financed from party funds, none of them have called for believers to be represented in state bodies, and nobody (which is astonishing!) has spoken out in detail about the vicious and lengthy persecutions of the faithful.

'It is known that there were many

illegal repressions of clergy. . . In that respect, representatives of the church shared the fate of their fellow-citizens. Violations of the laws of our country brought to an end the effective functioning of many, many [religious] communities. . . ' This was the generalised and super-diplomatic way in which the Patriarch has described the above-mentioned persecution. And this false formulation was then parroted by all the hierarchs and chorused by atheists. Thus the impression is created that there was no particular persecution of believers from the first months of the Soviet regime, the faithful merely shared the fate of the people as a whole. And this assertion is made in the era of *glasnost*', when the communists themselves are acknowledging their own martyrs of Stalinist terror! How long will the Russian Orthodox Church continue to whitewash the heinous crimes of atheists and shy away from the plain truth? And yet future trust in the church is largely dependent on this truth.

As we have noted, the atheists need the Russian Orthodox Church in order to escape from a situation of acute crisis. Should the church believe them, as she did 45 years ago, and then be subjected to repression once again after having given her help? Or maybe it would be better for the church to stick to Nietzschean principles: 'Push down the one who's drowning!' in order to speed the collapse of the oppressive regime? For there is no reason to believe that the godless shall not try to claw back any concessions to the faithful as soon as some retreat from the brink has been achieved: for struggle against God has always been a basic tenet of socialism. But Christ's church cannot abandon the country and the people in their time of woe, even if that woe has been caused by implacable foes. So the church will do everything to avert a national

catastrophe. Like the Good Samaritan, the church will extend a helping hand to the suffering people, not to the party and the atheist government, without any preconditions.

Yet without setting conditions, the church should, nonetheless, demand firm guarantees against any repetition of new persecution since the authorities are promising (after 70 years in power!) to turn the Soviet Union into a state governed by law. Such guarantees must be enshrined both in religious legislation and the Constitution and, to affirm the church's juridical safety from atheist onslaught, it is also essential to alter the structure and functions of the Council for Religious Affairs — it must include representatives of the clergy and the laity, and all the activity of the Council must be open to public scrutiny. Moreover, believers should be eligible for election to all local and highest organs of power (as has long been the practice in countries of people's democracy)* and have the right to form various kinds of associations which would be free of the control of atheist functionaries.

Perestroika is both a challenge and an appeal to the Russian Orthodox Church. A challenge to the church's enforced submission and voluntary servility, and an appeal for greater courage, daring and independence. The possibilities today are much greater than they were in 1943 and the post-war years, when the country was under the yoke of a terrible dictatorship, and still cherished some sweet illusions about communism. It would be an unforgivable error not to make the most of the present favourable conditions, or to do so strictly within the limits set by an atheistic state. It is absurd to fear

*Some representation for believers is promised in the new electoral law adopted at the end of 1988. *Ed.*

decisiveness, for the situation cries out for it.

Reasons for fear dwell in another quarter. It is wise to fear excessively optimistic assessments of the new policies as evidence that the bolsheviks have, at long last 'seen the light'. One must guard against the temptation of national-bolshevism which inevitably leads to the motto that 'the people, the party and the church are united in the building of a bright future.' One must fear that the pressing political issues of the moment may obscure Christ's commandment about the salvation of every human soul and the necessity to evangelise those who have wandered from the Path.

The time of the church's Calvary and Resurrection is past. She moves now into the time of Pentecost, a time of inspiration by the Holy Spirit and preaching of the Good News in the fields and city squares.

Therefore it is essential for the Russian Orthodox Church to think about ridding herself of the ailments acquired in the long years of the 'Babylonian captivity', or her high moral authority shall soon flicker and dim. At the moment the average Soviet citizen sees the priesthood in a kind of aura of sanctity, simply through ignorance of the true state of affairs and out of a desire to reach for ideals. Some degree of disillusionment will be unavoidable, but it will be devastating if the hierarchy takes no measures aimed at the moral enhancement of its priests, who shall be under increasing public scrutiny in the years ahead.

Challenge and appeal are directed presently not only to the church, but also to that active sector of the laity which calls itself the 'church community'. For a long time, and justifiably, these believers considered themselves to be the only independent voice of the church, speaking the truth without fear and exposing falsehood. But now, when the truth will also be voiced by a formerly silent priesthood, the monopoly of the 'church community' shall be broken, to the obvious annoyance of some of its leaders who treat the truth as though it were their personal, life-long privilege. As *glasnost* grows, this 'community' will be faced with a dilemma — should it help the hierarchy to heal the ailments afflicting the body of the church, or adopt a sharply nihilistic stance whereby dissatisfaction becomes the norm, and a refusal to cooperate in any way a matter of principle.

Will it be possible to find ways of ensuring fruitful cooperation in a truly mutual cause, or shall the barriers of bitterness, offence and pride prove insurmountable? The test ahead is a very serious one, and its results will be a significant factor in determining whether the ruinous discord between the church and a part of the Orthodox intelligentsia shall endure, a discord which, in its time, facilitated the victory and entrenchment of a destructive regime.

*Translated from Russian
by Alyona Kojevnikov*