

Religious Themes in the Soviet Press in 1989

DIMITRY V. POSPIELOVSKY

This paper is an overview of the most salient religious themes appearing in the Soviet media. Its focus is on the year 1989 as the first post-millennial year and therefore more characteristic of the new trends and attitudes than the special case of 1988. But a few words on the background are in order.

Early signs of a turn-around in Soviet religious policies occurred in the course of 1985-86, first in the form of some clearly pro-Christian literary works, particularly by such authors as V. Rasputin, V. Astafiev, and even Ch. Aitmatov.¹ Perhaps even more significant were several pro-church speeches at the 8th Writers' Union Congress² and an article on the church's response to the Chernobyl tragedy by Yuri Shcherbak, the *Literaturnaya gazeta* Kiev correspondent, a doctor of medicine and a World War II veteran. The interviews with Orthodox hierarchs, included in the article for the first time since the war, dealt with a real tragedy, rather than the usual propaganda of Soviet peace policies. The line of the article was that the church stays always with her people and, as in the past, had responded generously to the latest crisis. A parallel was made between the battle of Stalingrad and Chernobyl.³ It has been said that the Soviet state remembers the church only in situations of crisis, but this is also true of many of its citizens. Both clergy and laity have confirmed that the Chernobyl tragedy sent people in droves to the church seeking baptism. A major factor was the name: Chernobyl in Ukrainian means wormwood. Pious people immediately associated it with St John's *Revelations*, 10 and 11:

¹See their *Pozhar*, *Pechalnyi detektiv*, the short stories 'Mesto deistviya', and Aitmatov's *Plakha*, resp. Analysed in D. Pospelovsky, *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer* Vol. 3 (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 135-45. Aitmatov's hero is a 'godbuilder', not a God-seeker: he believes in God as a symbol of the sum total of peoples' hopes and ideals, not in a personal God.

²'VIII s'ezd pisatelei SSSR', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 2 July 1986; and Pospelovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

³Shcherbak, 'Bez domyslov i nedomolvok', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 23 July 1986.

. . . and there fell a great star from Heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon . . . rivers and upon fountains of waters. And the name of the star is called wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many died of the waters, because they were made bitter.⁴

The second powerful stimulus to turn to the church was the millennium celebrations of 1988. The wide media publicity given to the 29 April 1988 meeting of Gorbachev with the Orthodox church's leading hierarchs, and to Gorbachev's promise to end all discrimination against religion and believers; the millennial celebrations themselves given wide and very positive publicity; the appearance of churchmen on TV programmes, interviews and discussion with them, admission of past persecutions and current discriminations as wrong — . . . all this not only increased the interest of the general public in the church, but also diminished their fear of associating with her. The church began to be presented in the media, as well as in *belles lettres* as the cradle and guardian of Russian culture, the cause and disseminator of beauty, love, compassion, charity. *Glasnost*' made it possible for the media to reveal more and more negative features of the Soviet system, leading to the final discrediting of the ideology and its relativistic class morality, even as Christian ethics based on absolute values rose in prestige.

The general consensus of the clergy and laity is that the numbers of people of all ages, classes and categories approaching the church for baptism has increased many-fold since 1986 and particularly since 1988.

The fear that with the passing millennial year things would return to the Soviet 'normal' proved unfounded, as religious themes became even more prominent in 1989. First, let us look at how many times articles or letters dealing with the church, Christian thinkers, religious issues, or particular religions appeared in the two very significant liberal Soviet weeklies: *Ogonek* with its weekly circulation of 3.3 million in 1989, and *Moscow News* with its relatively small internal circulation in Russian of only 250,000.⁵

In *Ogonek* I found twenty articles, including letters to the editor, but excluding poems and *belles lettres* published in each issue of the

⁴The response of Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev to Shcherbak's question regarding such deciphering of *Revelation* was that God's hour is not known to anybody, wherefore the church does not approve of attempts to explain the mystical visions of St John.

⁵*Moscow News* editors have stated several times that their applications to make the Russian edition of the paper available for subscription inside the USSR have been repeatedly turned down by the authorities. The editors envisage that should the subscription right be granted, its circulation would surpass 3 million. (Open subscriptions for the Russian edition, beginning in January 1991, are now available for Soviet citizens.)

journal of which many contained religious themes, photographs or paintings of churches, monasteries, pilgrims, icons. *Moscow News* published a total of forty-four materials dealing with religion in one way or another, but always positively. I have failed to locate any anti-religious articles in either of the two publications. Nor did I find any attacks on religion in the daily *Izvestiya*, circulation almost 12 million, *Literaturnaya gazeta*, circulation 5 million, or *Novy mir* circulation 1.5 million, in the course of 1989. Indeed, *Literaturnaya gazeta* and *Izvestiya* publish material with religious content almost as often as, say *Ogonek*.

Of course, the professional anti-religious brochures and books, as well as *Nauka i religiya*, remain actively atheistic, but even the latter on occasion also publishes articles by believers, interviews with priests and Christian thinkers, and generally its tone has become much more tolerant than before. Specialised scholarly journals still publish anti-religious works, but these have also opened their pages to believers. Moreover, *Voprosy istorii*, has begun to publish church historians teaching at the Soviet theological schools of the Moscow Patriarchate.⁶ According to criticisms in the Soviet media, *Pravda*, the chief Soviet Communist Party daily, with its subscriptions falling from 11 million in 1988 to just over six million for 1990, does occasionally publish an old style attack on Christianity. But even the chief ideological journal of the CPSU, *Kommunist*, has published a number of articles written by Christians, such as the top Soviet astrophysicist Academician Raushenbakh, praising the church and her practice of personal confession as the major training for moral behaviour, and stating that no science can overcome a faith.⁷ *Voprosy istorii* has begun to publish a 40-volume series of Russian philosophers, including all the major Russian religious thinkers and theologians of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The range of topics in the context of which the Church and religious faith are discussed is very wide, for example:

- the church and charity: love, compassion, welfare;
- the church and culture, including national culture, patriotism, devotion and service to one's people;

⁶E.g. Ieromon. Ioann (Ekonomtsev), 'Vizantinizm, slaviyane i Rossiya', *Voprosy istorii*, No. 8 (1989), pp. 55-75.

⁷B. Raushenbakh, 'K ratsional'no-obraznoi kartine mira', *Kommunist* No. 8, (1989) pp. 89-97; V. Lakshin, 'Nравstvennost', spravedlivost', gumanizm', *ibid*, No. 10, pp. 33-42 — the author is probably an agnostic, but his moral dualism (spirit and matter) and defence of the dependance of morals on faith in God are clearly Christian; the round tables on spirituality, morals and human civilisation in Nos. 13 (pp. 71-80) and 15 (pp. 67-81) include Christian apologists: Archbishop Kirill of Smolensk, in fact, in the latter round-table. These are just a few of the materials in which Christian values are openly defended and proposed as a positive alternative.

- the church and the arts, beauty, and literature;
- the church as an active factor in society and social life, in past and present;
- persecutions and restoration of churches and religious traditions;
- religious philosophy and theology;
- monasticism;
- faith in the modern world, rediscovery of faith, personal conversions and spiritual experience, experience of the supernatural.

The Church and Charity

Although according to the 1929 legislation in force (until the autumn of this year), the church may not engage in charity, the newly formed Soviet Fund of Health and Mercy elected Metropolitan Aleksii of Leningrad (now Patriarch) as its co-chairman and as its representative in the Congress of Peoples' Deputies. Many if not most local chapters of the Fund include representatives of the clergy, whether Orthodox or Evangelical; and the media periodically report on parish Mercy and Charity groups looking after hospitals, nursing homes, orphanages, and doing all work free of charge. In many cases whole parishes took a hospital or some other institution for the old, the invalids and the infirm under their protection. The media reports how these Christian volunteers bring love and kindness where there had been only bureaucratic officialdom. The church participates in physical and psychological rehabilitation programmes for Afghan veterans and invalids.⁸ Priests visit such institutions as well as prisons to counsel the infirm and the criminals, hear confessions, perform extreme unction rites, serve the liturgy. Here is a description of a priest's visit to a female labour camp in the Perm Province in the Urals:

This was like a dream . . . The door locks clicked and two priests entered . . . female thieves, murderers began to cross themselves; many wept . . .

In the whole history of this camp, no one has ever received such welcome . . . these women never cried like that before anybody, or confessed as they did to [these priests].

⁸ *Izvestiya*: 17 March, p. 6; 26 November, p. 4; and 'Ochishcheniye dushi', 27 December; *Moscow News*: 'Pravo na miloserdiye', 8 January, 1989; 'Speshite delat' dobro', 21 May; 'Miloserdiy nado uchitsiya', 30 June; 'I sostradaniye, i pomoshch', 30 July; '50,000 dollarov dlya invalidov', 'Miloserdiye', *Ogonek*, No. 38, pp. 28-33.

'... for the first time in five years spent in this place,' said one prisoner, 'I am seeing real human faces; this gives me the faith that... we are still capable of love and mercy.'⁹

Prisoners rioting in a male labour camp demanded, as a condition to begin negotiations, the presence of a journalist and a priest. 'Why a priest,' asked the reporter, 'Are there many religious believers among you?' 'Yes, quite a few', said the prisoners, 'but the main reason is that we need someone who would treat us as human beings.'¹⁰

A contrast between the church and the secular state is once again presented in reports on the, so far, abortive attempt of a Moscow church to regain control of its pre-revolutionary rectory in order to turn it into a nursing home for the elderly. This would have been the first nursing home in the Zamoskvoretsky district of Moscow where there are 1,500 single old people living without any relatives and needing care. Supported by the local soviet and by the Red Cross, the parish's initiative, nevertheless, was rejected by the present occupiers of the building: 30 bureaucrats administering a state building company of 140 construction workers. Their only excuse for not moving out: the location of the building was convenient. And no one can do anything against them because they are members of the Building Ministry's *nomenklatura*, over whom the local authorities have no power.¹¹ Though the church is involved in these areas, it remains the case that legally priests and laity can in principle still be arrested at any time for such activities as visits to prisons and hospitals, charity work, the running of Sunday schools or teaching religion to any groups of children or adults.¹²

Yet they do teach. Not only in the still illegal Sunday schools, which, nevertheless, have been mushrooming across the country in the course of the last two winters, and favourable reports about some of which have appeared in Soviet media. Some state high schools have begun to invite priests, as well as ministers of other religions, to teach the basics of their religions to willing pupils. According to a report about one such school in Leningrad, classes on Orthodox theology and the Bible taught by a local priest, Fr Vasili, are always overcrowded, attended not only by the senior high school students, but also by graduates of that school and parents. Judging by the newspaper photograph, the religious class is given not in a regular classroom but in a large auditorium, absolutely packed, with some

⁹G. Selivanov, 'Grekhi nashi tyazhkiye', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 13 December 1989.

¹⁰D. Radyshesky, 'Trebuyem zhurnalista i popa', *Moscow News*, 2 July 1989; Mel'nikova, 'Svyashchennik v tyur'me', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 9 August 1989.

¹¹V. Kovalevsky, 'Svyatoye delo', *Izvestiya*, 26 November 1989, and a letter by the rector and warden of that parish published in the above article.

¹²'Glasnost' vysvetit vse', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 10 January 1990.

students standing.¹³ At the very time when religious instruction is being aggressively pushed out of schools in the West, special secondary schools, named *lycée* and *gimnaziya* after their pre-revolutionary prototypes, are being set up with an emphasis on classics, which include religion, sacred music (and music in general), medieval and church history, Greek, Latin and Church Slavonic, iconography and medieval art in general.¹⁴

Thirty-one year old Fr Andrei Yakhimets from Lvov, serving in Novaya Ladoga, not far from Leningrad, has expanded his educational efforts to include general moral education for young people, moral preparation of young couples for marriage, education against alcoholism. 'We must also courageously step into youth clubs,' says the pastor, who participates in discussions with atheists in the local library. The newspaper report has only praise for him.¹⁵

Even the very conservative college of bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church in their last local episcopal council dedicated to the fourth centenary of the Moscow Patriarchate resolved to reconstruct religious education on all levels, children, youth and in the general education systems. While the resolutions in full appeared only in the church press, the secular press published excerpts in the form of interviews with individual bishops.¹⁶

Religion and Culture

Although the octogenerian, D. Likhachev, is by no means a pioneer in pointing out the centrality of religion to culture, the derivation of the very word 'culture' from 'cult,'¹⁷ recently he has popularised the concept through the media. Beginning with his already cited speech at the 1986 Writers' Union congress, through a multitude of articles, interviews and TV round tables of 1986-89, he has stressed the inalienable trinity of culture-morality-religion. Lamenting the moral

¹³ 'Svyashchennik v shkol'nom klasse', *Izvestiya*, 29 October 1989.

¹⁴ R. Armejev, 'Budet litsei Andrey a Rubleva', *Izvestiya*, 19 November 1989.

¹⁵ O. Shestinsky, 'Poisk npravstvennogo', *Moscow News*, 2 April 1989. Information on Fr Andrei's birthplace received by this writer from the priest.

¹⁶ 'Zayavleniye arkhieiereiskogo sobora', *Izvestiya*, 25 October 1989; 'Opredeleniya Arkhιεiereiskogo Sobora. . .', *Moskovski tserkovny vestnik* (MTsV), No. 14 October 1989, p. 2; Kirill, arkhiepiskop Smolenski i Kaliningradski, *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 3 January 1990, where he insists that the church has a clear programme of reforms, but this cannot be fully implemented until new state religious legislation appears and until it grants the church juridical status. Now that the legislation 'On the Freedom of Conscience' has been ratified by the Supreme Soviet on 1 October 1990, the church has achieved juridical status. Also: 'Vstrecha s ierarkhami tserkvi', *Izvestiya*, 2 February 1990.

¹⁷ See relevant discussion on church and culture in Pospelovskiy, *A History*, pp. 50-60.

decline, cultural nihilism and vandalism, the catastrophic state of the arts, libraries and education, the loss of a sense of beauty and the destruction of nature, Likhachev points out that these are derivatives of materialism as philosophy and of the relativistic class morality, which deny the universality of non-material values. In contrast, he says, a Christian treats the environment with reverence as God's creation, denies the concept of the randomness of life and of the world, sees all creation and everything created by God as sacred and meaningful. The Orthodox Church — the architecture of her temples, the iconography, the aesthetics of the rites, the choral music — all these cultivate in her flock a sense and love of beauty, art, music. Seeing the world as an organically interrelated and mutually interdependent whole, a believer develops a sense of his own responsibility to and for God's world, a sense of duty to apply the talents granted to him by God; while the idea of sin and the moral example of saints and the living pastors and monastic leaders address themselves to the Christian's conscience. Thus faith, beauty and goodness become another interrelated trinity of a believer's world and moral imperatives in one's life.¹⁸

At the 1986 writers' congress Likhachev had called for the formation of a non-governmental public Cultural Fund. It was duly created later in the year with Likhachev as its president. Gorbachev's wife and Metropolitan Pitirim, the head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Publishing Department, are among its Board members.¹⁹

Its luxuriously illustrated periodical, *Nashe nasledie*, 160 pp. (printed by the Maxwell Press) is published six times per year. Every issue has had at least one article on religion in the context of Russian or any other national culture, history, ideas, or art. Number 1 for 1989 contains only one such entry: an illustrated article on the Russian Monastery of St Panteleimon of Mount Athos in the past and present. It laments the narrow nationalism of the Greek Government which practically bars Slavs from Mount Athos; and it calls for joint action on the part of the UN, UNESCO and the Cultural Fund to put pressure to bear on the Greek government to restore to the monasteries on that peninsula their original international character.

¹⁸E.g. the following Likhachev articles and interviews with him: 'Ot pokayaniya k deistviyu!', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 9 September 1987; 'Predvaritel'nye itogi tsysyacheletnego opyta', *Ogonek* No. 10, March 1988, pp. 9-12; 'Kreshcheniye Rusi i gosudarstvo Rus', *Novy mir*, No. 6 (June) 1988, pp. 249-58; 'Rossiya', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 12 December 1988; 'Mysli o kul'ture budushchego', *Izvestiya* 15 November 1989. The concept of personal sin and repentance as essentials of a morally healthy person and hence of society is often put forward in the Soviet media, e.g. the Raushenbach article, No. 7 above; letters from readers, e.g. 'Tsena nigilizma', *Izvestiya*, 8 March 1989.

¹⁹Recently Likhachev complained of corruption and misuse of the Fund's finances by its new functionaries for their own needs. See his 'Ne stat' by nam "obkomom kul'tury"', *Izvestiya*, 2 June 1990.

Subsequent issues contain a very interesting illustrated article on the late Soviet-Russian painter Pavel Korin's famous unfinished painting, 'The Departing Russia,' containing the first three 20th century patriarchs, the late Patriarch Pimen as a young deacon, and hosts of other clergy and monastics set in the Kremlin's Dormition Cathedral. The first three issues for 1989 contain a rather fascinating autobiography of the famous mid-19th century Russian renegade, V. S. Pechorin, who had left Russia for good in 1836, wrote the famous verses: 'How sweet it is to hate one's fatherland. . .', and after infatuations with utopian socialism ended up as a Roman-Catholic priest in Dublin. Many other essays deal with major Russian religious thinkers of the 20th century and their ideas, leaving no doubt as to the journal's positive attitude to religion. This is followed by a moving and informative account of monastic life in the USSR today.²⁰ The colour photographs show mass pilgrimages, colourful services in monastic chapels, Fr Zenon, Russia's greatest living iconographer, in his monastic icon-painting workshop, and pictures of the monasteries themselves.²¹

Profiles of almost all major Russian religious thinkers, philosophers and theologians have appeared in numerous Soviet mass circulation serials and newspapers in the course of 1988-90, always stressing their Christian *Weltanschauung*, where only a few years ago this would have been minimised or ignored altogether, should those names be mentioned at all.²²

The art pages in *Ogonek* reveal to the Soviet reader the predominance of religious themes in the art of contemporary Soviet painters. Short comments on the artists, accompanying the reproductions, confirm that many are practising religious believers and were even professionally oppressed by the Soviet Artists' Union because they explored 'inappropriate themes', as recently as 1981.²³

Interviews with modern Soviet composers of the younger generation and musicians likewise reveal the strong religious convictions of some of them. The greatest living Soviet composer, Alfred Shnitke, born in Russia of a Jewish father and a German mother, says: 'My musical tradition is Russian, in my creativity I feel the presence of German

²⁰ *Nashe nasledie*, Nos. I, II & III for 1989, respectively pp. 61-84, 31-75, 97-117 and 120-34.

²¹ A. Nezhny, 'Voskhozhdeniye na svyatuyu goru', *Nashe nasledie*, No. III (1989), pp. 144-58.

²² E.g. S. Khoruzhyi, 'Lev Platonovich Karsavin', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 22 February 1989; V. Bibikhin, 'Konstantin Nikolayevich Leontiev', 5 April 1989; S. Polovinkin, 'Yevgeni Nikolayevich Trubetskoi', 24 May 1989; P. Gurevich, V. Makhlin, 'Prorok v svoem otechestve', 22 July 1989; *Sobesednik*: V. Todres, 'Tsarsstvo sovesti', No. 37, September 1989, p. 6; *Nashe nasledie*: A. A. Takho-Godi, 'Preodoleniye khaosa', No. V, 1989, pp. 74-92.

²³ N. Isacheva, 'On ne prosil sud'by inoi', *Ogonek*, No. 24, June 1989, pp. 8-10.

blood, less so of Jewish . . . By faith I am a Christian, Roman Catholic'. And in another place he says: 'A miracle is a miracle, and miracle is God'.²⁴

Monastic Life.

In many of his writings and statements Likhachev has emphasised the great positive cultural, educational and scientific role of monasteries in Russian history, their contribution not only to spiritual and literary culture and the chronicling of history, but also to material culture. Thus the far-northern island monastery of Solovki utilised hot water springs to grow excellent vegetables and apples in the Arctic as early as the 16th century, developed highly productive fish hatcheries and constructed complicated engineering works and mills, serving over the centuries as a peasants' academy of sorts, where the Arctic and sub-Arctic peasants used to send their boys to learn literacy as well as carpentry, fishing techniques, agriculture, and other crafts.²⁵

The monasteries, especially the peripheral rural ones, and the culture of the Old Believers were the two great sources of the peasant civilisation representing an unbroken continuity of pre-Petrine culture which by the early 20th century began to fertilise the westernised Russian secular culture, particularly in art and poetry. The greatest modern peasant poet, Nikolai Klyuev, came from the midst of Old Believers, claiming to be a direct descendant of the famous martyred 17th century Old Ritualist leader, Archpriest Avvakum. His poet-friends, Oreshin and Klychkov, were also of Old Believer background. Klyuev's and Klychkov's poetry was deeply religious, even mystical, many of their rhythms came down from ancient Russian ballads and Old Believers' spiritual verses. Their work could have begun a new strain in Russian literature, quite different from the westernised gentry culture known through the Russian urban or aristocratic artists and writers. But the Bolsheviks made sure that national-religious rural culture was nipped in the bud before it could spread its seeds. Klyuev, 'one of Russia's best poets' as a Soviet literary critic remarks, had been isolated in the Siberian exile in 1934 and shot three years later. Klychkov, likewise, disappeared in Soviet dungeons in 1937.²⁶ His fate illustrates the thesis of another

²⁴O. Martynenko, 'Al'fred Shnitke: istina v mnogoobrazii', *Moskovskije novosti*, 14 May 1989, p. 16; D. Biryukov, 'Chuvstvo otvoyevannoi svobody', *Ogonek*, No. 49, December 1989, p. 29.

²⁵Likhachev's writings as cited in footnote 18 above and Iu. Brodsky, 'Solovki', *Nashe nasledie*, IV, 1989, p. 45.

²⁶V. Shentalinsky, 'Gamayun — ptitsa veshchaya', *Ogonek*, No. 43, October 1989, pp. 9-12; G. Klychkov (son), 'Medvyani istochnik', *Nashe nasledie*, V, 1989, pp. 93-100.

contemporary Soviet writer, Boris Vasil'ev, that the Bolsheviks were most consistent and brutal in the destruction of the peasantry. The proletariat was too weak and small in numbers, he writes, therefore:

the state . . . aimed first and foremost at the atomisation and destruction of the village . . . Stalin's collectivisation was not merely an economic or even a political act . . . Its content, its global aim was destruction of the countryside as a huge social force.

Rural churches, he writes, were the backbone of that culture, hence they had to be wiped out.²⁷ That thesis is amply confirmed in contemporary ruralist prose. *The Eve* by V. Belov describes precisely these methods and aims in the process of enforced collectivisation.

As to the monasteries, it was not only the peasants and the uneducated to whom they addressed themselves. The famous Optina Monastery, some 180 km. south-west of Moscow, was a disseminator of Orthodox culture not only among the commoners, for it also enlightened the most famous writers and thinkers of pre-revolutionary Russia. At the end of 1987 the ruin of that monastery was at last handed to the Church by the state. An article in *Ogonek* describes life in the monastery two years later, amidst restoration made possible by donations of generous pilgrims. The article minces no words. It begins with cases of brutal and senseless murders of bishops and other clergy and monastics as early as 1918, and concludes:

By 1922, 2,691 married priests, 1,962 monks and 3,447 nuns had been executed by court verdicts. No less than 15,000 [church laity] were executed without trials. More than 700 monasteries and convents were liquidated, the one in Solovki having been turned into a concentration camp.

The Optina Monastery was liquidated in 1924, replaced by an orphanage, later transformed into a number of workshops and living quarters. In 1940 it housed one of the groups of Polish prisoners later to be shot at Katyn. The churches, as well as most monastic buildings, were reduced to ruin. Photographs show young monks and young (even teenaged) pilgrims. The abbot informs them that during World War II the church was the first one to appeal to the nation to sacrifice all for the defence of the country. Someone remarks, 'but weren't there priests who supported the occupiers?' Fr Yevlogi does not condemn such priests as previously required, but explains that this was a natural reaction to the opening of churches in the occupied territories after they had been shut and destroyed by

²⁷ 'Lyubi Rossiyu v nepogodu', *Izvestiya*, 17 January 1989. See also I. Shafarevich 'Dve dorogi k odnomu obryvu', *Novy mir*, No. 7 (July 1989), p. 153.

Stalin. No Tatars, he adds, had ever done as much harm to the church as Stalin.

The Optina Monastery used to have a famous library of 33,000 books and several hundred unique manuscripts, a printing press and an active group of monastic linguists who translated and annotated Church Fathers' writings and published them. The reviving monastery has only 300 books but an enthusiastic librarian, a kind and loving monk, writes the journalist, and adds without any sneer that a miracle has recently been recorded at the monastery. The librarian, who spends whole nights praying at an icon of the Virgin, noticed one night the appearance of a fragrant moisture on it. This was later witnessed and documented by the abbot.

Who are the 54 new monks and novices? One is a veteran of 'high social life' who gave up all physical pleasures, moved to the monastery in the hope of being tonsured one day, doing all sorts of menial jobs at the monastery. Another one had a high administrative job, was a party member. When he was caught by colleagues attending church and warned he would lose his job if he continued, he returned his party card, and ended up in the Optina. More than half of them have Soviet university degrees: doctors, architects, scientists, linguists, engineers. The average age is thirty, the youngest novice being under twenty-one years of age. In the two-and-half years' history of the reborn monastery there had been one defection — by a novice who had wandered about for six months only to return and 'be received with love like a prodigal son', as Fr Melkesidek, Archimandrite Yevlogi's assistant for publications and business, recounted to this writer.²⁸

A similar group of monks, only on a tiny scale, are to be found in the reviving ancient Georgian monastery of Dzhvari, deep in the Caucasian Mountains, as described in a very moving autobiographical novella 'Dzhvari' in the monthly *Novy mir*. The abbot and both his subordinates (one still a novice) are all young men with degrees, and one is even a former communist historian and researcher at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism(!). The monastery is very severe, ascetic, and yet open to the world, to pilgrims. The visiting lady, probably the author herself, comes with her son, a teenager, a talented musician and a very serious and conscientious believer with the ambition to dedicate himself to the church. Both are recent converts. The author informs us that the son has since become a seminarian. A newspaper literary critic remarks on the work:

'Dzhvari' is something so entirely new not only in our literature,

²⁸N. Chugunova, 'Optina, zavyaz', *Ogonek*, No. 34, August 1989, pp. 26-28; augmented by this writer after a visit to the monastery in July 1990.

but in our social life as such, that its appearance can safely be called a happening . . .

It is a novella written by a person . . . with a believing soul, passionately thirsty for a true life in the faith. This is what raises the novella to its unusual spiritual height . . . It 'is not yet a prayer, but neither is it simply literature',

he cites the author, and adds:

Even yesterday the appearance . . . in the legal press of such a colourful artistic confession of the Orthodox Christian faith would have been impossible.²⁹

This newly discovered world of Orthodox spirituality and its openness to the world outside, readiness to come to its aid, to open the arms of the church to the salvation of the lost flock is constantly contrasted in multiple Soviet publications to the dreariness and the spiritual and cultural barrenness of the secular Soviet world. One such piece, lamenting the state of secular culture, the fires and floods in the nation's most important libraries, the emigration of the Soviet Union's best musicians and artists, and the failure to protect and restore historical buildings, remarks:

A pleasant exception to that rule is the restoration of St Daniel's Monastery from its recent state of abominable desolation. [Secular] culture is clearly lagging behind the cult.³⁰

Numerous articles discuss the sorry state of culture in the USSR: the state budget for culture is one of the lowest in the world, not a single new concert hall has been built in the last several decades, and those that exist have been ruined by disrepair or reconstructions that destroyed acoustics, etc.

But here is an excellent illustration of an inverse relationship between official atheism and culture. The following happened in 1989 in Kadom, a small town in the Ryazan' region, not far from Moscow. The director of the local music school with five other teachers, all under 40 years of age, began to sing in the local church choir. This reached the relevant educational, party and komsomol authorities. All of them attacked the teachers for ideologically subversive behaviour, reminding them that they were workers on the ideological front. Having failed to force the teachers to stop singing in the church, the authorities addressed themselves to the local official of the CRA (Council for Religious Affairs) who tried to convince the priest to

²⁹ V. Alfeyeva, 'Dzhvari', *Novy mir*, 7 (July) 1989, pp. 3-82; I. Vinogradov, 'U poroga' *Moskovskiy novosti*, 1 October 1989.

³⁰ B. Lyubimov, 'Treshchiny v zdanii', *Ogonek*, No. 4, January 1989, p. 31.

forbid the musicians to sing in his church. When the 26 year old priest, an expert in medieval church music, refused to comply, he was transferred to the farthest and poorest parish in the diocese. Those teachers who were party or komsomol members were expelled from the organisation; the head of the school was forced to resign. Children at the school showed their support for the persecuted teachers by drawing crosses on school walls. The school, formerly a happy place with enthusiastic teachers and children, has now become a very sad place; and instead of crosses four-letter-words have now been scratched on a piano, even as Firsova, the deputy head of the local Department of Culture declared:

There are no irreplaceable people. If need be, we might even close the music school. But we shall use any means available to put an end to your singing.

In contrast the school's deposed principal said about her singing at the church:

We discovered a new world, a new harmony. We were now ready to sacrifice all for it. To understand our stubbornness, it is necessary to appreciate our art. I nearly broke down in tears when we began singing there for the first time.³¹

Repression of the Churches

The above report also brings us to the question of persecutions of clergy. Numerous articles now admit that the whole historical road of the Soviet state has been paved by the blood of the martyrs for faith, and that the martyrdom did not begin or end under Stalin, but had been around from the first days of the Bolshevik era. There was even a lengthy and moving article on the Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fedorovna, a sister of the last Tsar's wife, who took the veil after her husband, the Grand Duke Sergei, governor-general of Moscow, had been murdered by a revolutionary. The story, accompanied by her portrait as a nun, gives a moving account of the Martha and Mary convent she had founded and the charity and medical help the convent engaged in, rehabilitating alcoholics, taking care of orphans, criminals. The author, an Orthodox priest, paints the portrait of a saint brutally murdered by the Bolsheviks in 1918 along with other politically absolutely innocent relatives

³¹ A. Vasinsky, 'Buka', *Izvestiya* 28 and 29 September 1989.

of the tsar, only hours apart from the murder of the tsar and his family.³²

The barbaric destruction of Christ-the-Saviour Cathedral, which had taken forty-four years to build, mostly by voluntary donations collected across the whole Empire, to commemorate the casualties of the Napoleonic invasion of Russia, has lately received much attention in the media. Under public pressure the hot-water open-air year-round swimming pool that was built in its place has been drained. An all-Russian voluntary society for the rebuilding of the cathedral has been formed and has received considerable support in the press, which has even revealed that although the cathedral was dynamited in 1931, the decision to destroy it had been taken as early as 1922.³³

But there are also reports on the continuing harassment of believers in the Gorbachev era as well. One of the most sensational and scandalous events occurred in the industrial city of Ivanovo, north-east of Moscow, a city of almost half a million inhabitants with only one functioning Orthodox church. For years believers have been demanding the reopening of a cathedral turned into the regional archives repository in 1939. The city and provincial soviets as well as the local party leadership kept refusing. The central Council for Religious Affairs in Moscow finally granted registration to two Ivanovo religious associations with the right to claim two churches: the cathedral and a smaller church in a suburb. But still the local authorities resisted, using all sorts of excuses:

— there are only 5,000 religious believers in the whole city, hence one church is enough. Yet according to a diocesan report, on an average 51 persons per day had been baptised throughout 1988, i.e. more than 18,000 people newly baptised souls in that single city church in a single year!

— the new archives building, the construction of which would be completed before the end of 1989, was too small to house the archives, declared the local party boss at an electoral meeting for the Congress of Peoples' Deputies. On checking with the head of archives it was learned that all the existing documents would not fill the new building.

— it was claimed that the majority of the residents were against the restoration of the church to the believers; but the failure of any of the city fathers to be elected to the Congress of Deputies proved the reverse; particularly since the party boss lost to a welder who supported the believers.

³²Protoierei A. Shargunov, 'Velikaya knyaginya', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 4 October 1989.

³³R. Armejev, 'Khram', *Izvestiya*, 23 September 1989; A. Shamaro, 'Smert' khrama', *Nedelya*, 17-23 July 1989.

— to impress the public with the priority of the archival documents over everything else, the party even declared publicly that they included documents on the trials and executions of the Stalin era, which, as the journalist points out, is nonsense: such documents are still only in the KGB archives, out of bounds to the public. But the mendacious statement was made to antagonise the public against the believers, to blame them for hindering the work of unmasking Stalin's crimes. Another argument was that Ivanovo is the city where the first *soviets* were born in 1905 and therefore it would be intolerable to have a functioning church in the very centre of that city. The chairman of the city soviet uses another argument: there are laws which are straight-forward and have to be fulfilled, and others which have to be interpreted in accordance with one's atheistic conscience. To these, he argues, belong laws on the registration of religious associations; hence his communist conscience does not allow him to adhere to them.

The result of these tactics was that four women — three in their forties, one 28 years old — went on a 16-day long hunger strike. Beginning on 21 March, they laid on boards on the church steps, totally exposed to the elements. To further humiliate the women, the administration of the city garages situated in the yard of the church refused them the use of their toilets, while the women were becoming physically too weak to walk to public facilities quite a distance away.

A major scandal erupted as the BBC and other foreign broadcasting services reported the case. Soviet papers published articles sympathetic to the hunger strikers, informal organisations came to their defence. Eventually, especially after the loss of the elections, the city fathers had to bend to public pressure and promise that the church would be returned to the believers during 1990, as soon as the documents had been transferred to the new archival building. Even then the church would be returned with strange limitations: no funerals to be conducted or funeral processions to proceed from that church, situated in the immediate neighbourhood of the party offices.³⁴

³⁴Information on the number of baptisms was given by the bishop of Ivanovo, E. Komarov, 'Ivanovskoye delo', *Moskovski tserkovny vestnik*, No. 7, July 1989, p. 6. The rest is from the following sources: A letter of 3,000 Ivanovo parishioners to *Ogonek*, No. 6, February 1989, p. 2, on forthcoming hunger strike; A. Ignatov: 1. 'Po doroge, vedushchei k khramu', 2. 'Protivostoyaniye v Ivanove', *Moskovskie novosti*, 2 April and 23 April respectively, 1989; A. Nezhnyi, 'Strasti po krasnomu khramu', *Ogonek*, No. 28, July 1989, pp. 17-21; Nezhny-Kharchev, 'Treti razgovor', *Ogonek*, No. 44, pp. 9-12, where Kharchev reproaches the Synod of bishops for not raising official protest in defence of the Ivanovo believers, although one of its sessions occurred precisely at the time of the hunger strike and the bishop of Ivanovo participated in the session. Also: a letter in *Ogonek*, No. 49, December 1989, where the author, N. Gorokhov, requests that in future the CPSU should give up its official anti-religious militancy and declare neutrality on the question of faith.

Here is a Soviet journalist's comment on the event:

Every time society falls prey to delusions of heart and mind, and ceases to appreciate the importance of absolute values, when it expects revelations of truth from idols created by itself, then man loses the sense of responsibility for all that is happening to his nation.

Contrasting to the party bureaucrats' behaviour the selfless actions of the informals who came to the believers' support and who as 'dissidents' have suffered for their ideas in one form or another, the journalist remarks that they were gaining nothing in these actions except spiritual freedom, which they needed because

when a man feels he is a slave, he bears no more responsibility for the destinies of his city, county, nation or the world. But the moment a human being recognises his 'filiality', the need to build a more humane and morally healthy life immediately awakens in him.³⁵

There have been numerous articles in the Soviet press on similar cases of persecutions, on the refusals by local authorities to hand over a church to believers, on unjustly high taxes imposed on the church. An impressively frank summary of the difficult position faced by the church and her clergy appeared in *Literaturnaya gazeta*.

The author, Bogdanovsky, begins by pointing to the numerous unpublished internal instructions on the application of state policies on the church. Nor are the laws, issued in 1929 and amended in 1975, much of a relief either. They are phrased in such a way as to 'allow their broadest possible interpretation, leaving the parish at the mercy of anybody possessing even the very minimal power prerogatives'. The parish, as well as the rest of the church, having no juridical status, remains defenceless. The parish can be closed by secular officials on the flimsiest of pretexts. The priest cannot be appointed without the CRA representative's 'registration', cancelled at will for such 'transgressions' as catechetical talks for those preparing for baptism, teaching religion to children or adults, let alone charity work or active missionary endeavours.

Of course, it will be the diocesan bishop, not the CRA official, who will remove or transfer the priest, but on the CRA official's request. An 'unco-operative' bishop will likewise be transferred or simply 'retired to a monastery', again formally by a Synod's decree.

³⁵Nezhny, 'Strasti', pp. 17 and 19.

The decision of 1961, forced upon the church, deprived the priest of all powers within the parish, transferring them to the lay executive organ with the warden at the head. Only the group of twenty, responsible for the church property to the local Soviet government, elected the executive of three persons. Until recently the Soviet authorities, as a rule, refused to recognise the validity of the 'twenty' unless it was composed of elderly, uneducated women, whom the local *soviet* would pressure to elect its nominee as the warden. Bogdanovsky enumerates the kind of people thus appointed as wardens, particularly in those parishes which had substantial incomes:

an ex-Soviet administrator who proved too incompetent or corrupt for the job, but who retained ties [with his *nomenklatura* protectors], a former shop manager caught stealing, a retired KGB officer . . . All of them would gratify their benefactors, not ignoring their own pocket either . . . 'I am the Soviet power here', shouted a warden, a former alcohol saleswoman, at a Moscow priest, 'Just you try to report on me!'

He tried, and was transferred to a distant rural parish.

A parish can do nothing without bribes to state officials, continues Bogdanovsky:

a 'tax' for the right to repair a church, a 'tax' to prevent a projected highway from passing through the church yard, a 'tax' for the right to light candles during the service.

And then legal taxes:

if a priest's salary is 400 roubles a month, he pays 156 of them in income tax . . . And then there is an umpteen number of taxes on all kinds of church income and activities.

In his own case, when his fourth child was born, he was refused the 4.65 roubles a month family support to which theoretically every fourth child is entitled — not those whose father works for the church though. Bogdanovsky reproaches the Supreme Soviet for having totally ignored the status of church employees when discussing pension and other social service improvements during the autumn 1989 session, and appeals to its members to remember them in the next session. He also questions the necessity of special legislation on religion. In a country ruled by law, he writes, it would be sufficient to give the church a full juridical status and to add a few articles to the codes of civil and criminal law stipulating the legal equality of believers and unbelievers and punishments for the abuse of their rights and convictions. Laws should also stipulate which forms of religious education and other church activities are to remain proscribed, on the

principle that all which is not proscribed is legal, and so that in future those priests who have now begun to form Sunday schools, to visit jails and hospitals, to form mercy and charity groups, would not find themselves in prison once again. He also suggests that the Council for Religious Affairs be replaced by a state department responsible to the Supreme Soviet.³⁶

The 'Uniate' Question

Bogdanovsky cautions his readers not to criticise the clergy for their alleged 'timidity'. Indeed, the cadres of the clergy, the slow reaction of the church establishment to the new possibilities made available by *perestroika* and *glasnost*, are frequent subjects of discussion both in the secular and in the Moscow Patriarchate's press. The main line of criticism in the secular media directed at the bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church has been in connection with the so-called Uniate question in Western Ukraine, i.e. the revival of the Ukrainian Catholic Church of the Eastern Rite. Although the original suppression of the Uniate Church had been Stalin's decision and was the work of his punitive organs, and all that remained for the Orthodox Church was to welcome the churchless Uniates into the fold of the Orthodox Church providing continuity of church services in the temples that would otherwise have been simply closed and destroyed, the Moscow Patriarchate's share of the blame lies in its refusal to admit publicly that the so-called Lvov Unification Council of 1946 was a fraud.

While many members of the Moscow Patriarchate's clergy recognise the necessity to resolve the Unia problem and consider the Russian Orthodox Church should not hamper the revival of Uniate parishes in any way,³⁷ the Moscow Patriarchate for a long time remained formally silent on the issue, while Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev and the Ukraine (an ethnic Ukrainian) kept categorically refusing to recognise the existence of the question or its legitimacy. In contrast, the Soviet media began by the middle of 1989 to lean in favour of granting the Uniates official recognition, although as late as February 1989 *Izvestiya* had still denied that there were millions of Uniates in today's Ukraine.³⁸ The legalisation of the Unia following Gorba-

³⁶ Bogdanovsky, 'Glasnost', *Literaturnaya gazeta*.

³⁷ This writer's private conversations with some leading clergy of the Patriarchate and his witnessing of several bishops' reaction to the Uniate believers demonstrating in front of the Patriarchate's Publishing Department by greeting them: 'God help you!'

³⁸ S. Tsykora, 'Kolokola nad Desnoi', *Izvestiya*, 1 February 1989; Mitr. Filaret and S. Filatov, 'Dva mneniya', *Moskovskiyе novosti*, 30 July 1989; G. Rozhnov, 'Eto my, Gospodii!', *Ogonek*, No. 38, 1989, pp. 6-8; A. Mineyev, 'Ch'i vo L'vove khramy?', *Moskovskiyе novosti*, 26 November 1989, p. 27.

chev's visit to the Pope was a bombshell: within no time of the 19 Orthodox churches of Lvov, 15 reverted to the Unia; in Ivano-Frankovsk only one church remained in Orthodox hands, but even that one was taken over by the Autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church, a schismatic body which had broken off from the mainline Orthodox Church of the Soviet Union. The abbot of the Hoshiv Orthodox Monastery in the same diocese, restored to the church only a year earlier, was attacked and received knife stabs from some roving band of hoodlums, originally reported to have been from the lay Committee for the Defence of the Ukrainian Catholic Church demanding the return of that monastery to the Ukrainian Catholic Church. But according to latest reports, the hoodlums had nothing to do with the Ukrainian Catholic Church. However, Ukrainian Orthodox clergy and seminarians from Lvov and Ivano-Frankovsk, encountered by this writer last summer, painted a picture of widespread violence in the area. According to them, as far as the laity and many of the 'Uniate' clergy are concerned, the feud is not theological in its content, but nationalistic and political, as the laity and even many newly self-declared 'Uniate' priests are theologically ignorant. Many of them do not know the rubrics of the service, and when asked who had ordained them, reply: 'None of your business. The Lord and my heart know, and that is enough.' The line of attack for the Uniates is that Orthodoxy had been imposed on them by the communists, therefore it is a religion of Soviet and Russian imperialism. If you are Ukrainian, you must belong to the Ukrainian national religion, i.e. Ukrainian Catholicism. In other words, in this campaign an Orthodox Christian in Western Ukraine becomes by implication a traitor. Hence the attacks and forceful confiscations of churches from the Orthodox in many villages, although the hierarchy of the 'Uniate' Church may have nothing to do with that, as implicitly recognised by the Orthodox bishops who now say that the negotiations to settle the problem of the distribution of temples between the Uniates and the Orthodox in Western Ukraine should be conducted with the Uniate hierarchy and clergy, not with the allegedly violent lay committees.³⁹

³⁹ 'Zayavleniye Svyashchennogo Sinoda Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi', *Izvestiya*, 20 December 1989; R. Vadimov, 'Eto agressiya', *Moskovski tserkovny vestnik*, No. 1 (19) January 1990. It should not be ruled out that violence may indeed have been committed, especially since the president of the Committee for the Defence of the Ukrainian Catholic Church is the same Ivan Hël' who, along with Valentyn Moroz, was deprived of the status of political prisoners by an international prisoners' honorary court in Mordovia camps for instigating hatred between nationalities and terrorising other Ukrainian prisoners for being friendly to Russian and Jewish prisoners. See: *Khronika tekushchikh sobytii*, No. 47 (Chalidze reprint, p. 98).

The appeal to the Ukrainian Catholic hierarchy is rather ironic in view of the fact that at least in its official statements the Orthodox hierarchy until recently refused to recognise its validity and insisted on the validity of the fraudulent Lvov 'Sobor' of 1946 which had officially abolished the 'Unia'.

Some of the media's criticism of the bishops' college accuses them of being too static, of having adapted themselves to the old system, not daring to respond to new challenges. The former head of the CRA, Konstantin Kharchev, claimed that the reason why the synod of bishops had lodged a complaint against him with the Supreme Soviet Presidium was because he wanted the church to be more independent and future patriarchal elections to be truly democratic. Some synod members fearing that in free elections they would not have a chance, allegedly preferred government's pressure in their favour to free elections. This article, however, was followed by a convincing rebuttal written by an official of the Central Committee.⁴⁰

Occasionally bishops are accused of despotism over priests, removing them from their parishes at will, against the wishes of the parishioners, with no reason at all. As pointed out by Bogdanovsky, above, the decisive force behind such actions is usually the official of the CRA. But at least in one report the official agreed to leave a very popular priest alone, nevertheless the bishop, Metropolitan Methodius of Voronezh, deprived him of the right to serve; thus, as an anti-religious journal comments, 'that bishop has contributed more positively to the cause of atheism than a dozen professional propagandists'⁴¹

Not all of the media assessments of bishops are negative, however. The central TV on Sunday 15 April 1989, started a programme called 'The Moral Sunday Sermon'. The first person to give it was Pitirim, the Metropolitan of Volokolamsk, whose sermon, 'Thoughts on the Eternal', received high praise in *Moscow News*. Two weeks later, however, the 'preacher' was Yuri Bondarev, an extremist right-wing national-Bolshevik writer and supporter of *Pamyat*. This caused an immediate negative reaction amongst at least some listeners, including a family of CPSU members, who protested that the sermon hour should be exclusively that of clergy, and only theirs.

The Clergy

Articles on the clergy and their education are often revealing. In an excellent article on the Moscow theological schools at the Zagorsk Trinity-St Sergius Monastery we read about a young teacher at the

⁴⁰Nezhny-Kharchev, 'Treti razgovor', pp. 9-12 and A. Degtyarev, 'Neobkhdimoye poysneniye k "Tret'emu razgovoru"', *Ogonek* No. 48, November 1989, pp. 28-29. S. Averintsev, Priest Mark Smirnov and several art historians protest against the synod's attempt to prevent free and independent icon painting, to monopolise and freeze it, *Moskovskiy novosti*, 26 February 1989.

⁴¹V. Lebedev, 'Otets Georgi — bezrabortny', *Nauka i religiya* No. 2 (February) 1989, pp. 34-35.

seminary, Fr Artemi. Formerly one of the best teachers of literature at the country's elite Moscow Physics-Mathematics Secondary School, he had lost his job for attending church services. A seminarian, Andrei Kurayev, had been a student of philosophy at a state university, and in the student branch of the *komsomol* was responsible for atheistic propaganda. His duties included attending churches in order to find out if there were any university students among the worshippers. Thus he became acquainted with the church, converted, left the university and was now training for the priesthood along with other former atheists who constituted approximately one-half of the whole student body of over 600 at the seminary. The article has nothing but praise for the student body, for the educational methods and broadness, high culture of the curriculum, the inner spiritual freedom of the teachers and students — all of these are a cut above the secular higher educational institutions in the Soviet Union, according to the author.⁴²

Ironically, the secular authors' assessment of clergy in the last two years, has been much more positive than the vision of the clergy from within the church, expressed both in secular and ecclesiastical publications. A priest, Mikhail Arlov, sees a process of demoralisation within the church dating from Metropolitan Sergi's involuntary 1927 pledge of loyalty to the Soviet state which identified the interests of the 'openly theomachistic state with those of the church'. This led to many years of revoltingly mendacious public utterances by the church's hierarchs and resulted in a new breed of parish priests who were forced to repeat uncritically official lies.

In the 1970s the CRA . . . tried to create a new phenomenon, a Soviet priest who would combine Christianity with Marxism. The experiment failed, but what came out of the experiment . . . is a large number of clergy without any principles.⁴³

A more balanced interpretation of the same phenomenon is to be found in an article by one of Russia's most famous sermonisers and popular theologians, Fr Alexander Men', who diagnoses the Soviet system as evil, developing an

inertia of evil, the inertia of a gigantic social illness covering almost one half of the globe . . .

⁴² A. Tsurulnikov, 'Iz zhizni dukhovnoi shkoly', *Ogonek*, No. 5, January 1989, pp. 28-32; 'Svyashchennik', *Moskovskiy novosti*, No. 23, 1988, p. 16 — a story about a professional psychologist who, after being converted, went to become a priest. V. Shevelev, 'Bog v pomoshch!', *Moskovskiy novosti*, 22 October 1989, p. 3; a letter by the Popov family protesting against sermons by laymen on the TV, *Ogonek*, No. 49, December 1989, p. 4.

⁴³ 'Svoboda sovesti', *Moskovskiy novosti*, 3 December 1989, p. 15.

Now the church is expected to save society by its great treasures of the spirit. Don't you understand that our ecclesiastic house was likewise robbed, turned upside down, debased, depopulated for a long time to come.⁴⁴

Yet, he says, his faith is optimistic. Evil creates nothing, it is but 'a caricature on God's creation'. He believes that the present crisis is 'the birth pangs . . . of a normal human life, of which we have been deprived.' Just like Bogdanovsky above, Fr Men' holds the opinion that the clergy and the church were invariably affected by the general malaise of society, but holding onto the teachings of Christ they have preserved these teachings with which alone they can cure themselves and help gradually to cure the society around them.⁴⁵

Conclusions

What transpires in reviewing the Soviet media is that, in contrast to only half a decade ago when the church activists fighting for survival were predominantly retired people and uneducated old women, now leading members of the intelligentsia, scholars and scientists, writers and artists, act as prominent apologists and advocates for the church. No doubt this has directly affected the status of the church in Soviet society, changing her image in the public eye from that of an enclave of the ignorant and defective elements to at least a leading factor in Russian culture and its source.

Nevertheless, the church and its clergy are still being punitively taxed, paying higher taxes even than the new private and profit making co-operatives.* Moreover, the church is still treated by the state as a residual commodity. Earlier we discussed the triple conflict between a parish, the local government (siding with the parish) and a ministry under whose jurisdiction is a building firm whose bosses occupy the former parish house which the church wants to transform into a retirement home for the single and needy elderly people. Although the new Moscow diocesan weekly, *Moskovski tserkovny*

⁴⁴Fr Alexander Men' was murdered with an axe on Sunday 9 September 1990 just before 7am while walking to a suburban train station on his way to serve the regular Sunday liturgy at his Pushkino church.

⁴⁵'Trevogi, nadezhdy, plany', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 10 January 1990. In *Moskovski tserkovny vestnik*, No. 18 (December) 1989, Boris Kozlov, its editor, attacked the state policies towards the church and even the current draft of state legislation on the church in even tougher terms for retaining the supreme power of the CRA over it. See his 'Shag vlevo, shag vpravo. . .', pp. 1 and 6.

*This should no longer be true after the passage of the new Law on the Freedom of Conscience on 1 October 1990.

vestnik, reported in March 1990 that the building had at last been returned to the parish and all the paperwork completed, in fact, even as late as July of that year the building firm had not moved out. In another instance the Botkin Hospital, one of the best hospitals in the country, gave over a wing and the attached hospital church to an Orthodox community of mercy and charity in order both to activate the church for themselves and for the patients and to let the community take care of certain categories of patients. The group had been registered by the local government in Moscow as a religious community and that particular church assigned to it. But there is a plumbers' workshop in the church and it has no intention of moving out, despite the local government orders, protests by the RSFSR Writers' Union and other social and parliamentary groups. A report in *Izvestiya* asks: why does not the government of the Moscow city act decisively; cut off energy from the workshop and seal it?⁴⁶ The answer, of course, is that: 1. as the Ministry of Culture has repeatedly stated, culture is the most undersubsidised category in the USSR, and its budget is residual in principle. Why should one then expect a different treatment of religious culture? 2. as members of the Russian church point out, even when necessary laws are passed and the church receives full juridical personality, the most important thing will not be the laws, but how and whether they will be obeyed. For seventy years the country has been ruled by decrees and secret instructions, not by laws, and as long as the old *apparatus* system remains in fact even if not in name, no radical improvements should be expected; although there are gaps in it now, so that much depends upon the attitudes of local authorities.

Neither should the KGB be ignored. According to priests and seminary students, the KGB continues to threaten, harass and try to recruit them as before. The only difference is that at the moment it cannot follow up on its threats if the seminarian or the priest refuses to cooperate. But so many of them are still unsure whether the current freedom is to last, or whether one day the KGB will come down on them with a vengeance as so many times in the past decades? This fear can be felt more on the periphery, which is at least one or two years behind Moscow or Leningrad in terms of *glasnost*, and where the KGB threats are still occasionally followed up by mysterious road accidents, beatings by 'hoodlums' who are never located, and even 'accidental' deaths.

If one were to generalise about the prevalent tenor of material appearing about the church in the media, it is the church as the source of 'universal moral principles', a moral educator of the nation, a perpetrator of honesty, responsibility and work ethics. And it is quite

⁴⁶ 'Miloserdnyu nuzhen priyut', *Izvestiya*, 20 July 1990.

characteristic of the deeply felt suspicions of the Soviet state and its ulterior motives, that many members of the clergy say: For seven decades the state was bleeding the church white so that she would not interfere with its enslavement of the nation. Having sucked all the healthy juices out of the nation, demoralised it, made the country ungovernable because of the present moral state of the nation, the state now turns to us once again in hope that the church would restore moral health to the nation, make it once again capable of working for the state. If with God's help we achieve that, then the state will again turn against the church, she will be once again in its way once her job has been completed.

The return of thousands of churches and dozens of monasteries, practically all of them in a state of ruin, requiring billions to be properly restored and fully functioning again, the clergy and believers see also in terms of the state's exploitation of the church. The state's programme of restoration and upkeep of architectural and historical monuments has failed. Now let the church do the job at her own expense. Once they are functioning, Intourist will bring foreign tourists to the sights and reap benefits for the state, while the church will carry only the burden of expenses and repair costs. Such is the degree of confidence in Gorbachev's state.

As to the continuity of the reform process, it seems that in Moscow and Leningrad at least, most begin to believe that there is no return to the past, but that confidence is still very recent and fragile. This distrust was one of the main reasons why the church, and not only senior hierarchs took such a long time to react to *perestroika*. Russian clerics say that when it came most people believed it to be another trick, like Mao's 'Hundred Flowers campaign', to expose the most eloquent and outspoken critics of the regime in order to round them up and clamp down on society. It is only after Gorbachev's meeting with the Holy Synod on 29 April 1988 that the church began to believe that things were really changing. And it was only in 1989 when Gorbachev allowed and tolerated the anti-communist revolutions in Eastern Europe and the return of thousands of churches that the church people began to be convinced that changes might be irreversible and that it was time for the church to speak up as well, without fear of catastrophic consequences.

The conclusion to this paper was written by the author after his return from the USSR where he spent three months in the spring and early summer of 1990, first as a guest lecturer at the Moscow and Leningrad theological schools and then as a Canadian exchange scholar attached to the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, researching in the archives on modern Russian church history.