

Editorial

It would be impossible to introduce the fiftieth issue of *RCL* without looking back at *RCL* Vol. 1, No. 1 and making a few comparisons. Not surprisingly, much has changed. The first issue of *RCL*, published at the beginning of 1973, confined its coverage to the USSR; the next few issues turned to the other countries of Eastern Europe, as well as to China; and during recent years we have devoted space to the questions raised by the existence of religion in the political environments of countries as far apart — physically and culturally — as Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Nicaragua. With regard to religion, too, our scope has broadened considerably: although Christianity remains the principal focus of attention, *RCL* has published material on other religions ranging from Islam (which is widely recognised to be, potentially at least, an extremely powerful cultural and political force in the USSR), to the Siberian “cult of the bear” (Vol. 13, No. 2); in this issue we publish extracts from *samizdat* material about the treatment of Hare Krishna devotees in the Soviet Union (see pp. 298-99). *RCL* has increased considerably in sheer size (the first issue was just forty pages in length), and several technical advances have been made. The latest is our acquisition of new technology which enables me to type this Editorial, and determine its layout on the pages of the journal, at our own computer terminal on Keston College premises.

What is perhaps more remarkable, however, is how *little* has changed. *RCL* Vol. 1, No. 1 published a translation of a Soviet document, dating from the 1960s, addressed to local government authorities, which lays down procedures for “supervising the observance of legislation on cults” at parish level. In the *Chronicle* section of this issue (pp. 318-19), Marite Sapiets presents an analysis of four more recent documents, two of which were marked “secret” or “not for publication”. These documents, reports by the Council for Religious Affairs in the Lithuanian SSR, indicate an unchanged attitude on the part of the present-day Soviet authorities, who clearly regard “religious associations” as a potential threat, requiring close

observation and control.

Another item published in Vol. 1, No. 1 betrays official Soviet concern over the continued survival of what it calls “religious prejudices”: a lengthy article in *Pravda* (1972) entitled “Atheist Education” bemoaned the apparent ineffectiveness of much of the party’s scientific atheist propaganda and called for improvements in “the preparation of propagandist cadres for the anti-religious front”. In this issue of *RCL* (pp. 332-35) we publish the full text of a document which appeared this year in the Bulgarian atheist journal *Ateistichna Tribuna*, and which calls for a strengthening of atheist propaganda in terms remarkably similar to those used in the *Pravda* article which featured in the first *RCL*. What is even more remarkable is that the *Ateistichna Tribuna* document is in fact the text of a 1957 Bulgarian politburo resolution — a resolution which is, according to *Ateistichna Tribuna*, “a truly historic document which continues to inspire the scientific and ideological cadres to develop the theory and practice of atheism”. Indeed, very little has changed.

The Soviet authorities’ disquiet at the survival of “religious prejudices” ought, perhaps, to be increased by the evidence, presented in Algirdas Landsbergis’s article, “God’s Whispers in a ‘Godless’ Literature” (pp. 262-67), of the depth to which religious images and ideas are embedded in Lithuanian culture. In the *Documents* section of this issue (see pp. 339-46) we find further striking evidence of the continued vitality not only of Christian *worship* (which, within limits, the Soviet state is happy to tolerate), but also of Christian *thought*: a review, originally circulated in Czech *samizdat*, of an officially-published Soviet book demonstrates the author’s clear — for a Soviet author, surprisingly clear — philosophical commitment to a Christian view of morality.

RCL has much to report, then, which is positive. Complaints of maltreatment and appeals against injustice still dominate our survey of Soviet religious *samizdat* (pp. 297-303), but these are not the whole picture. In his introduction to the first issue of *RCL*, Michael Bourdeaux said that the journal

is not — and . . . could never become — a “record of persecution”. It intends to cover all aspects of religious life, putting the persecutions and pressures in perspective, while emphasising positive features, particularly the spiritual rebirth which seems to be occurring in church life in so many communist lands.

Fourteen years and fifty issues later, *RCL* continues to fulfill that brief.

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