

Chronicle

New Chronicle Section

With this volume of RCL we have begun a new Chronicle section which combines the old Chronicle and Sources sections. Sources has, of necessity, become increasingly selective in recent years, as we are now including summaries of the samizdat, secular and religious press of other countries besides the Soviet Union. We continue to provide surveys of press and samizdat as part of the Chronicle section's coverage of events and background information. In this issue we feature a survey of recent trends in Soviet atheist propaganda and a study of a series of articles on religion which have appeared in the Hungarian intellectual monthly, Kritika.

Samizdat Bibliographies and Documents

Keston College continues to publish a comprehensive listing of Soviet religious samizdat, which is updated periodically as new documents are received. Readers may request bibliographical summaries of all Soviet religious samizdat, or of specified denominations only. Photocopies of complete documents are also available. Summaries and texts ordered from Keston College cost 10p per page (plus VAT, UK only), plus postage.

Information about samizdat documents from other countries is available from the respective researchers at Keston College.

Legal Changes for Russian Orthodox Church?

Metropolitan Sergi of Odessa, in statements about preparations for next year's millennium, has made some interesting comments about forthcoming changes in church regulations and, possibly, in state laws

governing church life. In a report to a session of the Jubilee Commission of the Moscow Patriarchate, according to the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* (1987 No. 3, p. 14), he said:

An important act of the forthcom-

ing Council will be the adoption of a Charter (*Ustav*) of the Russian Orthodox Church, which will replace the Statute (*Polozheniye*) on the Administration of the Russian Orthodox Church currently in force. The Charter must be founded upon traditional church canon law, taking state legislation into account.

The present Statute was adopted in 1945 and revised in 1961. This brief statement follows a somewhat longer interview which the Metropolitan gave to an English-language publication for overseas consumption (*Moscow News*, 1987 No. 1, p. 13). There he said that the Statute "in our opinion, needs to be perfected" — a strong hint that the church is dissatisfied with the present Statute. He also appeared to suggest that at present the Statute may *not* be founded upon canon law. He does not state in what ways, if any, the present Statute might fall short of canonical norms. However, it is conceivable that he might be referring to amendments to the Statute passed in 1961 by a Council of Bishops, and confirmed by the 1971 Local (i.e. National) Council. The amendment deprived the parish priest of financial control over his parish, which passed to the lay church council. This aroused considerable controversy, and was widely believed by church members to be contrary to the canons. Moreover, the Council of Bishops was irregularly convened, and the amendment was clearly passed under state pressure, at the height of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign. If the amendment is in fact to be repealed, it will be an achievement for which many within the church have been working for over twenty years. The most outspoken opponent of the 1961 amendments, Archbishop Yermogen, was forcibly retired and died in the monastery to which he was sent.

Unofficial comments made by reliable sources since Metropolitan Sergi's statement indicate that the 1961 amendments on the parishes are indeed to be revoked. The widely-respected Archbishop Kirill of Smolensk is said to be heading the committee preparing the revisions.

Another very significant hint is given by Metropolitan Sergi's statement in *Moscow News* that the new Charter "will also take into account the changes in the operating legislation". This appears to mean state, not church legislation, and probably refers to apparent changes which were outlined in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* (1986 No. 1), the status of which has been the subject of much debate. The state itself is not known to have published any changes to the legislation governing church life, and although nothing could have been published in *JMP* without state approval, it is not clear how widely the changes are known about, or being taken advantage of, by Orthodox believers in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, church spokesmen questioned publicly about the apparent changes in the law have either denied that there have been changes, or played down their significance.*

Metropolitan Sergi's statement constitutes an admission that there have in fact been changes in the legislation, and, given that the church is considering revising its own statute partly to take account of them, an implicit admission that the changes are important.

However, the matter continues to be a focus of debate. Although there has been no official announcement concerning state legislation since Metropolitan Sergi's statement, strong rumours continue to circulate

*For a fuller discussion of the 1986 *JMP* article, see *RCL* Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 312-14.

that the Council for Religious Affairs is in the process of revising the 1929 Law on Religious Associations (revised, but not substantially, in 1975). In a recent *samizdat* appeal to Mr Gorbachev, a group of Russian Orthodox believers expressed the fear that the expected revisions would be only minor, and set forth their own view of the changes which would be necessary to bring about true religious freedom. It is possible that church leaders who denied that there had been changes in the law, after the publication of the article in *JMP* mentioned above, feared to give the impression that there had been substantial changes in case this undermined their chances of pressing for genuinely substantial changes at a later date. It is also possible that, in the present politically uncertain atmosphere, the CRA may feel itself to be between two stools: if it

publishes only minor changes there will be great disappointment among Soviet believers and, perhaps, negative reactions from the West, while if it publishes major changes it could run into future political problems if Gorbachev's policies, and even Gorbachev himself, were to disappear from the scene. Comments which seemed to reinforce the view that some changes may be in the offing, made by the CRA chairman, Konstantin Kharchev, on a visit to the USA last August, should therefore be viewed in this context.

In a recently-published interview in *Moscow News* (1987 No. 38), Metropolitan Alexi of Leningrad comments forthrightly that "church-state relations have overgrown their limits" — a strong hint that the Law on Religious Associations needs to be revised.

JANE ELLIS

Gorbachev: Hopes and Fears

Who is Gorbachev and what does he stand for? Those questions have been agitating journalists, scholars, politicians and human rights activists for over two years now. A closet Dubček seeking to push the USSR in the direction of "communism with a human face", or a highly intelligent *apparatchik* using new slogans and clever propaganda in an attempt to lull the outside world into a false sense of security? Should he be encouraged in his efforts to reform the stagnating Soviet economy or should we fear, and therefore resist, real change in the Soviet Union? More importantly, what impact are his policies likely to have on the ordinary Soviet citizen, especially the religious believer?

Elected to head the Soviet Com-

munist Party in March 1985, the youthful and apparently dynamic Gorbachev has done much to change Western perceptions of the USSR. His speeches are free of many of the old clichés and are delivered in a style calculated to keep his audiences awake; he works hard and expects his colleagues — indeed, all Soviet citizens — to do likewise; he also appears to have reined in attempts to create a personality cult. In the international arena he has seized the propaganda initiative on the question of disarmament.

Almost immediately upon taking power, the new General Secretary launched a harsh attack on the failings of the Soviet economy, an attack which he has since refined and taken much further. In this, he was