The Russian Orthodox Church and the Soviet State - Part II

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3. Aspects of the current relation between state and church

The present situation in state-church relations is marked by diverse and contradictory developments. Much favors the thesis of religious renaissance in the USSR; on the other hand there are -- as a reaction to it -- visible signs that atheistic propaganda is being forced; finally, Gorbachov has of course raised hopes in the religious-ecclesiastical sphere by his reforms.

Religious Renaissance in the USSR?

"One of the most interesting changes in Soviet society during the Brezhnev era is the increase of interest in religious questions which expresses itself in a growing movement towards religious communities. One can observe this in almost every part of the Soviet Union in nearly all kinds of beliefs." This statement by Otto Luchterhand dating from 1980 seems to have been confirmed in the years since then. G. Seide in his thorough analysis "Religious Renaissance in the Soviet Union -- Myth or Reality?" concludes:

The loyalty of a vast population group to religion and church is mainly a consequence of the religious education and tradition practiced in the families. This is documented by the fact that the numbers of believers has remained constant for the past two decades. At the same time these figures contradict the atheistic claim that the church and religion in the Soviet Union find themselves in a crisis. Religious philosophical lectures, organizations of women and youths, religious symbols and topics in art and literature, rather point to newly revived interest in religion which is not confined to the lower and uneducated population groups, as official propaganda would have us believe.²

2 Ibid. p. 35.
An indirect confirmation of the religious renaissance in the USSR comes from Tirana, Albania -- the more reliable because Albania is not on good terms with the Soviet Union. On September 14th 1985 a program was transmitted over Radio Tirana entitled: "Religion -- A Counterrevolutionary Instrument in the Hands of the Revisionistic Bourgeoisie." In this program "the revisionistic Soviet state" was blamed for financing "great national companies that produce cult objects and holy relics, and publish in numerous editions the Bible and the Koran, theological works and journals, calendars with religious holidays, etc." The strong spreading of religious ideology in the Soviet Union is evident also in increasing numbers of those who participate in holy services and have their children baptized, who have cult objects in their homes and wear religious symbols. The facts that 30 million people regularly go to services and that 60 percent of all children in Moscow are baptized show that the influence of religion is more and more increasing. 3

It will not be surprising that, on the other hand, Russian Archpriest George Goncharov, Associate General Secretary of the Christian Peace Conference, sees the development in his country, in Orthodox perspective, very positively. In a talk with Lutheran World Information on March 9th 1987 5 he sees the Russian Orthodox Church in the current Soviet process of reformation as the main sign of "the moral renewal of society." He denies a real conflict between the Communist Party and the church in the sphere of ethical renewal. They both want a "high moral standard" for the people. A systematic comparison of the moral codes of Communists and Christian believers shows "surprising parallels at many points." As the only important difference between the two positions Goncharov sees the fact, "that the communist doctrine is based on purely materialistic views and that the existence of God is not accepted." But it is this difference, Goncharov concludes, which shows the spiritual superiority of the church. "Out of its knowledge of the reality of God it draws a higher awareness and a better insight into the value-related needs of the people." The fact that more and more young people enter the service of the church is convincing witness that Soviet youths' interest in the spiritual life is increasing. "The youth is our hope" -- so finished Goncharov his positive outlook on the future of the church in the Soviet Union.

The Forcing of Atheistic Propaganda

An article in "Pravda" on 8th August 1980 was headed: "Educate Convinced Atheists!" In this article atheistic education is emphasized as an important element in "reinforcing the spiritual-ideological conviction of the Soviet people, and the growth of their inner maturity and culture." But at the same time the writer complains of large deficiencies that cannot be explained by the "religious influence which still exists"; the facts rather show that "the niveau of (atheist educational) work does not by far fulfill the requirements of the Party." As a consequence "special attention should be paid to the education of specialists in scientific atheism." Nevertheless it is important, "in the uncompromising battle with religion as an ideology that is incompatible with scientific facts, to create an atmosphere of delicate sensitivity toward persons, also toward a religious person who is an equal member of the collective. In working with them one has to have the ability to use only methods of ideological influence, of persuasion and proof." 4

An essay by the Kiev philosopher W. Zoc from 1984 has the same direction. He also pleads for overcoming "the traditional antireligious propaganda." Today it is not only important to abolish religion but to show the "moral and cultural values" of atheism. Zoc worries further that the strong growth of religiousness in the Soviet Union could be reinforced by the approaching millennial celebrations: "On the eve of the millennium of Christian Church in the Soviet Union, clerical propaganda tries to interest people in religion which has been the supposed base for Russian culture." At the same time the philosopher disapproves of tendencies in the Soviet society which go along with this churchly view. Especially historians and writers have emphasized in recent works the religious cultural heritage of the Russian past. In this way they promote the "reanimation of Christianity." 5 Unintentionally Zoc confirms thereby the differentiated attitude within the Soviet science of religion which was mentioned above.

Eugen Voss, of Glaube in der Welt 6 points out that among the prisoners who have been released since February 1987 only a few are confessing Christians -- among them however the Orthodox priest Gleb Yakunin and the founder of the "Religious Seminars for Youth" Aleksandr Ogorodnikov. On the other hand in the first quarter of 1987 "well-known methods of suppression were observed in various Christian groups, such as interrupting services,

4 Reprinted in Lutherische welt information, Monthly 4 (Geneva), April 21, 1987, pp. 9f.
fines, warnings by the police and arrests." Voss believes that the treatment of freedom of religion will not change very much in the near future, even under Gorbachov.

The signs for this are: the atheistic propaganda goes on as usual with the same financial and personnel support. The introduction of atheistic ceremonies progresses. The use of Orthodox churches as places for atheistic rituals is being considered. There are a lot of state confiscated unused churches. At the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe the Soviet Union defends an attitude which on one hand is unyielding in regard to the freedom of religion, and on the other hand wants to secure more room for atheists. As they declare this at an international event, this indicator is of importance.

The Latest Laws Concerning Religion

In Spring 1986 the British institution "Keston College" noted a "sensational change" in Soviet legislation. The British institution refers to an edition of the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate, which shows revisions of the laws concerning "rights and duties of religious groups." The "most important change seems to be the acknowledgement of religious groups as juridical persons." A quotation from the Journal says: "A religious group enjoys the rights of a legal person." In this status—corresponding to the law -- buildings can be constructed or bought, means of transport as well as clerical articles and instruments of cult can be bought. The acquisition of buildings is subject to the laws governing contracts concerning trade and sale. The buildings becomes property of the religious group."

Until now all church buildings have been state property. They are leased to the registered religious groups. When a religious union dissolves the whole property belongs to the

8 Ibid. p. 17.
9 Ibid. pp. 22f.
10 The following is based on a report in Lwi, weekly No. 12 (April 1986), pp. 16f.
According to Keston College religious groups can now invite pastors to celebrate public divine services. This is an accommodation to small religious groups who have no pastor nearby. It is also new that permission from the local administration is no longer needed for pastoral care of the sick, for religious ceremonies in convalescent homes, and for Christians in prisons. Previously, these services were only possible without permission when the client or prisoner asked for it. Now also the family or friends can call a priest if for example the ill person cannot do so. Completely new is permission for priests to visit old people’s homes. Finally, the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate also indicates that children are taking part in religious ceremonies. The Christians and their children who have reached the age of ten are allowed to take part in religious rituals. Until now children who were not yet 18 have not been allowed to take active part. Keston College sees this as “a great improvement in the life of Christians.” It seems as if a larger part of the Christian life no longer has to take place in the catacomb — “Glasnost” here, too, and the chance for the public to be convinced of the loyalty of Christians, as they show this loyalty.

One hopes that these changes are not the end of the reforms. Archpriest Goncharov points out that the “representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church take part in conversations with government experts about new laws proposed for religious groups, in order to protect the interests of the church. “New elements” are already being practiced, he says, but at this point it is too early to go into details.”

After the conversation between the Moscow Patriarchate and the leadership of the Party on April 29, 1988, which was concerned with the millennial celebrations, and after the Regional Council which took place on the occasion of the millennium in June, the profile of Gorbachov’s religious policy can be somewhat more clearly discerned:

— As a millennial anniversary gift, the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev has been returned to the Russian Orthodox Church. After restoration by the state and the church together, it is intended for many uses. The laying of a cornerstone for a new cathedral as a memorial to the millennium in a recently developed area of Moscow is a symbol of the fact that the authorities have quietly but finally taken leave of the theory that religion will soon die out.

— Paragraph 52 of the constitution will be changed. This paragraph governs the equal rights of religion and anti-religious propaganda. Until now of course these rights have not been

11 Ibid., p. 16.
12 Ibid., pp. 16f.
13 Ibid., p. 17.
equal. The practice of religion has been limited to the cultus while anti-religious propaganda has had nearly unlimited possibilities to work in the public sphere. For the future a true equality is promised which will allow the church to work in the public sphere according to its needs, including the possibility to give religious instruction on church premises.

Rumors persist that the state will offer the Russian Orthodox Church the opportunity to run their own hospitals with church personnel, especially with nuns as nurses. In fact there are a few signs that the state is inclined to make use of Christian experience with works of charity in cleaning up its somewhat worn-out health care system. In this connection some other denominations might even be preferred to the Russian Orthodox Church.

4. Development Perspectives

A summary outlook on development perspectives is not easy in view of the many layers and the contradictions of the data, especially if one tries to avoid sliding into the realm of speculation or projecting one's own wishes onto the situation. Correspondingly, the predictions of observers also turn out to oppose each other.

Paul Oestreicher, the new Dean of Coventry, trusts Gorbachov with his "mixture of realism and idealism" to have a "good sense for the positive role which religion can play in the struggle against corruption, alcoholism, slovenliness, and for the genuine desire of the Soviet people for peace." He sees in the foreground of the thousand year jubilee of the conversion of Russia in 1988 a "chance for a change" and therefore even "good reasons to invite Gorbachov as an honored guest of the Patriarchate." In opposition to this, Eugen Voss sees the Russian Orthodox Church more and more in a role "which gives it public character outwardly but simply and only in order to support Soviet foreign policy and to dupe naive church people in the West." The ideological captivity of religion is for him further clear in the "skill with which a history stamped by religion is so well integrated into the Marxist-Leninist interpretation that the impression is given that Christianity and Marxism agree." In reality, however, he says, "the result will be the overcoming of living spontaneous faith." This phenomenon seems to him "to be much nearer to an apocalypse than was Chernobyl."
Naturally religious policy only plays a subordinate role in
the domestic politics of the Soviet Union. Economic and
organizational problems in the process of restructuring are much
more prominent at the moment. Experts assume that the drought
which the Soviet economy must endure will last at least two to
three years. A lot of skepticism must be overcome not only among
the apparatchiks but also among the people. 17

The Ambivalence of the Way of Reform

The process of perestroika entered a new stage with the
plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party
of the Soviet Union and the summer meeting of the Supreme Soviet
in the last days of June, 1988. The move was made from
announcing a new policy to the phase of decision making and
practice in central areas of economic and social change. With
this the idea of perestroika comes closer to the practice of
daily politics. Essential to this is that Gorbachov's demand for
 restructuring was fundamentally approved in the meeting of the
Central Committee. The idea and the direction of radical reform
-- "more socialism, more democracy" -- seem thereby to be
basically and finally accepted by the central bureaucracy of the
party. The weak points in the practical daily work of the
bureaucracy are, to be sure, not removed thereby, but the
bureaucracy will no longer find it so easy to avoid opening
itself to drastic economic reforms and qualitative change in the
mechanism of the economic system. Already in May the first step
"away from administrative and toward economic management methods"
was taken with the passing of a law "concerning individual work."
Now two central laws give the restructuring process dynamic
contour. One is the law which introduces the legal
responsibility of management, which gives the citizen the right
to appeal to the courts in cases of misuse of office or
bureaucratic arbitrariness on the part of state and security
officials. The other is a law which guarantees to industrial
enterprises and production companies more independence. Insofar
as the state planning commission (Gosplan) and countless
ministries are deprived of the right to intervene in regular
business matters and instead are directed toward strategic tasks,
the style of directing both economy and society from the top
should be gradually overcome. The Gosplan must only guarantee
the total balance of the economy, for example by setting the
finance, political and foreign trade conditions for business
operations. The new law gives to businesses themselves "the
freedom to establish their plan, to accomplish production, and to
control their profit." A step-by-step transition to the new
order is foreseen. In the first phase businesses must produce up
to 60% to fill state orders. After an appropriate adjustment
period, the measures for the whole of industry in the 13th five

17 Ibid., p. 1.
year plan 1991-1995 will take hold. June 28, 1988, a party conference was called in which the direction of efforts for reform and democratization since the XXVIITH Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1986 were discussed and tested.

Naturally it has not yet been finally decided whether these measures and this reform discussion will really result in further economic social, political and cultural reforms. And so it is not surprising that among those on the left the question is discussed whether this socialist society marked by political deformation is reformable at all. Basically two positions stand over against each other. 2. Mlynar is, for example, "convinced that the Soviet political system is reformable, that it can develop itself progressively in order finally to arrive at a qualitative transformation that will not be the removal of socialist order but simply its real and true development."

The other position also begins with the argument that the political system of socialist societies is confronted with a growing process of social differentiation to which it must react. Social change results in political changes. The purpose of these political changes is, however, according to this point of view, the modernization of existing structures of power. This is the opinion of the prominent member of the Polish "Solidarity" movement Adam Michnik, following the former Marxist reformer and now dissident Leszek Kolakowski. He speaks of a process of counterreformation introduced by Gorbachov which tries to assimilate criticism in order that the traditional structures can be adjusted to changed conditions of life an effort to restructure institutions from within with the object of incorporating values which were created outside the institutions and against their will so that they will cease to be unsettling and hostile The meaning of reform from above is

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18 E. Voss feels driven to the conclusion that the people react "with mistrust, reserve, criticism and scorn to the policies of reconstruction. The response in the Soviet Union stands in sharp contrast to the interests and the hopes which Gorbachov's policy has awakened in western countries." (Is There a Change - op. cit. p. 19) Thank God - one can say quite seriously! - this somewhat tendentious picture is simply being corrected daily by "actual existing reality". One hopes that the prejudices in the West disappear in the same measure as the acceptance of Gorbachov's reforms grows in the East!
counterreformation in order to rescue the Communist system. 19

So the question has not been settled in the circles of the left, whether liberalization and democratization of the Soviet system is possible in principle or whether the system is in no condition to be changed from within. In fact, reorganization and the democratizing processes bound up with it must embrace all areas of the society: business, Party, the electoral system, culture, education, nationality, social organization, state and the state structure, law, the military, etc. If however it should prove correct that we are seeing in the USSR today not just some cyclical campaign but really the dawning of a new epoch, then we must take it seriously "that democratization is not only a solution but the essence of restructuring. We must change our perspectives and our habits in order not to be outside the stream of life. This is our urgent advice to all who doubt and hesitate." 20 With these words Gorbachov gives nothing less

19 Z. Mlynar, Kreuzweg der politischen Reform, p. 45.

20 A. Michnik, "Der gro e Gegenreformator" in Der Spiegel, Hamburg, Nr. 21, 1987, p. 154. The Soviet mathematician and author Alexander Zinoviev also takes the campaign for liberalization and democratization for a simple propaganda swindle: "Communism with a human face is either logical nonsense or a trap for simpletons. Gorbachov and his collaborators are capable of deceiving many people in the West." Lev Kopelev, however, who certainly does not belong to those who have illusions about 'real socialism', objects that Zinoviev is 'still completely caught in a dogmatic manichaeism which we learned in school and which recently has again appeared widely in the West: either capitalism or communism. These are abstractions with no reality behind them.' (Both quotations from Lev Kopelev, "Man mu an Wunder Glauben. Ein Gespräch mit Johano Strasser", in L'80, Köln, No. 42, pp. 7-8). Wolfgang Leonhard regards the development with similar realism. More than most others he pleads for a "sober analytical view of the Soviet Union" and rejects "pathological Communist haters and Western disarmament dreamers equally." For Leonhard Gorbachov is "not the leader of the Soviet Union but the first among equals." What has happened however to the political style and cultural climate of the Soviet Union since his taking office is for Leonhard "an incredible change", even though "the system so far has not changed." Leonhard praises especially the first signs of freedom of the press, more free room for art, and the attempts to loosen up the bureaucratic economic system. In foreign policy also there are, he says, positive beginnings: more realistic elements in Soviet proposals for disarmament than before. His answer to the question whether the Soviet leadership can be trusted is, "yes, as far as it is the Gorbachov wing."
than a historic statement of the position of today's socialist societies. With this question of the value of socialist democracy, Lenin himself raised "the central question of the transition and laid the foundations of his objectives." According to its previous self-understanding, the Soviet Union finds itself in the phase of "a developed socialism" which must be developed and perfected further. Gorbachev implicitly corrects this position now in that he demands qualitative changes in the search for ways and methods to accelerate social-economic progress. He clearly states that "the economy...is the decisive living space of society." However, he also emphasizes that technocratic solutions ordered from above do not promise success in making the existing economic structure effective. Instead "such forms of production organization" must be introduced, "which make it possible for every worker to feel like a master of the house in his place of work." Despite all the remaining "significance of control from above", in the future "it will be fundamentally important to raise the level of effectiveness and control from below under conditions of democracy in the society." Of course these restructuring processes will demand of their subject, the workers, a new structuring of their conditions of life (mobility) of their social and personal ties (family, work relationships, etc.). This must proceed for the individual in recognizable and within limits controllable steps, if it is not to provoke resistance. The self-understanding and self-consciousness of these "house-masters and subjects" are clearly not yet sufficiently developed to energize from below the offer of reform from above. The necessary "conquest of social apathy" will however only be achieved when the autonomy of the subject in his economic and social activities is really guaranteed by the authorities according to the new laws. It cannot be a matter of developing the economic egoism of each individual, but rather of guaranteeing the unity of social order and personal initiative. In the words of Lenin, "that which is already realized in culture, in daily life, and in customs" must also be achieved in society.

"If Glasnost lasts a year longer, then it could succeed": thus Leonhard judges Gorbachev's chances. (Quoted from Schlesische Zeitung, Leutkirch, 5 Sept. 1987, p.3).

21 M. Gorbachov, Wir brauchen ... op. cit., p. 395.
22 George Lukacs, Demokratisierung heute und morgen, Budapest, 1985, p. 62.
23 Ibid., p. 393.
The problem for Gorbachov is to achieve a stage in social development in which democracy will be practiced as the style of relationships of everyday life. It would be naive to believe that the Russian people after centuries of despotism and dictatorship are now suddenly capable of democracy. On the one hand, he must relate to the impressions of a mass consciousness which has been stamped by lethargic customs. On the other hand the liberation of self-activity from the limits of party and state bureaucracy seems only to be possible by opening up precisely that political structure which up to now has not only maintained but also produced the attitude of stagnation. It is in order to find a practical way forward that Gorbachov lays such weight on the politics of the party cadre and seeks radically to affect the center of political self-understanding. With his proposal to "nominate non-party members for leading functions" he de facto makes an end of the doctrine of the avant-garde position of the party. With the "open nomination of persons" for leading positions a mechanism of social competition is established for the party cadres in order to stimulate the renewal of structures from within. Gorbachov's policy, therefore, runs along definitely populist lines as he tries in his reform project to put pressure on the bureaucracy from above and from below. Naturally this is playing with fire. It would be all too easy for forces to be set free which would go in quite other directions. Therefore an important condition for the success of the reform policy is that the process stay under control in order to exclude the danger of anarchy or the cry for a strong man. 25

Both the West and the Eastern neighbor states of the USSR bear a certain indirect responsibility for the success of Gorbachov's reform direction: the West in promoting or at least not hindering this course, and the Eastern neighbors in not seeking to block it. Gorbachov needs a success in the matter of disarmament. Here the Americans and their Western allies bear a serious responsibility for the further development in the Soviet Union. Continual blocking of the far-reaching proposals of the Soviet Union would strongly limit the possibilities of further liberalization in that country and bind its resources again to the military.

25 In his somewhat poetic way, Leo Kofler offers a congenial summary of Gorbachov's standpoint with the statement that "a living process" is being carried out "on the basis of the dialectical relation between didactically controlling centralism and creative democratic autonomy of the individual whose goal is a human being for whom wealth no longer consists in possessing but in being a many-sided, developed, playful (Marx) human being inclined to the erotic enjoyment of life (Aufbruch in der Sowjetunion?, Hamburg, 1986, p.107).
In the other countries of the Eastern bloc, governments are looking with differing feelings at Moscow. Reactions range from open agreement in Hungary and Poland through waiting good will in the GDR and skeptical mistrust in Czechoslovakia to open rejection of the reform direction in Romania. It is not yet clear whether liberalization will succeed everywhere as it has already succeeded at least in Poland. Still the impulse for renewal of the system comes for the first time since the fall of Khrushchev, not from the periphery of the empire but from the center itself. Therefore it will hardly be possible to isolate the seat of reform as in Czechoslovakia in 1968 or in Poland in 1980-81. The stiff and encrusted Soviet system of hegemony under Brezhnev was for the dogmatists in Warsaw, in Prague or in East Berlin a firm base. They could always reckon with it when they could not master their inner crises with their own strength. Now this firm base itself starts to move. This movement will hardly be restrained by pressure from without; rather it will radiate outward to the periphery. The room for action of the forces of reform in the countries next to the USSR has been significantly expanded. They can now make compromises with social forces without being called to order by Moscow.

The Place of Religious Policy

Religious policy only plays a subordinate role in the domestic politics of the Soviet Union today. Priorities lie clearly in the further development of an effective socialism. All other reforms are only to be expected in the far future of the socialist society. E. Voss received from a Soviet diplomat "with an expression of regret" the answer to his question concerning the effects of perestroika on religious policy, "that it will be another generation before the Party concerns itself with religion."26 Voss sees "no recognizable signs that the policy of perestroika will lead to a change in religious policy." He even reminds us "that under Nikita Khrushchev reforms in economic and cultural politics were accompanied by the greatest persecution of the churches since the '30s."27 As chief witness for this skepticism, he calls upon the Bishop of East Berlin Gottfried Forck. For Forck, Gorbachov is "very appealing in his peace initiatives and in other proposals which he has made above all concerning economic, political and social processes. Whether he will bring any improvement for the church, I am not yet sure. I have not yet read anything from Gorbachov about greater tolerance toward the Christian faith."28

27 Ibid., p. 23.
28 Ibid.
On the other hand, Sergius Z. Bankowski, also a veteran co-worker in the Institute Glaube in der Zer Welt, definitely foresees an improvement in human rights and religious freedom under perestroika.

Especially the revision of criminal law could bring with it a certain liberalization in that not every non-conforming opinion would in the future be regarded as anti-Soviet. Furthermore the long-awaited updating of the laws on religion could bring with it not only the status of a juridical person for the church but perhaps more free space for its activity and improved conditions for believers, with more religious liberty in public life, and equality of opportunity in education and vocation. 29

A precondition for this development in the desired direction is, however, "that the church leadership, especially that of the Orthodox Church, try to take active part in the process of perestroika and to have an influence on the formation of the new religious laws." At the moment, however, Bankowski regards the Orthodox Church leadership as not in a position to play an active role and to encounter the state as a partner.

The believers and the non-party members have no means at their disposal to bring their concerns in an organized way before the state. They have neither a free press, a party structure, nor representatives in the government. National minorities who struggle for their basic rights, and dissenting groups, have even fewer chances to gain a hearing for their concerns before the government whether in relation to the right of movement, the right of emigration, or the right of self-determination. 30

Still it seems to me there are new positive signs just in this direction which justify further hope. Let me take as an example the case of the priest Yakunin, for 20 years a symbolic figure among dissidents over against the state and the official

30 Ibid.
church in the USSR. Yakunin (with Nikolai Eshliman) at the end of 1965 broke years of silence concerning the persecution of the church in the USSR with a spectacular memorandum to the heads of the state and of the church. In May of 1966 the Patriarch Alexei forbade him to exercise the office of priest. In 1975 together with Lev Regelson, he laid before the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi a description of the true situation of the churches in the USSR. In 1976 he founded, together with two other Orthodox believers, the "Christian Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Believers." In August 1980 he was arrested. After five years at hard labor in a prison camp he was given on February 5, 1987, an early release from the banning sentence which followed his imprisonment.

No confession of guilt was required of Yakunin. On his release he wrote a statement to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR that he would "engage in no activities against the law or opposed to the society." On April 28, 1987, Yakunin turned to Patriarch Pimen through Metropolitan Yuvenali with a request that the prohibition on his exercise of the priestly office be lifted. Yakunin assured the Patriarchate in his appeal that he would refrain from any "uncanonical, contralegal, or antisocial activity." "I intend to hold strictly to the disciplinary norms of the church in my service. I may express the hope that at the coming Jubilee of the Russian Orthodox Church I may again stand before God's altar as a priest." The matter was dealt with at a meeting of the Holy Synod on May 12, 1987, and the lifting of his prohibition was officially announced by the Foreign Office of the Moscow Patriarchate.

On the occasion of an unofficial press conference, Yakunin noted as positive signs among recent events the opening of some churches in the provinces, and some baptisms in Moscow and Leningrad which did not have to be registered by the state. "Yakunin should also have said that he does not believe that Gorbachov would behave himself so anti-religiously as his predecessor." Confident in this perception, Yakunin raised his voice anew in defense of the church with a petition to Gorbachov. Together with eight Orthodox believers, he demanded on May 23rd 1987, referring to the general restructuring in public life, a restructuring also of the relation between state and church. In the petition, a catalogue of proposals was set forth which, if realized, would make possible a genuine religious life of believers on a new basis. The revision of the cult laws of 1929 so long considered, should not be limited to unsatisfactory changes. Above all paragraph 17 of the 1929 law was noted "which discriminates against the most elementary rights of believers and

31 Ibid., p. 9.

32 Ibid., p. 10.

33 Ibid.
lays upon them a prohibition unacceptable for their conscience against works of mercy and welfare and the social life of the congregation."34 The other proposals are concerned with the publication of religious literature, removal of the prohibition on meetings of believers in the churches other than divine services, permission for religious instruction of believers, return of particularly venerated relics and icons, the return of the Monastery of Caves in Kiev, etc.

Yakunin and the other signatories wrote this petition to Gorbachov in full awareness that not too long ago a public statement of this kind would have cost them their freedom. Now, however, another wind blows and the call to opening renewal and democratization encourages them to continue their work for freedom of religion and the church -- fundamentally with the same arguments as earlier. Metropolitans Yuvenali of Krutitsy and Philaret of Kiev, in a press conference called by themselves on June 11, judged this public petition to be "a violation of the promise which priest Gleb Yakunin gave" and they warned "that he -- if he continues to take part in such activities -- would be dismissed from all clerical activity in the Moscow Patriarchate."35 Meanwhile, Yakunin has become pastor in Scelkovo, 35 kilometers northeast of Moscow. He has continued to make public his demands, most recently at the reception which President Reagan gave for dissidents in his visit to Moscow. Recently he criticized the Patriarchate because it did not use the current thaw courageously enough, though perhaps this criticism has become moot in light of what happened in the "summit conference" between Gorbachov and the Patriarch and in the regional council which followed. A direct reaction of state offices to Yakunin’s new activities has not to my knowledge been forthcoming. Gleb Yakunin -- a test for perestroika in state and church? We will see what further developments will show.

A look at Poland can enlarge these comments on the place of religious policy in the process of perestroika. There the church regards the liberal turn in Poland inspired by Gorbachov’s direction as confirmation of the line it has followed of mediating balance. On the other side the contribution which the bishops have made to the stabilization of conditions in the country has been very positively evaluated by the party. Recently the prominent party spokesman Ryszard Wojna wrote that the episcopacy had never lost sight of the interest of the state; the church "criticizes the government often to be sure, but is nevertheless always ready for dialogue and does not consider itself as an alternative to the state."36

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

The new evaluation of Polish Catholicism, which is beginning to show itself in the Soviet Union, must be nearly a sensation in this connection. The strength of this church has given the Moscow leadership many headaches and much annoyance in the past. The Soviet media, for example, blamed the church often for the hostile demonstrations and excesses which followed the declaration of martial law on December 13, 1981, and labeled it the real manipulator behind opposition activity. This picture has now been shaken. Recently the correspondent of Literaturnaya Gazeta, Potshivalov wrote an interview with Cardinal Glemp. In the introduction to it, he wrote "it is hard for a Soviet citizen to understand that a socialist country can be Catholic at the same time. We had gotten used to the idea that religion is only an anachronistic relic, a sign of cultural backwardness. In Poland, however, the clock runs differently. Here the overwhelming majority of the people, among them many Communists, confess religious faith and see something self-evident therein. The otherness of Poland must be accepted by the Soviet Union fully. This could only improve our mutual relations."37 Such a sober evaluation of the situation almost without any propagandistic distortion would hardly have been thinkable under Gorbachov's predecessors. The relaxation between state and church in the case of Poland is clearly approved by Moscow.

If I may risk a thesis in conclusion of these observations about further development in the USSR itself, I would with careful optimism raise three points.

1. Precisely because the restructuring of the economy will take a long time and will at first require sacrifice from the population before they come to enjoy the fruit and the returns of economic perestroika, this dry stretch will be accompanied by a cultural and spiritual liberalization. Gorbachov has learned not only tactically from Khrushchev's mistakes. Changes through time have given him the firm recognition that socialism without democracy is as non-functional as is authentic democracy without socialism. It lies in the nature of the inseparable relationship between democracy and socialism that this liberalization cannot be rescinded after the success of economic reforms. Beyond this Gorbachov's deep humanistic feeling guarantees that this liberalization will be a long process with many possibilities of development.

2. The millennial celebrations of the Russian Orthodox Church offers a magnificent opportunity to loosen up the relation between state and church and to develop further the possibilities of glasnost and perestroika in mutual relations. Without permitting oneself a direct comparison, there are some parallels with the Luther Jubilee in the GDR in 1983. Even if the state authorities in the USSR would like to play down the church millennium far more than did the government of the GDR the Luther festivities, a certain public effectiveness cannot be avoided.

37 Ibid., p. 34.
The leadership of the Soviet Union will want to show the guests from the world church their positive and fair side. A putsch from the right among Orthodox dogmatists seems also to be excluded for the time being. In addition, positive possibilities emerge in relation to the USA. For one thing the room for action by the USA is somewhat limited because of the presidential election campaign. For another, President Reagan needs (as does Gorbachov for economic reasons) a success in disarmament in order to rehabilitate his reputation which was badly damaged by the Iran-Contra affair.

3. So the year 1988 offers perhaps in some respects a "kairos"--a favorable time in historical and theological perspective--for the achievement and further development of the reform process in the USSR. In view of the theological relations and perspectives with which this article has dealt, a change in attitude toward other religions could also begin. Clearly the recognition is growing that religion cannot be destroyed by social changes and atheistic propaganda or by a change of consciousness. For the future, therefore, alongside the practical cooperation of Marxists, Christians and adherents of other religions, conversation about questions of coexistence of religions with the Marxist worldview cannot be avoided. I have tried to show in this article that the presuppositions for this dialogue on both sides are latently present.

5. The Challenge to Change

The millennium of the Russian Orthodox Church could become a "kairos" of a special kind also for the evangelical churches in the Federal Republic of Germany. "The blacking out of our particular guilt over against the Soviet people, once slated for annihilation, is the most calamitous and fateful occurrence of post-war German history." This word of Bishop Emeritus Werner Krusche from Magdeburg is the main theme of a series of theses under the title "Reconciliation and Peace With the People of the Soviet Union" which challenges us to repentance and change.38 Unfortunately the initiative of a working group at the Kirchentag in Frankfurt did not succeed in moving the Evangelical Church in Germany to make this series of theses their own and to give it thereby the official character of a church document. In our country [West Germany] the challenge of this subject is at the moment not capable of producing a majority or a consensus and the Evangelical Church in Germany shows itself shy of conflict as always. It would have been good for the Church, on the 40th anniversary of the Darmstadt confession, unloved though as it was

then by the right wing of the church, to reaffirm this word and direct it concretely toward the people of the USSR. In recent time the events surrounding the death of the one-time representative of Hitler Rudolph Hess, the beginning of a legend and a cult around his person, make clear in a frightening way how urgently necessary such a critical word of the church to the public would be in this connection, a self-critical word to our own past. (With the "common word" of the Evangelical Church Germany and the Federation of Churches in the GDR on the occasion of the millennial celebration of the church in Russia, we have meanwhile such a confession of guilt. Thank God!)

In the attempt to lay a new foundation for a relationship between the German people and the people of the Soviet Union, the theses begin by saying that this relationship cannot be understood only as an historical problem under the heading of cause and consequence. "In the war against the Soviet Union the foundation of the relation between two peoples and states was destroyed. All of us, whether older or born later, have to carry the heavy burden of this destruction. It reaches into the third and fourth generation as a part of the biography of every single German." Recognition and confession of guilt is then stated as presupposition of change, in the sense of condition for a new beginning, and every attempt to suppress guilt is theologically contradicted: "For us the guilt of others can only be a second statement after our own guilt has been recognized as its cause. Therefore we cannot cancel out our guilt with the guilt of others or relativize it by historical comparisons, and thereby declare it as resolved." To take seriously these theses is the first and most important insight which can fend off the suppression of guilt. They raise questions which in the first place are directed at the church itself: "What does it mean that we do not speak about the fact that there were practically no protests against the invasion of the Soviet Union and the conduct of the war against it? Where in the Evangelical Church in Germany have we recalled with repentance or regret the official statements at the beginning of the war and the attitude that lay behind them?" If however the

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39 Ibid., p.18.

40 Ibid., p. 20.

41 Ibid., p. 21. The war against the Soviet Union could not have been carried on as it was without broad support by the German people and the obedience of the armed forces. This basic sentiment also pervaded the churches. It was expressed, for example, in a telegram of the clergy council (Geistlichen Vertrauensrates) of the German Evangelical Church to Hitler on June 30, 1941:

"Mein Führer, you have banished the danger of Bolshevism from our land and now you call our people and the people of
theological and historical necessity of a church confession of
guilt toward the Soviet Union is recognized,

precisely the church should not shy away from
the expected public controversy. Rather it
should take as a particular task to press
this God-proclaimed guilt upon the ears of
those before whom we have become guilty. The
necessity of this recognition of guilt
concerns also the younger generation who were
not directly involved in the events of the
war. They are to be sure not responsible for
the deeds of their fathers and their
grandfathers. They are, however, for the way
we deal with this guilt and its consequences
in our society. Therefore precisely they
must resist all temptation to banish the
shadows of the Third Reich in order finally
to exercise a politics of national strength
without the mortgage of national socialism. 42

Finally the authors warn in this context about the "danger
of a cheap confession of guilt" that results in no practical
steps toward change. "Reconciliation with the peoples of the
Soviet Union will succeed only where one takes responsibility for
the guilty results of the past. The destroyed community relation
will be cleansed where deeds of repentance are done." Of course
we must recognize "that the damage which Germans wreaked in the
Soviet Union cannot be made good." What we can do is "to make

Europe to a decisive trial of arms against the deadly enemy of
all order and all Western Christian culture. The German people
and all its Christian members thank you for this deed. The
German Evangelical Church is with you in all its prayers and
with our never-to-be-forgotten soldiers who proceed with such
powerful strokes to remove the horde of pests so that a new order
may arise in all Europe under your leadership and an end may be
made of all inward distortion and smearing of what is most holy,
of all vandalizing of the free conscience." (op. cit., p. 27).

Even in the ranks of the Confessing Church there were
supporting statements. Landesbischof Wurm, for example, who to
be sure refused to allow this telegram to be read in the services
of his church, expressed his agreement: "Certainly every good
German rejoices that the German army is carrying out Europe's
great settling of accounts with bolshevism." (ibid.)

42 Ibid., p. 21.
known our preparedness by signs to overcome the consequences of
the war. For this we must begin to see the history and the
damage through the eyes of people in the USSR, to understand
their anxiety with relation to us, and to share their hope for a
peaceful coexistence. Only from this perspective can we
recognize the things that lead to the healing of the relationship
between us and people in the Soviet Union." 43

We must be clear that in the memory of Soviet citizens the
"great war for the fatherland" remains as one of defense against
a fascist regime which pursued the extermination of Soviet
peoples and the destruction of their political and social order
in cruel and inhuman ways. The German attack which confirmed the
historically based anxiety of the Soviet people concerning
attacks and brought the Soviet state to the border of collapse
leads the population and its leadership to the inflexible resolve
to prevent the repetition of such a war under all circumstances,
to secure the state against any possible attack, and to make any
effort necessary to this end.

We must therefore learn to understand the
enormous armaments effort and the enclosure
of East European states in their sphere of
power, also as a result of this need for the
greatest possible security, without of course
trying to justify the scope of this armament.
The Cold War, the huge military power of the
USA, the creation of a Western system of
alliances, and the withdrawal of Communist
China from Soviet leadership lead to a strong
growth of the feeling of threat and
encirclement and raise the Soviet need for
security. The post-war situation is
therefore to a large extent the consequence
and working out of the German war of
annihilation against the Soviet Union. 44

To acknowledge this and to confess this guilt overagainst
those who were victims and their descendants—this is the
precondition of a final overcoming of the post-war situation in
Europe. Such a confession of guilt could awaken in others the
readiness to admit their guilt as well. In contrast to a cheap
self-excusing, this admission of one's own guilt could lay the
foundation stone of a new and more trusting cooperation between
both peoples. Disarmament in the military sphere would find
thereby its necessary and meaningful completion in the building

43 Ibid., p. 22.

44 Ibid., p. 29.
of interhuman and interstate relationships which would be upheld not by skepticism and mistrust but by hope for an oikoumene as a home for all people.

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