Directorate of Intelligence

Confidential Micro

23461

CIA SOV 88-10027

23461

# Gorbachev Confronts the Challenge of Christianity

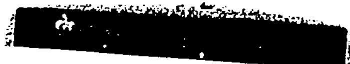
An Executive Summary

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE AS SANITIZED
1995

Confidential

SOV 88-10027
May 1988

Copy



| | |
|---|---|
| **Warning Notice** | Intelligence Sources or Methods Involved (WNINTEL) |
| **National Security Information** | Unauthorized Disclosure Subject to Criminal Sanctions |

| **Dissemination Control Abbreviations** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | NOFORN (NF) | Not releasable to foreign nationals |
| | NOCONTRACT (NC) | Not releasable to contractors or contractor/consultants |
| | PROPIN (PR) | Caution—proprietary information involved |
| | ORCON (OC) | Dissemination and extraction of information controlled by originator |
| | REL... | This information has been authorized for release to... |
| | WN | WNINTEL—Intelligence sources or methods involved |
| | A microfiche copy of this document is available from OIR/DLB (482-7177); printed copies from CPAS/IMC (482-5203; or AIM request to userid CPASIMC). Regular receipt of DI reports can be arranged through CPAS/IMC. | Classified by<br>Declassify: OADR<br>Derived from multiple sources |
| | All material on this page is Unclassified. | |

Directorate of Intelligence

~~Confidential~~

# Gorbachev Confronts the Challenge of Christianity

**An Executive Summary**

This paper was prepared by Office of Soviet Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief SOVA

*Reverse Blank*

~~Confidential~~

*SOV 88-10027*

*May 1988*

# Gorbachev Confronts the Challenge of Christianity

**Scope Note**

This publication summarizes the research and findings of an in-depth analysis, DI Research Study [ ]

## Gorbachev Confronts the Challenge of Christianity

**Key Judgments**

*Information available as of 1 May 1988 was used in this report.*

Christianity is alive and well in the Soviet Union. It continues to compete successfully for the allegiance of the populace, challenges the official ideology, reinforces nationalism in both Russian and minority homelands, and is attractive to alienated youth and even to some party members. Believers defy the state by conducting pilgrimages and proselytizing, setting up underground churches, and publishing religious samizdat advocating believers' political rights

Gorbachev is significantly modifying the regime's approach to religion in an apparent attempt to gain support for his broader economic and social revitalization programs from religious believers (roughly 40 percent of the populace), and especially from the Christian community (estimated at 25 percent of the Soviet population). However, his attempt to replace the traditional heavyhanded and repressive approach, which stressed the rigorous enforcement of atheism, with a more subtle strategy is proving extremely divisive. A bitter dispute has opened up among many religious believers over the sincerity of the regime's program and, by implication, the utility of cooperation with the regime. The Russian Orthodox Church, long noted for its submission to state authority, has taken advantage of increased regime tolerance to become more outspoken in pressing for an expanded role. Certain activist groups are aggressively pressing believers' rights. For example, thousands of Ukrainian Eastern Rite Roman Catholics have petitioned Moscow to restore their legal status, lost when Stalin forced them into the Russian Orthodox Church in 1946.

There are serious disagreements within the top leadership as well over the wisdom of opening this Pandora's box. "Second Secretary" Ligachev seemingly speaks for conservatives on this issue as on others, and there are hints that Gorbachev's policy on religion is poorly received by KGB Chairman Chebrikov, Ukrainian party boss Shcherbitskiy, and Defense Minister Yazov. Local party leaders—who have traditionally violated believers' rights with impunity—question the wisdom of relaxing restrictions and continue past repressive practices. This is particularly true in the Ukraine and the Baltics, where Christianity is closely allied with nationalist activism.

The regime is playing with fire by accommodating so strong an ideological rival with natural ties to nationalism in both the borderlands and the Russian heartland. Serious nationalist disturbances in the Caucasus or the Baltics—where churchmen were indirectly involved during recent months—could provide ammunition for conservatives to press for a crackdown and further exacerbate reported deep leadership differences over other elements of reform. Gorbachev and his allies will need deft timing and careful monitoring to avoid both a further surge in Christian belief and a corresponding backlash from conservative ideologues.

## Gorbachev Confronts the Challenge of Christianity

Seventy years after the USSR declared itself an atheistic state, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and his colleagues are concerned over the growing influence of Christianity in this Millennial year. Regime nervousness has been fueled by a continued inability to curb the appeal of Christianity and fully subordinate the clergy, despite a vast array of levers for applying pressure. Official atheistic propaganda, KGB penetration of churches and clergy, and persecution of religious activists have often boomeranged. Clumsy propaganda has unintentionally publicized Christian history and beliefs, while widespread repression and imprisonment have provided activists with martyrs and new audiences for proselytizing in prisons, labor camps, and subsequent exile.

While the Soviet regime has been conspicuously silent on the number of believers, a broad array of internal indicators testifies to a burgeoning of church memberships, with the evangelical groups and underground congregations growing faster than traditional denominations (see the appendix). In addition to public worship—the sole legal activity of congregations registered with the state—the faithful conduct banned activities such as pilgrimages, proselytization, appeals and petitions to authorities, pacifism, and civil disobedience. Growing numbers of believers are also engaged in underground activism—smuggling religious literature from abroad, circulating religious samizdat, and organizing underground churches and seminaries. Others are active in overt religious dissent—working to gain political rights for believers and to expand the role of churches in Soviet society.

The upsurge in Christian belief over the last decade has occurred against the backdrop of fundamental demographic shifts that have uprooted the Soviet population both physically and psychologically. The belief in technology that replaced traditional religious faith during the early postrevolutionary decades was weakened during the economic slowdown and growing societal problems of the 1970s. Popular cynicism and malaise in the wake of Brezhnev-era stagnation and corruption provided a fertile seedbed for reawakening interest in religion. In recent years the nostalgic search for ethnic roots by Russians and minorities alike has strongly reinforced the religious impulse by calling attention to the churches' historical role as the paramount culture bearer.

Events since the 1970s have magnified the impact of these long-term forces. Western radiobroadcasts have increased popular awareness of religious life abroad and the role of religion at home. The election of an activist Slavic pope and the 1981 upheavals in Poland stimulated religious activity by Soviet Catholics. Detente and the Helsinki accords, as well as the spectacle of a sequence of aging and weak political leaders, apparently led many Christian activists to believe that—short of an open challenge to the system—religious practice would be tolerated.

The persistence and vitality of religion present significant problems for the regime. The churches are the only legal institutions, outside the party-state framework, with the potential to attract followers across class and, in some cases, ethnic lines and to create a program for mass action:

- *Ideology*. As the only tolerated nonofficial ideology, religious belief—particularly Christianity—offers a worldview and values that challenge Marxism-Leninism. Not even party members—forbidden to practice religion—are immune to its appeal. Gorbachev and other leaders have railed against Muslim practices by party and Komsomol members in Central Asia—warnings that apparently apply to closet Christians as well. Some party officials in the Baltic and Ukrainian republics reportedly take part in secret liturgies and provide materials for samizdat religious publications.

*Figure 1. Huge crowds—officially acknowledged to number about 45,000 daily—have converged from as far away as Central Asia on a tiny Ukrainian village since a young girl saw a vision of the Virgin Mary on the belfry of an abandoned chapel on the anniversary of the Chernobyl' nuclear disaster. The pilgrims reportedly have contributed 62,000 rubles to maintain the shrine, and authorities are apparently disturbed and divided among themselves over how best to counter the "miracle."*

- *Nationalism.* Because most denominations in the USSR are ethnically grounded (see map), religious faith reinforces ethnic identity and—in such borderland areas as the Caucasus, the Baltics, and the Ukraine—creates a particularly potent type of nationalism. In Armenia, for instance, the head of the independent Orthodox church played a key role in supporting demands for the incorporation of Nagorno-Karabakhskaya Autonomous Oblast as "natural, legal, and constitutional." While the regime can play on Russian Orthodox believers' pride in the traditions of Russia, religion in the borderlands conquered by the czars reinforces resentment of the Russians, who are associated both with political repression of non-Slavic nations and with the officially privileged position of the Russian Orthodox Church.



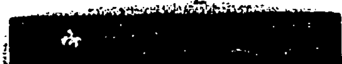


**Figure 2**
**Principal Locations of Christian Believers in the Soviet Union**

- *Youth.* The regime seems particularly uneasy over the attraction that religion holds for Soviet young people. In particular, espousal of Christianity by growing numbers of youths belies the propaganda cliche that faith will die out with the older generations. The regime's problem is highlighted by the great appeal to youth of the fundamentalist sects and ethnically based denominations, which often require a level of uncompromising rejection of Soviet society and open sectarian activism—including draft evasion—that cannot be officially ignored.

**Gorbachev's Strategy**

Gorbachev is crafting an approach to the Christianity issue consistent with his more flexible agenda on human rights and cultural expression. Specifically, he seems to be trying to win allegiance for his broader economic and social revitalization programs from religious believers (roughly 40 percent of the populace), and especially from the Christian community

Figure 3. "Kiss the icon; maybe God will help us with our exam!"

(estimated at 25 percent of the Soviet population). Gorbachev apparently calculates that granting concessions to their demands will line up religious organizations and believers behind him and win the approval of many liberal intellectuals and cultural figures who—although not themselves believers—favor a loosening of repression for churches as the bearers of the national and cultural heritage.

Gorbachev appears willing to expand somewhat the legal bounds of religious expression, in an effort to draw all but the most obdurate believers into open and monitored activity, while isolating and discrediting those activists who will not conform to the new rules. He appears to be working through two key figures—Politburo member Aleksandr Yakovlev, who oversees the party propaganda apparatus, and Konstantin Kharchev, in charge of the State Council for Religious Affairs (CRA). Under their guidance, ideologists are developing differentiated and more nuanced tactics to combat Christianity

**Utilizing Traditional Levers of Control . . .**
Despite his apparent determination to liberalize Soviet policy on religion, Gorbachev has yet to repudiate explicitly the elaborate and overlapping bureaucratic system of controls that has been developed since 1917 to curb denominations, clergy, and individual believers. Party and state agencies still wield a broad array of instruments for controlling denominations and congregations. The chief vehicle is the legislative requirement that congregations of 20 or more believers must register with the CRA. Only its approval ensures legal status, access to premises in which to hold worship services, and the right to collect donations and employ clergy.

In return for these privileges, however, registered churches effectively surrender their autonomy. They must raise their own operating funds, but the CRA maintains checks on their finances. By setting the numbers of places in seminaries, vetting candidates, and registering clergy, the state controls the size and quality of church staffs and places KGB informers throughout the hierarchy. A large body of evidence indicates that senior clerics of the Russian Orthodox Church and other registered denominations have collaborated with the regime, particularly in voicing support for Soviet foreign policy.

Unregistered congregations fare even worse: their services are often disrupted, and some of their clergy and activists are jailed or forced to emigrate. For instance, Estonian authorities initiated criminal investigations against two activist pastors of an openly antiregime, illegal church in the republic, and—when that failed to silence the sect—deported the ministers in early March in hopes of destroying the church.

The registration policy, by creating a dual class system for religious denominations, has encouraged infighting and suspicion within the religious communities [ ] in the late 1970s, even senior Russian Orthodox clerics are almost evenly divided into those who are completely

*Figure 4. Gorbachev has shown a degree of respect for some churches—perhaps viewing them as symbols of healthy national pride—and was shown on Soviet television touring an ancient Lutheran cathedral in Riga in February 1987.*

obedient, those who are publicly loyal yet encourage greater church activity and recruit young members, and those who openly disobey the state by evading laws on worship.

The regime also has at its disposal instruments for intimidating and punishing individual Christians. Clergy and members of the congregation are often fined by the local government for leading or attending unregistered services or providing religious education. Religious activists are ostracized at work or school, and some religious believers have been branded "unfit parents" and threatened with loss of their children.

A broad array of criminal code provisions, only some of which relate directly to religious activity, is used to jail believers—for example, spreading "anti-Soviet (religious) propaganda," participating in religious processions that "disrupt public order," or conducting religious education of the young. Believers are also charged with a variety of trumped-up secular crimes—such as failing to carry internal passports, theft, disorderly conduct, or parasitism (lack of employment). Christian activists, in fact, account for almost 40 percent of all political prisoners known to us.

Even since Gorbachev's election in March 1985, some activists have been jailed, others have been forced to emigrate or have been committed to psychiatric hospitals, and some have been physically threatened. Young Christians serving in the military forces have reportedly been physically abused and even killed in officially tolerated hazing. Some reporting suggests that Roman Catholic priests and lay activists in the Baltic republics have been injured or have died under suspicious circumstances, which dissidents attribute to the police. While there is no solid evidence that these injuries or deaths were arranged or sanctioned at the top of the KGB, there are also no reports that anyone has been punished for those crimes

**... And Developing New Tactics**

While continuing to rely selectively on these repressive levers, Gorbachev has emphasized incentives for approved behavior. He has apparently mandated more sophisticated and less adversarial propaganda. According to one report, he urged that the reference to atheistic propaganda be dropped from the party program revised in 1986 and, when that failed, had it toned down.

Moreover, the regime has been more responsive to several longstanding church complaints, has allowed the registered churches an expanded public role, and has guaranteed them a more secure status in society:

- It has increased domestic production of religious literature and is relaxing some customs restrictions on importation of religious materials. While implementation of the new customs rules remains spotty, Baptists are importing 200,000 Bibles during 1988, half of which have reportedly arrived. The regime granted the Russian Orthodox Church permission to bring in 250,000 Bibles and to publish a special Millennial edition in 100,000 copies.

- Some church leaders have been given access to the domestic mass media. For example, Gorbachev's meeting with Orthodox Church leaders on 29 April and part of this year's Easter services were televised (see inset). Metropolitans of the Russian Orthodox Church and the head of the Armenian church have used television interviews to stress that the churches have an important role in Soviet society today and that constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion must be strictly observed.

- The CRA has become more protective of believers' rights against obstructionist and repressive local bureaucrats. The CRA's intervention was instrumental in the publicized reprimand and dismissal in early 1987 of district officials in Krasnoyarsk who had confiscated a new church building belonging to an Orthodox congregation.

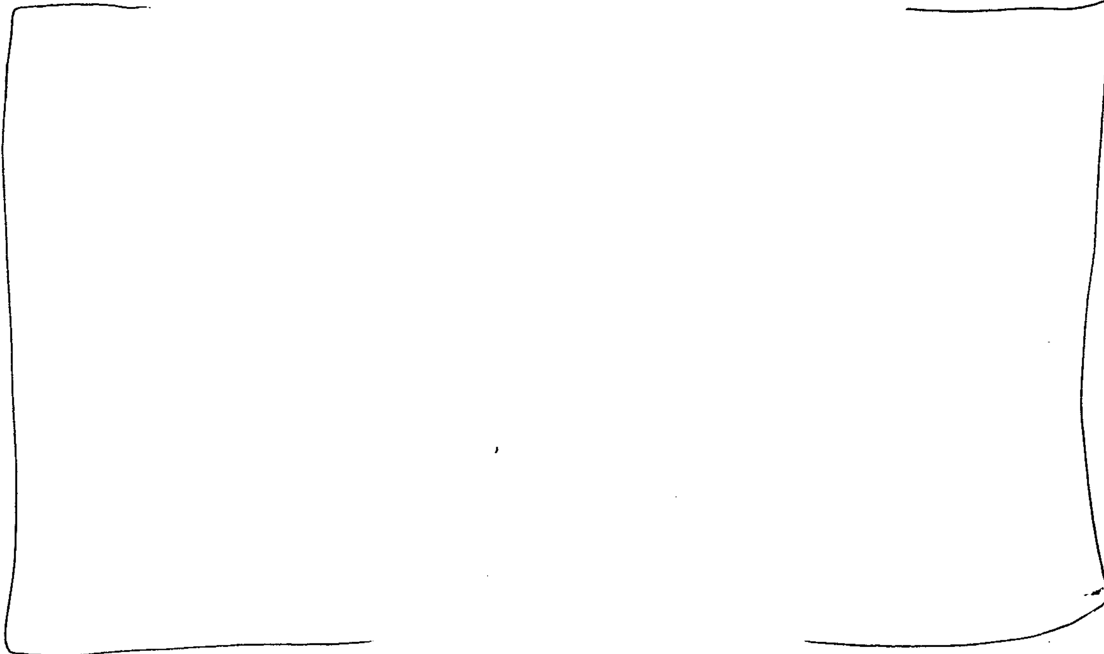
- Militias have eased up on embarrassing public displays of force against religious activists. Despite the protests of an irate passerby, Moscow militia stood by quietly during a 20-minute prayer meeting conducted by an unofficial Soviet peace group near Pushkin Square on New Year's Day 1987.

Gorbachev, in his recent remarks to the Patriarch and other Orthodox leaders, confirmed that the basic law controlling religion, enacted in 1929, is being revised. The new law will reportedly make churches juridical persons with the right to provide charity and religious education. A number of administrative constraints on church activity—such as the regulation that clergy must register baptisms—apparently are already being relaxed in anticipation of the draft law. Revised republic criminal codes reportedly will curtail some laws often used against believers, notably those forbidding "anti-Soviet" propaganda and slander. But these moves are apparently generating heated debate in official and legal circles, and their precise provisions are as yet unclear.

Other important Gorbachev policies are having an indirect, but vital, impact on Christianity in the USSR. For instance, over 90 of the more than 275 political prisoners amnestied during 1987 are Christian activists. While about 290 others remain jailed, a large number of those released have resumed their religious activism and in some cases are forming the nucleus of new or rejuvenated groups of Christian activists. For example, Josyf Terelya, a major activist for the banned Eastern Rite (Uniate) Roman Catholic Church in the Ukraine and a former long-term political prisoner, spearheaded the signature drive for a petition demanding legal status for the church. Reportedly, he delivered the petition personally to the Kremlin in August 1987—shortly before his forced emigration to Canada.

Furthermore, Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* in culture and the media has had the unintended effect of introducing more positive portrayals of clergy and believers into media productions and the arts and giving wide currency to the Christian religious message. One of the most popular films for Soviet audiences in the past three years—*Repentance*—uses clear and powerful Christian symbols to counter the merciless power and terror of a Stalinist dictator. Notable among many literary works in this genre is a novel by a famous Central Asian writer that has been serialized in *Novyy mir*. The novel presents a God-seeking hero who finds meaning by saving drug addicts through Christian morality.

*Gorbachev Meets With Russian Orthodox Patriarch*



*At an unprecedented Kremlin meeting on 29 April 1988, General Secretary Gorbachev discussed the coming Millennial celebration with Patriarch Pimen, four senior bishops of the Synod, and the head of the CRA, Konstantin Kharchev. He noted Soviet regime steps to support the church, including the return to church ownership and reconstruction of the Danilovskiy Monastery. He acknowledged the church's contribution to Russian history. In addition, he admitted that "not everything was easy and simple" in church-state relations. He noted that churches had suffered under the "tragic" events of the Stalin period, but that those "mistakes" are being rectified. Gorbachev said, "We clearly see the entire depth of our differences, . . . but the believers are Soviet people, workers, patriots, and they have full right to express their conviction with dignity." He pledged that the new law being drafted on freedom of conscience will reflect the interests of religious organizations.*

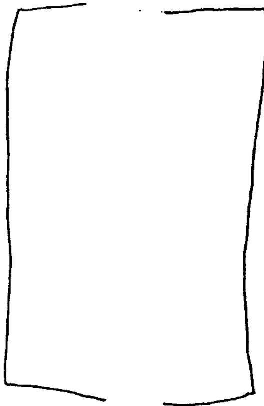


*Figure 5. Mother Teresa, the Roman Catholic nun famous for her charity work in 77 countries, made an unprecedented visit to the USSR in August 1987. If recent Western press reports are correct, permission for her order to open an affiliate in Moscow would be the first breach in official prohibition of religious charitable work.*

## Reactions to the New Policy

The salience of Gorbachev's policy is reflected in the intensity of reactions it has elicited from believers and officials alike. By providing expanded opportunities for legal activity by registered churches and moderate, "loyal" Christians, the new regime strategy requires denominations and individuals to define more precisely their own relationship to the regime—thus opening up a bitter internal dispute over the proper use to be made of the new options. Similarly, the official establishment at all levels has become polarized over the appropriate limits of concessions in this area, with opinions ranging over a spectrum from "conservative" to "liberal."

**By the Believers . . .**
Most officially registered churches appear to be interpreting the policy as an invitation to press additional demands and are making cautious attempts to maximize the opportunities provided. The Russian Orthodox Church, long noted for its submission to state authority, has become more outspoken—both in Soviet media and privately—in pressing for an expanded role. It may be trying to change its image—particularly by exploiting a favored position in this Millennial year—and to upstage more outspoken clergy and dissenters. In particular, senior church figures like the Archbishop of Astrakhan' and Metropolitan Filaret are actively pressing the regime to live up to the Soviet Constitution's formal guarantees of freedom of religion and to return historic church property like the Kiev monastery. Others have apparently been quietly invited by officials to comment on the revision of laws controlling religion, with an eye to legalizing charitable and educational activities by churches.

Some groups of believers are taking an even more vocal and active stance in demanding believers' rights. Several unofficial organizations representing various denominations in Moscow and in Latvia and the Ukraine have appealed to authorities for changes in legislation to improve the status and broaden the rights of churches. As noted, thousands of Ukrainian Eastern Rite Roman Catholics have petitioned the top leadership to restore their clandestine church to the legal status it lost when Stalin forcibly incorporated it into the Russian Orthodox Church in 1946.

Individual Christian activists have also pushed for further policy changes, but they are sometimes bitterly divided on how to attain their goals. Some, like well-known dissident Orthodox priest Gleb Yakunin, are ready to work with Gorbachev, while others—like religious dissident Nikolay Ogorodnikov—openly test the limits by founding new samizdat Christian journals and discussion groups and planning countercelebrations of the Millennium of Christianity in Moscow and the Ukraine. Some believers in the Baltics and Armenia have taken part in public demonstrations to push their causes, while others stand aside, decrying official loosening of controls as a mere propaganda device.

**. . . And by the Regime**
There are signs of differences of opinion within the leadership and throughout the bureaucracy over how to handle Christianity. The central question appears to be the extent, and the length of time, that the system should accommodate the presence—and even growth—of Christian believers and denominations, and how much modification of repression can safely be allowed without risk of political and ethnic destabilization. While Gorbachev seems to have the upper hand, he must contend with a significant minority opinion among the leadership and often outright resistance by local authorities



2568

***The Politburo.*** "Second Secretary" Ligachev appears to be the spokesman for a relatively traditional approach to religion within the top leadership, as on the broader questions of *glasnost* and political and economic reform. His tone has been more negative and combative than Gorbachev's on several counts. Specifically, he has linked religious belief to subversion of the Soviet state and condemned activists in minority areas as "bourgeois nationalists" who "deck themselves in religious clothing" in order to damage the state. He sharply attacked "reactionary" religions on Soviet frontiers in Central Asia, the Ukraine, and Lithuania—the centers of Islam and Roman Catholicism.

KGB Chairman and full Politburo member Viktor Chebrikov probably is also uneasy with the loosening of secret police controls over religion and the decision to grant amnesties to religious prisoners last year. He too has stressed the "ideological subversion" waged by Western intelligence. Minister of Defense Dmitriy Yazov—a candidate Politburo member—has deplored the tolerant portrayal of Christian belief in the Soviet media and arts, presumably because it feeds pacifist views among potential and current military cohorts. Ukrainian party First Secretary Vladimir Shcherbitskiy's views on the appropriate role of Christianity are also apparently hardline. Faced with a strong underground Eastern Rite Catholic Church that is fiercely nationalist and has a large following across class lines, he has accused "religious centers abroad" of using the church for "ideological aggression."

Despite these reservations, ideology secretary Yakovlev—reportedly the prime architect of *glasnost* and other more nuanced domestic policies—has been empowered to direct the media to provide a more positive treatment of Christianity. While apparently opposed to any "romanticization" of the past or nationalist exploitation of *glasnost* that would allow the churches to rival party authority, he seems to favor according more legal functions to registered Christian churches and tapping the creativity and hard work of loyal and nonconfrontational believers

Gorbachev and his Politburo supporters on this issue—a group that probably includes Moscow party boss Lev Zaykov—apparently consider that most believers are patriotic Soviet citizens and that the regime is strong enough to contain any growth of belief. These leaders may believe that the churches' broad appeal and proven staying power make it essential to draw these potentially rival organizations into the mainstream of the regime's reform programs—as is being attempted with the mushrooming unofficial groups supporting ecological, cultural, and a myriad of other causes.

***Bureaucracy.*** Many officials—both in the center and in the provinces—are unenthusiastic about the new leader's liberalizing strategy to curb the appeal and influence of Christianity (see inset). According to a high Soviet official, spokesmen for state religious organizations are divided among themselves over whether to continue the old-line, militant struggle against belief, or to make a radical separation of church and state—and, if so, whether to legislate any supervision over the churches.

In any case, Gorbachev's initiatives are often flouted by local militia and secret police in regions far from the capital. According to one account in a prominent liberal journal, when confronted with complaints by a CRA instructor from Moscow that he was obstructing the new policy, a local official in Kirov replied, in effect: That's Moscow! But we do things our own way here.

Particularly in national areas such as the Ukraine and the Baltics where Christianity is strong and closely allied with nationalist activism, officials continue to drag their feet. Not surprisingly, given the intertwining of religion and nationalism, regional officials also betray an alarmist attitude toward the inroads of religion that goes beyond most statements made by members of the central leadership. For instance, the first secretary of the Moldavian party told the republic Komsomol congress in February 1987 that activists have increased their efforts in recent years to entice "politically immature" young people into illegal religious sects under the guise of weddings and preconscription parties for young military draftees. As noted, foot-dragging by local authorities and harassment of believers by provincial bureaucrats have been the subject of a number of exposes in the central press.

*The Public Debate*

*A heated debate over Christianity's proper role in Russian history and Soviet society is continuing in the Soviet press and intellectual circles. Although Gorbachev and other regime spokesmen and commentators now contend that most ordinary believers supported the Revolution and were loyal builders of Soviet industrialization and defenders against the Nazi invasion, the more conservative commentators focus on the reverse side of the coin—that certain clergy and "extremists" act against the homeland.*

*Hardliners warn that the churches are now attempting to "adapt to modern conditions" to appeal to a more educated population and become relevant to today's needs. They charge that clever churchmen are abusing* glasnost *to turn the regime's new "tolerance" to the advantage of the church.*

*There is a further argument over whether culture and morality owe their origins to Christianity. Leading writers and artists—like well-known poet Yevgeniy Yevtushenko—who have made such a linkage have been accused in the press of "flirting with religion" and reopening the supposedly closed issue of God's existence. Yevtushenko and other writers have responded in defense of their position, asking how you can even understand Russian literary classics like Pushkin or Tolstoy without reading the Bible.*

*There are indications that both sides of the debate are espoused among the ordinary public. Letters to newspapers and reports of public lectures on atheism reveal alarm on the part of some citizens over what they see as dangerous concessions to believers and an abandonment of official atheism by the regime. One angry elderly woman challenged the speaker at a propaganda society lecture by asserting, "The view that religion can play a progressive role is sheer hypocrisy!" Another questioner asked, "Why have we given up the struggle [against religion]?" Other citizens cautiously suggest support for the arguments made by cultural figures that Christianity is at the base of Russian civilization and culture.*

**Prospects**

Gorbachev's intent, as most recently reflected in his meeting with Orthodox leaders, is to rationalize and regularize—rather than to liberalize fundamentally—the treatment and status of Christians in the USSR. But, because he has not set out clearly defined limits on legitimate activity, his initiatives are sparking debate and opposition.

A number of factors could have an impact on the direction of regime policy in this area:

- An important driving force behind regime willingness to modify its harsh policies toward religion is the recognition of the need to mobilize Soviet society even at some political risk. Because his programs will require further economic sacrifices—tightened labor discipline and even possible unemployment with little hope of consumer satisfaction in the short term—Gorbachev may feel the need to offset these by additional concessions in the area of religious freedom.
- Alternatively the leadership cannot tolerate a basic challenge to its legitimacy. If the Christian community runs too fast with its newfound "freedoms," Gorbachev will have to scale back regime concessions.
- Liberalization of religious policy will also depend on the support of a solid majority of the Politburo behind Gorbachev's approach. If he can consolidate his political position, he can probably move quickly. If his opponents remain entrenched, however, he might have to dilute the liberalizing provisions or stretch out the time frame of his concessions to Christian believers.
- A chill in East-West relations could remove an incentive to adapt internal human rights actions to gain approval from Western states, although the current warming trend works in favor of Gorbachev's initiatives.

Several indicators should serve to mark whatever direction is taken by the regime:

- Changes in the forthcoming Criminal Code and other statutes to broaden churches' social and educational roles, relax constraints on clergy, and mitigate repression of activists would indicate a more conciliatory approach.

- Any distinct shift in the official treatment of Christian activist groups—granting them official status, or merely exercising benign neglect by not stopping their activities—would be tantamount to recognition of denominational legitimacy to carry on social welfare and publication activities.

- A Gorbachev visit to the Vatican, as has been widely rumored, or an official trip by the Pope to the USSR—which now seems less likely—would probably necessitate a more conciliatory policy toward Roman Catholics in the USSR. The recent dispatch of a high-level Vatican delegation to the Millennial celebrations keeps the channels open for a future papal visit.

- Increased visibility or, conversely, a crackdown in use of Christian motifs and symbolism in the arts and media would be a reliable indicator of leadership attitudes on the boundaries of permissible articulation of Christian sentiment.

- The extent to which Millennium celebrations next month are publicized and involve the faithful, and—more important—the degree to which the church perpetuates recent concessions, will be crucial indicators of regime intentions toward Soviet Christianity. So far, Gorbachev's positive remarks concerning believers' contributions to Soviet society in his late April meeting with Russian Orthodox Church leaders suggest that concessions will outlast the Millennial year.

Several further changes that are reportedly under consideration by the leadership, if carried out, would indicate an even more fundamental shift in official policy toward religion. Legalization of the Eastern Rite (Uniate) Roman Catholic Church in the Ukraine, a Constitutional amendment legalizing religious as well as antireligious propaganda, and reversal of the 1922 decree nationalizing church property would be major steps toward institutionalizing Gorbachev's new initiatives on religion, and thus militate against a future radical reversal of policy.

Gorbachev and those closest to him apparently think that reducing the most overt religious repression will improve society-state relations and deprive nationalists and "extremists" of an important issue—while coaxing a stable and productive sector of society back into the economic and social mainstream. But Gorbachev is playing with fire in seeking the support of a traditional ideological rival that naturally reinforces the nationalist impulse in sensitive borderland areas and in the Russian heartland. For instance, further nationalist disturbances in the Caucasus and the Baltic—where clergymen have been indirectly involved—and growing religious activism in the Ukraine and Moldavia could present an occasion for coercive reaction from a conservatively biased leadership and start another round in the historical cycle of official relaxation and repression of Christianity. Although current indicators are pointing in the other direction, the political trade-offs needed to assure support for a broad reform program in other areas could cripple Gorbachev's liberalizing initiatives toward the churches.

Because the question of the role of Christianity is so sensitive with respect to party legitimacy and so closely tied to national identity and aspirations in both Russian and minority cultures, the success or failure of Gorbachev's new strategy will be a barometer of his political strength. The difficulty of articulating and administering a coherent and positive policy toward the churches and unregistered groups could exacerbate reported differences within the top leadership—especially with "Second Secretary" Ligachev and KGB chief Chebrikov—over elements of reform, particularly those that touch on the explosive mix of religion and nationalism

In short, Gorbachev and his allies will need a deft sense of timing, as well as careful monitoring and adjustments to his policy, if he is to avoid a further surge in the strength and prestige of Christian faiths, a miscalculation by Christian activists causing them to press for even greater concessions, or a backlash from conservative ideologues.

## Appendix

## Major Religious Denominations in the USSR

### Mainstream, Legal Denominations

**Russian Orthodox Church (ROC)**
***Founded:*** 988 A.D.

***Number of Registered Congregations:*** 6,794

***Estimated Number of Believers:*** 55 million, making it the largest Christian denomination in the USSR.

***Legal Status:*** Officially registered with the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA). Hierarchal structure under a Holy Synod headed by a Patriarch. It has 73 dioceses, led by 76 bishops, metropolitans, and archbishops; eight monasteries and 13 convents, plus the recently reopened Danilovskiy Monastery in Moscow; and an unknown but apparently growing number of clandestine congregations and splinter groups. Member of World Council of Churches (WCC).

***Relations With Regime:*** Enjoys a relatively favored position among denominations and has permission for publication facilities, restoration of ancient churches, and foreign travel, particularly in conjunction with the Millennium. The Patriarch and many clergy reportedly are KGB collaborators, but some clergy reportedly disagree with the policy of cooperation with the state or have become open dissidents.

***Training of Clergy:*** Three seminaries and a correspondence course. Two theological academies train church officials and seminary professors.

**Roman Catholic Church**
***Founded:*** Date unknown

***Number of Registered Congregations:*** 1,099

***Estimated Number of Believers:*** 4 million

***Legal Status:*** Legally registered churches in the Russian, Moldavian, Belorussian, and Baltic republics.

***Organization:*** Has no central organization in the USSR and maintains only poor official contact with the Vatican. It has three bishops. Only Lithuanian dioceses are functioning somewhat normally. Underground congregations served by secretly ordained priests and nuns.

***Relations With Regime:*** Hostile; traditional regime distrust intensified by the clergy's role in Baltic nationalist dissent. Official propaganda portrays activist clergy as "extremist" conspirators with Western intelligence and the Vatican.

***Training of Clergy:*** Only one legal seminary—in Lithuania—enrolling about 50 students, but some priests are reportedly trained abroad and others are assigned officially to parishes in Poland. There is a chronic shortage of priests.

**Armenian Apostolic Church**
***Founded:*** 301 A.D.

***Number of Registered Congregations:*** 89

***Estimated Number of Believers:*** 1.5 million

***Legal Status:*** Legally registered, independent national church. No reported underground groups. Member WCC.

*Organization:* Hierarchal structure, headed by the Catholicos of Echmiadzin. It claims jurisdiction over the faithful in the diaspora, not all of whom render allegiance. Like the Georgian church, it is independent of the Russian Orthodox Church. It has six monasteries.

*Relations With Regime:* Staunchly nationalist. While there is no well-documented link to nationalist groups, there is some overlap with human rights groups. A widespread religious revival since the mid-1970s led to a fourfold increase in baptisms, even of party members' children. It has some fiscal independence due to faithful abroad.

*Training of Clergy:* It has one theological institute.

**Georgian Orthodox**
*Founded:* c. 150 A.D.

*Number of Registered Congregations:* 80

*Estimated Number of Believers:* 500,000

*Legal Status:* Registered national church, operating legally. The language of service is Georgian. No reported underground church or unregistered congregations.

*Organization:* It has a hierarchal structure on the model of ROC but completely independent of it. Headed by a Patriarch.

*Relations With Regime:* Like the Armenian church, it antedates the ROC and has an independent history. The hierarchy has generally been compliant to the state, but the lower clergy and laity are strongly nationalist. Several Georgian human rights dissidents are also religious activists. The 1970s religious revival among nationalists apparently provoked a massive media attack and KGB subversion of the hierarchy.

*Training of Clergy:* The church educates and ordains clergy independently. According to the Patriarch, a new ecclesiastical academy, with instruction in Georgian, will soon open in Tbilisi.

**Lutheran**
*Founded:* Mid-13th century

*Number of Registered Congregations:* 443

*Estimated Number of Believers:* 670,000

*Legal Status:* The vast majority of churches (in Estonia and Latvia) are registered; but there are some unregistered congregations in Russian-settled areas of Central Asia and the Soviet Far East. Most members are of German descent. Member WCC.

*Organization:* Latvian and Estonian churches are strongly national but have recently begun interrepublic relations. Each is headed by an archbishop of national origin.

*Relations With Regime:* The churches have had a traditionally quietist policy toward state control, until recently. There are some signs of differences between higher and lower level clergy, with senior clerics preferring a passive stance toward public issues.

*Training of Clergy:* There is an acute shortage of pastors. The church has one seminary in Latvia and one in Estonia, supplemented by evening classes in Latvia.

**Evangelical Christians-Baptists**
*Founded:* Mid-1800s

*Number of Registered Congregations:* 2,976

*Estimated Number of Believers:* 3 million

*Legal Status:* The 1944 Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists united Baptists and Evangelicals. Several Pentecostal and Mennonite groups have since joined. It is officially registered with CRA. Member WCC.

*Organization:* It is nonhierarchal, congregational. Local congregations select preachers and presbyters, determine local religious activity, and elect central leaders. The Central Union Council influences and coordinates local congregations; it maintains strong links with Baptists in the West.

*Relations With Regime:* Relations are cool but correct. It is often included in international gatherings, and its leadership is probably co-opted by the regime. It publishes a legal journal and reportedly has been allowed to open the first "amateur" (nonstate) video recording studio in Moscow.

*Training of Clergy:* Since 1968, correspondence courses have been given for new presbyters. But the great majority of the estimated 300 full-time and 30,000 part-time preachers are self-trained laymen.

Mainstream, Illegal Denominations

Eastern Rite Roman Catholic (Uniate)
*Founded:* 1596

*Number of Registered Congregations:* None

*Estimated Number of Believers:* 5 million

*Legal Status:* Not registered with the CRA, exists only underground. Petitions in 1987 requesting a legal status were signed by thousands of clergy and laity.

*Organization:* Since forcible absorption into the ROC in 1946, it has been a clandestine denomination. Strongly nationalist, concentrated in the western Ukraine, it is served by an extensive network of clergy (reportedly 12 bishops and 1,000 priests). It has been able to exchange information with the Vatican and adherents in the West through religious samizdat (notably the *Chronicle of the Catholic Church in the Ukraine*).

*Relations With Regime:* Extremely hostile. Its traditional open support for Ukrainian separatism exacerbates its historic rivalry with ROC—the church favored by Moscow. Official propaganda portrays clergy and activists as conspirators with the Vatican and Western intelligence services.

*Training of Clergy:* Priests are secretly trained and ordained. There is no seminary within the USSR.

**Radical or Fundamentalist, Illegal Denominations**

**Seventh-Day Adventists**
*Founded:* 1886

*Number of Registered Congregations:* Unknown

*Estimated Number of Believers:* 100,000

*Legal Status:* Most congregations are not registered and operate clandestinely. The principal locations of congregations are Latvia, Estonia, the Ukraine, and Moldavia.

*Organization:* Neither central organization nor professional clergy. Local congregations—often based on hereditary membership and recruitment among neighbors—are coordinated by traveling senior believers.

*Relations With Regime:* Although the church acknowledges state power, relations are quite hostile. In 1961 the organizational center was dissolved because of alleged illegal activity, and contact with coreligionists abroad was stifled. Doctrines of refusal of military service and keeping the Sabbath on Saturday have increased regime hostility. Believers are harassed in army labor brigades and civilian workplaces. Schismatic (unregistered) Reform Adventists advocate noninvolvement in society or even dissident religious activism. They have been subjected to harsh repression: all three leaders until 1980 died in labor camps.

*Training of Clergy:* There is no formal seminary; the church recognizes the "priesthood of all believers." There is some informal training of elders.

**Initsiativniki or Reform Baptists**
*Founded:* 1965

*Number of Registered Congregations:* None

*Estimated Number of Believers:* 150,000

*Legal Status:* Not registered with CRA; all congregations are clandestine.

*Organization:* Nonhierarchical. Formed out of a deep schism within the Evangelical Christian-Baptist Church in 1961 concerning relations with the state. Congregations are autonomous; the theology is radical and requires active proselytizing. Several attempts at reconciliation with legal Baptists, apparently supported by the CRA, have failed.

*Relations With Regime:* Separatism from mainstream Soviet society and complete independence from the state make relations hostile. Members are harassed, and many are jailed. It publishes an illegal journal and operates at least one secret printing press.

*Training of Clergy:* No institutional training is known to exist.

**Pentecostal**
*Founded:* c. 1914

*Number of Registered Congregations:* Unknown

*Estimated Number of Believers:* c. 500,000

*Legal Status:* With few exceptions, congregations are unregistered and clandestine.

*Organization:* Congregational structure of largely autonomous local groups. Probably less than half of the congregations belong to the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. There is little communication among congregations, largely because of emigration of activists to Europe and the United States. It has a hierarchical structure within congregations with extremely powerful presbyters and extensive surveillance of members. Congregations worship secretly in homes or in the open air, changing locations frequently to escape detection.

*Relations With Regime:* Extremely and openly hostile. It is uncompromisingly separatist from the state and its educational, military, and other bureaucratic systems. Its strict beliefs and radical rejection of state authority have resulted in withdrawal to isolated communities and pressure for emigration. Civil disobedience marks congregations in the Soviet Far East. Many refuse military service. Many clergy are jailed; all members suffer severe harassment.

*Training of Clergy:* Presbyters are self-trained and ordained by congregations.

**Jehovah's Witnesses**
*Founded:* c. 1920

*Number of Registered Congregations:* None

*Estimated Number of Believers:* c. 40,000

*Legal Status:* Illegal, conspiratorial. Criminally prosecuted since inception: 7,000 members were deported in 1948-51, and the church was subjected to a repressive campaign in 1957.

*Organization:* It has an elaborate hierarchal structure and is closely tied to the parent church in the United States. The USSR Regional Committee is administered from Poland. Local groups of 10 to 15 members meet secretly to study *Watchtower* magazine, which is distributed via a clandestine network.

*Relations With Regime:* Mutual hostility, open political antagonism mark relations. Members consciously reject secular society (unlike Pentecostals and Adventists, who passively avoid the Soviet system). Missionary expansion among labor camp and exiled populations in Central Asia and Siberia has alarmed the regime. Whereas officials have attempted to lure other radical sects (Pentecostals, Reform Baptists, even Adventists) by offering legal registration, no flexibility is apparent toward Witnesses.

*Training of Clergy:* Lay group leaders are trained in underground schools, following precepts of *Watchtower* and instructions from abroad.

## Major Non-Christian Religions in the USSR

### Islam

*Number of Registered Congregations:* 751, including about 30 million believers.

*Estimated Number of Believers:* Up to 45 million nominally affiliated.

*Locations:* Central Asia, some parts of Western Siberia and the Caucasus.

*Legal Status:* It is legally recognized. Moreover, unofficial mullahs perform illegal folk ceremonies, often quite openly.

*Organization:* Sunni Muslims—the great majority of Muslims in the USSR—are under three spiritual directorates for Western Siberia, Central Asia, and the northern Caucasus. There is a fourth directorate for Sufi (Shite) Muslims in the Transcaucasus. No central body unites them: all report directly to CRA.

*Relations With Regime:* Soviet media harshly attack unofficial mullahs as "superstitious" and "anti-Soviet." The regime is apparently concerned over possible inroads by fundamentalist Islamic propaganda from Iran and an upsurge in brotherhoods. It counters with state-sponsored international Islamic gatherings in Soviet Central Asia.

*Training of Clergy:* There is one theological school and an Islamic Institute; together they train 60 to 80 students per year.

### Judaism

*Number of Registered Congregations:* 109

*Estimated Number of Believers:* 2 million

*Locations:* Groups are in urban centers throughout the USSR, concentrated in Moscow, Leningrad, Minsk, and Odessa. There are also some communities in Georgia and Central Asia. The Jewish Autonomous Region in the Soviet Far East (established in 1928) did not succeed in attracting settlers: by 1976 the Jewish population had dwindled to under 12,000 (one-fifteenth of the total).

*Legal Status:* Legally registered, with 50 operating synagogues.

*Organization:* No central structure in the USSR; based in local communities. No known underground synagogues exist; secret Hebrew classes are given in major cities. Reportedly, one or two Hebrew classes in Baku, Azerbaijan, have been allowed to operate openly.

*Relations with Regime:* Official attitudes are generally hostile, complicated by pressure for emigration. Relaxation on emigration and culture have not ameliorated policy toward Judaic religion significantly.

*Training of Clergy:* Inadequate number of rabbis (35-40); most are of advanced age. There is one seminary in Moscow. Two rabbis were recently allowed to train in the United States and others reportedly in Eastern Europe.

### Buddhism

*Number of Registered Congregations:* Unknown

*Estimated Number of Believers:* 400,000

*Locations:* Traditional locations near Mongolia and Lower Volga region (until 1940s). Recent conversions of young people have spread the faith into European Russia and the Baltic republics.

*Legal Status:* Legal, although all monasteries were destroyed in the 1930s.

*Organization:* The regime established the Spiritual Administration of Buddhists in 1950 as watchdog.

***Relations With Regime:*** Ethnically oriented official repression is probably based in the historic antipathy of Russians toward their ancient Mongol enemy. Conversions of Slavic and Baltic youth create added regime hostility.

***Training of Clergy:*** Since its virtual institutional destruction in the 1930s, illegal contacts with clergy in Mongolia probably have aided training. Since 1970, some students (13 in 1986) have been permitted to study legally in Mongolia.