

## RELIGION &amp; PHILOSOPHY



*Archmandrite Ioromin conducting a service in the Zagorsky Monastery northwest of Moscow. Some Soviet leaders have been Christians, most notably Georgi Malenkov, prime minister from 1953 to 1955.*

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### *The Soviets and the Church*

"Holy Russia's Millennium" in *The Economist* (April 2, 1988), 25 St. James's St., London SW1 1HG, United Kingdom; and "988-1988: Uses and Abuses of the Millennium" by Simon Franklin, in *The World Today* (April 1988), Royal Institute of International Affairs, 10 St. James's Square, London, SW1Y 4LE, United Kingdom.

Last June, the Soviets celebrated the millennium of Christianity in Russia, commemorating Prince Vladimir of Kiev's mass conversion of his subjects, who were baptized in the Dnieper River in 988.

As both *The Economist's* editors and Franklin, a fellow of Clare College, Cambridge, point out, most Soviet Christians have had little reason to celebrate their heritage.

During the tsarist era, the Russian Orthodox Church was backed by the state. But the Communists, after Lenin led them to power in 1917, declared a "war on God," killing or banishing thousands of priests and bishops and closing scores of monasteries. After Hitler's armies invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Josef Stalin allowed some religious freedom, permitting the Orthodox Church to elect a patriarch and re-open some

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seminaries. But one of Stalin's successors, Nikita Khrushchev, revived the antireligious campaign in 1959, closing 10,000 Orthodox churches and jailing large numbers of religious leaders.

The revised 1977 Soviet Constitution declared that citizens had "the right to profess any religion." But many restrictions remain; holding services in private homes or in the open air, for example, is still forbidden. The Council for Religious Affairs, a state agency, controls admission to seminaries, and can block ordinations of priests or bishops. Atheist propaganda is distributed by *Znanie* ("Knowledge"), a nominally private, but state-sponsored organization.

Church attendance has become more popular since Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985. Today, the Russian Orthodox Church has 6,800 churches, 6,000 priests, and an estimated 50 million members. (The second largest Christian denomination in the Soviet Union is the Roman Catholic, with 4.5 million members.)

Gorbachev's *glasnost* policies promise more open discussion of religious issues. Some figures from the past, such as icon painter Andrei Rublev, or military hero Prince Dmitri Donskoi, have been canonized. But substantive reforms, such as allowing priests to teach religion to children or letting churches engage in charitable work, are not yet being considered. The Ukrainian Catholic Church, suppressed by Stalin in 1946, is still banned. Soviet leaders apparently fear that truly free churches might prove formidable challengers to Communist rule. As Politburo member Alexander Yakovlev put it in 1987, "We must decisively repudiate any attempt to portray Christianity as the 'mother' of Russian culture."

### *The First Scientist?*

"Science as Handmaiden: Roger Bacon and the Patristic Tradition" by David C. Lindberg, in *Isis* (Dec. 1987), Univ. of Pa., 215 South 34th St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19104-6310.

Of late, Franciscan monk Roger Bacon (c. 1220-1292) has been widely regarded as the first man to separate science from religion. Lindberg, a science historian at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, disagrees. Far from being a "harbinger of things to come," Bacon's views were clearly in tune with his time.

Early church fathers believed that facts or theories not contained in the Bible were useful only if they improved analysis of the Bible's meaning. In his *De doctrina Christiana* ("Christian Instruction"), St. Augustine (354-430), for instance, taught that of all pagan knowledge, the Christian need only know rhetoric, mathematics, "mechanical arts," and history. All other subjects, including biology, astronomy, and physics, were not useful since they diverted a Christian from Biblical understanding.

Medieval monasteries followed St. Augustine's example. The standard course of study for monks (the *lectio divina*) centered around the Bible. Non-Biblical sources were only considered as supplements to Biblical teaching. By Bacon's day, however, "an enormous body" of Greek and Islamic texts had been translated, many of which contradicted Biblical teachings. How could a Christian, for example, agree with Aristotle's denial of personal immortality?