

Mother Russia by Luba George

ROC backs Ogarkov's 'perestroika'

The Orthodox Church views "the defense of the fatherland" as a top goal for the 1988 millennium.

The 1,000th anniversary of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which will be celebrated in 1988, is promoted with great fanfare in the newly published *Moscow Church Herald*, the six-language journal of the Moscow Patriarchate. It not only promotes the millennium in the Western world, but contains the Swiss bank account numbers, held by Metropolitan Pitirim of the Moscow Patriarchate, to which contributions can be forwarded.

The official ROC celebrations scheduled for June 5-17, 1988, are being coordinated with Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov's war-economy build-up, *perestroika* (restructuring). Eruptions of Great Russian chauvinism during the coming mystical millennium will proceed in tandem with the war drive, to fulfill the "mission" of making Moscow the Third and Final Rome, capital of a global empire.

Several international conferences in preparation for the millennium have already been held in Russia and abroad, and more are planned. Special brigades are working at top speed to complete the restoration and expansion of the Danilov monastery in Moscow, designed to become the Moscow Patriarchate's headquarters in 1988.

Metropolitan Pitirim of Volokolamsk and Yuryev, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's publishing department, said in the first issue of the *Moscow Church Herald* that the monthly will devote much coverage to the 1,000th-anniversary preparations. The *Herald* also serves as a propagan-

da vehicle for the Soviet-run "peace movement" in the West, as the following quote from Metropolitan Pitirim shows: "Our readers' interest is sure to be evoked by interviews and roundtable discussions with religious workers and scientific experts from around the world under the motto: Religious Workers for Saving the Sacred Gift of Life from Nuclear Catastrophe."

Pitirim, awarded last year the Soviet State's "Order of the Friendship of the Peoples," was recently interviewed by Moscow television. Asked, "What are the universal values that unite believers and atheists in Russia?" Pitirim replied: "I think the main and greatest value we have is the joint life we share in a single fatherland. This feeling of the homeland . . . which we live for and for the sake of which each one does his duty." He was then asked to describe the attitude of the Church on *perestroika*. Pitirim answered: "For us this is something we talk about every day. . . . Man is evolving, therefore those processes now taking place in our state naturally affect everyone. . . . The church consists of the perfection of the human being as a personality."

Soviet embassies in Europe and other parts of the world are involved in promoting the anniversary celebrations. In Bonn a big reception was held at the end of May for leading West German church figures, to inform them of the millenary event and woo them into co-celebration. This is part of the broader Soviet effort to break West Germany out of the Western alliance.

Soviet diplomat Gennadi Yelisaryev said that "religion and the churches in the U.S.S.R. play a very important role in the blossoming of the Socialist Motherland."

According to ROC sources in Geneva, the "Russian Party" of Third Rome fanatics has been working on a new Soviet Constitution. The new Constitution, which is actually a Byzantine Empire-modeled Church-State Concordat, is expected to come out in 1988. "Major changes" were reportedly already made in the Constitution just before Leonid Brezhnev died. These changes, never published, included granting the Russian Orthodox Church full legal status. The ROC Bishop in Geneva explained: "It's all there on paper . . . soon it will be made into reality."

Last year, the Soviet state quietly restored the right of property ownership to the ROC and other "religious associations." This is indeed a major reorganization of Soviet society, revoking 1929 laws which nationalized all church possessions. Before 1986, all nationalized property was leased to registered religious associations. Under the new law, the ROC enjoys "the rights of a juridical person." The ROC may, in accordance with the law, "build or buy structures, acquire means of transport, church articles, cult items, with the right to their ownership. . . . Buildings thus acquired become the property of the religious association."

Another gesture by the Gorbachov government in the Concordat direction: Two of the most prominent Russian Orthodox dissidents, Aleksandr Ogorodnikov and Fr. Gleb Yakunin, were freed recently after serving more than eight years in labor camps. Ogorodnikov, a Slavophile mystic, said after his release: "The future of Russia is indissolubly linked to the Church and the revival of Christianity."