

principles and takes account of all present realities. . .

Despite the rhetorical appeal to "Leninist principles" — Lenin's policies left thousands of believers in graves or labour camps — and the considerable understatement of the declaration that relations between believers and the state "have not always developed normally", most believers must have been pleased with the more positive approach adopted towards them. Yet some expressed concern that the Communist Party, which remains the ruling body in the USSR, retains its commitment to the view that religion is somehow "unscientific". Moreover, however "liberal" Gorbachev's intentions, all those concerned with human rights must be worried that the only section of the General Secretary's comments on human rights to draw applause from the conference delegates was that which warned against "irresponsibility" in the use of democracy, e.g. the creation of opposition parties and

the attempt to redraw national boundaries.

Summing up the conference, it seems clear that *perestroika* has been taken a stage further and that its opponents are unable to present any coherent alternative. It also appears (at the time of writing) that religion is to operate within wider parameters than for many years. Yet the considerable limitations that still affect religious believers cannot be ignored. Likewise the danger signals for the churches to be found in Gorbachev's recent and brief pronouncement on religion should not be disregarded. Like all political leaders — of right or of left, of democracies or authoritarian regimes — Gorbachev has little time for turbulent priests. Hence the conditional nature of the "new deal" for religion implicit in his speech — we give you more space if you support our policies. Herein lies cause for hope and concern.

JOHN ANDERSON

Students at the Riga Seminary

At present there are only two Roman Catholic seminaries in the USSR — one in Kaunas, Lithuania, and the other in the Latvian capital, Riga. The Lithuanian seminary caters primarily for Lithuania and its seminarians are almost entirely Lithuanian. In the absence of any seminary in Ukraine or Belorussia, the Catholic Church has to use the Riga seminary to train priests for other parts of the USSR as well as for Latvia.

A document recently received from the Riga diocese, which gives detailed statistics on the seminarians and clergy attached to the diocese, shows clearly that native Latvians are now

outnumbered five to one at the Riga seminary. A list of seminarians (1987-88), giving their national identity and place of birth, reveals that only 16 out of eighty are Latvians. Twenty-four are Poles, mostly from Ukraine and Belorussia. There are also 16 Ukrainians, 11 Germans from the Central Asian republics (where their families were undoubtedly deported under Stalin), and ten Belorussians. In addition one Estonian, one Russian and one Lithuanian are studying for the priesthood at Riga. The eighty seminarians listed are divided into six years, including the final year which is made up of

students who have already been ordained.

The Catholic Church in Latvia, although it is certainly not as large nor as active as the Lithuanian Church, has survived the Soviet period much better than the Latvian Lutheran Church, and with a current membership of about 300,000 may well be the largest church in Latvia. According to the document, there are 179 Catholic parishes in Latvia, but only 105 priests, of whom 33 are over sixty years old. Most priests look after at least two parishes. Only 24 are below the age of 41 and more younger priests are certainly needed. Yet the overwhelming majority of seminarians ordained at the Latvian seminary are heading for parishes outside Latvia.

The reason for this is made fairly clear by a third list — one of Catholic priests and parishes in the USSR outside Latvia and Lithuania. There are 257 such parishes, but only 127 priests, of whom 55 are attached to the Riga diocese and almost all graduated from the Riga seminary in the last ten years. These 55 look after 111 parishes, while 131 parishes are served by 72 "local" priests (i.e. priests who were mostly ordained before the war and therefore do not consider themselves under the jurisdiction of Latvian or Lithuanian

bishops). Fifteen parishes are without a regular priest. Five priests were privately ordained in Lithuania, and five in Poland. Ten have come "from Lithuania" and are probably attached to Lithuanian dioceses.

The unseen presence of the Eastern-rite Catholic Church is almost tangible. Four priests are described as *uniatus*, but it is stated that they "celebrate Mass in the Latin rite". All these priests are in areas outside the heartland of the Eastern-rite Church — Ukraine and Belorussia, where no "Uniate" priests are mentioned. However, some of the priests in the 93 Ukrainian and 105 Belorussian parishes may belong to the Eastern rite. It is more than probable that some of the Ukrainian, Belorussian or even "Polish" students at the Riga seminary are Eastern-rite Catholics. Both Eastern- and Latin-rite priests need theological education. The official Soviet dislike of the Eastern-rite Church is probably the main obstacle to Catholic hopes of a third seminary, as its intake would be almost entirely from Ukraine and Belorussia. Meanwhile the Latvian seminary caters to all nationalities — as a result, much of the teaching is in Russian, although very few Russians are Catholics.

MARITE SAPIETS