

Remarks to Religious Leaders at the Danilov Monastery in Moscow

May 30, 1988

It's a very great pleasure to visit this beautiful monastery and to have a chance to meet some of the people who have helped make its return to the Russian Orthodox Church a reality. I am also addressing in spirit the 35 million believers whose personal contributions made this magnificent restoration possible.

It's been said that an icon is a window between heaven and Earth through which the believing eye can peer into the beyond. One cannot look at the magnificent icons created, and recreated here under the direction of Father Zinon, without experiencing the deep faith that lives in the hearts of the people of this land. Like the saints and martyrs depicted in these icons, the faith of your people has been tested and tempered in the crucible of hardship. But in that suffering, it has grown strong, ready now to embrace with new hope the beginnings of a second Christian millennium.

We in our country share this hope for a new age of religious freedom in the Soviet Union. We share the hope that this monastery is not an end in itself but the symbol of a new policy of religious tolerance that will extend to all peoples of all faiths. We pray that the return of this monastery signals a willingness to return to believers the thousands of other houses of worship which are now closed, boarded up, or used for secular purposes.

There are many ties of faith that bind your country and mine. We have in America many churches, many creeds, that feel a special kinship with their fellow believers here—Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Orthodox, and Islamic. They are united with believers in this country in many ways, especially in prayer. Our people feel it keenly when religious freedom is denied to anyone anywhere and hope with you that soon all the many Soviet religious communities that are now prevented from registering, or are banned altogether, including the Ukrainian Catholic and Orthodox Churches, will soon be able to practice their religion freely and openly and instruct their children in and outside the home in the fundamentals of their faith. We don't know if this first thaw will be followed by a resurgent spring of religious liberty—we don't know, but we may hope. We may hope that perestroika will be accompanied by a deeper restructuring, a deeper conversion, a *mentanoya*, a change in heart, and that *glasnost*, which means giving voice, will also let loose a new chorus of belief, singing praise to the God that gave us life.

There is a beautiful passage that I'd just like to read, if I may. It's from one of this country's great writers and believers, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, about the faith that is as elemental to this land as the dark and fertile soil. He wrote: "When you travel the byroads of central Russia, you begin to understand the secret of the pacifying Russian countryside. It is in the churches. They lift their belltowers—graceful, shapely, all different-high over mundane timber and thatch. From villages that are cut off and invisible to each other, they soar to the same heaven. People who are always selfish and often unkind—but the evening chimes used to ring out, floating over the villages, fields, and woods, reminding men that they must abandon trivial concerns of this world and give time and thought to eternity."

In our prayers we may keep that image in mind: the thought that the bells may ring again, sounding throughout Moscow and across the countryside, clamoring for joy in their new-found freedom. Well, I've talked long enough. I'm sure you have many questions and many things on your minds, and I'm anxious to hear what you have to say.

Note: The President spoke at 2:35 p.m. in the reception room at the Father Superior's residence. Prior to his remarks, the President viewed restored icons at the monastery and discussed restoration techniques.

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