

God's Rents

**FRED HARRISON reports from Moscow
on the bid to restore spirituality in the land of Russia**

SCOTTISH QUAKER Alastair McIntosh has launched a new interest in biblical economics among policy-makers in Russia.

In a 35,000-word study called *Land, Power and National Identity*, he explains the crucial role played by the spiritual content in the landscape in people's lives.

Mr. McIntosh began campaigning on the land question in Scotland, where he argues that in British constitutional law, Scottish feudal land is owned ultimately by God.

In Moscow, a new movement called Science & Religion was being launched by Dr. Dmitry Lvov, Academician-Secretary of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He had come to recognise that the integration of land, spirituality and community empowerment was a precondition for re-building national identity. As part of the programme for developing the public's understanding of the significance of land in society, he agreed to invite Mr. McIntosh to prepare an essay for study by senior economists and theologians in both the Academy of Sciences and the Russian Orthodox Church.

In February, seminars were held at the Academy and in the Holy Trinity Sergiev Monastery. A meeting was also held with Dr. Sergei Glasyev, chairman of the State Duma Economics Committee.

Dr. Sergei Shirokov, a theologian at the Russian Academy of Sciences, and Professor Eduard Afanaslev, dean of economics at the Russian Orthodox University of St. John the Divine, both said that it was "divine providence".

Dr. Mikhail Gelvanovsky, director of the National Institute for Development who shared Mr. McIntosh's claim that the rent of land and natural resources was given as God's providence for the equal benefit of all citizens, said: "Man alone cannot save this country, but with God's help maybe we can."

Dr. Tatiana Roskoshnaya, Executive Director of the Land & Public Welfare Foundation, St Petersburg, who circulated Mr. McIntosh's essay to the team of experts from the Academy of Sciences and the

Orthodox Church, said: "This text penetrates deeply into the Biblical economic principle that 'The profit of the Earth is for all'. As such, it helps us to draw on the wealth of our own spiritual traditions. At a time when Russia is caught dangerously between the collectivisation model of the communist past and capitalism's option of privatisation, it suggests a third way – one where land ownership and the benefits from rent are largely vested in the community."

MR. McINTOSH teaches at the Edinburgh-based Centre for Human Ecology, an extension of the Open University. He was challenged with the claim by Dr. Gelvanovsky that 75 years without religion meant that "we lost the ability to communicate on what to do about the land".

During the Yeltsin years laws and decrees had been passed without consulting the Russian people which resulted in natural resource being given away to a small minority. A considerable part of the revenue from resources fled the country rather than being shared among the population.

Mr. McIntosh told the Russian economists and theologians that humans were only at the beginning of their tenancy on earth. Sustainable development was a long-term way of thinking about how we relate to earth.

"The idolatry of advanced capitalism is that it devalues God's providence through nature. We need to understand the theology of economics", he said. Russia could write the principle of the Jubilee into all leases of land. "You have the opportunity to treat land as the providence of God, as



■ Scottish Quaker Alastair McIntosh

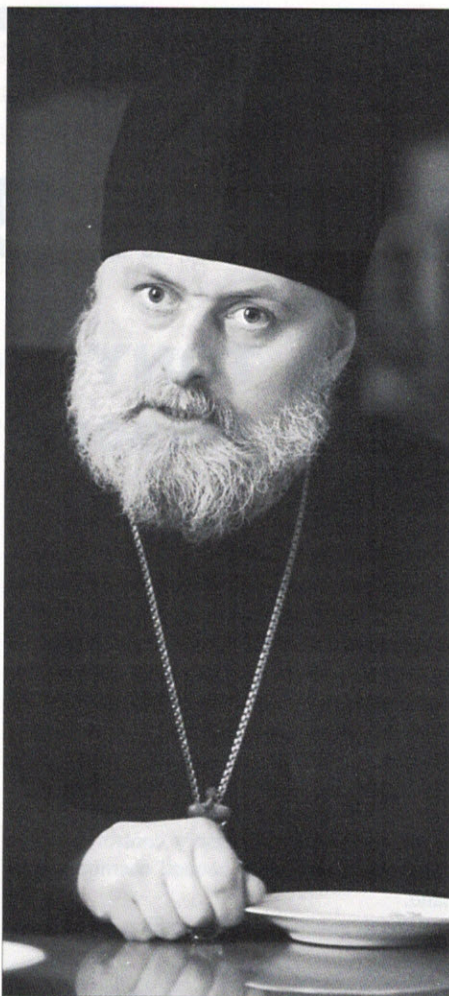
an example to others, for social and ecological justice."

Citing Leviticus XXV as teaching that "nobody should own the land forever, because the land belongs to God," he suggested that biblical theology taught that leases in Russia should be for no more than 50 years.

He asked how God's providence could be shared in a nation, given that some regions may be richer than others, as with the oil-rich areas. "One way is through a tax on land and natural resources. Such a taxation system can be the mechanism by which God's concern for justice can be honoured. It is important to understand such a taxation system as a spiritual tax because if you forget about the spiritual basis of taxation the people in the rich natural resource areas will not understand why they should share with the areas that are poor.

"So it is necessary to have a programme of public education, not least through the teaching of the church, to help people to understand that a system of resource use that embodies the principles of Jubilee and the sharing of resources, God's providence, is the price paid for civilisation. The Bible is very clear on this.

"Time and again, especially in the Old Testament, God says that if you don't care for the land, if you don't look after the needs of the poorest, God will destroy the



■ Father Eugene

land and break up society".

Respect for the place in which we live,

according to God, was the mark of a true citizen. "The communist system tried to honour internationalism, but without the spiritualism, so you are paying the price in the destruction of society," said Mr. McIntosh.

The Russian Orthodox church is preparing a doctrine on social and economic policy. The Rector of the Moscow Theological Academy, Father Eugene said that they needed to develop strategies that would enable the population to rebuild society on new foundations.

FOLLOWING THE writing of his essay, Mr. McIntosh was invited to discuss the land question at the annual meeting of the Quakers in London in May.

The Rowntree Foundation awarded a grant for the publication of a collection of Mr. McIntosh's writings on applied liberation theology and social activism. The main essay is the study presented in Russia. Other articles range from the address that launched land reform on the Isle of Eigg to essays in national newspapers and a scholarly work published by the United Nations Environment Programme.

☐ Copies of *Healing Nationhood* (£7.50 post free) may be purchased from the Centre for Human Ecology, 12 Roseneath Place, Edinburgh, EH9 1JB, UK.