

Letters

The Soviet empire in disarray

Sir: Your leading article, "The Soviet Empire in Disarray" (*The Tablet*, 30 September), envisages the possibility, even likelihood, of the USSR breaking up into a number of separate states asserting their historical national identities. Recent developments in Russia have provoked a number of speculations — some favourable, some disturbing. But none have raised the formidable prospect of the huge atomic and bacteriological arsenal of the Soviet Union being split apart among a lot of new states of varying stability, and in many cases operating in circumstances of severe tension.

Only since the recent events in the Baltic States have accounts appeared in the Western press of the wholesale deportations in 1945-46 of Estonians and Latvians, halving the ethnic populations of these countries — carried out with extreme brutality; and then the introduction of Russians to man the factories and collective farms which the Soviet government introduced. All the hatreds thus aroused are now reemerging to plague the reformist endeavours of the present rulers of Russia. These same emotions must be stirring in Ukraine and throughout the Southern and Eastern republics.

This growing influence of nationalism must surely affect the Soviet armed forces, no matter what measures the central authorities take to maintain cohesion and loyalty.

It is difficult to see how the Western powers can react to these developments — taking place on Soviet soil. But in view of the inability of the nations of the world to contain atomic proliferation, dire possibilities must be considered. Let us hope that Mr Gorbachev will be able to keep control of his country.

Walter Bell
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Fears for the Church

Sir: John Harriott makes life in the Church sound like a sentence in the Gulag. Is he being serious?

The Church is organically a communion of Churches which need the central authority of the Pope in order to live in unity. The local Church has a responsibility to make present the faith of the whole Church. Those who strive to change the mind of the teaching authority portray the teaching itself as inflexible and unjust. I would commend a maxim of Segundo Galilea: "Conflicts of Christian life and mission, even for just causes, lose their

evangelical value if they are met without love." The Church is not motivated by any lust for domination but must serve the whole community and demand of each part of that community a realisation that they are a part with all the rights and responsibilities that entails. It is insulting to the vast body of Catholics to compare them to East Berliners or to berate the bishops when every word they say is liable to be misinterpreted by a self-appointed *nomenklatura* answerable it would seem to no one.

(Fr) James Tolhurst
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Information wanted

Sir: If there is a theologian (fundamental or systematic) amongst your readers who would be willing to explain to me why women cannot be admitted to the permanent diaconate, I should be most grateful.

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A Carthusian's cell

Sir: I have read with interest your Notebook item on the recent redisplay by English Heritage of Mount Grace Priory (*The Tablet*, 22 July). Our displays are the result of careful and detailed research and certain of the comments made in Notebook, therefore, need to be answered.

In particular, the manner in which we have refitted and furnished the cell rebuilt by Sir Lowthian Bell in 1905 is based on fifteenth-century Carthusian inventories and illustrations, from England and the Province of Antwerp, within which the Mount Grace charterhouse lay, and from the considerable body of evidence recovered by excavation at Mount Grace since 1969. There is ample evidence to show that the quality and scale of the furniture and the number of pieces we commissioned are correct for a charterhouse cell of the fifteenth century, and that the internal arrangements of the cell are as accurate as we can make them. Generally speaking, late medieval monastic life, even for "Christ's poor men", was more comfortable than has often been supposed. Our furnishing of a reconstructed cell attempts to give an accurate impression of a Carthusian cell of that date.

Though our introductory exhibition appears to lack information on the spiritual side of Carthusian life, we do in fact

reproduce a page of Prior Nicholas Love's translation of St Bonaventure's *Mirror of the Life of Christ*, as well as several pages from the religious miscellany produced at Mount Grace. Inspection of our display on daily life will show that some of the Divine Office was said in church each day.

(Dr) Glyn Coppack
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