

WCC Photo: Peter Williams

Inside -- The Church & the Soviet Union

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Review of IRD Executive Director Kent R. Hill's new book, *The Puzzle of the Soviet Church*

Russian Orthodox Priests Tour West, Tell of Soviet Churches' Plight

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Helping Christians in the Soviet Union

Oldline Churches Maintain Flow of Familiar Political Statements

But with signs of greater care and complexity

The following reports reflect recent activity in several of the oldline denominations. The Lutherans' August meeting was especially significant -- the first since they united in a 1987 merger. The Disciples of Christ gave some attention to reforming their deliberation processes. Generally, churches still devise narrow options in reaction to complex situations such as South Africa and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. China and Central America likewise attracted notice.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

CHICAGO -- When delegates to a deliberative assembly must speak in two-minute sound bites, one can't be too disappointed at the outcome.

This may help explain why the 1,044 delegates from the ELCA's 65 synods who gathered here in August took all of ten minutes before voting to "press for an end to U.S. military aid" in Central America, as well as "encouraging" an end to the U.S. embargo against Nicaragua.

This aside, the resolution sent up from the memorials committee was unusually restrained, considering the fevered nature of some resolutions passed along from individual ECLA synods to the national church assembly. The memorials committee is charged with taking synodical resolutions to the national church and fashioning a response. A half-dozen or so synodical resolutions on El Salvador flatly delegitimized the newly elected government. Not one ever mentioned the depredations of the FMLN's guerrilla resistance.

Yet the final version brought to the convention floor by the memorials committee displayed a welcome sense of nuance. Along with calling for an end to U.S. military aid, the final version also included demands for "the cessation of all destabilizing military involvement ... by countries outside the region." The resolution predictably endorsed the Arias peace plan, but went on to condemn "all human-rights abuses, whether by governments, revolutionary movements, or death squads."

The major moralizing at the convention was reserved for the question of divesting the ELCA's pension fund stock holdings in companies doing business with South Africa. The assembly directed the Board of Pensions to divest completely by September 1, 1991, after

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(Denominations, from Page 1)

rejecting a milder recommendation from the memorials committee.

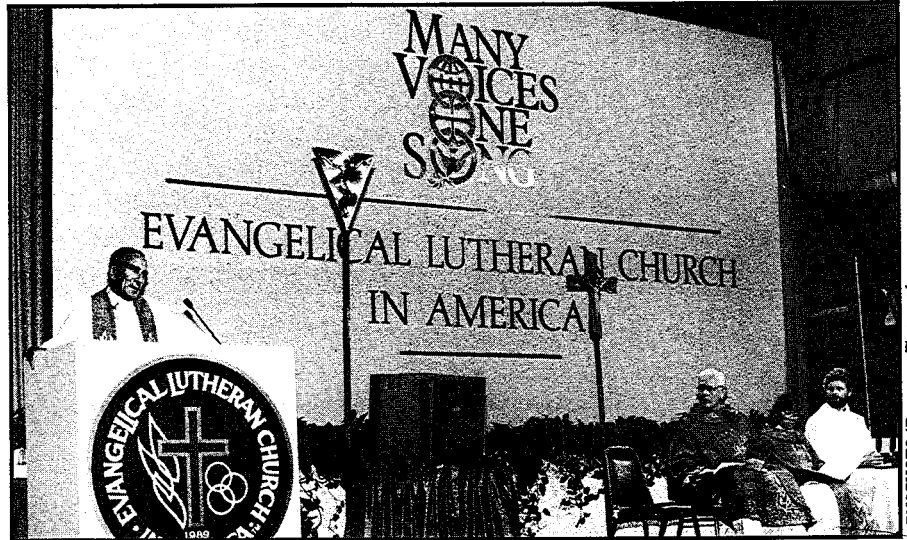
Board of Pensions Executive Director John G. Kapanke warned that following "a time line would be nearly impossible." His patient explanations about the pension board's "fiduciary responsibilities" to pension members found few friends among those such as an Oakland pastor who was determined to strike a blow "for those suffering and dying under the tyranny of those who support apartheid." Most of the debate hovered at the level of Washington, D.C., Synod Bishop Harold Jansen: "We need to forget reason and go with our passions."

Maybe so, but the ELCA may be walking into a legal minefield. The ELCA maintains "defined contribution" accounts for its pastors and church workers. The "defined contribution" benefit plans establish accounts for each individual participant. The funds, in short, do not belong to the church at large, but to the individual contributor. A fact lost in the debate is that contributors already may hold their pensions in a "social purpose" fund, double-screened against South African investments. Yet fewer than ten percent of ELCA's 16,000 clergy participate in the fund.

"Telling the Board of Pensions to divest for political reasons," said a former pensions official privately, "is like someone telling you that you must keep your savings account with Republican bankers." Only one speaker, Paul Hinlicky, of Delhi, New York, questioned whether divestment was the best tactic for the church to employ against apartheid.

Contrary arguments, however, could not overcome the organized divestment advocates. Indeed, a group called Pension Members for Justice specifically endorsed pension board candidates based on their view of divestment. The "passion" of the assembly was such that only pro-divestment candidates were elected.

Finances are a concern at another level in the 5.3-million-member ELCA, which is the result of a 1987 merger of three Lutheran denominations. The ELCA found itself with a \$15.6 million deficit in 1988. Current figures reveal another deficit in the making, with a \$4.3 million shortfall in the first quarter of 1989. Member giving is not low (up \$1.1 billion). The trouble is that congregations want to spend more of it at home rather than send it to the Chicago headquarters. Spending caps



World Council of Churches General Secretary Emilio Castro opened the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's August assembly, which voted to stay in the WCC / NCC.

have been imposed and the national staff has been cut. Reported by the Rev. Russell Saltzman, a pastor who is the editor of *The Lutheran Commentator*.

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

INDIANAPOLIS -- In pronouncing upon complex issues in foreign affairs, this year's biennial General Assembly of the Disciples of Christ was relatively restrained -- less shrill and dogmatic -- compared with past assemblies.

This restraint reflected, in part, the preoccupation of the assembly with basic theological issues raised by evangelicals. Restraint also resulted from a growing awareness among Disciples that the handling of controversial social and political issues has not been entirely consistent with Disciple theology. The assembly responded by adopting new ground rules for future assemblies. The goal was to increase education and reflection in deliberations, while limiting the occasions for win-or-lose voting on controversies. In short, the assembly sought to encourage more light and less heat.

Still, the August assembly could not resist a certain amount of ideologically tinged pontification on social and political matters. Adopted resolutions endorsed the Palestine Liberation Organization as "the self-chosen political representative for vast numbers of Palestinian people," and the African National Congress as "the representative political organization for millions of South African blacks." As presented, voters only had the choice of supporting either the endorsed group (the PLO, the ANC) or an oppressive government (Israel, South Africa). A sense of the spectrum was missing; there was no

Religion & Democracy is published by the Institute on Religion and Democracy, 729 15th Street, N.W., Suite 900, Washington, DC 20005 (202/393-3200). Kent R. Hill, Executive Director and Editor; Diane L. Knippers, Deputy Director and Managing Editor; Lawrence Adams, International Affairs and Economics Associate; Alan F. Wisdom, Research Director; Fredrick Jones, Research Associate and Assistant Editor. IRD membership is \$25.00 per year; a subscription to the newsletter is \$15.00 per year (and is included in the annual membership fee). Tax-deductible contributions in any amount are welcome.

recognition of other views (especially regarding divestment) on these issues.

To the assembly's credit, it also adopted a resolution deploring the recent "killings and injuries" in China. Yet the resolution was strangely muted in contrast to others in recent years condemning violence and repression elsewhere (e.g., Palestine and South Africa). The resolution characterized the recent events in China as a "military and police action" rather than as the shooting of unarmed demonstrators. Further, the resolution expressed no sorrow over the setback to Chinese aspirations for democracy and freedom. It urged release of those "imprisoned only because of their involvement in demonstrations," but took no position on the justice of the demonstrators' cause. Would the resolution have been the same if it related to similar events in South Africa?

Reported by Steve Bruner, a delegate to the assembly and a contributor to the magazine, Disciple Renewal.

United Methodist Church

Nuclear arms and China dominated the agendas of many annual conferences this summer. Central America is out. Boycotts are losing steam. Ecotheology, however, is in.

Many conferences took their respective swipes at the brutalization of those seeking freedom and democracy by the Chinese government. Eighteen resolutions passed, ranging from overwhelming support for student protesters to complete condemnation of the government's violence. Despite China's long record of repression under communism, no conference denounced the system.

Arms control clearly was a pressing issue. Conventional arms reduction met the same strong approval as reducing or dismantling of U.S. nuclear forces. Three conferences called on Bush and Gorbachev to end their military confrontation, while the South Carolina conference asked leaders of the Warsaw Pact and NATO to negotiate toward making such alliances unnecessary.

Only one conference voted for strengthened sanctions against South Africa, but the overall condemnation of apartheid was clear. The California-Nevada conference urged that pensions be divested from companies providing support to South Africa. Most conferences voting on the Royal Dutch/Shell (tied to Shell South Africa) boycott supported it. One even declared itself a "Shell-free Zone." The drive to boycott General Electric for making nuclear weapons, however, generally fell on unsympathetic ears.

Successful resolutions included calls by several conferences for negotiations in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. West Ohio expressed concern over "increasing militarization of our life and communities." Nebraska supported a "peace tax." Eleven conferences denounced the Strategic Defense Initiative. Uniquely, the UMC youth organization requested Estonia's independence from the USSR. The hottest concerns voiced at 25 meetings were ecological, from global warming to styrofoam cups.

Reported by Steve Beard, an IRD research assistant.

Presbyterian Church (USA)

PHILADELPHIA -- Presbyterians know one political rule by heart: If an issue is too hot to handle, send it to a special committee and let it sit there a while. The 1989 General Assembly in June followed this rule to the letter. Moderates and conservatives did not have to fight another leftist provocation; however, they knew that the major battles had not been averted, just postponed.

On one after another sensitive issue -- abortion, homosexual ordination, funding of the World and National Councils of Churches, church agency structure -- the assembly deferred action. Most of these matters rest in the hands of special committees not due to report until 1991.

The date 1991 is probably not coincidental. Under terms of the 1983 reunion of northern and southern Presbyterians, former southern congregations were given an option of withdrawing with their property -- for a

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period of eight years. This provision lends an incentive for delaying controversy until 1991, lest it cause offended southern churches to flee the PCUSA fold.

A lack of dominant issues left the 1989 General Assembly open to a wide range of overtures from lower levels of the church. For example, a subcommittee of the Peacemaking and International Relations Committee dealt with El Salvador, human rights in Romania and the Philippines, and U.S. immigration law -- all in one day.

The reform group Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom (PDRF) was able, by brief testimony, to influence the texts of two resolutions. The one on El Salvador was amended to call on the FMLN guerrillas, as well as the government, to respect human rights. The final resolution, however, still treated the the elected Salvadoran government as illegitimate, urging a cutoff of U.S. military aid to that government and its replacement by a "broad-based" coalition including the guerrillas.

A resolution on U.S.-Soviet relations was also shorn of a demand for repeal of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment (which ties U.S. trade with East-bloc nations to their willingness to allow free emigration). A staff "resource person," the Rev. Robert Smylie, tried to portray the amendment as simply a vain anti-Soviet gesture; however, PDRF Executive Director Paul Scotchmer persuaded commissioners that they needed to know more before pronouncing on this specific legislation. (Ironically, Smylie argued strongly for linking trade to human rights elsewhere when the accused human rights violator was the struggling democracy in the Philippines.)

But the U.S.-U.S.S.R. resolution remained unbalanced
(See Denominations, Page 8)

Glasnost, Christianity and Cold War Puzzles

An inescapable dimension of the Cold War has been the struggle over human rights between democratic liberalism and communist totalitarianism. We may therefore rightly ask if the "end of the Cold War" encompasses fundamental changes in the Soviet human rights record.

A key indicator of such change is religious freedom. As explained by Secretary of State George Shultz, in 1985, "Without religious liberty, what other aspect of individual thought can be spared? Once the border of that sacred realm is crossed, all freedoms inevitably become vulnerable."

In assessing the status of Christianity in Mikhail Gorbachev's Soviet Union, the evidence is encouraging but far from conclusive. Soviet Christianity now finds itself suspended between unprecedented opportunities and lingering forms of persecution.

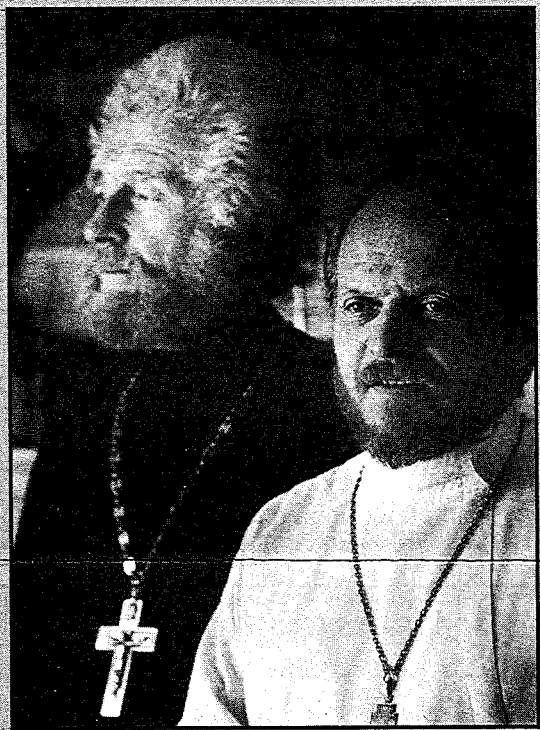
An essential reference guide for understanding these developments is Dr. Kent Hill's masterful new book, *The Puzzle of the Soviet Church: An Inside Look at Christianity and Glasnost* (Multnomah Press). Hill provides sound historical synthesis, moving personal narrative, and extended examination of trends under Gorbachev. The book has already earned high praise from the West's eminent authorities on Soviet church and state, including Michael Bourdeaux, Peter Reddaway, Bohdan Bociurciw and incoming National Council of Churches' president, Orthodox priest Leonid Kishkovsky.

A Suffering Past

Appreciating the present status of Soviet Christians best begins by understanding the past. Hill demonstrates that militant Soviet atheism toward religion has been central to its totalitarian ideology and practice. If Soviet masses remained captive to religious opiates, they could not achieve the higher materialist consciousness of the "new Soviet man."

The often brutal Soviet assault on religion went through tactical phases in which limited, fragile space was granted to the official Orthodox and Baptist churches. Such concessions came with a high price. The Christian witness found itself increasingly confined within four physical walls, except when called upon to serve Soviet foreign policy disinformation.

Soviet churches thus faced choices between valiant protests at the risk of total destruction, or discretionary compromises in hopes of preserving the church's physical survival. In assessing this puzzle, Hill counsels us to avoid quick judgment. Christians in both the persecuted "catacomb" churches and the official, compromised churches have suffered dearly -- though in different degrees. Genuine spirituality survives in both.



Kevin T. Gilbert/The Washington Times

Russian Orthodox Priests Visit IRD

On August 4, the IRD held a press conference for Fathers Gleb Yakunin (above, right) and Georgi Edelshtein (above, left), both Russian Orthodox priests who were touring the West to explain the condition of the church in the Soviet Union.

Fr. Gleb said that the disillusionment of all Soviet citizens with communism has opened a "window of opportunity" to evangelize the country. Standing in the way are restrictive laws on religion. Legal reform is imperative, he said. If Western economic aid is not tied to democratization and legally based human rights, the only likely political shift will be from communism to military dictatorship. "We're very afraid that the situation that is occurring now is going to bring the country into economic chaos," he said.

With mass support for General Secretary Gorbachev shifting to populist critics such as Boris Yeltsin, Fr. Gleb expressed concern that conservatives would take over, leading to "the same situation that occurred in China." The economic changes in the Soviet Union, however, are irreversible. "The only question is how much blood is going to have to be shed and how long are those people who are against all the reforms going to keep continually crushing it down."

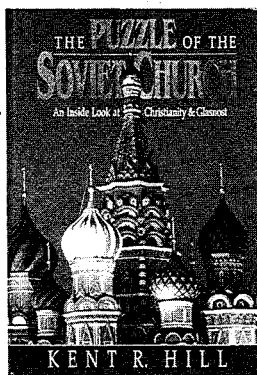
Both Yakunin and Edelshtein exemplify the courage to act faithfully when the registered church leaders will not. In 1965, Fr. Gleb boldly confronted the church's Patriarch and the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet about anti-religious repression. He was stripped of his parish as a result. After continuing to expose state repression, he was sent in 1979 to a labor camp and then exile before being released in 1987. Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote that one of Fr. Gleb's letters inspired in him courage to confront the Soviet regime at a time when the church lacked the "skill and the will to defend itself."

Yet as the Soviet noose tightened, the "razor edge" question became one of discerning at what point cooperation with a militantly atheistic state becomes a repudiation of the church's obligations to transcendent authority. Differing responses are at the foundation of the splits from official churches. Paradoxically, the very persistence of unregistered, dissenting churches distracted Soviet "religious" authorities, thereby accounting for much of the space left to the official churches.

Western Misconceptions

Unfortunately, Western Christianity has frequently misconceived the nuanced plight of the Soviet church. Extremes range from condemnations of the official churches as total communist plants or of the dissident churches as "fanatics and chronic lawbreakers."

Misconception lowlights of the 1980s include the National Council of Churches' (NCC) "peace offensive" to



The Puzzle of the Soviet Church

An Inside Look at Christianity & Glasnost

By Kent R. Hill; Multnomah Press, 1989

Review Essay by W. Scott Harrop

the Soviet Union. A 1982 NCC/NBC television documentary, "The Church of the Russians," featured a Soviet Orthodox official's claim that "Our discussions are absolutely free. There is no control over us . . . since our work is clearly religious." NCC tour leader Bruce Rigdon merely responded that the Soviet Council for Religious Affairs -- an arm of the Communist Party -- was an "example of cooperation between church and state." Hill incisively compares this view to mice "cooperating" with cats.

World Council of Churches (WCC) publications went far beyond "moral equivalence" logic to endorse the Soviet approach to human rights. "Collective rights" have been deemed as taking "priority over those of the individual" since "social, economic and cultural rights are the foundation of real freedom of the person." Dissidents have been portrayed as having only themselves to blame because they broke the law.

As Hill observes, such statements provided "Soviet authorities with foreign 'testimony' against accused

believers." One veteran ecumenicist lamented that such WCC activities had transformed the church body from being an independent salt of the earth into the "marmalade" of a Soviet-directed peace offensive.

Leading evangelicals have likewise seriously misrepresented the status of the Soviet church, as in Billy Graham's widely critiqued 1982 visit. Graham's "good intentions" of seeking peace and evangelism opportunities allowed for a heavy discounting of the negative side of Soviet religious life.

Hill, who was a key liaison to the Siberian Seven Pentecostals, also criticized world Pentecostal bodies for refusing to discuss the Soviet Pentecostals in labor camps or the thousands who wished to emigrate. Such silence was perhaps better than the early 1986 nonsense by then Assemblies of God evangelist Jimmy Swaggart. Swaggart rationalized that no Soviet underground church existed because "There are very few telephones, . . . the weather is almost always bad . . . [and] because it is not necessary. The churches are open and people can go."

International discretion advocates such as the NCC, Graham, and the Baptist World Alliance concede that foreign protest may at times be necessary -- but not for them, since their work must avoid becoming a "rallying point for the anti-Soviet activities." Yet playing by the Soviet rules of discretionary silence has often provided rallying points for pro-Soviet propaganda.

The presumed fruits of international quiet diplomacy also deserve scrutiny. Amidst the Western religious "peace offensives" in the early 1980s, the best Western scholars on the Soviet church, as well as the United States Catholic Conference, were carefully documenting a massive crackdown on Soviet religious dissidents. Sadly, as the statements of prominent Western visitors became more rosy, the plight of Soviet believers became more grim.

Hill appreciates working for peace, international evangelism, interstate ecumenical contact, and quiet diplomacy. But discretion is hardly "silent" when such conflicting agendas produce loud repetition of the disingenuous, blissful line of the Soviet church leadership.

Such criticism is not "blaming the victim" tactics or "cold warrior rhetoric." While we ought not to condemn compromises made by the Soviet faithful, we can insist that our own Western church leadership avoid being drawn into the same captivity as the Soviet churches. "Glasnost is a two way street."

Enter Glasnost

Given this historical context, Hill then details positive developments under Mikhail Gorbachev, which include:

- The number of Christian leaders in prisons and psychiatric hospitals has steadily declined.
- Import levels of Bibles and religious literature have increased tremendously.
- Some experienced foreign critics are now allowed to visit Soviet believers.
- Three high-ranking Orthodox officials were elected to

the new Soviet Congress of Peoples' Deputies.

- The jamming of Western broadcasts such as Radio Liberty and the BBC has ceased.
- Religious themes in popular song and film are tolerated, as are tours by Western evangelical artists and speakers.
- Soviet Pentecostals are being allowed to emigrate in great numbers.
- New churches are being registered at a rapid pace.

The new openness includes admissions of official misconduct toward religion. Konstantine Kharchev, as chief of the Council on Religious Affairs, startled observers by conceding that Soviet legal guarantees of religious freedom were fundamentally flawed. Kharchev even suggested that the Soviet state must have nothing to do either with religion or with atheism -- a position which would impoverish tens of thousands of atheist lecturers.

But repeated rhetoric about changing Soviet laws on religion has yet to become institutionalized reality. Kharchev was recently removed from his CRA post, perhaps because his openness was too liberal for the party and

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as a foreign opiate of the people.**

for the compromised official clergy. Persisting specific problems include:

- The Ukrainian Catholic Church remains pressured and unrecognized.
- Conscientious objectors, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses, continue to be sentenced to labor camps.
- Unregistered Baptists and Pentecostals are still harassed with fines and intimidation.
- Confiscated religious materials are reportedly piling up at Soviet customs -- despite the lifting of restrictions.

Most fundamentally, Christians remain, at best, "second-class citizens" in the Soviet system. The key ticket to education and advancement is still membership in the Communist Party, and entrance therein entails an atheist oath.

In short, the Soviet state has yet to wean itself from the view of religion as a foreign opiate of the people. Until the Soviet system perceives religious faith as a positive -- or even benign -- entity, Kent Hill urges the West to assert "a prudent combination of private intervention and public pressure."

President Ronald Reagan once spoke of a post-Cold War world in which the life veins of mutual communication between East and West would become broad, deep and free. In this spirit, Western leaders -- especially those of the church -- must not shrink from public recognition of continuing problems for Soviet believers.

Caution remains an essential watchword. Yet the present "window of opportunity" for Soviet believers and

their Western brethren deserves open-eyed exploration and testing.

W. Scott Harrop is a "Peace Scholar" of the United States Institute of Peace, in residence at the University of Virginia. Views expressed are not to be attributed to the U.S. Government. Reprinted from News Network International, September 8, 1989.

 **Religious Liberty Alert**

Responding to Glasnost:

The Christian Community's Role

The world has been captivated by the changes in the Soviet Union. With regard to the freedom of religious life in the U.S.S.R., it is necessary for Christians to move beyond a passive fascination to a well-informed involvement.

~~Kent Hill, IRD Executive Director and author of *The Puzzle of the Soviet Church: An Inside Look at Christianity and Glasnost*, provides straightforward and valuable advice for putting these changes in perspective:~~

- 1) "We must celebrate the power of God to sustain his people in the Soviet Union for more than seventy years under incredibly difficult circumstances."
- 2) "We ought to acknowledge fully the positive changes which have occurred and are occurring."
- 3) "We must firmly resist the temptation to enfold ourselves in the euphoria of the present while denying the major problems which remain."
- 4) "Now, more than ever, we must fully support those research institutions which have a track record of providing accurate information on religion in Communist countries."
- 5) "We must respond generously and quickly to the opportunities now available for helping fellow Christians in the Soviet Union."
- 6) "We need to expand dramatically our written and personal contact with fellow believers in the Soviet Union."
- 7) "We must reassess critically our past contacts with believers in [the] Soviet Union."

Acquiring current, accurate information is a must for putting this perspective into practice. Keston College, based in England, provides the most up-to-date information about religious communities in Eastern Europe. Other organizations, such as the Institute for the Study of Christianity and Marxism, and the Research Center for Religion and Human Rights in Closed Societies also publish journals and educational materials. Many other religious and non-religious advocacy organizations are listed in *The Puzzle of the Soviet Church*.

Christians ought to **supply financial resources** for one or several of the many fine mission organizations working to support believers in the U.S.S.R. Examples include the Slavic Gospel Association, Open Doors, and Christian Solidarity International, which all **distribute religious literature** in the Soviet Union. They will either mail the religious literature into the U.S.S.R. for you, or you can purchase the materials and mail them yourself. Several

organizations can provide names of individuals and churches wanting literature. The literature's probability of safe arrival is enhanced by sending no more than three books -- each of a different title -- per mailing.

Direct contact with Soviet believers is strongly encouraged (the above-mentioned mission organizations can supply contacts). Writing in simple English is helpful, as are descriptions of your own faith and Scriptural encouragements. You should avoid discussion of politics, and be persistent in writing even if you receive no reply.

You can play an advocacy role for Soviet believers by writing both U.S. and Soviet officials. The latter should be urged to comply with signed international human rights agreements. They should be commended for improving conditions for believers, while also being called to address very serious unresolved issues.

Individuals or groups also may sponsor Christian emigres. World Relief, a program of the National Association of Evangelicals, helps to resettle those coming to the U.S.; though the goal is to make them self-sufficient quickly, initial material and spiritual needs often are great.

There are tremendous opportunities available now that may not last. *The Puzzle of the Soviet Church* provides detailed information on how Christians can most effectively respond to this unique historical moment.

Addresses for organizations cited above:

Keston, USA
P.O. Box 1310
Framingham, MA 01701
(617) 247-7071

Slavic Gospel Association
P.O. Box 1122
Wheaton, IL 60189
(312) 690-8900

Soviet Refugee Project
World Relief
P.O. Box WRC
Nyack, NY 10960
(914) 268-4135

Institute for the Study of Christianity and Marxism
Wheaton College
Wheaton, IL 60187
(312) 260-5917

Open Doors/USA
P.O. Box 27001
Santa Ana, CA 92799
(714) 531-6000

Christian Solidarity International
P.O. Box 24042
Washington, D.C. 20024
(301) 989-0298

Research Center for Religion and Human Rights in Closed Societies
475 Riverside Drive
New York, NY 10115
(212) 870-2481 or 2440

The Puzzle of the Soviet Church

An Inside Look at Christianity & Glasnost

Multnomah Press, 1989



By **Kent R. Hill**

Executive Director,

Institute on Religion and Democracy

Available from IRD for \$15.95, hardback (\$14.35 for members). If payment accompanies the order, IRD will pay shipping charges.

"Kent Hill's work places him in the very front rank of American experts on a subject which is of potential concern to millions.... No one should enter into a Christian-Marxist dialogue without taking the cold shower which Kent Hill's analysis provides."

Michael Bourdeaux
General Director, Keston College

"Soviet society is teetering on the edge ... economically, socially and spiritually. The help and concern that Western Christians can provide to the religious and those interested in religion in the USSR can have a decisive effect on the future. Hill's superb book also tells them exactly how they can help."

Bohdan Bodiak
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

"Steers the correct middle course between the point of view that nothing has changed under Gorbachev and the belief that the millennium of freedom has arrived. By tracing the history of Soviet treatment of religion from the days of Lenin to those of Gorbachev, Kent Hill enables us to understand what changes glasnost has and has not wrought for Christian believers in the Soviet Union."

Ambassador Richard Schifter
Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs

(Demoninations, from Page 3)

in several respects. It contained only positive remarks about the Soviet Union under Gorbachev, and its call for closer ties with Soviet churches extended only to the "registered" ones which cooperate with the government.

In other parts of the world, though, the Presbyterian commissioners did break new ground in criticizing communist regimes. They forcefully condemned Romania's campaign of rural collectivization for its violations of human rights. The Assembly expressed outrage, too, at the bloody suppression of student demonstrations in China. It "affirmed the passionate expressions of the Chinese people of and for human rights, democracy, and freedom."

But two successful amendments to the China resolution revealed a continuing ideological double-standard. The original resolution had declared that the Chinese government had "destroyed its legitimacy by turning against its own people." The word "destroyed" was replaced by "undermined," apparently because some believed that the communist regime retains some legitimacy. Likewise, a phrase offering "support" for U.S. sanctions against China was softened, so as merely to "note" those sanctions. This change was explained as necessary to avoid giving the impression that the PCUSA identified itself with U.S. foreign policies. (It would have taken a quite addled observer to arrive at that mistaken impression.)

Presbyterians have seen encouraging progress in one area: openness. The General Assembly adopted a new policy of open meetings. It guaranteed Presbyterians the right to attend any church agency meeting, except in a few cases where confidentiality was required. Members also were promised a full accounting, beginning with 1988, of PCUSA grants to outside organizations. These moves came as a result of persistent prodding by the PDRF.

Reported by Alan Wisdom, IRD's Research Director.

Episcopal Church (US)

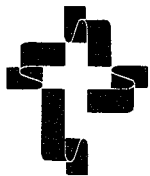
Episcopal Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning has been travelling the globe. In May, Browning, Desmond Tutu

of South Africa and two other Anglican primates visited Central America, where they condemned U.S. policies toward Nicaragua and Panama. In Panama, they called for an end to U.S. sanctions, citing the Noriega government's "promise of free elections," which it subsequently broke. In South Africa in June, however, Browning continued to press for comprehensive sanctions against that country in response to apartheid. In August, he visited the Soviet Union, where he noted the changes in conditions for Soviet believers and sought support for their new freedoms.

The Diocese of Washington sponsored a two-day conference in June focusing on, and ultimately endorsing, Palestinian statehood. Also in June, the Executive Council heard from its Peace Officer about the effects of U.S. policy in the Philippines. The Council resolved to study the impact of U.S. bases there and condemn U.S. "covert operations and the policy of Low Intensity Conflict."

Future emphases have been mapped out by such organs as the official Standing Commission on Peace and the voluntary Episcopal Peace Fellowship: Korea -- Promote U.S. withdrawal as a means to reunification. Southern Africa -- Support U.S. sanctions and disinvestment as primary means to end apartheid; monitor developments in Namibia and Mozambique, including South African harassment. Central America -- Support for the Sandinista regime; end U.S. aid to El Salvador; determine use of \$1.5 million in Church funds for "healing and reconciliation" in the area. Miscellaneous -- Condemn the presence of "racism" in international politics; challenge the exploitation by Western banks of Third World borrowers; revive the 1988 effort to declare nuclear deterrence immoral; promote "responsible investment" by boycotting weapons manufacturers such as General Electric, and businesses in South Africa -- particularly Shell Oil; emphasize global environmental concerns and a broad "theology" of the earth.

Reported by Lawrence Adams, IRD's International Affairs Associate and Director of the Episcopal Committee on Religion and Freedom.



Religion & Democracy

720 15th Street, N.W.

Suite 900

Washington, D.C. 20005

