

RELIGION & DEMOCRACY



The Institute
on Religion &
Democracy

September 1993 • Vol. 13, No. 6

Western Media Said to Tyrannize Globe

NCC to discuss resolution at November meeting

By Fredrick P. Jones

The world is awash in American media products. Cultural conservatives at home regularly express outrage over those products and the values transmitted through them. International advocates of democracy watch with sinking hearts as these products roll through emerging democracies, such as those in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Some liberal moralists share these concerns, shaped with their own priority of defending special groups said to be victimized through media portrayals. They reserve their greatest fire for the broader "cultural imperialism" they believe is perpetrated by the export of American media products abroad.

The National Council of Churches (NCC) is storing up some of that fire. In November the NCC will consider a resolution on "Global Communication for Justice" at its General Board meeting in Baltimore. The resolution is founded on the confession that, "We have not challenged the use of communication as a cultural force to support the powerful and to victimize the powerless. We

have ignored the use of communication by Western societies as a tool of cultural domination of other nations."

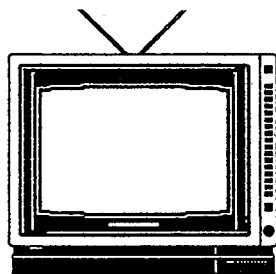
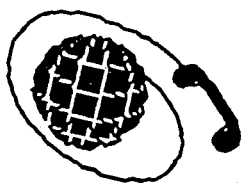
Below, the proposed NCC resolution will be discussed as it relates to: 1) cross-cultural influences, 2) the relationship between communications media and democratic systems.

Finally, suggestions will be given regarding issues that ought to be addressed in a substantially revised resolution.

Telling, Hearing Stories

The exposure of cultures to new and diversified media can be disorienting to citizens and the institutions they've built. Different ways of life, especially when they exhibit new kinds of freedom,

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Why Does IRD Criticize the NCC?

Over the years, the Institute on Religion and Democracy has raised a series of concerns about the National Council of Churches (NCC). Some consider these criticisms to be an unwarranted attack. Others have found the criticism instructive. What are IRD's concerns?

1) The NCC has been too focused on developing a monolithic voice to influence politics in Washington.

The quiet quest for theological unity often is obscured by loud political advocacy. This thrust toward maximum political impact often results in the NCC failing to represent the ways Christians may, in good conscience, disagree about policy solutions.

2) The content of resolutions up for debate at the NCC's General Board concerning public affairs displays a consistent leftist slant that reflects a failure even to hear and understand alternative views.

Further, the narrow, liberationist theological interpretation of justice frequently found in resolutions encourages diverse groups to play as trump cards their rights as social victims. This inhibits real dialogue about issues of racism, sexism, and the related social issues.

3) Rather than facilitating grassroots church cooperation, the NCC has tended to practice what has been called "bureaucratic ecumenism."

This means that relations among a few career church officials take precedence over the local work of Christian clergy and laypeople sharing the gospel and doing responsible social witness.

Do What with Pop Culture? ○

An interview with FCC Commissioner Ervin Duggan

It is hard to find many good things to say about much of what is found in American popular culture -- particularly film, television, and music. Moreover, the market doesn't often encourage the best artistic achievements. In response, some cry out for change -- either to get better "quality," to see represented the full spectrum of American life (including a more accurate picture of religious belief and practice), or to reduce the level of sexually explicit and violent material that is particularly harmful to children.

Federal Communications Commissioner Ervin Duggan, an IRD board member, responded to questions about popular culture, its impact on democracy, and the prospects for cultural change.

Are most popular culture artifacts really that bad, or is it that a few are able to make a lot of noise about a small number of especially tasteless or offensive programs?

I suspect that popular culture has been pretty shabby and vulgar in every age, although we constantly hear that Shakespeare wrote for the rabble. My sense, however, is that today's popular culture is at a particularly low ebb of taste compared to, say, the 1950s. Prime-time television fare in the 1950s generally supported majority middle-class values: intact families, monogamy, and sexual restraint, for example. Today's prime-time fare, by contrast, seems more centered on dysfunction, exotic lifestyles, and an anything-goes morality. On the bright side, home videos and cable television offer a wider variety of choices -- The Discovery Channel, for example -- and a measure of control for parents, if they choose to use it. Bringing home a good Disney video is one alternative to exploitative network fare.

Is some level of government regulation necessary, in your view? Are there some kinds of regulations that do not chill the climate for free speech?

I believe that government should have laws against obscenity, although it seems difficult to find a jury these days that's willing to judge anything obscene. And I support the Federal Communications Commission's enforcement standard that levies occasional fines on broadcast indecency. But we need to realize that when the general level of taste and morality breaks down in the society, government is hardly the agency to cure the problem. The police are occasionally called to quell family disputes and break up marital squabbles, but we don't think of the police as marriage counselors or the source of the values that inform family life. The problem is more a problem of ethics and morals than of law.

I am reluctant to have government step in and chill free

speech. I think what's needed is for individual citizens to chill their own free speech -- that is to say, to exercise decent self-restraint. I am free under the Constitution to say all sorts of hateful, tasteless, and uncivil things, but I restrain

myself. But instead we seem to have a society in which everyone keeps harping about his or her constitutional right to say any uncivil or offensive thing that comes to mind. I want a society in which people are free to say such unpleasant things, but I don't much want a society in which they constantly choose to say them.



Ervin Duggan

Are there really right-wing censors in every corner, as some would have us believe? Are they the real threat?

I suspect that the level of censorious sentiment is lower today than ever before, and that the strength of would-be censors less than ever. A useful question to ask, I think, is "What is the real wolf at our door?" In today's popular culture, it seems to me the the real wolf at the door is not censorship; a look at Phil Donahue or Oprah is proof that uninhibited free speech is alive and kicking in this country. The real wolves at the door today, in my judgment, are a pornographic concept of sex that robs adults of romance and children of innocence; a pornographic approach to violence that relishes gore and may even promote violent behavior -- and finally, a general, in-your-face tastelessness that coarsens social life and robs it of beauty, civility, and elegance. But again, the answer is not the blunt instrument of censorship; it's a positive effort to promote what is good and true and beautiful.

How much do pop culture moguls think about the social consequences of what they produce? What influences them as they consider what is either good or acceptable?

Unfortunately I don't think the moguls think about much else except what they sell. And at least until recently, they seem to have missed the point that healthy, wholesome family fare sells very well -- often better than exploitative sex and violence. I've been rather surprised, in my conversations with television and movie moguls, at how passive they are; they seem to consider themselves accountants, and defer to the judgments of writer-producers as the real creative minds. Among writer-producers, I think there's a great deal of concern about delivering certain messages in their programming; some of them have a real

deal to preach. Unfortunately they often are more attracted to delivering messages about condom use than self-restraint, messages about individual self-expression and freedom rather than communal responsibility. The people I've met in Hollywood, people with enormous influence, are intelligent and generally decent people. But they live in a culture that is as closed and unanimous in its way as the small Southern town where I grew up -- and the ideology of that world is quite secular, quite politically correct, quite commercial, and quite out of touch with mainstream values.

What's worse, the content of much of American popular culture, or the way parents have allowed their children to be saturated with it?

I'm not about to blame parents, who are beleaguered and without much help. A generation ago parents could depend on the popular culture to support and reinforce their moral values. Now they can't. A generation ago, parents (typically the mother) had more choice about whether they would work outside or inside the home. Now they don't; many who would like to be at home when their kids come home from school can't afford to be. A generation ago, I suspect, more families lived closer to grandparents and relatives than they do now. So children are unconnected, turned loose, exposed to a relentless and invasive televised onslaught -- and parents are told, by the very people who are concocting the swill, that they need to exercise more "control." To tell parents that parental "control" is the only answer is unimaginative -- like saying that gas masks are the only answer to air pollution, or that bulletproof vests are the only answer to drive-by shootings.

What is at stake in this? Is it too much to say that democracy is imperiled unless changes occur? What about other countries that receive large doses of what we produce?

What is at stake, in my judgment, is nothing less than the success or failure of the democratic experiment launched by our Founders two centuries ago. That experiment wasn't just about liberty; it was about liberty and responsibility operating in creative tension with one another. Tyranny was only one of the nightmares from which the Founders were trying to deliver humanity; irresponsible license -- freedom without restraint -- was the other nightmare. If we manage to create that nightmare through the agency of a violent, valueless popular culture, it could be the final betrayal of the Founders' dream. Something else at stake is the future of societies that are now trying to democratize themselves after decades of tyranny. What an irony it will be if the role model we present makes them hate freedom and decide it is not worth the price? Unless we improve the size and quality of our own democratic culture, we may end up helping the nations of Central and Eastern Europe move from tyranny to decadence with no redeeming ideal in between.

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A Hollywood Temptation

By John Prizer

I was under a lot of pressure and didn't want to be fired. The director who started the picture had been replaced, and his successor didn't like what I was giving him.

I had been the fourth writer assigned to this low-budget film about vigilante justice and was polishing the dialogue before each scene was shot. The new director had rejected my first pages, calling them "weak and literary." He wanted nitty-gritty street talk. I was eager to please.

I'd stay up all night rewriting the existing material and drop the new pages on the doorstep of the director's Hollywood Hills home each morning just before dawn. He would read them during his limo ride to the set and then turn them over to a production secretary to retype with his changes.

After a few false starts I figured out how to produce what he wanted. It looked like I would be kept on the picture. But there was a problem.

The secretary was refusing to type some of my pages. The language offended her. There were too many swear words and obscenities. She was quickly replaced. But I was unsettled. It was the first time anyone had been offended by my writing. The studio executive assigned to the project told me not to worry. He said his superiors were pleased with my work and hinted at further assignments.

Later a prop man took me aside and filled me in on the woman who had objected to my dialogue. She was considered a hard worker but a little crazy. "One of those fundamentalist Christians," he confided with a smile.

I continued to write in the style the director wanted and completed the picture without further incident. It received an R rating as the studio had intended, and even made some money. No one else complained about my use of language, including the handful of critics who reviewed it. But the incident stuck in my mind.

I had just begun attending church again after a lapse of more than ten years, and my faith was tentative and unfocused. That secretary's refusal to type my pages forced me to take a hard look at

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Is some kind of larger shift in the culture necessary if we are to relegate the media to a proper place in our lives and see its content change? How do we get there?

Two thousand years ago Jesus, and later St. Paul, advocated a profound shift in the culture of their day, a shift so radical and renewing that they used the metaphor of second birth to describe it. It was a shift, I would point out, that necessarily had to begin in individual hearts; no social or political shortcuts were mentioned.

Early in our history Jonathan Edwards set in motion a movement of spiritual regeneration so sweeping that today we call it the Great Awakening. We need another Great Awakening today; in its absence, while we await it and try to bring it about, I think Christians would do well to take to heart Jesus' admonition to be in, but not of, the world. I think there's great excitement and satisfaction to be found in thinking of oneself as part of a counterculture. Wasn't it C.S. Lewis who said that Christians are like secret agents parachuted into enemy territory? That sounds like an exciting challenge to me.

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myself and my work.

Contrary to popular myth, most people in Hollywood don't compromise their principles to get rich. They do so to keep working. Only a few hundred pull down the six- or seven-figure salaries you read about in *People* magazine. Everyone else is hustling hard to survive.

There are more than 350,000 people in Los Angeles looking for work in the entertainment business. In any given year approximately 12,000 of them earn a living. This means that for every job there are nearly 30 qualified people available. In this kind of competitive environment, it's suicidal to get a reputation for turning down work for reasons of taste or morality. Like most show folk, I considered myself lucky whenever I landed a job in the business.

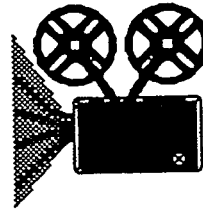
But unwittingly, that secretary had performed a kind of Christian witness. Her action took guts. If she hadn't been married to a production manager with close ties to the studio, she would have been fired.

She made me realize that religion should be more than something I did on Sundays. It also could influence my work -- not only the way in which I treated my fellow workers, but also what assignments I decided to accept.

Shortly after that, I began to divide my time between the film business and Christian journalism. This helped me sort out the relationship between my faith and my work. It wasn't easy. Nowadays I choose my assignments more carefully. And if I'm asked to do something which offends my conscience, I think I have the courage to say "no."

But the temptations are great.

John Prizer is the editor of the National Catholic Register.

**Communications**

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deflating passivity, the "amusing ourselves to death" syndrome, as Neil Postman described it. That so few corporations have so much control over the shape of popular culture makes the picture more worrisome still when it come to minimal hopes that the media would more truly represent diversity.

Most Christians, both outside and inside the NCC orbit, share these concerns. Many also would agree about other problems: the stereotypic way the developing world is often portrayed in the media, as well as the reality that the most marginalized in society don't get to reap the benefits of modern communications technology. The proposed NCC resolution, however, has staked these issues in more simplistic terms of liberation theology. The poor, it is argued, are not able to withstand the onslaught of Western, and primarily American, media. The media "encourage an artificial transnational culture based on a selective vision which affects the relations between peoples throughout the world," says the proposed resolution. People from developing world cultures, therefore, do not get to speak from their worldviews, and instead are known to others only through Western biases. Justice demands that they be liberated to defend and express their own stories without the overwhelming influence of Western media conglomerates. In the face of the "virtual elimination of any basis for global dialogue about equity and justice in communication," the resolution attempts to reinvigorate the much-criticized New World Information and Communication Order (see "Developing World Media Suspicions," p. 5).

"Theological/ethical" critique of global communications

Democratic ideals about the media and democratic government have been based on two things: an informed electorate that is capable of making meaningful political choices, and an open marketplace of ideas. In that marketplace, ideas contend with each other, the hope (in largely humanistic terms) being that truth would emerge and falsehood fall away. The media that conduct public discourse, thus, become vehicles for facilitating the accountability of government to the people.

Many contend today that American media nurture neither the citizenship responsibilities of the American people, nor the moral virtues that are necessary for demo-

have an understandable and sometimes intoxicating allure. Sometimes the freedom presented particularly in American music, television, and film is pure license -- no responsibilities, no consequences. Sometimes life fulfillment is wrongly identified with material consumption. Sometimes the overall result is a powerfully

atic self-government. At the extreme, however, some go as far as to say that democratic freedom is an illusion. For example, from the political left, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman have written that those with power in the culture control and manipulate the signs and symbols of public discourse. The media, rather than being independent sources that can hold government accountable, are said really to be a part of the self-reinforcing power structure that serves "to mobilize support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity."

If the supposedly free American media were so thoroughly integrated into a consolidated power structure, then democracy would not bestow the freedom it promises. This would be especially true for those who have no opportunity to reap benefits from the power structure: those whom liberation theologians frequently label broadly as "the poor" or as "the people." From this radical perspective, the marketplace of ideas, national or global, becomes an oppressive rather than an empowering arena for the poor.

One such theologian, Kim Yong-Bock, President of Hanil Theological Seminary in South Korea, told a 1992 conference jointly sponsored by the NCC and the World Conference on Christian Communication that currently there is a "culture war" being conducted between "the power and the people." It was initiated by Westerners who suppress the values of "Eastern/Southern civilization." The battle is

waged through political propaganda, commercial advertisement, and information technology. This cultural war takes place on both national and global levels.... Sometimes it works to domesticate the minds and desires of consumers, inducing them to buy things that are produced; this is to control and conquer the market. The educational system acts to establish hegemony over the minds of students in the name of socialization. Traditional cultural process and religious institutions are also mobilized to serve the cause of the powers. But the most important aspect of this cultural war is manifested in the modern mass communication media such as newspapers, wire services, radio and television.

This struggle has gone on in communist societies and dictatorships, as well as democracies in which a liberal press "is allowed [to] have a facade of freedom of speech." The process of communication in this system "is not merely the objective order of society and community; it also penetrates into the mind and brain ... and into the heart and soul of the whole human being," according to Kim. As a result, the people have lost their "subjecthood."

In place of this domination, enslavement, and enmity, new bonds of solidarity must be established. To accomplish this, "the people" need direct and immediate participation in the communication process in a way that allows the demonstration of their solidarity and their liberation. People must "participate in economic communication to be

Developing World Media Suspensions

The questions the proposed NCC resolution raises about "cultural imperialism" are not without validity due to the experience of colonization. During that era the European news services controlled the flow of information in and out of the colonies. These reports focussed narrowly on the highly dramatic, according to Indiana University's J. Herbert Altschull. "There were wars and pitched battles, exotic religions and strange customs, jungles and mountains, savages and heathens, disease and revolution." To many in the developing world, these "pictures were not only inaccurate but condescending as well; they had been drawn by an arrogant band of men afflicted with the narrow horizons of the ethnocentric," Altschull said. After gaining independence, these countries typically could not afford their own foreign bureaus and therefore had to rely on the old sources.

Leaders of these new countries tended to fear independent sources of information and economic power -- internal or external. In order to protect their fragile claims to sovereignty, these often-autocratic leaders turned during the 1960s and 70s to the United Nations to gain sanction for their efforts to impose media and economic controls.

One such attempt came through the call for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) through the UN's Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The NWICO, which was supported by many oldline U.S. church leaders, was in part a response to the reality that more information continued to come to the developing world through European and American media than was transmitted out from the perspective of those in the developing world. The conflict over the NWICO came to a head with the UNESCO-sponsored 1980 MacBride Commission report. In the MacBride report, the "fundamental arguments" for a new information order were based on an economic disparity between North and South. Correcting the problem was said to require "the elimination of unjust and oppressive structures, the revision of the present division of labor, the building of a new international economic order." The United States and other democracies resisted the NWICO, believing it would sanction the regulation of journalists and other restrictions on free speech. In the current climate of growing respect for free speech and dramatic technological advances, which the proposed NCC resolution fails to apprehend adequately, there may be new opportunities to address the old questions.

economically sovereign over their own life."

Though softer in tone, the proposed NCC resolution resonates with Kim's argument. It does not recognize many benefits in the democratic tradition of the free market of ideas. It claims to speak for a mythical, monolithic "people" who have been victimized by Western media. And it makes vague demands for communications power to be given to "the people" -- as if that would solve all problems.

Communication, says the proposed resolution, "is essential to human dignity. It is a pre-condition of a just and democratic society." Yet the agenda set by an increasingly deregulated media is self-serving and antagonistic to the common good.

The media have never adequately served the interests of the powerless at the periphery of society nor have they served minority groups by programming for their cultural, racial, creative, and prophetic concerns. Media increasingly represent the interests of forces at the centers of political and economic power neglecting the concerns of churches and other institutions which advocate for alternative visions and futures.

As a result, the powerless, whether in the United States or abroad, "rarely have the chance to tell their own stories. Others tell the stories for them, often laden with stereotypes. Their own reality is not depicted fairly. Neither is the information provided geared to their best interests, but rather is tailored to their own nations' or foreign commercial demands." With new technologies designed to serve "the mercantile and the military," people have lost control over their own cultural and economic lives.

The resolution continues: "The existing global web of communication -- symbols, images, and pictures simultaneously transmitted into scenarios and sequences of events -- catch and hold the lives of people everywhere. The web envelopes people's perceptions and understanding and finally invades the innermost chamber of consciousness, deeply affecting spirit as well as life."

However, the proposed resolution says that the media can "make it possible for persons, communities, and nations to participate fully in their own cultures as well as in shared world meanings and values." Some of the ways the proposed resolution says the NCC can help are by encouraging media literacy; affirming the church's support for the integrity of persons and their cultures and standing by victims of cultural domination; working to strengthen voices of persons "who are marginalized by the dominant culture" by supporting alternative media; affirming the right of all people to develop their own communication styles and to protect themselves from the monopoly of external interests; and supporting the use of media that promote "peace, understanding, cooperation and multi-cultural communities instead of violence, factionalism, militarism and ethnic strife." Of course, the NCC must integrate work

for "global communication and justice" into current peace justice, and advocacy agendas. This would include expanding advocacy efforts with government and communication industries in order to reform policies. Such advocacy would include a request for more news from developing nations, supporting access by developing nations to "global satellite orbital and spectrum space" when it becomes economically feasible for developing world economies, and encouraging the opening of forums "on the



WCC Photo/Peter Williams

creation and use of information technologies as tools in controlling the environment, economic opportunity, and quality of life for peoples in our own and other nations."

Many of these points (summarized here) are so vague and difficult to implement or constitute such large tasks that it is very hard to imagine what the NCC and its member communions would actually do with them. How these action steps can stand as priority concerns at this (or possibly any) point in time for the NCC is far from clear.

Those who would like to see the resolution tabled for reconsideration might consider these questions:

1) Is democracy part of the problem or part of the solution? The proposed resolution makes little mention of another very large part of the problem faced by the poor: their own repressive governments. Democracies that support free expression create openings for specialized forms of communication to which most sectors of society have access, and which can serve the political and economic empowerment of those who have been disenfranchised.

2) Are people really passive consumers of a unified, transnational media? The proposed resolution acknowledges none of the complexity involved in communications, including how people sort through what they receive. According to University of California sociologist Todd Gitlin, "Many scholars have demonstrated that when people watch the same television program they see different television programs." In other words, people sort what they receive through their pre-existing worldview rather than

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Russian Legislature Pushes to Restrict Religious Activity

By J. Patrick Gray

On July 14, 1993, the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation passed legislation intended to place restrictions on religious groups in Russia. While Russian lawmakers claimed the statute was directed at religious sects and cults, the bill was interpreted abroad as including restrictions on Russian citizens who are not members of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has been inundated with missionaries of all kinds. Yet even if the law were only directed at sects and cults, the restrictions represent a blunt step backward in the democratic development of post-Soviet Russia. IRD's 1992 Religious Freedom Award winner, the Rev. Gleb Yakunin, asked who the Supreme Soviet will choose to muzzle next, poets and artists?

The Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD),

which has been watching the situation

for some time, immediately joined efforts to monitor and influence legislative developments. Through Senator Richard Lugar's (R-IN) office, a "Dear Colleague" letter was

circulated in Congress calling for President Boris Yeltsin to veto the legislation. Eventually, more than 170 congressional names were added to the letter. IRD also worked with groups all over the United States in other attempts to stop the bill from becoming law.

After the law was passed by the Supreme Soviet, Yeltsin could sign the bill into law or return it for revisions. Aware of the global dissatisfaction from pro-democracy organizations, Yeltsin chose the latter, sending it back to the Supreme Soviet for further work.

On Friday, August 27, the Parliament passed a revised version of the law which again included inappropriate and onerous restrictions on indigenous and foreign religious groups. (Unfortunately, some Western news outlets at first reported that the problematic sections of the law had been deleted. The news media apparently fall victim to disinformation efforts by members of the Parliament.)

As *Religion & Democracy* goes to press it is unclear whether or not Yeltsin will have the authority to return the law to Parliament for further consideration. And even after the law is adopted, the final dispensation of the matter will not be clear until implementing regulations are drafted. Ultimately, a new Russian constitution may override the

legislative work of this Parliament -- a holdover from the Soviet era which seems to fight Yeltsin's democratic initiatives on every point.

The Parliament's efforts to curtail foreign mission groups has gotten the most international comment. While Westerners scramble to discern how the law might affect their work, less attention has been paid to disturbing new restrictions on the indigenous groups themselves. Some proposed restrictions have included: requirements for *all* groups to re-register, the provisions by which registration may be

denied (a government agency may refuse to sanction religious groups which "contradict social morality" or "offend" or "insult" others), and the ability of the government to shut down already registered groups prior to any judicial proceeding. Other language backs away from state neutrality regarding religion and gives



Russian President Boris Yeltsin. *Reuter/RNS Photo.*

preference to "traditional confessions" of Russia.

While supporters of the legislation assert that it is directed at sects and cults, the inclusion of "foreign-based religious organizations" in the language of the legislation includes many more religious organizations than the Unification Church or other non-Christian groups. Considering that the Roman Catholic Church is based in Rome, the Lutheran Church has historical ties to Germany, and surely the most poignant -- with Jews tied to Israel -- this or similar legislation has the potential to authorize major religious persecution. The whole tone becomes even more ominous when coupled with the harsh actions and vocabulary of some of the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, many of whom are affiliated with the Russian pro-nationalist group Pamyat.

A major voice for creating legal barriers against foreign religious activity has been Aleksy II, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, and a member of the Russian Congress of People's Deputies. Just before the vote was taken in July, Aleksy personally wrote a letter to the Supreme Soviet encouraging members to vote for the bill.

This may be the first run by Aleksy at making the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate the state church of Russia. He has been very critical of evangelism by foreign nationals. Even though he has participated in events such as a private conference with Billy Graham

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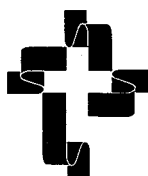
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during the recent Moscow crusade by the well-known evangelist, Aleksy seemed to resent the meeting greatly. While the Orthodox church was bitterly oppressed under Soviet totalitarianism, during the latter half of communist rule, the Moscow Patriarchate was, in a sense, the state church of the Soviet Union, enjoying the privileges of the ruling elite in return for covert state service. By tirelessly arguing that only Orthodoxy is fit for Russian people, the legislative result may be to make the Moscow Patriarchate the sole administration of the Church in Russia.

It is not surprising that many Russians would be dismayed by the influx of new religious groups -- and by the numbers of their fellow citizens attracted to non-Orthodox bodies. What is disturbing is the readiness of religious leaders to resort to government control and coercion to remedy the perceived problem and the willingness of the Parliament to cooperate. The emergence of democracy is far from assured in Russia, and this move represents a push to return to the practices of the Soviet era.

The Rev. J. Patrick Gray, an Episcopal priest, is IRD's associate covering the former Soviet Union.

**Religion & Democracy**

Eight issues annually published by the
Institute on Religion and Democracy
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Washington, D.C. 20005-4706
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(includes newsletter); newsletter subscription
alone is \$25 per year. Tax-deductible contributions
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absorb completely another way of seeing. Gitlin called the American-dominated flow of artifacts a "global semi-culture" that hasn't replaced foreign indigenous cultures, but instead, is becoming everyone's second culture (activating a certain "cultural bilingualism").

Further, according to Everette E. Dennis, Executive Director of the Freedom Forum Media Center at Columbia University, there is no evidence that anyone desires a bland, unified form of media. Instead, new technology may provide an opportunity to showcase various points of view and interests, rather than blurring them into one.

3) Do we really wish merely to preserve non-Western cultures so that citizens can tell their own stories? Cultures that attempt to shield themselves from interaction with others do not stay intact. Cultures change and evolve -- sometimes negatively, but also positively -- through communication. If cultural institutions and artifacts are to be preserved, it must be because the people are sufficiently prepared for the interaction with others that they may confidently pass along elements in their traditions that have enduring value. To encourage political protection for culture, as the proposed resolution seems to do, rather than just empowering people to process and pass along their culture, is a recipe for new forms of oppression.

4) Don't "the people" need to be transformed, too? Some elements of developing world cultures -- elements which show up in communication, such as the treatment of women and religious minorities, etc. -- need to be exposed to other perspectives. As Christians, we must hold that the gospel uniquely challenges all cultures, not just Western ones. It is an illusion to believe that beneath the dominant power structure there are "the people" who, once set free, will exhibit true unity in diversity.

5) Is the NCC ready to reform its own communications practices? The NCC has had its own difficulties in communication. It has failed to represent well minority viewpoints within the ecumenical movement, those that depart from the politically correct form of liberationism and victimology that have dominated its advocacy in public affairs. Further, the NCC has represented those in the developing world -- "the poor" or "the people" -- in stereotyped form, namely, as victims whose demand for "economic justice" makes them indifferent to liberal democracy and hostile to free markets. Some of "the poor" actually value democracy and markets, and cannot be written off as victims of false consciousness perpetrated by the unjust structure of global communications.