

Nairobi: A Door Opened

DAVID KELLY

Religious freedom in Eastern Europe is now squarely on the agenda of the World Council of Churches, that much criticized, but essentially hopeful institution of which the Russian Orthodox Church has been a member since 1961. A resolution of the WCC General Assembly, meeting in Nairobi in November-December 1975, requests the WCC's General Secretary to present by August 1976 a first report on religious freedom in the signatory countries of the Helsinki Declaration.

This decision in Nairobi is of the first importance not only for believers in communist countries, but also for the future of the WCC itself. In the last 14 years the council has seemed to some Western churchmen to look at the world from a distinctly left-leaning viewpoint, concerning itself with colonialism, racism and national liberation movements, while remaining silent on the discrimination and sometimes outright persecution suffered by millions of Christians in communist countries.

Before Nairobi there was talk that some dissatisfied Western Churches might pull out of the organization. That danger has now receded.

How the Decision Was Taken

The question of religious freedom in the Soviet Union was raised, in a way that could not be ignored, by a letter from two Orthodox believers in Moscow, Fr. Gleb Yakunin and Lev Regelson, which was published in Nairobi on 25 November, two days after the conference began. (For the text, see pp. 9-14.) The letter, in the form of an appeal to the assembly giving details of the persecution of believers in the Soviet Union and asking for help, was sent to the WCC General Secretary, Dr. Philip Potter, with a covering letter asking him to inform the assembly of its contents. The text appeared on 25 November in the Kenyan Christian newspaper *Target*, which was published daily while the assembly lasted and became, in effect, the conference newspaper. Official replies from the Russian Orthodox and Baptist delegations were published in *Target* on 28 November. These letters became one of the great unofficial talking points of the

assembly, but it was not until 8 December, two days before the assembly closed, that the opportunity was found to get the issue into the official proceedings.

This opportunity came in a debate on a report on disarmament and the Helsinki Declaration which had been prepared by one of the working committees during the earlier days of the meeting. A Swiss delegate, Dr. Jacques Rossel, proposed that the following be added to the final paragraph of the report:

The WCC is concerned about restrictions to religious liberty particularly in the USSR. The Assembly respectfully requests the government of the USSR to implement effectively principle number 7 of the Helsinki Agreement. (See footnote in *Editorial p. 2. Ed.*)

This proposal was ably seconded by Rev. Richard Holloway of the Episcopal Church of Scotland, and was opposed by the leaders of the Russian delegation. The proposal was put to the vote and carried, but it then appeared that some of the delegates thought they were voting on a motion of closure. After some confusion the English Baptist, Dr. Ernest Payne, proposed that the whole matter be sent back to the committee, as the assembly was now debating an issue which had not been considered by the committee itself. This proposal was accepted. The committee, which included a member of the official Russian delegation, decided to hold an open hearing on religious liberty in the Soviet Union that same evening after the close of the official proceedings. After the hearing, a substitute amendment was worked out in the early hours of 9 December by a panel of the reference committee including the Russian member. The new amendment referred to "alleged infringements of religious liberty" and did not mention the Soviet Union by name. When this was presented to the assembly in the morning, Dr. Rossel and Mr. Holloway offered to withdraw their own disputed amendment of the previous day if the following was added to the new draft:

The Assembly requests the General Secretary to see to it that the question of religious liberty be the subject of intense consultations with the member Churches of the signatory States of the Helsinki Agreement and the first report be presented at the next Central Committee meeting of August 1976.

This amendment was eventually accepted together with an addition proposed by a member of the Church of England delegation, Rev. Peter Bolton, which stated :

This Assembly recognizes that all the signatory nations appended below have equal responsibility to observe and carry out all the principles of this solemn agreement. The full list of signatories is as follows: (List appended).

These are the bare bones of what happened during two days of sometimes confused and often emotionally charged proceedings. Some people felt and expressed disappointment that the WCC, which takes such a strong and open line on issues like the South African and Chilean regimes, still could not bring itself to an open condemnation of religious persecution in Eastern Europe. Believers in Russia are more likely to look on the positive side of what has been done: the General Secretary of the WCC, an international body on which the officially-recognized Russian Orthodox and Baptist Churches are represented, will now be acting as a postbag for their appeals and complaints, and he has been directed to investigate the question of religious liberty with sufficient urgency to prepare a first report by August this year.

How the Russians Reacted

The official Russian delegations at Nairobi were in an agonizingly difficult position. To work for an officially recognised Church in an atheist State can only be extraordinarily difficult for a sincere Christian at any time; to have to represent that Church at a much publicized meeting abroad multiplies the difficulties and dangers. Throughout the proceedings at Nairobi the Russian and other Eastern European delegations were constantly in the position of having to defend, and indeed to a considerable degree extol, the system under which they live. They could hardly do less than challenge the letter from Fr. Yakunin and Regelson. Often they felt that some of their fellow-delegates were putting pressure on them in a way that was deficient in Christian love and fellowship. Sometimes their listeners were clearly impatient of what they said. At one point the Russians were understood to hint that if pushed too hard they might have to withdraw from the WCC. But at the end of the day they stayed and saw the crisis through, and while their official statements were sometimes less than frank, they did contain one or two surprising concessions and admissions and made, in the end, an impression of good will and Christian commitment.

Thus, in his written reply to the Yakunin-Regelson letter Metropolitan Yuvenali (Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Department of the Moscow Patriarchate) began by noting that Fr. Yakunin "has been in conflict with his own Church authorities for some time" while "Lev Regelson is known for his anti-ecumenism," and added that their letter "describes certain important moments of our Church's history in a prejudiced way". But later on he wrote:

We do not disguise the fact that there have arisen and that there do arise problems in the life of the Church, resulting from the infringement of the laws concerning religious communities, *both by local representatives of the State authorities* (our italics) and by members of Church communities . . .

Metropolitan Yuvenali continued :

Being loyal citizens of our country, we do not condone the actions of those who break (its) laws, whether on the political plane or any other. At the same time we cannot but note the fact that our society is evolving in the direction of ever-increasing development of democratic principles. The Church has found its level in this process and contributes to it to the extent that it is possible for her to do so. It is for this reason that we look to the future with faith and hope in the Lord . . .

The Evangelical-Baptist delegation's letter took a generally harder line. The text of both letters is reproduced in full on pp. 15-17.

At the open hearing on the evening of 8 December, people present understood Metropolitan Yuvenali to be hinting that if the amendment naming the Soviet Union went ahead his delegation might have to withdraw from the WCC; but the Metropolitan denied at a press conference the next day that he had made any such threat. Canon John Arnold, who was present as an interpreter, summed up what some Eastern European Christians were saying that evening as follows :

We are not pro-communist, we don't want to defend our government or our society whatever they do. What we want you to do is to take into account an historic fact that we live in a communist country. We live in that situation and we have to find our way. God is doing something with us in history. It doesn't help us at this stage in our pilgrimage if we keep on being pounced on by well-meaning friends from the West. You always say "we are only doing this for your own good". But we say to you that this particular way of going about things doesn't help.

The most moderate and convincingly open expression of the Russian position came the next day when Archpriest Vitali Borovoi (who, incidentally, is much respected in Western ecumenical circles) read out a prepared statement explaining why the Russian delegation had abstained in the vote on the resolution finally adopted.

On behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church delegation I should like to declare that we abstained not because we do not wish to collaborate with our Christian brethren in an endeavour to study to deepen our understanding of the plight of human rights including religious freedom in all places wherever these rights might be infringed or misinterpreted. We

are always ready, and at this present time, declare our readiness to participate in open, brotherly, and equitable discussion of these problems which are of prime importance to us all. We are prepared for frankness, for dialogue, and for cooperation, but we are unpleasantly disappointed by the prevailing atmosphere which surrounded the discussion of these questions at the Assembly, an atmosphere compounded of haste, nerves, emotion, and divisiveness. Although we believe and affirm that Jesus Christ frees and unites us, in this matter we have permitted sinful passions and divisions to sway us. We deeply regret this, and it is in order to indicate our disapproval of this atmosphere that we have abstained. However, as concerns the substance of this matter we are prepared for both cooperation and dialogue though in an equitable and fraternal atmosphere. We ask for your prayers, and we pray for you.

Finally, as a particularly good expression of the Western Churches' position on this issue at the conference we quote an extract from a speech by the distinguished Dutch veteran of the ecumenical movement, Albert van den Heuvel :

It's impossible to have zones of silence in the area of human rights. The WCC has taught us to speak about South Africa and Chile. I do not see how we can speak specifically about one country and not about another. If we really want to show brotherhood and fellowship we must debate the issues out in the open.

But the same speaker also made clear that the Western Churches were ready to learn from what the Russian churchmen said, and ready to go a long way to meet them :

At the open hearing I had the opportunity of learning a number of things. I learned that we help our Russian brethren and ourselves when we distinguish between a general problem and specific problems. Secondly, I learned again that we cannot speak about human rights in Eastern Europe unless we put it squarely in the common struggle for détente in Europe and for common involvement in peace work. We cannot work for human rights in Eastern Europe if we do not put it in the context of fraternal relationships and if we do not devise a language of respect and sympathy for all those Churches which witness in another social system. I've also learned that we cannot speak about individual cases without making known more of the research work little known in Western and Eastern countries. Finally, I learned that we have no way of having a fraternal debate together if we do not recognize our frailty. In this paper there is stress on four points – the differences between the situations in the different countries, an acknowledgement that Churches dare not be silent, an emphasis on the need for consultation, and instructions to the General Secretary that we can go to work.

Russian Christians Appeal to WCC

**APPEAL TO THE DELEGATES OF
THE 5TH ASSEMBLY OF THE WORLD
COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**

Gentlemen:

In response to the appeal by the leaders of the WCC to all Christians to participate in the activity of the Assembly, we, the members of the Russian Orthodox Church, consider it our duty to share with you the results of our deliberations.

These ideas, which are the outcome of numerous conversations with our Orthodox brethren, reflect our attempt to understand the very essence of the ecumenical movement.

Before the beginning of that movement, believers of every Christian denomination were inclined to regard their faith as the only true one or as the most true one and thought that Christian unity could be achieved only if all others would renounce their errors and adopt the full truth which they themselves had found.

Such a conviction was the result not only of their pride in their faith or of their inadequate broadmindedness, but also a manifestation of a sincere Christian maximalism based on their passionate love of Christ and fear of even the slightest infraction of His command.

Unlike this maximalism, the ecumenical movement is filled with a spirit of tolerance and cooperation and rejects mutual proselytizing.

Of course, many Christians of various denominations still harbour some doubts: does this attempt to overcome "competition" between faiths result from an increasing love for Christ in the believers' hearts, or on the contrary, is it the consequence of a cooling off of that love?

We hope that many delegates to the Assembly, aware of the full extent to which the views of the various denominations differ, and of the agony such differences cause, are as convinced as we are that only at the foot of the Cross of Golgotha can be born a love passionate enough truly to overcome the strife which alienates denominations from one another, and prepare Christian hearts for genuine unity.

Since Christians are not united even on the question of the significance of bearing the Cross in the modern world, we presume that doubts about the spiritual quality of the ecumenical movement may be banished only if the confession of the Cross in its original Gospel sense — as signifying the endurance of trials and tribulations for the sake of Christ's Name — is made the basis for Christian unity.

The tragic experience of the Russian Orthodox Church over the past 60 years offers many examples of new efforts of Christian love in response to the witness and suffering which the Church has experienced on a mass scale: it is this fact which gives hope that a complete victory over Christian divisiveness may be possible.

Not all the delegates may be sufficiently acquainted with the history of the Russian Church during that era, and therefore we consider that it is appropriate to remind you of certain examples which really deserve grateful remembrance and zealous imitation.

As long ago as February 1918 the representatives of the clergy of various faiths, forgetting their recent disputes and serious grudges, stood up with remarkable courage and grace in the defense of the Russian Orthodox Church which was the first victim of the anti-religious policies of the newly established government.

"No matter what the theoretical solutions may be, at the present moment the situation of the Orthodox Church is extremely tragic and therefore our sympathies are on her side," stated the Protestant pastor Val'ter.

"One cannot confine oneself to the solution of theoretical problems: church life is presenting a glaringly tragic picture which naturally attracts all our attention . . ." pointed out the Armenian Gregorian priest Ter-Grigorian.

Expressing their deep sympathy with the suffering Russian Orthodox Church, the representatives of Protestant Churches in Russia addressed the Local Council which was held at that time.

The Jews and Muslims voiced their

support, of the Christians. "A Jew can speak with particular emotion about the trials to which the Orthodox Church is being subjected at this time. Only those who were in shackles for a long time and bore them with difficulty can understand the feelings of one who is being shackled," said Rabbi Katsenelenbogen of Petrograd.

"We Muslims, who so carefully observe the commandments of our religion, greatly respect the religious feelings of other faiths and therefore look with particular sorrow at the bitter fate which has fallen upon the Orthodox Church and her parishioners," testified the Muslim imam Davlekanov.

Soon the Catholic Church in the person of Cardinal Gaspari added her voice of sympathy and support and addressed a dramatic appeal to the persecutors of the Orthodox Church.

Such voices of support and compassion aroused a deep response in the hearts of the Orthodox believers.

Upon the order of the Synod, Patriarch Tikhon wrote in his reply to the message of the Protestants:

"As my heart commands me, I wish to express to you and to your brethren in faith my sincere thanks for your love and your wishes of success for the work of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, and I pray to the Lord that the Kind Benefactor of Mankind grant you His heavenly reward for your compassionate response to the tribulations of those who are waiting for Christ's consolation. In the times of the sad and disastrous persecution which befell the Orthodox Church we are always mindful of Jesus Christ who comforts them 'that mourn and the persecuted for righteousness' sake' (Mat. 5:4, 10) . . ."

When Russia was stricken by terrible famine in 1921, Patriarch Tikhon called on the leaders of the Orthodox and other Churches to appeal in the name of Christian love to the nations of the world for selfless help to a Russia which was starving to death. Let us recall that cry for help from Russia, communicated to the world through her Patriarch:

"To you, every man and woman, to you, nations of the whole world, I address my appeal:

Help us! Help the country which has always helped others! Help the country that has fed so many and which is now dying of starvation. Not to your ears,

but to the depths of your hearts let my voice carry the suffering cry of millions of human beings doomed to death from starvation; let me bring it home to your conscience, to the conscience of all mankind. Help immediately! Give help generously, unstintingly, unconditionally!

To Thee, O Lord, our tormented country raises its cry: 'Have mercy and forgive us!' to Thee, Almighty, Thy sinful people raise their hands in supplication: 'Forgive us and be merciful to us!'"

The Christians of Russia will never forget the selfless efforts of the Catholic, Anglican and other Christian Churches that organized aid for the famine-stricken areas of Russia.

Orthodox believers will always remember the great testimony of Christian compassion manifested in the international protest against the mass arrest and execution of clergy and believers in 1922. We shall never forget that this protest movement was organized and instilled with energy and power in particular by Christians abroad: the Orthodox, Anglicans, Catholics and members of the Episcopal Church in the USA (the latter upon the initiative of Bishop Brent, then the head of the embryonic ecumenical movement).

Although about 10,000 priests, monks and nuns were nevertheless executed, the growing indignation of the world forced the wave of repression to ebb after a few months and achieved Patriarch Tikhon's release from detention, which was of decisive importance for the future of the Russian Orthodox Church.

This effective manifestation of Christian love, which frustrated an attempt to destroy the Russian Church at one blow, brought future Christian unity much closer than any number of theoretical conferences, which usually leave most believers quite indifferent.

A great step toward genuine ecumenism was the world-wide prayer for the persecuted Russian Church, organized in 1930 by Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants in Europe. Russian Christians gratefully remember the distinguished role which Pope Pius XI played in organizing this prayer, his passionate condemnation of the persecutors and the great sorrow he expressed at the suffering of the Russian people.

We should also like to remind the

delegates to the Assembly of the painfully shameful fact that the world-wide prayer in 1930 met with disapproval and protests on the part of the official leaders of the Russian Church. They denied that any persecution was taking place at all, and lied before the whole world by stating that those who appeared to be martyrs suffering for their faith were, in reality, just political offenders.

The Christian conscience of our brethren abroad was already facing the following question: "If brutality is so great that those who are being massacred are forced to smile and protest against any offers of help, would it not be better for them if we did not defend them?"

We should also like to remind you that the position adopted by the Orthodox Church leaders was accompanied by a spirit of extreme intolerance in matters of faith, an attitude which patiently ran contrary to the position of Patriarch Tikhon, under whose guidance a special sector of the Church Synod had been organized to work towards unification with other Christians.

The spirit of intolerance lingered on even after the war against Fascism made it necessary to organize a legal Church in the Soviet Union.

In accordance with Stalin's nationalistic policies, the newly organized Moscow Patriarchate supported the "modernized" formula "Moscow – the Third Rome" and showed open hostility toward the First and Second Romes (i.e., to the Roman Catholic Church and to the Church of Constantinople), as well as towards the World Council of Churches.

After Stalin's death, policies have changed from those of "cold war" to those of "détente"; and the foreign policy of the Church has undergone corresponding changes too.

In 1961 the Russian Orthodox Church joined the World Council of Churches. For the Russian Church that year was marked by an increasing wave of anti-religious terror and by forcible closing of churches, monasteries and theological schools everywhere. At the same time, Protestant congregations were subjected to no less brutal persecution.

The 22nd Congress of the Communist Party declared that "this generation of Soviet people will live under communism" – and in order probably to speed up

its advent, more than 10,000 Orthodox churches were closed on the territory of USSR from 1959 to 1965.*

The believers of the Russian Church never had any particular illusions about the fact that the Moscow Patriarchate became a member of the World Council of Churches; it was an act sanctioned by the government during a period of extremely brutal persecution of religion, and obviously followed the government's own strategic aims, which had nothing to do with the task of consolidating Christian positions in the modern world.

Nevertheless, Orthodox believers still hoped that Christian solidarity and determination to achieve genuine unity would prove stronger than the influence of anti-Christian forces; they hoped that the WCC would provide powerful support to its new member, initiate an international movement for the defense of persecuted Christianity and invite all Christians to united prayers for the suffering Church.

Such a hope was fostered also by the fact that in addition to its theological conferences and dialogues, the WCC programme included a plan for active service to people and society.

The wide scope of the WCC's interests included the struggle for peace, the limitation of the nuclear arms race, the prohibition of nuclear tests and the establishment of neutral zones.

The WCC has attentively followed the development of political and military conflicts (Vietnam, Middle East, Nigeria, Cyprus), and explosive situations (Cuba, Northern Ireland); it has dealt with problems of racial, ethnic or national discrimination and with problems of social injustice, with relations between rich and poor countries, with population control and with the fight against hunger in the world.

Among such a wide range of serious problems, however, the matter of religious persecution failed to occupy the

* The same type of suppression has been repeated recently. The latest action of this kind was the closing and subsequent barbaric destruction (in August 1975!) of an Orthodox church in Zhitomir, a landmark of church architecture. The church was razed before the eyes of shocked parishioners – Authors' footnote.

place it deserves – although it ought to become the central theme of Christian ecumenism.

The world did not hear the World Council of Churches raising its authoritative voice when the Russian Orthodox Church was half destroyed; that voice was not heard, either, even when in that vast country, China, Christianity was made illegal; no indignant protest was heard from the WCC even when religion was completely crushed in Albania – and the WCC still remained silent even after a priest was shot in Albania for having baptized a baby.

The WCC, which is composed basically of representatives of the Protestant Churches, failed to give support to the Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostalists in the USSR when their believers were subjected to persecution and oppression, and particularly when they were deprived of their parental rights because of their attempts to give their own children a religious upbringing.

One cannot believe, however, that a feeling of a genuine Christian solidarity will not after all eventually emerge.

We greatly appreciated and welcomed the fact that this year the WCC raised its voice in the defense of Georgi Vins, one of the leaders of Baptist dissidents in the USSR.

We hope that the Assembly will support this initiative and will seriously concern itself with including in the programme of future WCC activities a plan to aid those Christians who are victims of persecution anywhere in the world.

We are aware that many Christians are deeply concerned about the suffering of their brethren and wish with all their hearts to help them, but often do not know how to proceed.

We take the liberty of offering here some suggestions to the delegates to the Assembly. First of all, it seems to us that it is erroneous to regard those who are persecuted for Christ just as an object of Christian compassion. Quite often we forget that confessing and suffering Christians are the seed of the Church; they are Her glory, because of all the Christian family, they stand closest to the Lord Jesus Himself and imitate most directly and closely our Divine Teacher's Sacrifice on Golgotha.

It is an imperative task for us now to restore to the whole Christian commun-

ity all over the world the spirit of the first Christians who revered the confessors of faith: such reverence must be the most important ecumenical act, melting interdenominational alienation in the warmth of love!

Our reverence for the confessors of the faith does not mean of course that we should give up our effort to ease their burden – both of these tasks are inseparably inter-related.

What specific action can we take?

Here are some suggestions:

1. Christians all over the world must learn about their confessing brethren, wherever they may be the victims of persecution and whatever their denomination may be.

Information concerning the confessors should regularly reach every believer, or at least, every leader of a Christian community – church elder, pastor or priest. Furthermore, Christians should make the utmost use of the means of mass communication: radio and television, newspapers, magazines; it will be necessary to publish a special multilingual bulletin for mass circulation, which will offer information about those who confess Christ all over the world, in any denomination (it should include also information on confessing members of other religions).

Should not the Assembly deal with this question and devote every effort to initiate such a publication?*

* An example of such a publication of generally humanitarian orientation is *A Chronicle of Human Rights in the USSR* which appears in Russian and English editions in New York. The *Chronicle* includes information on those who confess their faith.

The religious and cultural journal *Vestnik RSKhD*, very popular in Russia, is also quite active in this respect; however, it is published in a limited Russian edition. The WCC's recent decision to discontinue its modest subsidy to *Vestnik* (the funds allotted to the organization of the Russian Student Christian Movement went, in fact, to this publication) was greeted with considerable bitterness and astonishment. Could the WCC reconsider its decision for the sake of helping the religious renaissance in Russia? – Authors' footnote.

2. The leaders of all communities should hold prayer meetings regularly, at least once a month, for those who confess Christ all over the world.

Reading of informative material, stories and sermons dealing with the self-sacrifice of confessing Christians, prayers and meditation, discussions of possible action by the rank and file believers – all this would be of enormous importance for the spiritual unification of Christianity.

Could we agree that such prayer meetings be held in Christian congregations all over the world on the same days?

3. Nothing can replace personal spiritual contacts.

It would be extremely important for believers to enter into personal contact with confessing Christians and their families, to correspond, offer material aid to prisoners' families and visit them on tourist excursions or business trips. If each confessor or his family could regularly receive greetings cards on Christian holidays from friends in various parts of the world, what a joy that would bring them!

4. The persecutors of Christians are now extraordinarily concerned about their international reputation. They are trying very hard to prevent any possible protest (one of the most glaring examples of this is their slandering of confessing Christians).

If Christians could overcome in themselves and in their fellow citizens egotistic indifference toward other people's suffering, they would find ways of promoting on the appropriate level an international protest campaign against the persecutors of confessors of faith wherever such persecution occurs.

If every believer would send a letter of protest once a month to the persecutors, and if at the same time he would appeal in the same spirit to public opinion in his own country, he would undoubtedly diminish considerably the fervour of the enemies of Christianity.

5. We believe that it is proper to support confessors of other religions as well as all fighters for freedom, human dignity and the preservation of God's image in man.

Such Christian acts will best witness to Christ in the modern world, and everyone will be able to say about Christians:

truly, these people have found God, because they more than any others love their fellow men!

The confessors of humanism, the self-less fighters for human dignity, need our Christian support in many countries of the world at this time, and it is of course our duty to bear witness about such confessors in our own countries first of all.

Vladimir Osipov, an Orthodox Christian and the editor of the Russian nationalist publication *Veche* was recently sentenced to eight years in prison. We appeal to the delegates to the Assembly to speak up on his behalf and to start a wide-ranging international movement to liberate Vladimir Osipov! May such a step serve as new evidence of the vitality of Christian humanism!

At the same time as *Veche* ceased publication, there began an investigation into another journal, *Jews in the USSR*, which has devoted considerable space to Judaeo-Christian dialogue. Its editor Ilya Rubin and his colleagues are now threatened with court action.

Andrei Tverdokhlebov and Sergei Kovalev were arrested and are awaiting trial for their activity in the defense of dissidents, including believers languishing in prisons and labour camps. They have done much to acquaint the world with the courageous struggle of Baptist dissenters and Lithuanian Catholics. Christians must not be ungrateful to them!

6. One of the most horrible weapons in the struggle against freedom of thought and conscience is the compulsory detention of dissenters in psychiatric hospitals and the forcible use on them of barbaric methods of "treatment" which impair their brains and minds.

Robert Coles' words apply to the unfortunate prisoners in psychiatric torture chambers more than to anyone on our planet: "Such people know what it means to be abandoned and deserted. In their perplexity they often ask themselves whether they are not already in hell, at this very moment. For them heaven remains a vision just as for a thirsty man in a desert. Somebody must save them . . ."

Are not Christians more than anyone obliged to lead the implacable struggle

against such a truly diabolical assault on human personality?

Doesn't the true sense of the terrible Divine condemnation: "Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire," (Mat. 5: 22) apply in particular to us, especially now?

We appeal to the delegates to the Assembly that they demand a compulsory international inspection of psychiatric hospitals, because it is there that we come up against a threat to mankind no less dangerous than nuclear bombs and bacteriological warfare.

Everybody knows the fate of General P. G. Grigorenko, the defender of the Crimean Tatars.

As a result of repeated and persistent demands on the part of world public opinion, Grigorenko was finally released; however, mathematician Leonid Plyushch, one of the organizers of the Group for the Defense of Human Rights in Kiev, is still being subjected to psychiatric torture. (*Recently released. Ed.*)

Christians all over the world must not ignore one single case of detention of dissidents or believers in psychiatric hospitals.

7. Some Christians in our country, exhausted after many years of oppression and humiliation, repeated arrests and other kinds of terror, wish to leave the USSR with their families or with their entire congregations and emigrate somewhere where they would be allowed to work and observe their religion in peace.

For instance, the family of the Latvian Baptist elder Janis Smit and of the Kirgizian Baptist Hartfeld have submitted many applications for exit visas; the Pentecostal congregations from the towns of Nakhodka and Chernogorsk have been trying to gain the right to emigrate for a long time without any success. The only reply they have received has been an intensification of persecution.

We appeal to the participants in the Assembly to pray urgently for these people; do not deprive them of constant fraternal concern and help them gain their basic right – to leave their country, or conversely, to return to their country!

8. Many confessors are now suffering for attempting to print and distribute the Holy Scriptures and spiritual literature. A printing house operated by Baptist dissenters was discovered last year in Latvia; 30,000 Gospels were confiscated and seven persons arrested.

Our country urgently needs Holy Scriptures!

Are the delegates to the Assembly aware of the fact that the Soviet customs officials confiscate and destroy Gospels seized from those foreign visitors who bring in more than one copy; that in Soviet libraries Holy Scriptures are not available to ordinary readers; that the inmates of prisons and labour camps are forbidden to own Gospels and spiritual literature?

Upon the request of the Moscow Patriarchate and of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists the Bible has been printed in state printing houses in a limited edition, but it may be freely purchased only abroad.

What can be done to provide Holy Scriptures for the Christians in USSR? Should you not do everything in your power to extend the activity of international Bible societies to our country as well?

Concluding our letter we should like to add that we do not regard our suggestions as the only possible or as the only right ones. Pluralism in our modern life requires that each community apply its particular creative efforts in order to establish new forms of Christian life and new forms of ecumenical cooperation.

We sincerely hope that our suggestions will not be ignored and that they will prompt the delegates to the Assembly not only to consider them, but also to act upon them.

On this occasion we wish great success to the work of the Assembly.

Moscow, 16 October 1975.

FR. GLEB YAKUNIN

LEV REGELSON

(*Target's translation has been slightly amended by reference to the original Russian – Ed.*)

Russian Orthodox Response

To the Editor of *Target*,

We are prompted to address this letter to you by the article published in your paper on the 25th of this month, in which is summarized the letter from two Orthodox Christians resident in Moscow.

We note that the first of the signatories, the priest Gleb Yakunin, has been in conflict with his own Church authorities for some time, while the other, a layman, Lev Regelson, is known for his anti-ecumenism, having addressed a statement to the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1971 in which he severely criticized the ecumenical attitudes and ecumenical activities in the theological field of the Moscow Patriarchate's representatives. It was a statement in which he argued that ecumenism and all connected with it is a danger for Orthodoxy and must be seen as a heresy of our day.

As far as the letter published in your pages is concerned, we consider it necessary to state that it describes certain important moments of our Church's history in a prejudiced way. As is well known there were numerous and highly placed representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church who, after the revolution of 1917, adopted an antagonistic position vis à vis the establishment of a socialist order in our country. This antagonism found its expression in explicit official declarations and activities which gave rise to considerable difficulties not only in the relations between Church and State, but also in the Church's inner life.

In 1923, after his declaration of loyalty to the Soviet State, His Holiness Patriarch Tikhon gained the opportunity to direct the activities of the Moscow patriarchate in a normal fashion, and this indeed had exceptionally important consequences for the subsequent development of ecclesiastical life in our land. His efforts, aimed at the normalization of this legal life of the Church on the basis of loyalty to the laws of the State, were continued by His Holiness Patriarch Sergi; the same principle was followed also by His Holiness Patriarch Alexi. Thanks to this attitude of the Church's

leadership and of the vast majority of the Church's faithful, the Russian Orthodox Church – within the framework of the existing legislation of our land – carries out its work in parishes, theological seminaries, monasteries and so forth to this day.

We do not disguise the fact that there have arisen and that there do arise problems in the life of the Church, resulting from the infringement of the laws concerning religious communities, both by local representatives of the State authorities, and by members of Church communities; yet we cannot but bear witness to the highly beneficial activity of the Council for Religious Affairs, attached to the Council of Ministers of the USSR in dealing with these infringements. Not infrequently rumours of these infringements are brought to the attention of Western Christians in an exaggerated – sometimes, distorted – form, which provokes an inadequate reaction from these Christians, thus complicating the resolution of our internal Church problems. So far as the Christian upbringing of the rising generation of believers is concerned, many who have visited our country and our churches have seen and will see countless examples of such upbringing in our churches. This upbringing is pursued by means of those traditional methods which have prevailed in the Russian Orthodox Church since time immemorial, in so far as they do not come into conflict with the legislation on the separation of Church from State and school from Church. An exceptionally important part in this process is played by the family, where the foundations for this upbringing are laid.

Each country has its own laws, by which it regulates its life; the infraction of such laws involves certain consequences. Being loyal citizens of our country, we do not condone the actions of those who break these laws, whether on the political plane or any other. At the same time we cannot but note the fact that our society is evolving in the direction of ever-increasing development of democratic principles. The Church has found its level in this pro-

cess and contributes to it to the extent that it is possible for her to do so. It is for this very reason that we look to the future with faith and hope in the Lord.

We address this letter to you in order to assist the readers of your paper to gain a realistic picture of the position of the vast majority of the Russian Orthodox Church's members, whom we represent at this Assembly, in respect of the problems of Church-State relations in

our socialist society.

We would ask you, Sir, to publish it in your paper.

On behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church delegation at the 5th Assembly of the WCC at Nairobi.

Yours sincerely,

METROPOLITAN YUVENALI
Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Department of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Russian Baptist Response

To the Editor of *Target*,

In connection with the letters published in your paper concerning the life of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the USSR, letters which create a distorted impression of the spiritual service and witness in our country, we would ask you to publish the following information on behalf of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in the Soviet Union.

The history of the Evangelical Baptists in Russia has lasted for more than 100 years. At the present time the Union has four Evangelical trends: Baptists, Evangelical-Christians, Pentecostalists and Mennonites, who perform their services in more than 5,000 churches, and involving more than half a million believers. We are glad to note that about 6,000 new members join the Union through Baptism every year. Witness to Christ our Saviour is carried on through church services and personal testimony, as well as by deeds. The Church pays most attention to the spiritual education of believers, teaching them to be living witnesses to Christ at home and in the community, and to be the bearers of the blessed Light of God's love to sinners.

The history of the Baptist Union in Russia, as in many other countries, has seen several schisms on various questions. God gave us strength to overcome these schisms and in 1945 the unification of all four evangelical movements took place.

In 1961 a new schism took place. The leaders of the schismatic Baptists began to condemn the Union for coming into fellowship with the other three denominations and also for participation in the WCC. Their motto was "Persecuted Church is the Saving Church." Our

churches continue to treat those brothers and sisters who have separated from them with love trying to convince them to return to the united brotherhood. We have achieved good results already — many of them have returned to their former local churches while 30 separated congregations have officially registered as autonomous churches. Following repeated warnings from local authorities that they should conduct their activities in compliance with the existing legislation some of the leaders of those separated have been convicted.

The leaders of the AUCECB repeatedly expressed their wish to reconcile with them and to conduct joint services. Delegates of the Congresses of the AUCECB issued two appeals to the Supreme Authorities in our country to be merciful to the convicted Baptists. Many of them have been released, the five convicted for unlawful printing in Latvia among them. Now the process of reconciliation is going on. This is our internal affair and with God's help we may complete it.

It is of our great concern that the activities of the breakaway Baptists have become the subject of the political game in the West, including the Churches, besides the role of these brothers is often exaggerated thus causing damage to peace and friendship among Churches and peoples.

Our churches carry on great service and their members are true and loyal citizens of their Motherland. Recently our Union has published Bibles and New Testaments. Since 1945 the magazine *Brotherly Messenger* and the Annual Calendar have regularly been published. We hold Bible Courses for training pastors. Our fraternal contacts with the WCC,