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from time to time calls attention to published material that might contribute toward clarification or understanding of issues affecting world peace. The accompanying reprints constitute Reprint Mailing No. 102.

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The following is quoted from "The Long-legged House" p. 15, by Wendell Berry. (Recollected Essays 1965-1980. North Point Press, Berkeley, CA. 1981):

"We haven't accepted—we can't really believe—that the most characteristic product of our age of scientific miracles is junk, but that is so. And we still think and behave as though we face an unspoiled continent, with thousands of acres of living space for every man. We still sing 'America the Beautiful" as though we had not created in it, by strenuous effort, at great expense, and with dauntless self-praise, an unprecedented ugliness."

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SON OF SMART ROCKS: BRILLIANT PEBBLES

"Brilliant pebbles" is the latest candidate for a phase-one Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) system. (The name comes from the earlier "smart rocks," referring to so-called space-based kinetic-kill vehicles, rocket interceptors designed to destroy by impact.) True to the aimless, zigzag course of SDI over the last six years, it represents another sudden shift of technological focus for the program. Like its predecessors, brilliant pebbles is being touted by its advocates as the solution to the problem of effective, affordable missile defense. But the implausible claims being made for the cost and capability of the program have no firm basis and must be treated with great skepticism. Moreover, even if the concept could be made to work as advertised, a brilliant-pebbles system, faced with likely Soviet responses, would share the limited effectiveness and rapid obsolescence of other space-based kinetic-energy-weapon (KEW) schemes. And, as with other such plans, deployment would destroy both the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty and prospects for nuclear arms reductions, while stimulating a new offense-defense arms race.

Thousands of Orbiting Rockets. The brilliant-pebbles concept is the epitome of decentralized command-and-control. It consists of thousands or tens of thousands of small, autonomous rockets based in permanent orbit several hundred miles above the earth. The rockets would be poised to intercept Soviet missiles launched against the US or its allies in the "boost phase" —the first few minutes after launch. Each interceptor would have sensor, computing, and navigation capabilities to allow it to detect, track, and home in on individual ballistic missiles without the aid of outside support.

The concept is not new: a similar system, called BAMBI (ballistic missile boost-phase intercept), was examined and rejected in the early 1960s. Many serious questions about the new program must be answered:

Cost and weight. For brilliant pebbles to be successful, each interceptor package must remain small, autonomous, and cheap, so that vast numbers of them can be easily deployed at reasonable cost. There are good reasons to doubt that this can be done in the near term. Skepticism has been voiced even by the new SDI director, Lt. Gen. George Monahan, who told Congress that the concept is in the "very, very early stages of research" and that the technology has "a lot of unknowns."

Weight and cost estimates have varied widely among advocates over the last year. Lowell Wood, the creator of the concept, originally claimed that brilliant-pebbles rockets weighing five pounds could be built for $100,000; the current official estimate is a 100-pound interceptor at $275,000 to $1 million a copy. As a cost comparison, the Air Force in 1983 awarded a multiyear contract of $1.17 billion for 28 Navstar satellites, approximately $42 million per spacecraft. This is 30 times more expensive than the highest SDI estimate for each brilliant-pebbles interceptor, a system of much greater complexity and technical capability. While much larger production runs would drive down interceptor costs, it has yet to be shown that such complex systems, incorporating the latest computer and sensor technology, can be mass-produced, let alone that such a huge saving could be gained.

Computational capabilities. One major unknown lies in the computing and software field. While it may someday be possible to develop a supercomputer the size of a cigarette pack, this is several years away and cannot possibly be achieved with "off-the-shelf" technology. Moreover, as with earlier strategic-defense proposals, the reliability of the software for brilliant pebbles is questionable.

Sensor package. A key element of brilliant pebbles is an innovative sensor package, with perhaps as many as four different sensors—an optical star tracker, infrared and ultraviolet

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sensors, and a laser radar. While this package would represent a vast improvement over current detector capabilities, it remains in the early stages of development, with miniaturization one of the critical obstacles yet to be overcome.

Response time. Another major, as yet unsolved problem is devising an alerting system for brilliant pebbles that allows for confirmation of attack while still providing the interceptors enough time to track and home in on their targets. The problem will get more difficult as the Soviets develop faster-accelerating missiles. To indicate the magnitude of the problem, SDI officials have assumed that confirmed warning could be received within 70 seconds of the launching of a Soviet attack, although presently this requires two to three minutes. The newest Soviet ICBMs burn out in about 180 seconds, leaving interceptors at best a scant 110 seconds to attack their targets. Worse yet (as discussed below), the Soviets could deploy missiles with burn times of less than one minute, rendering brilliant pebbles entirely useless.

Soviet Countermeasures. In theory, brilliant pebbles has one advantage over other ballistic-missile-defense schemes: the very large numbers of independent rockets should reduce the vulnerability of the system to antisatellite attack. On the other hand, putting huge numbers of objects in space could add to the problem of space debris, possibly damaging both brilliant pebbles and other satellites.

In any case, brilliant pebbles shares the inherent drawback of all space-based-rocket concepts: unlike "beam" weapons, which in theory would act instantaneously over vast distances, rockets are much more limited in their velocity and range. This fact can be exploited by straightforward offensive countermeasures to reduce or negate the effectiveness of the defense. The most effective countermeasure would be Soviet "fast-burn" booster missiles, which could launch and release their warheads in as little as one-third the time needed by current missiles. Since the interceptors must strike their targets before the boosters burn out and the warheads are released, the effectiveness of the brilliant-pebbles system would steadily fall in proportion to the booster burn time. Against missiles that completed their boost phase in only a minute, the effectiveness of brilliant pebbles would be reduced to zero. There are, theoretically, methods to counter fast-burn boosters; none, however, is likely to be effective. Thus brilliant pebbles would not overcome the problem that is the Achilles heel of space-based KEW defenses.

Because of these problems, brilliant pebbles would suffer early obsolescence, requiring the United States to deploy either a new defense able to cope with advanced Soviet boosters or an effective "midcourse" defense (requiring the ability to discriminate between warheads and decoys), or both. There are no indications that either system will be feasible in the foreseeable future. Thus, even if it worked, the success of brilliant pebbles would be temporary. Investment in this defense scheme would merely mark the beginning of an indefinite race to stay ahead of an ever-changing Soviet offensive force.

—Robert Zirkle

(Robert Zirkle is an arms analyst for the Union of Concerned Scientists)

(Reprinted by permission from THE MANCHESTER GUARDIAN WEEKLY)

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There's pebble vision on Capitol Hill

TRUST brilliant Dan Quayle to endorse the latest Star Wars scheme — the "brilliant pebbles" which would swarm around space by the thousand on the look-out for incoming missiles. The idea was left behind as a farewell gift by the Star Wars supremo General James A. Abrahamson. In case anyone missed it, he also got the Center for Peace and Freedom, an offshoot of the Heritage Foundation, to pass it around. The pebbles — really miniature interceptors — would be deployed at different altitudes to form a "multi-layered defence". Each is about three feet long, with its own sensors and navigation equipment, and each would have its own "protective cocoon" to ward off interference by Soviet ground-based lasers. If a ballistic missile appeared above the clouds, it would be faced with what amounted to a swarm of bees. At least one pebble would be sure to "ram into the target at very high speed," said General Abrahamson with great assurance. He suggested that a really "graceful way" to test the scheme was to put a stripped down version of it (called brilliant eyes) into space. That would only cost ten billion dollars for a "thin layer" of the little beasties, plus a mere 15 billion more for the necessary satellites and ground equipment to ensure that they did not mistake something elese — like a shuttle perhaps? — for an enemy missile.

If this was a video game, it would catch on quickly, and the customers would call it cool or neat — or even brill. Unfortunately, it is for real if the heartbeat-away man has anything to do with it. However much Star Wars was provocative and destructive of east-west detente, this brilliant version is the same multiplied several thousand times. And there is another problem: is there enough space in space for all this new junk? Even the straightforward Star Wars proposal has been estimated to require at least one hundred satellites each powered by a nuclear reactor, with a design life of only seven years. Scientists already worried by the 35 Soviet reconnaissance satellites in orbit view the Star Wars monsters with alarm. With several thousand miniatures swirling around as well, it would become like a nuclear dust storm. This is without even considering the possibility of collisions with one of the 6,000 items of space junk now in orbit that measure more than 10 centimetres — or the other estimated 42,000 that measure more than one centimetre, all moving at about 22,000 miles per hour.

President Bush has been very quiet about Star Wars since being elected. The optimistic view is that he will keep it as a research programme rather than opt for deployment, or at least throttle back on the funds so as to postpone deployment indefinitely. But Mr Quayle has a licence to intervene on the subject, as chair of the National Space Council which Mr Bush revived. The council is supposed to advise the White House on space policy and resolve conflicts among the agencies competing for funds. Mr Quayle's speech should do just the opposite. Alarmingly, it is said to have been approved by the White House. Let us hope that was done on the principle that kids should be allowed to play with their pebbles. But these are some pebbles, mister.

(Reprinted with permission from Sojourners
Box 2927, Washington, D.C. 20017)

DIALOGUE AND DISSENT

POSSIBILITIES UNDER PERESTROIKA

by **JIM WALLIS**

"Look at the people," whispered a friend. "Most of them are crying." We were peering down over the balcony rail of the Moscow Baptist Church. This was a Thursday night service, but the sanctuary was full, the balcony jammed, and worshipers had spilled out into the foyer. The quiet tears were noticeable as the people were praying. A very tangible power and presence filled the place.

I was visiting the Soviet Union with a small group of journalists from the United States. Ten days of dialogue with Soviet dissidents had been arranged to discuss the reality and future of the changes taking place in their country. The Americans were all from "dissident" publications as well, and it was thought that we might have some things in common.

What we found was a virtual cornucopia of new political groups and initiatives all born under *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Out of the frozen ground of Soviet society, new and still-fragile shoots of cultural and

A bishop blesses a man and his grandchild outside the Pokrovskaia church in Moscow.

political life are breaking through to herald what all those involved fervently hope will be a Russian spring.

Each day in Moscow, we had almost non-stop conversations with a wide range of people and groups having a great variety of experiences and perspectives. While they seem to run the entire ideological spectrum, they all appear to want the same thing—a more democratic, pluralistic, and open political system and society. Most seem tolerant of each other and even supportive of the different opinions and roles among them.

"That's what democracy means," they would tell us. The groups have names like Civic Dignity, The Club of Social Initiative, Democratic Perestroika, Democratic Union, Moscow Popular Front, Obschina (Community), *Glasnost* magazine, The Trust Group, and more.

I was the only "religious" journalist in our group, but many of the others joined me in visiting churches and seeking out both church leaders and religious dissidents. We met with human rights activists and those who, until recently, had been in prison, some for many years.

Some of the groups seem quite "establishment," with respected members from the Academy of Sciences. These groups are made up of political scientists, physicists, historians, journalists, and filmmakers who met with us in comfortable conference rooms where portraits of Gorbachev and Lenin adorn the walls.

But most of our meetings took place in crowded apartment living rooms with more ordinary people who work at the grassroots level. These walls are more commonly covered with art, political posters, Russian icons, and, in one instance, a picture of Robert Redford.

OUR GUIDE WAS VIKTOR ZOLOTARYEV, a 28-year-old activist who, for me, symbolized the best of the hopeful but realistic idealism many of these new groups represent. His group, Civic Dignity, is mostly made up of young people who believe politics should be "moral," but they are quick to admit that most people think that is impossible. They started as a human rights group but soon realized that such concerns inevitably lead to political involvement.

The night we met with Civic Dignity, the group was wrestling with the dilemma of how to stay faithful to their belief in law when the authorities act in lawless ways. They and other groups recently had public meetings and protests blocked by the police. Gandhi's name came up in the conversation, and a discussion ensued about civil disobedience.

Viktor is committed to nonviolence and has become a vegetarian. While riding the Moscow Metro to the next meeting or walking back and forth from our hotel on Karl Marx Square, Viktor and I would often get into long talks about moral philosophy and political strategy.

There is a freshness and sincerity in Viktor and his friends which bodes well for the political health of the nation. They aren't really sure where they are headed or, for that matter, what lies ahead for them or their country. What is clear is how deeply they care about the future and how much integrity they are bringing to the questions.

"The most terrible thing is that people have had no choice," said one of the members from The Club of Social Initiative. Their president, Grigory Pelman, told us that these political clubs became a means of getting people into active social life again "when most were still living with the memory of stagnation." The groups help people to find each other, discover new resources, and create the new initiatives necessary to reconstruct the country, according to their members.

These activists don't want a monochromatic society with no autonomous spheres but a "multicolored future with many ways of living." In place of a totally planned economy in a unitary society, they speak of "economic democracy." Some talk of replacing bureaucratic management with worker self-management, while others speak of introducing a "free market," and many favor both.

A movement toward a multiparty system is critical for most, but some believe more genuine political discussion is possible within the one-party system. Pelman feels the most important task is the realization of new economic conditions and social activities. He said that the need for pluralism would lead to "tensions and contradictions," a price they seem willing to pay for greater freedom.

But regardless of the issues under debate or the opinions held on all sides, the real change in the Soviet Union is the introduction of political discussion itself. There were many times when we found ourselves in the midst of a room where fervent political dialogue was under way. But even if we couldn't understand the conversations in Russian, it was the changed political atmosphere that became the significant thing to see. We were witnessing, as Viktor put it, "the first growth of political life" in the Soviet Union.

WHILE WE WERE THERE, a "democratic fraction" was announced within the Young Communist League and, much more significantly, we learned of a new effort by 50 prominent members to create the same inside the Moscow Communist Party. Such party "fractions" have always been illegal, but under *perestroika*, permission has been granted.

For many, however, the real obstacle to genuine political reform was the absolute power of the party itself. Until the Communist Party was willing to surrender its monopoly on political control, there would be no fundamental change in Soviet politics. The dissidents' strategy, said one member of Civic Dignity, is "to use openness to create more openness without provoking reactionary forces." Many are still very wary of the old bureaucracy and conservative bu-

reaucrats resistant to change. Some even spoke of the danger of civil war.

Democratic Perestroika is a club formed by a new generation of social scientists. They hope to produce alternatives to one-party monopoly socialism, which, according to them, is "not socialism at all." Democratic socialism is the movement they want to build. Gorbachev's pluralism isn't enough, they say, and the concentration of power in one man should give way to mechanisms of control from below.

"*Perestroika* must not be ruled by one man," said a club member. Another favored "real socialism" and the "greening of civil society in Moscow." There was a humorous moment when one member of the group called for a "fourth revolution—a peaceful revolution." He was interrupted by another who pleaded, "Please, no, say *evolution*. There have been enough revolutions in this country."

We quickly saw the political differences between various groups. One observer described the spectrum between traditionalists, liberals, democratic socialists, and new leftists. But American-style political labels and categories really don't fit here, in a country with such an entirely different history and experience.

For example, the capitalist-socialist debate doesn't really exist in the Soviet Union, though the words are used in political conversations. Those realities and choices are simply not part of people's situations.

The only system that the Soviet people know is the one that has failed. Gorbachev's bold experiment in reform comes not because of U.S. strength, as Ronald Reagan has claimed, but rather because the new Russian leader had no choice. The totalitarian and stagnant system that many of the people we met describe as "70 years of terror" simply could be sustained no longer. In this unitary state, creativity had been made illegal and continued political repression made necessary social progress impossible.

To conceive of "socialism" apart from their experience of it is more than many we spoke with can imagine. It is natural for many Soviets to look to the West for alternatives, even though they have never been there or read a foreign language newspaper. The West is simply the only alternative to their own system that they know.

Among the dissidents, we often found a mirror image of the historical tendency of American radicals to idealize the Soviet Union or other socialist revolutions as preferable alternatives to U.S. injustice and violence. After awhile, we realized that when many dissidents spoke of "capitalism" or the "free market," they were referring more to the political system of pluralism they imagined in the West than to anything else.

ONE OF THE MOST strongly pro-West groups is the Democratic Union. One irony is that its members are perhaps the most activist, regularly committing civil disobedience and going to jail. We had interesting conversations comparing the conditions of Soviet prisons with the U.S. jails some of us have known. Their analysis of Gorbachev's reforms is the most negative, and their demands the most radical. Utilizing quite provocative and confrontational tactics, they are in continual conflict with the authorities.

Some of our most interesting discussions were with veteran human rights activists like Lev Timofeyev, an economist, journalist, and recently released political prisoner, who is now with Press Club Glasnost, a civil rights coalition. Related to Helsinki Watch, the club is a sort of Soviet ACLU (American

Day by day, the process of democratization is harder and harder to reverse," Timofeyev said.

Civil Liberties Union) working in defense of human rights and political prisoners. He confirmed the fact that many political prisoners had been released, and it was from Timofeyev that I learned that an imprisoned Russian Orthodox priest I came to ask about was soon to be set free.

"Day by day, the process of democratization is harder and harder to reverse," Timofeyev said. "I'm an optimist. The powers of resistance have less and less chance of going back." But he is also cautious in pointing out that the resistance to change is very great, and, therefore, change should be made very carefully.

Like others we spoke to, this experienced political observer is concerned about the dangers of instability. He mentioned the realities of nuclear power stations, bandits, and a political underground of reactionary forces that others likened to a Soviet mafia. But any democratization of "hard and official structures" is useful, according to Timofeyev.

When asked "What kind of society do you want?" Timofeyev's answer was unlike the theoretical visions we had heard from many dissidents. In tempered realism, he replied, "No, I want to be active in this society....We cannot predict the development of history ....I was surprised by how fast *perestroika* came."

A fascinating discussion developed with Timofeyev after he expressed the view that any interference with the free market was incompatible with democracy. He cited Milton Friedman, the ultraconservative economist from the University of Chicago.

When it was clear that he wanted to discuss the matter, I described the dynamics of the free market in the area of housing and their consequences for the poor in inner-city Washington, D.C. That was terrible, said Timofeyev, who recommended that the government make provision for low-income housing. When we pointed out that such proposals often draw the accusation of "socialism" by the free-market economists he admires, the human rights activist frowned. "Well, then, I support that kind of socialism." It was yet another example of how the terms and language of debate in the United States cannot be superimposed on the political dialogue in the Soviet Union.

Sergei Grigoryants, editor of *Glasnost* magazine, provides the perspective of the independent movements in the Soviet Republics, whose rapid growth and emerging militancy add yet another explosive element in an already volatile political crucible. After many days of hearing so many varied and conflicting assessments of the political situation, I became convinced of Grigoryants' assertion that "the organization of democratic initiatives is the only real hope for changing the country."

The role of Gorbachev himself is one of the greatest ironies. The method he has chosen to democratize his country requires the consolidation of more and more power in himself. Some say that is the only way it could have happened, while others contend it is the ultimate contradiction that could become the most formidable obstacle to true political democracy. "Democracy will have come when Gorbachev himself can be criticized," one dissident said to us.

The official line now is that Lenin was a true socialist and so is Gorbachev. Every leader in between "distorted" true socialism. Such a simplistic and self-serving analysis relegates more than 60 years of the 70-year experiment to the period of distortion. More important, it fails to acknowledge the roots of Stalinism that were already present in Leninism. And it does not allow for a climate in which the policies and practices of Gorbachev the reformer can come under real democratic scrutiny.

While there is undeniably much more cultural and political space now in the Soviet Union, the economy remains largely untouched by the reforms thus far. Unless that problem is resolved, it may prove to be the Achilles' heel of *perestroika*, and Gorbachev knows it.

However, there is another more troubling political dilemma just under the surface of every conversation. A basic contradiction remains. How can democratization really take place on the foundations of a system

that is essentially undemocratic? Before the 1917 Revolution, there was czarist Russia, which means that no popular democratic tradition really exists in the Soviet Union. Upon what will a democratic future be built?

THE FIRST NIGHT we arrived, even jet lag couldn't keep a few of us from a walk to Red Square. We entered through the high-arched gate and made our way up a steep cobblestone walkway to the most famous public place in the Soviet Union. Finally we reached the top and saw one of the most spectacular sights any of us had ever seen. The breathtaking expanse, brightly illuminated, quickly roused us from our travel-induced stupor.

On the left is displayed an unbroken line of huge and dramatically colored flags, and they were rippling in the cool night breeze. On the right is the massive Kremlin Wall, standing behind the impressive starkness of Lenin's tomb and the enormous reviewing stands, where communist officials watch hundreds of tanks thunder through the endless expanse of Red Square on important political occasions. We learned later that we had arrived on "Constitution Day," and the square was all decked out and lit up for the celebration.

But it was something at the far end of Red Square that caught my eye, almost as if everything else simply led up to it. We quietly approached and felt almost overtaken with the beautifully colored onion domes of St. Basil's Church, reflecting almost mystically in the night's illumination. It seemed as though everything else in the square pointed to this Russian Orthodox church that had been closed by the revolution and made into a museum.

Later in the week we visited the Kremlin. On the inside, the Kremlin is filled with churches. The irony of that never left me during the entire trip. Most of the inner sanctums of Soviet political power are off-limits to the long lines of tourists that daily stream into this old fortress that has become the worldwide symbol of communist power. But inside the Kremlin, what the people are doing is viewing religious icons in Russian churches.

Beautifully painted representations of Christ, Mary, the disciples, and saints—the icons are much more than a principal Russian art form to the millions of Orthodox Christians and anonymous believers who revere them as sacred objects of worship and devotion. Some people just stand and meditate for a long time, and the atmosphere of prayer is clearly discernible—inside the Kremlin.

The churches themselves are wonderful to behold, and there are five of them within the Kremlin walls. They have survived the 70 years of atheistic propaganda and persecution, and it almost seems as though these churches and all the extraordinary faces in their icons are keeping a careful eye on their communist adversaries, rather than the other way around.

The Russian Christians have suffered grievously, especially during the terrible Stalin years. It is said that most active Christians were martyred or sent to prison. I met with Christians who had known the pain and purging of persecution.

ZOYA KRAKHMALNIKOVA and her husband, Felix Svetov, are ex-political prisoners recently released from exile. Their only crime was their faith. Both are writers, and she was the editor of a religious journal named *Hope*. Zoya spent five years in prison before being exiled to Siberia where, eventually, she was joined by Felix, after he too was released from prison and sent into exile.

Democracy will have come when Gorbachev himself can be criticized," one dissident said to us.

It was a "mystical experience" that led to her conversion from atheism. The magazine she edited concerned itself with spirituality and theology, but that was enough to put her in jail. During Zoya's prison years, it was her "thirst for Christ" that enabled her to survive. The KGB tried repeatedly to break her through interrogation and intimidation, but she refused to submit to their demands. She says that she "really experienced hell" but learned that "only a strong faith can save us—a faith that goes until the very end."

Today, Zoya believes that Christians are "rather taken with the comforts of life." She thinks the problem in the West is just as great because "Christianity has become a comfortable way of life—well-established, rich, and safe." There is a powerful fervency and determination about this woman. She outlasted her persecutors, and it's easy to see why.

At the same time, Zoya possesses a very gentle spirit and a mature faith that has been tested and purified. Her piety is very natural and real. "Christianity is madness," Zoya said. "It is the madness of the cross. Only by returning to the true source of Christianity is there hope." She firmly believes that the persecution the Russian church has lived through can be a true gift and grace to the world.

Epiphany Church is the "largest working Russian Orthodox Church," according to the tour book. I wondered what a "working" church is, compared with one that doesn't work. A friend of mine knows a priest there, so I went on my first Sunday morning in Moscow. A number of our delegation came along.

I have never seen anything like it in my life. The inside of the church is absolutely radiant, with gold-colored walls literally covered with icons. The smell of incense curled through the air, while wonderful music wafted up to the brilliantly crafted ceilings. It actually sounded like the singing of angels, so when I couldn't see the choir, I wasn't surprised.

It was standing room only in the church, and that is because everyone stands all through the Orthodox services, which typically last at least two to three hours and are held at various times throughout the day—every day. As I had often heard about the Russian churches, this one was very full.

Men were there, along with some families, and everyone says that the number of young people is increasing. However, it was the women who made the lasting impression on me. They appear to be simple women, even poor, working-class, and peasant mothers who look and dress the same way they have for decades.

At one point in the service, a "babushka," as these women are often called, was having difficulty getting through the crowd of worshipers to where she wanted to light her candle. She poked my companion, Adam Hochschild from *Mother Jones* magazine, handed him her candle, and pointed to the place he should take it. Adam gracefully weaved through the worshiping throng to the candle stand of flickering hopes and prayers, where he graciously completed his assignment.

ALEXI BYTSHKOV IS pastor of the Moscow Baptist Church and president of the Union of Evangelical Christians. Proudly displayed on his office wall is a large, framed photograph of Billy Graham delivering a sermon in the church on the occasion of its 100th anniversary. Bytshkov is a respected Russian church leader who believes that *perestroika* may be ushering in a new era of church-state relations in the Soviet Union.

The liberalization extends to the churches, according to the Baptist pastor, and his church is now allowed a freedom to do things hardly imagined possible just a few years ago. The Baptists are now holding open-air meetings in Moscow. He reported a great interest in church teaching, music, and literature. Formal dialogues and debates are occurring between students on the meaning of being a believer. He said many are "thirsty and eager to hear."

For the first time, they now have a great supply of Bibles. From the Scandinavian churches have come 150,000 Bibles, in Russian and with commentaries. On the day before, 50,000 had arrived from Finland. The Baptist World Alliance has sent 180,000 Bibles and hymnals, and more seem to be coming all the time. Before *perestroika*, only a small number were allowed. "The Bible is a great treasure for us," said Bytshkov, and he told me the story of how his old family Bible was carefully passed down from generation to generation.

When the revolution came, the church

was completely shut out of all the social services it had carried on for many years; from then on, only the state would be needed, was what church people were told. Now that is changing. In a dramatic turn of events, Christians are being welcomed back into social service by the communist state.

Bytshkov told the story of a government official addressing a group of Baptists who were volunteering at a state hospital. "I never thought that I, as an atheistic scientist, would be standing before Baptists to say thank you for your help. We provide the chemistry, and you provide the love."

Children's education, once strictly forbidden, is becoming more possible again. Much of the new church activity is still illegal, but the authorities are "indulgent" now. New "freedom of conscience" provisions are being drafted to cover all groups, including the churches. The Baptists are even part of the process of writing the sections which apply to them. Their three most basic concerns are evangelism, education, and unity; and they believe that progress is being made on all three fronts.

There is still tension between "official" churches, like Bytshkov's, and the "unregistered" churches. The historical animosity between the Orthodox Church and the rest of the churches is not yet gone. However, a more ecumenical spirit seems to exist now, and most feel that *perestroika* is part of the reason for it. The churches need always to be reminded of a statement made to me by Alexi Bytshkov: "The real ecumenical movement started in Stalin's camps."

MY LAST MEETING proved to be one of the most memorable. With map in hand, I walked, took a bus, and walked some more, only to find myself lost in a vast maze of apartment complexes without a translator. After an hour's search, I found Andrei and Yelena Bessmertny. I was soon glad I did.

They are a young married couple, both 37 years old, with a 13-year-old daughter. Both had adult conversions to the Christian faith after rising through professional and party ranks like many bright Soviet young people. He works in a film institute, and she in a publishing house.

They are very open people, exuding both an active faith and a creative spirit. Andrei and Yelena began to tell me of the independent lay movement in which they are deeply involved. The movement is made up of small cell groups that meet in homes and apartments for Bible study, prayer, discussion, and support. Priests are involved, but not in a hierarchical way, and the heart of the movement is lay people. These two young Russian Christians displayed a far more ecumenical spirit than I had found elsewhere.

The more I heard, the more I recognized what I was encountering. They spoke of spontaneity being the mark of the Holy Spirit and of a movement of faith that came not from above, but from below. I tentatively asked them, "Have you heard of the term 'base community?'" Yes, they replied excitedly, but they confessed to not knowing much about it. However, they thought it was something like their groups. I told them of such communities in Brazil, the Philippines, Central America, and the United States. Yes, they had heard some things about these events, and it felt very familiar to them.

Andrei and Yelena Bessmertny

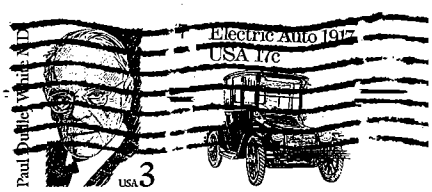
I began to describe characteristics of base communities around the world, and Andrei and Yelena responded to each with whether it fit their experience or not. It was amazing. At almost every point, their experience rang true to that of the base communities. We spoke of participation, organization, relationship to the church, the roles of priests and laity, the role of women, the place of the Bible and prayer, identity with the poor, distrust of power, tension with the state, rejection of war, desire for peace, commitment to renewal.

They wanted to know more, and so did I. I told them about Sojourners, and they told me the history of their movement that now numbers in the thousands in cities across the Soviet Union. I had found a base community movement in the Russian Orthodox Church. Our situations, experiences, and ways of looking at the world were quite different; yet, the more we talked, the more it seemed we had in common. When our time was up, we all three sensed that while our first conversation was over, our dialogue had just begun.

I came home tired but strangely refreshed. The trip taught me again that our God is a God of surprises. No circumstance of oppression or situation of hopelessness is as bleak as it sometimes seems. God, in the many forms of faith and the human spirit, continues to break through, open things up once more, and turn the world upside down. That was the promise at the beginning, and as Dorothy Day (who happened to love all things Russian) was apt to say, "It's still going on." □

The following is quoted from "The Long-legged House" by Wendell Berry. (Recollected Essays 1965-1980, p. 71. North Point Press, Berkeley CA. 1981):

"The most important learning, that of experience, can be neither summoned nor sought out. The most worthy knowledge cannot be acquired by what is known as study—though that is necessary, and has its use. It comes in its own good time and in its own way to the man who will go where it lives, and wait, and be ready, and watch. Hurry is beside the point, useless, an obstruction. The thing is to be attentively present. To sit and wait is as important as to move. Patience is as valuable as industry. What is to be known is always there. When it reveals itself to you, or when you come upon it, it is by chance. The only condition is your being there and being watchful."



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