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EUROPE TRIP REPORT

LONDON - PARIS - GENEVA - BERLIN (EAST

AND WEST) - MOSCOW - BUCHAREST - SOFIA

- ATHENS (and the island of SPETSAL)

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

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June 27 -- July 28, 1978  
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TO: Avery Post, President of the United Church of Christ  
in the U.S.A.

COPIES: David Stowe, Executive Vice-President of the United  
Church Board for World Ministries; UCBWM Officers and  
Executive Staff; and Related Bodies

FROM: Howard Schomer, UCBWM Secretary for Europe/World Issues.

DATE: July 28, 1978 in Spetsai, Greece.

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## FOREWORD

For two evident reasons, this account cannot follow the usual model of a UCBWM staff member's short report to the President of the United Church of Christ on a recent overseas journey. You yourself led our three-man delegation to most of the European capitals visited, and need no summary outline of the usual type. Moreover, the whole trip sought to explore the present state of our UCC relationships with some of our principal European sister churches in the World Council of Churches family, and to lay the basis for closer future relationships.

This detailed record is intended to assist all those in the United Church of Christ, or the co-operative bodies of which it is a part, who bear special responsibility for making such interchurch relationships stronger in the months and years ahead.

No individuals will be mentioned by name in the body of this report. A broad array of foreign names unfamiliar to most of the intended readers would probably discourage the rapid assimilation of the substantial data and ideas. Furthermore, no one other than the author should be in any degree responsible for the story here told and interpreted. A list of the main partners to the dialogue, country by country, is however appended for convenience of follow up.

The geographic order of the report follows that of our actual travels, rather than the West - to - East movement suggested in the title.

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THE BERLINS

The Germanies have been two separated lands for 33 years, and the Wall dividing the two Berlins - part of the visible barrier that runs from the Baltic to the Mediterranean - is ominously real. Nevertheless, the Evangelical Church of the Union, our close sister church, continues to maintain that it is one church, autonomously organized in two regions, the Federal German Republic and the German Democratic Republic. It is remarkable that West German church representatives are invited to meetings of the East German ECU (initials for the Evangelical Church of the Union) Ecumenical Affairs Committee, and vice versa. While in theory, the relationship of the two halves of the ECU constitutes but one of the many ecumenical relationships in which each is involved, it seems clear that, in rough analogy to the American-British tie, the connection between the ECU-West and the ECU-East is a very "special relationship". As both explore with theological thoroughness their eventual public recognition that they are, de facto, in a single fellowship of pulpit and communion table with other United Churches in other lands, as they continue to be with each other, and especially with the United Church of Christ in the U.S.A., their deep longing to be part of a meaningful, non-political, chasm-spanning spiritual community is most evident.

Among the highlights of our East German visit was the three-day session of the ECU Synod, which is convened only every five years. This brings together the heads of the five historic regional churches and about 75 other top church officials, mostly staff, many lay, a number women. They comprise the eminent professional leadership of some 6-7 million East German United Church people, served by more than 30,000 church employees of many categories. This is the 33rd year of ECU life in a national society officially committed to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, and which tirelessly teaches materialism and atheism.

The ECU also lives in a network of connections with the three Lutheran regional churches of East Germany, with their 5-6 million members, forming with them since 1969 the Federation (Bund) of Evangelical Churches in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). I think the UCC is privileged to be loved and trusted by so many Protestants in East Germany, who are bearing their Christian witness wisely and faithfully within a society which eagerly anticipates the demise of all churches.

At the ECU Synod, there was a long theological discussion centered on what is called "Barmen III". This is the third thesis of the famous Barmen Confession developed by Karl Barth and the German Confessing Church Movement at the height of its struggle with Nazism. This paragraph still says with effective eloquence that the church knows only one Lord and Master, and must faithfully adhere to His command no matter what earthly lords and

masters may say. In a near-totalitarian society, the Synod wrestled with how to make this thesis applicable today. For example, the GDR government has announced the introduction of military education in the high-school curriculum beginning September. All of the churches in the Federation have decided to protest this innovation. In their situation, this is an unprecedented act of resistance to the powers that be.

The Deputy Secretary of the GDR Office of Religious Affairs rather surprised the Synod, as well as the ecumenical visitors, by inviting the Synod's Executive Council and the foreign guests to a Saturday reception at 9:15 AM in that rebuilt Renaissance architectural gem, the Berlin City Hall (the Rote Rathaus), or more precisely, in the Rathaus Ratskeller. Such a gesture had never been made to an EKV Synod before, and the bishop who chairs the Executive Council told me that the reception would last "at most thirty to forty-five minutes." But when we entered the Ratskeller, we found a sumptuous breakfast most formally spread before us, and four top members of the State Office on hand, as well as the Deputy Burgermeister of Berlin, a woman, who made the first speech. Only some of the foreign guests, and all of the Executive Council, were up to consuming the many inches of sausage at the center of this unexpected, second breakfast, but all of us rose to the challenge of the ritualistic series of cognac toasts in spite of the hour.

But there was more to this affair than the embrace of churchmen and churchwomen by Marxist officials. After the UCC President's carefully chosen words of appreciation for this hospitable occasion, spoken in the name of all the guests from abroad, the Deputy Secretary encouraged questions and comment from the whole gathering. I think we should register as a possible new phase of communist appraisal of the obviously non-communist institution in its midst - the church in the whole socialist world - his concluding remarks: "As Marxist-Leninists in a socialist society, building the communist society of the future in which we believe churches will disappear, we recognize that Christians and churches are a fact of life today. Indeed, citizens who are Christians are an important part of the production force which is developing our nation, and the churches are helping in building our socialist society. This is why we consider it normal to allocate some State funds for the support of theological chairs and institutions in our universities: church people have helped create these funds by their labor in State enterprises. You know, while Communists are certain that religion and churches are not forever, nobody knows how long there will in fact be Christians and churches in our midst. As long as there are, they are guaranteed by our Constitution equal treatment under the law, and freedom for their worship activities."

While this formula seems to provide a modus vivendi under which the East German churches can carry on, they are too Protestant to define "worship activities" as services held within temple walls. They resist every State pressure that might hasten

their prescribed demise. With prudence, they even try to contribute to public thinking on public issues. For example, the Federation's recent pastoral letter opposing the introduction of basic military theory into the high-school curriculum, with optional participation in summer camp-training, has obviously embarrassed the government. The Deputy-Secretary avoided any discussion of this delicate subject. We saw that, with their memories of militarism, and experience of dictatorship, our GDR colleagues fear that young people who do not "volunteer" for the summer drill sessions will eventually find themselves disadvantaged for university admission or job promotion.

For us, the truth evident in all this about church life in East Germany is that our sister churches there may be cabined and confined, but they are authentic churches led by freely-chosen bishops and presidents. Such leaders expect no miraculous deliverance from dictatorship for their people or their churches, but they are committed to a centimeter-by-centimeter struggle for the full freedom of church witness and service, and for the promotion of the whole nation's civil liberties and rights.

To take a 15-minute elevated train ride from the Berlin which is the capital of the German Democratic Republic to the other Berlin which is only the state capital of one of the Federal German Republic states, as we did on a bright Sunday morning, is to move from one form of church struggle to another. We had already taken part in wide-ranging theological and ecclesiastical discussion with the bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg (West), his main staff colleagues, and some other West German church leaders a few days earlier. Now we were fortunate in being a part of the Berlin mini-Kirchentag, called the "Summer Church", an innovation of the new bishop, held in the beautiful green expanses of the big parks surrounding the city Convention Hall. More than 1.7 million Berliners belong to this ancient "Volkskirche" which, with its many educational and welfare institutions employs some 50,000 people. But the average Sunday service is attended by but 1% of the members, although they belong to a parish and voluntarily pay their church taxes, a percentage on all income taxes, both individual and corporate. If the church in East Germany must struggle to maintain a relevant Christian witness amidst political materialism and ideological secularism, the church in West Berlin and all of West Germany must do so amidst the economic materialism and hedonistic secularism of a prosperity never before known by the German masses.

This "Summer Church", very much like Boston's cultural event, the "Summer Thing", was a lot of fun for all ages. Musical groups, dancing groups, athletic groups, talk shows, platform speeches, all culminating in a solemn worship service, with moving, fresh liturgical prayers, and brass bands! The main statements, by the UCC president and the bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg, lifted the spirits of several thousand people in this outdoor congregation, by their very human and poetic styles.

I found my part, a German-language interview on the UCC and various critical "world issues", a bit much. The contrast with church life beyond the nearby Wall could hardly have been greater than when the Burgermeister of West Berlin, in his words of greeting at the great worship service, chose to read a plain, sober statement of his personal Christian commitment and faith.

The Berlins -- what a vivid binocular introduction to the strangely different vocations - the destinies -- of our fellow Christians in the two halves of Europe today!



A strange place to celebrate the Fourth of July - even with the U.S. Ambassador's gracious invitation to an embassy reception for the whole diplomatic community and representatives of the Soviet politbureau! Our Moscow business was of course quite other, but this reception led to a disturbing and challenging experience. We saw the seven Pentecostalist farm people from Siberia who had sought refuge in the crowded waiting-room of the Consulate ten days earlier - and who were deeply anxious about the eighth, a 16-year-old son who alone had been caught by the Soviet sentinels before the embassy doors, and of whose fate no information at all could be obtained. I was glad that you shook the old father's hand, expressing Christian concern to the two families, through an interpreter, although there was nothing we could do to obtain the Soviet exit permits which are their objective. But we tried to be helpful when an embassy official spoke of the annoyance their sit-in was causing at the moment of great sensitivity in USSR-USA negotiations about critical world issues. It brought to mind having been called to another U.S. embassy on an even more memorable occasion, in Budapest in 1957, when there were but four U.S. citizens on Hungarian soil, and finding that our Head of Mission there had a church refugee as guest - Cardinal Mindzentzy. He was entertained by that embassy until his exit permit was finally granted nearly sixteen years later. I strongly urged that the U.S. Government now give clear demonstration that you do not have to be an aristocratic cardinal to be sure of secure refuge on U.S. embassy grounds.



It is obvious that our government cannot secure these peasant Pentecostals the USSR exit permits they seek because of their conscientious objections to military service and their conscientious denials of the right of their government to prohibit the religious education of their children or to compel them to attend atheistic public schools. The embassy can do nothing about their refusal to bow to the Soviet regulation banning admission into church membership of those under 18. I argued, however, that the United States should be prepared to shelter them until their own government honors its commitment under the Helsinki Accords to freedom of emigration for all citizens.

The top leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church extended our little delegation great courtesy. In full regalia the arch-bishop who serves the Patriarch of Moscow as his Secretary for Foreign Relations, flanked by the suffragan Bishop of Moscow and the lay expert who heads many of the Church of Russia's delegations to international conferences on social issues, received us in state in the 18th century salon of the Foreign Affairs Department for two hours of conversation. None of us will ever forget the exemplary calm of the whole party when a loud explosion occurred at the outset of the session, just as you were introducing David Stowe, with chips of frosted glass landing in the open teapot, the tray of sweets, our still empty cups, and on our persons. I could not resist asking whether this explosion was a Molotov cocktail, although we all quickly noted that it was but the dramatic death of one of the many electric bulbs in the crystal chandeliers above us.

The table reset, the exchange of toasts and greetings in Russian ceremonial style necessarily followed, and meandered into substantive inter-church and theological discussion. The underlying story was that an old, closed, state church had been steadily opening its heart to fellow Christians, inside Russia and around the world, ever since its reception into the World Council of Churches at the Third Assembly in New Delhi in 1961. We noted that our host had skilfully scheduled the topics to be touched on, with due inclusion of our Christian ministry of peace-making and opposition to certain kinds of arms - those in which it is likely that the USA may have a marginal lead! We noted that, with the time required for interpretation, we ourselves had not managed to put forward many ideas before it was necessary to adjourn to lunch. Our host noted this also, and indicated that this would therefore be a "working-lunch".

If that expression conjured up the image of our familiar "brown bags" at "475" and "287", we were soon disabused. We proceeded in several comfortable cars to a kind of Hall of Mirrors on an upper floor of a downtown restaurant-club with visibly different hospitality levels. There was a queue on the sidewalk waiting to enter the busy street-level restaurant. We were received upstairs in a manner hardly known in New York's best private clubs. By now the party had doubled and around the great table a superb meal took

major attention for the next couple of hours. Again, through our competent interpreter (the same who had escorted and assisted me 17 years earlier!), we sought to exchange ideas about the ecumenical movement, the church's teaching and missionary task, the widening interreligious dialogue of our times, the witness of the church in our respective societies. It was like an elaborate minuet, in which each partner's movement is rather distinct from the other's, but in this case never quite corresponding. We had the feeling that if everything our hosts said in either the morning or afternoon phase of our conversation were stated in the hearing of a Soviet state official, it would have occasioned no disturbance, for none of the push-and-tug of the church-state relationship in East Germany was ever audible.

Therefore we asked if we might have an opportunity to meet with someone from the official Soviet Council on Religious Affairs, and our church hosts arranged for us to call on the head of the Department of Foreign and Ecumenical Relations at the end of the afternoon. This proved to be a fascinating hour, but also very different from the official reception in East Germany. This ranking officer received us in a plain little dry-as-dust civil servant's cubicle, spoke with light irony of how much better staffed and housed was his church counterpart, our host of the morning, and flatly told us that in the matter of church-state relationships, we should never, "like the French, go around telling other people their coffee is no good!"

This "commissar" talked at great length, interpreting the constitutional provision that "separates church from state and school from church" as a great act of liberation. The freedom referred to turned out to be absolute equality of all registered religions before the law. This in turn meant freedom of worship within the church walls, but not of religious instruction of those under 18, except within their own families. It also meant that groups which either refused to apply for registration or were refused such registration, e.g., the Pentecostalist branch from which those sit-inners at the U.S. embassy came, or the Reform Baptists whose leaders are in prison, had no such religious rights at all.

To crown the snow job so generously provided, this official referred with pleasure to the new printing of the Bible, about 100,000 copies, which the State had done for the church in the 1970's. He bluntly reminded us that paper, presses, and printers all belong to the State, and so the only way the church could get more Bibles was through the generosity of the non-believing State. Then he proceeded to take an example of the State printing from a closed cabinet to present it as a gift from the Soviet government! Obviously, this was a fine though unrequested demonstration of reverse lend-lease, a Bible movement the opposite direction from most of those that cross Soviet borders! From other sources we learned that this State printed Russian Bible cannot be found on sale anywhere in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet official then told us about the new constitution which had just been ratified and which does modify to some extent the provisions regarding freedom of religion. Specifically, the new constitution has changed the stipulation of the 1929 constitution that "there is to be freedom of religions worship and freedom of anti-religious propaganda." That is a very unequal pairing! The revision states simply: "There is to be freedom of religious belief and of unbelief." It is possible that there is a slow, hardly-perceptible loosening of some of the state constraints on religion. This is what he suggested to us, within the unchanging framework of an assumption of total state ownership and control of all the resources of life.

Our government host made much of the 1976 "Moscow World Assembly of Religious Workers for Justice and Peace", an inter-religious meeting initiated by the Church of Russia, and involving invitations and plane tickets for some 600 selected persons from all religions and continents. He hailed this as "unprecedented". I tried without success to set up a second conversation with him on this subject alone. As a member of the international Board of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, which antedates this 1976 Moscow venture by ten years, and at each of whose assemblies the Church of Russia has sent a full delegation (as observers rather than delegates), but to which he made no reference, as he repeatedly called the Moscow international interreligious meeting "the first in the history of the world", I would like to have probed the reasons for this alteration of fact, or to have asked why no member of the WCRP international Board of some 30 members was invited to the Moscow meeting. Incidentally, the Russian lay expert had told me that he would see me in New York in September as the WCRP international Preparatory Committee plans that body's 3rd World Assembly!

Our Orthodox hosts did several other much-appreciated things for us. They made an appointment with national staff leaders of the Evangelical Christian and Baptist Union, to which body we had written months before but without answer. In the plain surroundings of their headquarters (which gave Dave home-sickness for 14 Beacon Street), we met with the vice-presidents - one for the Baptists, one for the Evangelicals, and one for the Pentecostals, plus their publications director. With simple tea and no toasts, we covered much the same ground as with the Orthodox leadership, but more concisely and less subtly. Most revealing was the irritation of the leader of this registered section of the Pentecostals when we brought up the plight of the unregistered Pentecostals in the U.S. embassy. "Many call themselves Pentecostalist who are not Pentecostalist at all!" he affirmed with vigor. He was evidently not about to call upon those unfortunate people, or to seek to help them in any way. The conversation about George Vins and the Reform Baptists disclosed similar antipathies. We left feeling that the 5,000 Baptists in Moscow's only recognized Baptist Church are like the members of the 40-some Orthodox churches in the Metropolitan area in one respect: both had the limited security of a kind of unnegotiated, or dictated, concordat regulating licit church behaviour and unilaterally establishing a rigid framework of church-state relationships. Within these limitations, high and low churchmen alike were doubtless doing their best, and boat-rockers were as unwelcome in one community as the other.

All parties encountered in our Moscow wanderings concurred with the reports we had heard before leaving the States - reports of a wave of spiritual awakening and renewal, inside and beyond the parishes and congregations. But clearly these words hold different meanings for different sectors of the religious and the national community. When we visited "the Orthodox Vatican" some 50 miles from Moscow - Zagorsk - it seemed to mean the doubling of the enrollment in the three remaining theological faculties. Exactly what this might mean was less than evident to us when, in a private lunch with the professor who is secretary of the faculty, we learned that a major theological discussion of the moment focusses on the question: "Was Christ incarnate in the human nature of Adam before the Fall or that of Adam after the Fall?" - a matter which I regretted you had to confess the United Church of Christ was also not clear about.

We gathered in other circles, less Establishment-oriented, that it meant an intense searching of Scripture and Tradition for the salvation of the nation, and a profound sense of the intimate presence of Christ in their personal weakness and rejection. For still others, of high intellectual standing, it seemed to breed the same superb contempt for all Establishments, and confidence in the ultimate Renaissance of "the Russian Spirit", which we in the States have recently heard in Solzenitsyn's Harvard Address.

The most profound spiritual happening of our whole Europe trip took place in a humble flat, gathered in quiet around a kitchen table in dim yellow light. A number of those present, in their late twenties or early thirties, had become Christians only three or four years ago. After rich sharing of hopes and fears, of possibilities and impossibilities, a pale young scholar who alone had not spoken all evening, quietly addressed the three of us, saying: "this is an historic meeting - a miracle. You are wealthy, independent and strong, we are poor, despised and weak. Yet we are meeting as brothers. Yes, this is a miracle. God must be rejoicing. We speak of persecution. We are glad for your help in our poverty, but we are not only oppressed but also impressive. We are preaching, converting people to the Faith. I am convinced that Russia will return to God!"

The Soviet Union - vaster than both China and the USA together - a mosaic of peoples, cultures and religions. We have spent but a few days in Moscow, mainly among top leaders of the churches, a minority segment of the nation. We have seen within their ranks immense diversity - we have even seen members of the Moscow synagogue leafleting in front of the U.S. embassy reception to testify favorably as to the government's treatment of Soviet Jewry! We have felt the shock waves of the new demonstration-trials of the Helsinki Watch movement. We had the feeling that anyone with whom we talked was under surveillance. We have no summary judgments to utter on the massive and inscrutable phenomenon of religion in the USSR today. But we know that there are Christians and Jews and Muslims there, and church structures which bend and weave but which nevertheless show visible fruits of faith and hope and love.

PARIS

Our flight westward to France was a double homecoming. For we were welcomed at the airport not by an enigmatic technician-interpreter, as in Moscow, but by the president of the French Protestant Federation of Churches. Once again we are in a society very much like our own in that the church is simply the church - freely determining in Christ whether any public policy should be supported or criticized, resisted or targeted for amendment. And it was for me personally a return visit to the land where our family, under assignment of the American Board and the Congregational Christian Service Committee, had lived and worked for nine years after World War II. Because many key posts in French Protestant life are now held by people with whom we had started out in the ministry, and some former students at the College Cevenol bear significant responsibilities in this country, we were helped to get far into the current state of French affairs rather quickly.

At parsonage dinner tables and in walks through the slums with Protestant urban industrial missionaries, worshipping at a communion service in the austere "First Church" of Paris Protestantism, across from the Louvre, we were plunged into the heady mix of Huguenot spiritual and social existence - a minority church - less than 2% of the nation - without a minority complex!

The agenda of topical issues before French Protestantism had, for UCC ears, a familiar ring. The French Protestant Federation, we could see, grouped the mainline Protestant churches-reformed, Lutheran, Evangelical, Baptist - for a common approach to undenominational concerns such as theological colloquia, Scriptural research and promotion of Bible-reading, human rights worldwide and especially civil liberties of foreign workers in France, and the development of a Christian stance on major international, economic and social issues facing the French nation.

But what about the "neo-Protestants", e.g., the Pentecostalist movement? And what about the "super Protestants," i.e., those conservative evangelicals of deep Calvinist tinge who had refused to join the 1938 union that made Reformed, Evangelical, and Methodists into the single Reformed Church of France, in polity a cross between Congregationalism and Presbyterianism and in theology esteeming historic Protestant creeds as testimonies rather than tests - because of its "un-Protestant-like ambiguity"?

The head of the Federation had to leave us after our dinner with his family because of an opportunity that had suddenly surfaced for the first time in the 40 years since the 1938 union. He was invited to participate in an assembly of these "super Protestants", in their spiritual capital in southern France. They were prepared to listen to a presentation of Reformed Church, Protestant Federation, and World Council of Churches views on various items on their own agenda! Would the Pentecostalists eventually offer a parallel opening

"on the left?" Ever since Vatican II, collaboration between the Federation and Roman Catholicism had developed openly on many levels, for Catholic-Protestant co-operation had, in fact but less openly, grown steadily in World War II and its aftermath, constituting one of the pressures that led Pope John to call the Council. But now there was crying need for more ecumenism among the Protestants themselves and it just might be coming.

As in other free societies shaken by change and still more change, the French churches face anew the pastoral and moral issues posed by shifting sexual mores. Studies had been made, synodical statements fashioned, and an exchange with the UCC in this domain was welcomed.

In the struggle against the sale of arms to South Africa, French Protestant and Catholic leadership jointly approached the French government, with little evident effect. Dealing with French corporations on this or other matters of social policy not only failed to mobilize Catholics and Protestants together, but also failed to win united Protestant support. Not owning stock in corporations, but having a disproportionate number of business executives and high government officials in their ranks, French Protestants - in spite of affirmative stands by church leaders - tended to feel that the World Council of Churches and the U.S. churches were wrong to act as institutions in pressuring corporations: this should be done by individual Christians in business and government (what ever happened to Walter Judd?). The French churches' greatest impact in the public area was clearly their highly competent efforts in behalf of asylum for political prisoners, the reception of many waves of refugees, and the struggle for actual - and not merely theoretical - equality of housing and welfare provisions for France's millions of foreign workers, e.g., North African, Portuguese, and Black African.

The most moving fact of internal Protestant church life seemed to us to be the absolute material solidarity of congregations with congregations and ministers as a corporate body. It seemed obvious to our hosts that stronger churches bear a large part of the current expenses of weaker churches, and that all ministers receive the same salary with minor increments for seniority and indemnities for exceptional living costs, wherever they serve, including national headquarters and seminary faculties.

In the Reformed Church of France, for example, the National Synod determines annually the total projected cost of salaries for ministers, regional and national staffs, and theological faculties. This money total is divided by the total number of congregations (more than a thousand), and the resultant figure is declared to be the "cost of a pastoral post". Then in Regional Synods, with due regard for the number of pledging members and congregations that range from 50 to 2,000 members, and for the relative affluence of these members, the "fair share" of each local church is calculated, and it sends this amount to the national treasurer in quarterly installments. (A church like the Oratory of the Louvre, where we wor-

shipped, may enjoy the ministry of but two pastors but pay into the national church treasury for four or five, including this number of shares for the support of regional, national and seminary staffs.) The national treasurer sends every one of these workers their nearly identical monthly salary checks, (salaries comparing well with those of French junior high school teachers), and the operating expenses for their respective offices and schools.

This common pot for the common life of the church seemed so obvious to our hosts that its details emerged only under our almost incredulous questioning. The French are a nation of individualists and none are more passionately individualist than the Huguenots. What testing by fire - that 18th century of ruthless extermination and survival only in the mountain wilds - must underlie this sense of solidarity!

By extrapolation, the same will to hold all church things in common has been extended during this decade to the historic work of the Paris Missionary Society (founded in 1792!) in Africa and the Pacific islands. Now the nearly 30 autonomous churches - from this immense territory plus French Switzerland and France - sit in annual meeting together, determining basic inter-church policies and mutual assistance for this whole francophone area.

This international "Community of Protestant Apostolic Action" has taken over most of the responsibility of the now-dissolved Paris Missionary Society. The interpretative, recruitment and fund-raising functions have been placed in a new "French Protestant Department of Mission." The General Secretary told us that these two new structures were not models for others -- they had grown out of the peculiar French missionary experience within the sprawling old French Empire and with relatively few partnership arrangements with missions of other denominations, national backgrounds and languages. It struck us as a creative response of an heroic missionary-minded minority church, with more than 60 missionaries serving overseas to the end of an empire and the birth of multilateralism. We wondered what new response our UCC and UCBWM might be making to the same challenge, in our much more complex overseas endeavors.

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GENEVA

The General Secretary of the World Council of Churches and a score of his principal colleagues, many just back in Geneva from important travels and meetings, must have set aside much urgent business to offer you and the head of the Reformed Church in America, as new members of the WCC Central Committee, an extraordinary intensive course on the state and the strivings of the Council today. David Stowe and I, welcomed back as "old boys", greatly benefited from this carefully planned orientation and update.

Section by section, the heads of all the units and sub-units sat with us for unhurried and candid presentations of their particular phase of the great ecumenical endeavor, their goals, accomplishments and problems. My own sentiment, at the end of this intensive course, could be expressed: "If the world Council's reach does not exceed its grasp, what's a heaven for?"

- Faith and Order preparing to square the circle at Bangalore soon;
- Church and Society grappling with science, technology and human values at M.I.T. next year;
- the Commission on International Affairs struggling to work up a theodicy for Third World and socialist misdeeds that First World churches can swallow even as they are pressed to struggle against Western aggressivity and power;
- the Program to Combat Racism providing a unitive force in WCC life since Third World, Second World, and First World churches (except some blunt-spoken German churchmen) can almost all agree to pronounce big anathemas and allocate modest staff time and funds whenever South African apartheid is mentioned;
- the continuing struggle to find and promote economic and social development projects that are genuinely participatory and genuinely viable;
- the massive church aid for indigenous welfare, relief and church development programs that incarnate the spirit of the ecumenical diakonia;
- the gradual recovery of a balance between the ideological anti-business forces and the pragmatic use-business forces in the WCC constituency as the "Study Action Programme on Transnational Corporations" takes form;
- the identity crisis of all segments of the WCC trying to serve and give voice to the "under-30's";
- the similar struggle of sub-units seeking to achieve ecumenical consensus and action on educational and women's concerns in a variegated world society;
- a feeling that in World Mission and Evangelism the permanent questions posed by the universalistic claims of Christianity in a world of many religions, rather than such passing political cliches as "missionary moratorium" are the order-of-the-day;
- a gratifying atmosphere of return-from-the-brink at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey with well-matched complementary abilities in the leadership team, and overflow conferences, seminars and courses.



All this, we could see, was being carried by an executive staff of about 60 but three-quarters of the staff of the pre-Nairobi era. Moreover, the little-mentioned but haunting question hangs over all: with the Swiss franc so strong, with Swiss prices so high, and with Swiss policy forcing the employ of ever-more Swiss support staff and the consequent loss of highly-motivated "volunteers" from constituent churches everywhere, will it be possible to maintain the WCC headquarters in Switzerland indefinitely? Indeed, can this question, with alternative sites in view, be rationally studied, leading to proven conclusions? Or are there so many imponderables and unpredictables involved that rational planning and projection must be renounced as unrealizable, and a decision be based largely on sentiment - and the gambler's instinct.

While few WCC staff seemed inclined to mention this overarching uncertainty, we sensed that for both the individual and the house it is causing an understandable feeling of insecurity. Everybody knows that "there will always be a World Council of Churches", that its establishment in Amsterdam in 1948 is an irreversible fact of Christian history. It would greatly help, however, if large member churches that have not yet geared themselves to carry their fair share of the burden of its cost, e.g., the churches in socialist countries, would now devise ways of so doing.

I am sure that we will not forget, and our UCBWM colleagues should all know, that after the long hours with staff groups at the UCC offices, the General Secretary, his deputy, and quite a number of unit and sub-unit leaders, reserved the evening for us at the Luiz Carlos Weil home, where we were able to have fellowship with staff spouses as well. In the lovely ambience of the Weil-Herrscher hospitality, we were able to enter more deeply into the privilege and the plight of headquarters life and service today.

In earlier WCC years, British and American Congregationalists were certainly disproportionately represented in WCC secretarial positions. Today there is but one continuing UCC member in this body, and one temporary. Perhaps our turn to help locate the unusual gifts needed in such service will come again.

In one of our Geneva conversations, the General Secretary was sharing the dilemma that springs from an ever-growing Agenda and a shrinking WCC budget for administration and headquarters staff. I hazarded the thought that, in setting priorities, the WCC must be seen against the backdrop of its many member churches that employ literally thousands of staff in simple maintenance of their established routines. "Perhaps," I said, "the World Council of Churches is too small an organization to do anything that is not controversial. Perhaps it is called to pare any activities that are merely routine, even as it would any that are merely mediocre." I think I will stand by this rule-of-thumb.

LONDON

This was the first official visit of UCC leaders to the United Reformed Church of England and Wales. Ties between the Congregational Christian Churches and the Congregational Union of England and Wales had been as close as those uniting the Evangelical Synod of North America and the Evangelical Church of the Union in the Germanies. Somehow they have, however, received less nurturing from both sides of the Atlantic as first our union and then theirs took place. We were delighted to find that we and our British hosts were quite of one mind on this matter; the time is ripe to renew and update our ancient ties.

The United Reformed Church came into being 6 years ago, joining the Congregational Union of England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England in organic union. The Congregationalists were upward of 200,000, the Presbyterians were about 100,000. Some 300 Congregational Churches have not entered the new structure. The United Reformed Church, like our UCC, thinks of itself as a uniting church, and is exploring further union possibilities with the tiny Christian (that is, the Disciples) denomination in England. The last Congregational general secretary before the union has spent the past 6 years as Secretary of the interdenominational Commission on Christian Unity - involving the two largest British churches, Anglican and Methodist, as well as the United Reformed Church and a few others. He told us that the morning's news from the Anglican General Synod in session at York was quite encouraging. The Commission's novel approach - a 10-point "covenant" into which participating churches would enter without modifying their present organizations unless and until such became necessary, focused upon the terms of full mutual sacramental and ministerial recognition. York had agreed to pursue this approach further.

On the mission front also, our British hosts showed us solid new creations, and further aspirations. We met with the executives of the Council for World Mission, hearing of a new pattern of relationships between the many autonomous churches issuing from the 170 years labor of the London Missionary Society and the Presbyterian Overseas Missions Committee across the once-great British empire. Like the "Community" successor to the Paris Missionary Society, the central characteristic of the new Council is complete equality of national church votes in a new multi-lateralism. Perhaps it is different from the "Community" in placing less stress on joint-action-through-mission and more emphasis on mutually helpful roles in the co-ordinated worldwide mission activities of the various parts.

On the organization of the United Reformed Church, there is a cognate department, working directly with the multi-national Council in terms of interpretation, promotion, and recruitment. It enjoys equal status with the departments of Christian education, church in society, and stewardship. In this, also, the parallel with the French pattern is visible. Knowing of the many confessional, linguistic,

and national origin lines transected by the old LMS operations, we felt that this new British mission structure might have interesting things to show us in the next few years.

In various forums, the United Reformed Church is already developing fresh liturgical insights and writing new orders of service, examples of which we have brought home. Faced with the increasing absence of youth from church life, it, too, is trying to re-create the whole curriculum of Christian education. We were struck with the experiment that has every level of church school, from small children to adults, dealing with the same Scripture-and-theme on the same day, in ways appropriate to the several ages. It will be interesting to test whether the hoped-for dividend of intra-family discussion of a common issue actually is secured. The materials seemed vivid and down-to-earth. Will they be used?

The budget-and-salary-making process, we discovered, was not unlike that of the French Protestants. In addition, each minister, having been housed in parsonages during his working years, is provided a rental allowance for the house he chooses for his years of retirement. The same picture of low-level material security and of solidarity and equality that characterizes the life of the French clergy seems to mark that of the United Reformed Church clergy today - rather a changeover from earlier Congregational practice which mobilized the limited power of the annual Assembly to recommend minimum support figures to the earnest consideration of the congregations, in whose hands budgeting provisions were traditionally lodged.

Since the 9 Provincial Moderators (there is a name that UCC Conference Ministers might like to weigh) of the URC were just concluding a two-day work session, we were able to lunch with them. We sensed that their chief work-load was easing pastors in-or-out of the 150-200 churches in each of their circuits. They are equipped with certain powers, under URC by-laws, to facilitate their task; e.g.; the Provincial Moderator's approval is required for a pastoral call or departure. The gathering of new churches in the mushrooming industrial areas is their priority mission concern, and this now is almost always done in full inter-denominational fashion, in which the Anglicans participate. The success of this "supra-denominationalism" becomes evident in that some who have joined such new churches have a real identity problem when they move to another locality where the old competitive churches stand side by side.

Not surprisingly, the URC looks to the British Council of Churches to take action in a wide variety of fields where a peculiarly URC enterprise seems unnecessary. Our hosts arranged for us a good session with the BCC General Secretary and several of his departmental colleagues for international affairs, world mission, and community and race relations. The General Secretary said that Britain now numbers more Muslims than Methodists - and the latter are the second-largest Christian body. He sketched the sea-changes the country has undergone or faces, for which many in the nation, he indicated, have been and are totally unprepared. "We face questions

never before raised on these islands," he said, "such as; what does it mean to be 'British'? Are we capable of becoming a multi-racial society?" He then told us of a comprehensive BCC study of "Britain Today and Tomorrow". The scope of this investigation - the first such undertaken since Archbishop William Temple's virtuoso work in the 1940's on Christianity and Social Order involved 150 professionally-qualified people and dealt with a kaleidoscope of task force labors:

1. Britain in a World Setting
2. World Justice and British Economic Priorities
3. Law, Freedom, Justice and Equality
4. Employment and Unemployment
5. Creating Community
6. Violence, Non-violence and Social Change
7. Power and Powerlessness
8. Leadership
9. Education and Society
10. Culture, Morality and Styles of Life
11. The Family-Culture and Morality
12. Good News for Britain Today and Tomorrow

I have taken the space to list the topics involved in this ambitious enterprise because I am prompted by it to wonder if both our NCC and our UCC could learn something from it. Not that the pot-shots which take much of our energy -- social justice, women's movement, world hunger, transnational corporations, human rights, etc. - are not urgently required, but that they remain just that, pot-shots. Could American Christianity, and United States society, be helped by a systematic Christian effort to see our laundry list concerns holistically? What is our news, as Christians-- both the bad and the good-for our nation today and tomorrow?

The BCC study, far from completed, has now given the general public a paperback interim report, pulled together by that same facile writer, Trevor Beeson, a Canon of Westminster Abby who similarly edited for the BCC in 1974 a volume of documents on religious conditions in East Europe, called Discretion and Valor.

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BUCHAREST and CLUJ - NAPOCA.

My visit to Roumania was prompted mainly by the UCC's need to know more about the state of religion in this Latin-socialist country, about the civil rights of its large Hungarian-speaking minority and about potential Roumanian Orthodox interest in increased contact with American Protestantism in general, and our denomination in particular. I was also interested in sensing the basis and extent of the well-known Roumanian foreign policy independence within the Socialist bloc. I had never been in Roumania, and so far as I knew our UCC involvements there had up til now been limited to disaster relief grants, on the one hand, and reports of our Calvin Synod Conference on problems encountered by the Hungarian-speaking minority.

The bishop heading the Romanian Orthodox Church's Department of Foreign Relations, a member of the UCC Executive Committee, cabled to welcome my proposed visit, and assigned the director of the church's ecumenical press office to build a program about my specific church interests - and a car and a driver to facilitate its accomplishment. I met with members of the Orthodox theological faculty, visited the church publishing and printing establishment in Bucharest, and a nunnery and a monastery in the country. I looked in on services in the Cathedral, and a number of parish churches, all in Bucharest. I met the head of the Baptist denomination in his office in Bucharest. Still escorted by the editor, I flew 300 miles to the chief Reformed Church center, Cluj, meeting there with one of the two Reformed bishops, the Lutheran rector, and professors of New Testament and Practical Theology (at the inter-denominational Protestant seminary), and lunched at the university with the editor of the Reformed press. All of the Reformed people I met were Hungarian-speaking Roumanians. As they spoke German or French, I could talk with them directly.

On my arrival I had indicated to my general host, the Orthodox bishop, that while I had often read of a diverse and widespread renewal in the Soviet Union in recent years, I was ignorant as to whether any like movement was underway in Roumania. "If you go around our country asking such a question," he responded, "people won't know what you are talking about. Here the experience is continuity - back to the Age of the Apostles!" He added that, whatever might be the situation elsewhere, in Roumania there had been no closing of churches under socialism, no closing of seminaries, no persecution of the clergy, no diminution of priestly vocation - and a continuing flow of monastic vocations. All of these affirmations became evident to me in the course of my four-day visit.

The massive reality of the Orthodox Churches' multiform presence in Roumania is very impressive. One hears church bells in the capital as well as the countryside. I passed no church edifices that appeared out of service, and saw a few new ones. With ultra-modern printing presses, imported as a gift from the West German Evangelical Churches in return for a cash gift of the Roumanian Orthodox Church to the German-speaking Lutheran Churches of Roumania,

I saw big multi-colored editions rolling out; church almanac , liturgy books, Christian education materials, Bibles.

Distinct from the Soviet situation, here the publishing house is church property. I believe it prints materials in German and Hungarian for the Protestant churches also. Similarly, the land of both the monastery and the nunnery belongs to the church. I was told 20% of Roumania's agricultural land is privately-owned, and nearly everything necessary for the maintenance of these communities is grown on their own property. In addition, the nuns own large modern looms and produce quantities of intricately-designed and embroidered vestments for the churches of the land -- the Roumanian-Orthodox has about 9,000 parishes, (the Hungarian-speaking Reformed Church in Roumania has about 732 parishes and some 700,000 members)-- each church requiring four or five different sets of vestments for the various liturgical seasons and feast-days.

The crowds I joined in the Patriarchal Cathedral and in the St. Artim's parish church in Bucharest participated in the liturgy in many ways. Their adoration was expressed not only by the intensity of their listening and the vigor of their beautiful, spontaneous chants but by frequent "signs of the cross" and, wherever the minimum requisite space could be found, kneeling with forehead touching the floor. I was told that Orthodox ritual and observance so impregnate everyday life for the majority of the population, including communist-party workers, that it remains the normal thing for all babies to be presented for baptism on the eighth day, and for most weddings and funerals to take place in the parish churches.

The distinguished pastor of the more-than-a-century-old Hungarian Reformed Church in the center of Bucharest received me in the parsonage as well as the church house, and showed me the sanctuary. Although the Hungarian-speakers are a small ethnic minority in the capital, I gathered that the handsome church is well-filled at the Sunday services, and that the large parish seminar room has Bible study groups of 30 or more two evenings a week. I saw a string of parishoners waiting to see the pastor - a tall man of aristocratic style, whose theological education had been completed in West Germany.

The same kind of "upper-class" rather than "people's-church" style was noteworthy in Cluj, the big city of Transylvania - one of the two provinces where the Hungarian-speakers are numerous, and the Reformed Church prominent. The Reformed bishop received me in his spacious, historic "palace" - another tall man of imposing presence. It was easy to imagine this Hungarian minority in its century-long role under the Austro-Hungarian monarchy - the Western-style, highly-cultivated ruling class, belonging to the Western church tradition - some Protestant (Reformed or Lutheran) and some Roman Catholic. I could understand that the end of their hegemony and their integration into the majority-led society of the present Roumanian republic would have placed them under the strain of a difficult adaptation even if the republic were not socialist. Yet

no Hungarian-speaker took the opportunity to speak of difficulties, let alone human-rights sufferings such as were mentioned at the 11th General Synod of the UCC. I had direct evidence that outside delegations - contrary to one allegation - were frequently received. Not only were festive photographs to be seen of honorary doctorates being conferred on the President of Princeton Theological Seminary, the Stated Clerk of the UPCUSA and certain West-European Protestant notables, but two French church leaders, a Catholic priest and the Lutheran Dean of the Paris Theological Faculty chanced to be visiting Cluj while I was there. The interdenominational Protestant seminary - Lutheran, Reformed and Unitarian - is the only graduate seminary in the land, granting university-level degrees and operating in two centers - one in the heart of Lutheran country and the other in this Reformed stronghold, Cluj. My Orthodox escort, the editor, was registered here for doctoral studies beginning in September.

When I visited the General Secretary of the Baptists, who with the Pentecostalists constitute a small but growing movement among the Roumanian majority while the Lutheran, Reformed and Unitarians seem rather to be large, well-preserved, and effectively maintained ethnic-minority churches, the Baptist leader told me that his community would again this fall have several students at the Cluj seminary. He noted that the main teacher at the Baptist Bible School in Bucharest had also been educated at Cluj. While the Baptist building was very plain - both the headquarters offices and the meeting-hall for worship - I gathered that the worship and Bible-studies of the Baptists were well-attended all through the week.

The General Secretary had attended Baptist meetings abroad, including the USA, and seemed quite at home in international ecumenical affairs. I believe his church is considering applying for membership in the World Council of Churches. Nevertheless, I had heard of difficulties, and I sensed less ease of relationship with the big churches than that enjoyed by the Lutherans and Reformed. I could well imagine that a younger church movement, appealing to the Roumanian majority rather than historic ethnic enclaves, would be seen by the Orthodox as less acceptable, as inevitably prone to proselytism. I could imagine also that Baptists and Pentecostalists, with their extreme decentralization, would be less acceptable to the government, be much harder to observe and control. I had heard of past problems. Nobody shared any current church-state issues with me.

It is an unfortunate fact that Protestants in East Europe, as at home, are harder to catch in the act of worship than are other Christians, Catholic or Orthodox. While the Protestant sanctuaries are classically plain, even denuded, inside, they tend to have all doors locked except for a few announced hours each week. The richly-adorned churches of the Catholic-Orthodox traditions are, of course, open most days most of the time, and both private and corporate acts of devotion are going on much of the time. It is therefore harder to see the evidence of Protestant

fervor and commitment than that of the more liturgical and mystical traditions. But the sheer fact of their tenacious existence as minority movements, the vigor of their self-defence and their evangel-ization, is prime evidence of another kind of faith and piety, harder to come by, perhaps, and surely no less strong. In Roumania, Baptists, Lutherans, Reformed, Pentecostals and Unitarians, as well as Orthodox, have honored places among the country's 14 officially-recognized religious denominations.

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Preparation for this first UCC (or Congregational Christian) visit to the Bulgarian churches since World War II was difficult, and the results were less than satisfactory. The Department of Foreign Relations of the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria had made no response to a letter of early June concerning the visit, and it had seemed prudent not to write in advance to the main Protestant denomination, the Congregational Church - established nearly a century ago by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions - in view of the totally unfounded but very serious charges levied against the leading ministers of that body some years ago, bearing upon their relationship with Western churches.

The Roumanian Orthodox Church Department of Foreign Relations, however, kindly telephoned its Bulgarian counterpart to reconfirm my plane arrival time, and request a hotel reservation in Sofia. A member of that Department's staff met my plane and took me to my hotel - and that was that. During the next 24 hours I received three messages that the Department would be contacting me, and only after long waits at the indicated times did I abandon hope of meeting with representatives of the Orthodox Church. I had to be content with my own itinerary - dropping in on the most centrally-located Orthodox parishes. In one case this was most rewarding: in an ancient but relatively-small basilica fronting on what is today Lenin Square, I chanced to see a moving diaconal activity. The week-day morning liturgy over, a score of the maimed, the halt, and the elderly were being served a generous luncheon-snack right in the sanctuary, under the ikons, by what I took to be the equivalent of the parish "Women's Guild".



Locating the First Congregational Church on a side-street less than a mile from Lenin Square, I dropped in at the end of the afternoon when, if the pattern resembled that of the Evangelical-Baptists in Moscow and Bucharest - there might be a prayer meeting or Bible study. I found members of the Parish laying a cement floor in the now old meeting-hall or sanctuary, which might seat some 500 people. In the enclave, separated from the street by an iron fence and stone-pillared iron gate, there was also a small church house and a parsonage. When I knocked at the parsonage door, the minister in work clothes was about to join the parishioners working on the cement floor. He gladly invited me to his study instead, and his wife and a grandson cordially served some refreshments.

This pastor, acting head of the Congregational Church, reproached me that in all the years since World War II, no one from the old American Board - or the UCC, of which he was vaguely aware - had come to visit. I reminded him of the great difficulties of the post-1948 period, when some 14 or 15 of the Bulgarian Protestant ministers had been imprisoned on trumped-up charges, and when, in my then functions as World Council of Churches Secretary for Interchurch Aid in Europe, I had been informed that I could not be granted a visa. We both recalled that the president of the Congregational Church had, thanks goodness, been invited to occupy one of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church seats at the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1975, and that there he had met our UCC president and our UCBWM head.

I learned that this Sofia congregation numbered physicians and nurses, and practitioners of other liberal professions (according to Western conceptions) among its members. I was told that, both in Sofia and in other cities, attendance was only half as good as among the Pentecostalists, who perhaps had more zeal and less fear. The impression I gathered was that while the Congregational Church had shrunk from perhaps 15,000 to 6,000 members, under the trials of the past 30 years, it may still be the main Protestant group recognized by the Bulgarian government, having an unusual proportion of "intellectuals" among its adherents.

My host also remarked that in recent years Baptist and Pentecostalist leaders had been invited to various confessional meetings abroad, and had been allowed to go to them - whereas the Congregationalists had received no such invitations. Of course, I responded that I would bring this need and this possibility to the attention of both the United Church of Christ and the World Reformed Alliance.

The central need of the Bulgarian Congregationalists is, however, an opportunity to educate a few candidates for the ministry. There is no Protestant seminary in Bulgaria, and the present ministerial corps is made up largely of pastors who studied theology before World War II. I was told that while it would be hard to locate qualified candidates who could pursue studies in a foreign language, it was not impossible. I understood that

government permission might be more hopefully sought for studies in another socialist country than elsewhere, e.g., the German Democratic Republic. I said I would bring this to the attention of both the WCC and the WRA in Geneva, and write about it also to the president of the Evangelical Church of the Union in the GDR. And I indicated that the UCBWM would want to have a share in enabling any acceptable ministerial candidate to pursue studies abroad.

Deeply meaningful as this conversation was for me, and I believe for my host, I sensed the unspoken inhibitions in the general situation. I was not invited to attend the upcoming Sunday service. Walking toward - but not to - my hotel on Lenin Square, conversation in the open air became somewhat freer. I felt sure that our Bulgarian Congregational brothers and sisters should be gratefully and fervently remembered in our United Church prayer. I concluded that we should deliberately probe the possibility of meeting some of their fellowship and study needs, whether directly or through our various European connections.

By telephone, I tried once more to see whether the Orthodox bishop heading the Department of Foreign Relations - who had been our CAREE (Christian Association for Relations with Eastern Europe) guest in the States three years ago - would like to receive me. He indicated that I would shortly hear from the aide who had met my plane what program was feasible -- and I did: a note at the hotel indicating that I was free to leave!

I wondered if this curious treatment could be related to the same underlying and unexplained developments which, it was reported, had caused the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to send no official delegates to the June session of the World Christian Peace Conference at Prague. One East European had intimated that the Bulgarian church quip was: "Since we are not allowed to discuss political things at home, why should we go to Prague to do so?"

Nevertheless, a great religious encounter was still in store for me before plane-time. I chanced on the Sofia synagogue - in its threadbare simplicity, frequented by the tiny remnant Jewish community. The caretaker told me I should go to see the permanent exhibition describing the trauma of the Nazi war period for the ancient Bulgarian Jewish population, largely of Sephardic origin. With much difficulty I finally found this exhibition, behind locked doors in a fifth-floor apartment in an out-of-the-way sector of the city. A Jewish girl, a student, led me from panel to panel and showcase to showcase, narrating the overwhelming story. Hitler repeatedly requisitioned Bulgarian Jews for the slave-labor camps at Maidanek and elsewhere. Each time, few were delivered and many were hidden. Jewish students rose to leading roles in the communist-directed resistance to the Bulgarian fascist regime and its Nazi overlords. Liberal democrats in the Bulgarian political life petitioned the government ministries to block the deportation of Jews. The Resistance leaders were almost all killed, in their 20s and 30s.

As the Nazis made their most determined drive to round up the bulk of the 45,000 Bulgarian Jews, an Orthodox archbishop and a Catholic bishop publicly declared that to deliver them to the Nazis would be a national shame and a great sin. The Bulgarian population in many towns and cities demonstrated against the government's deportation plans. By various tactical manoeuvres, the main body of Bulgarian Jewry was still in the country when the war ended. Most - with searing memories of their long peril and their youthful martyrs - subsequently emigrated to Israel.

So ran the story this little slip of a girl recounted as we moved from picture to picture, text to text, exhibit to exhibit, in the utter stillness of this Jewish Upper Room. With awe and trembling, she made me a vicarious participant in the ordeal of her people -- and their ultimate deliverance to the new tribulations of the Israeli-Arab irrepressible conflict. I wondered if this new and longer chapter of their testing, in which the black-and-white character of their struggle against the total evil of Nazism was replaced by the sickly gray of the shared guilt of Israeli-Palestinian justice-and-injustice, might not be even harder to bear...

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ATHENS - and the island of SPETSAI

When I left Sofia, I was bound for Larnaca in Cyprus. Our UCBWM missionary associates, the Ziebells, our prized specialists in Orthodox Church life, now conduct a church conference center at Ayia Napa. I needed to try to see the heady experience of our visit in East Europe through their eyes. I wanted to tap their wisdom on the new Israeli-Arab impasse, born out of their years of service in the refugee work of the Middle East Council of Churches. I would like to consider with them the possible UCC contributions to the thorny Cyprus-Greece-Turkey debate in the U.S. Congress. And, as co-founder with Elsie Schömer in 1949 of another church conference center in Europe, Fellowship Center in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, France, I would greatly have enjoyed seeing Ayia Napa and hearing of its progress and problems.

To my surprise, considering the unsettled Cyprus situation, all flights from Athens to Cyprus were solidly booked for at least a week, and this last lap of the planned itinerary had to be renounced. I therefore decided to combine a few days rest and recreation with the writing of this full report, in Athens and the nearby island of Spetsai. I felt that it would be good to try to pull all of these experiences together while I was still under the undiminished spell of European church life -- and before I found myself submerged in quite other phases of my World Issues Office labors, such as the very different corporate social responsibility matters doubtless piling high on my desk during my long absence.

There was Eastern Orthodoxy all around me still, but in its Greek rather than Slavic or Latin expressions -- and in the recently recovered freedom of a democratically-governed society. The never-ending hub-bub, the constant hum-and-roar of Athens, so striking after the stillness of Sofia, Bucharest and even Moscow, was everywhere marked by the church presence: many domes, and bells, and busy parish scenes. In Spetsai alone, an island but fifteen miles around with only 3,600 inhabitants, there are 46 churches, the same number as in greater Moscow with some eight million people!

Crowding each celebration of the original 4th century Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom that I had heard so recently in Bulgarian and Roumanian and Russian translations were Greeks of both sexes, all ages, and diverse social classes. It was easy to sense that here was still another people whose identity is not in crisis: under the violent changes of the political order across the years and the centuries, their Orthodox faith and worship remained unchanged. In Orthodox Christianity, most Greeks and Bulgarians and Roumanians and even Russians, seem to find themselves, their fellow-men-and-women, and their whole world, firmly defined.

Next to my hotel on the Dapia harbor, with its hum and whir at peak season, was the church of Aghios Antonios, a tiny Orthodox chapel. I chanced in during the joyful ceremony of baptism. The alert eight-day old boy was fascinated by the elaborate anointing of all his parts by the bearded priest, amid the resonant chants of an assistant and all the laity. As the long rite reached its climax, the priest with his robe sleeves rolled-up immersed the baby three times in the tub of tempered water before the altar. As the infant received his baptismal name, a fine gold chain with his baptismal medallion was slipped over his head -- a necklace of piety he was to wear his whole life through. With exalted and joyous chants surrounding him he was paraded before the main ikons on all four walls, his lips pressed against them swiftly in a kiss of veneration. His head was bent also over the officiant's ring-finger, his first respectful kiss of the clergy hand that would guide him through all the years ahead. Then -- a Christian child! -- he was clothed in his glorious white baptismal gown and circulated before all the approving and adoring family circle, a considerable tribe. His eyes beamed back his happiness in their approval. All

of us in the church were then "pinned" with a little baptismal souvenir, including a liberal Protestant from overseas -- no questions asked!

Let this report end with no smart considerations, simply this picture, this witness of a believing people. They have come through much time, many tests, much danger, numerous temptations, and surely many failures. In our very different way, so have we -- children of mediaeval Catholicism, the Renaissance and Reformation, of Puritan Revolt and Pietist Escape, of the Age of Enlightenment and the Age of Disbelief, all of which sea-changes the Orthodox world of Europe somehow escaped. The wonder is that today we are nevertheless a close fraternity in Jesus Christ, striving together to tell the world wherein lies its salvation.



A P P E N D I XPERSONS CONSULTED ON EUROPEAN CHURCH AFFAIRS  
BY UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST DELEGATION, JUNE AND JULY 1978BULGARIA

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Rev. Hans-Joachim Fraenkel, Bishop  
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Rev. Eberhard Natho, President  
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Rev. Albrecht Schoenherr, Bishop  
 Church of Berlin-Brandenburg and Chairman,  
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Rev. Heinz Langhoff  
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Rev. Wolfgang Funke  
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GDR State Officials

Mr. Kalb, Undersecretary  
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GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC con't.

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Unregistered Pentecostalists

The Vaschenko family of Chernogorsk, Siberia, currently engaged  
in a sit-in at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow

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