

The Effects of Persecution on Church and Mission

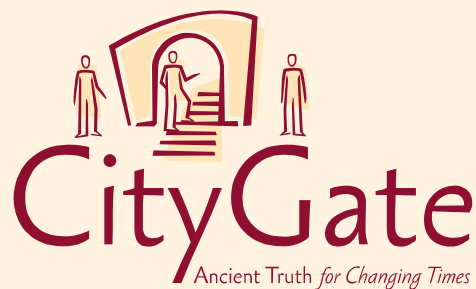
In Central and Eastern Europe

November 1989

A CityGate Field Study

Written by

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This is the first edition of this paper. We would like to thank all who shared their experiences and helped us with their insight. We would appreciate all your comments and critique. They might help us to fill the gaps we left out and correct our unintended mistakes.

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The Effects of Persecution on Church and Missions in Central and Eastern Europe.

Marsh Moyle

As we consider the results of persecution on the church and missions we see both positive and negative effects. While there are undoubtedly many problems resulting from persecution which hinder the growth of the church and the glory of God and which need to be confronted rigorously, there is much more for which to give thanks. Because this paper will focus rather narrowly on some of the negative aspects it is important at the beginning to put them in their positive context. Many positive consequences of persecution have been well documented. We could begin with the survival and in some places spectacular growth of the church, then the individual courage showed by many. Stories from prison camps of those willing to give their freedom and lives have been inspirational, leading to deeper commitment of the church around the world. Stories of missionary heroes also abound: people who have understood the situation and have spent their lives seeking to help the church. The response of the church worldwide to the need for literature, education, money, medical aid, prayer, support for the families of prisoners, protest letters campaigns and so on have been an example. There is no doubt that the lot of prisoners in the Soviet Union has been helped by the thousands of letters sent by well-wishers from around the world, if only because it showed the prison censor that someone knew and cared for the prisoner. Many have testified to the opportunities to witness to the reality of the fellowship of believers at such times.

In 40 years we have not seen change as rapid as profound or as tenuous as that which has taken place in the Soviet Union and satellite states in the last few years. In such a time of change it would be foolhardy to fail to re-evaluate. This is a time for questioning, for reassessment, for taking stock in order to move forward with renewed effectiveness. A look at the effects of persecution upon missions and the churches they serve will help develop future strategy in our work in Central Europe and the Soviet Union.

In this context we need also to consider the negative effects? How has church growth and the work of mission been hindered because of persecution or our reaction to it?

We, the church and missions, are like a ship that has seen battle. She has survived, some may even dare to say that the battle is won, but she is wounded, her mast is shot through, her sails are torn, her men are tired and some are scarred. Her Captain gives the order for damage control and for inspection. Only then can he repair the damage, heal the wounds, correct the course and pick up speed.

The examples in this paper are taken from several Central and Eastern European countries over the last 12 years. They come mostly but not exclusively from Protestant churches and address the problems faced by them. They come mostly from the Pre-glasnost era, and some issues discussed in this paper may soon be out of date. However they leave a legacy which must be confronted if we are to be effective in these areas in the next generation.

The issues raised in here are not only found in countries hostile to Christianity. You will find examples of them wherever the church and missions exist. However certain aspects of the Marxist social and economic system highlight these tensions.

The difficulty in a paper of this nature is that one has to generalise. The area under discussion covers nine countries and even more cultures. What is true of one country may not be so true of another. There are many exceptions to the examples presented here. Each should be judged within its context. Each country and each region within it, has its own distinctions. We must recognise these regional differences and which often depend on the attitude of local authorities. The fact that persecution has never really been defined and that we speak in vague generalities of the "Eastern Bloc" is a part of the problem. The suffering of believers in Hungary or Poland, in the last generation, cannot be compared with those in Albania.

What appears to be persecution to the church may not be intended as such by a world which is post-Christian. Some Christians in Great Britain have found their freedom to preach in the streets curtailed in recent years. They are moved on by the local policeman. They cry persecution. The fact is that the young policeman who moves them on has a different world view than the policeman of 30 years ago. The Law is the same, the interpretation is different. This is, of course, very different from the country where the explicit aim of the government is to destroy belief in the supernatural wherever it is found.

This paper is divided into five parts.

- 1) The problem of the church and the cultural pressures of a Marxist state. How does the church and its members respond to and act in a society which has non-Christian values, where corruption is the norm, and to maintain a comparative standard of living one has to go outside the official economic structures and law? Does life in such a climate have any impact on the ability of the church to withstand persecution?
- 2) The problem of state persecution. A description of some of the ways pressure is applied to the church and the individual.
- 3) How does this persecution effect the church?
- 4) How have missions reacted under these circumstances? A number of illustrations will describe some of the problems that arise.
- 5) Some ways forward.

In raising some very sensitive and difficult issues, I do not mean to judge either the church or any individual missions. There are many questions and few answers. For many of our friends these issues are very painful everyday struggles. It is not for me to give cheap and abstract answers. However it would be a neglect of duty to ignore issues which have been left unattended too long and are critical to our thinking for future ministry in the Soviet Union and Central Europe.

1. The socialist system and its effects on the Church.

It is helpful to differentiate between the persecution by the system and the system itself. There are influences within the system under which everyone suffers, not just Christians. These have an impact on the church and at some levels influence how well the church is able to deal with persecution.

1a. Socialism breeds dependency.

The State is all pervasive, it provides everything and imposes itself on all areas of life. There are always those who by nature are independent but the majority wait and do what they are told. It is the safest way. Contact with refugees shows this. Many of those who have had enough initiative to leave expect that everything will then be supplied for them. What does this mean in the church? People have an expectancy that someone else is going to do something. They expect that the church leaders are going to do it all, that the Western Missions are going to provide. The concept of personal responsibility is weak.

1b. The education system.

It trains people to learn by rote rather than by experimentation. Education is the tool by which attitudes are shaped. There is little room for freedom of thought. This can sometimes be extended to church education. People are used to hearing what they are supposed to believe and repeating it back. They are not trained or encouraged to think for themselves. A preacher came to a church in Czechoslovakia and preached that in the end times the united armies of the North would attack Israel. Another visitor who did not agree with this version of the end times asked people afterwards if they had understood what he was saying. They had, after all, nodded in agreement all through the sermon. They were surprised to realise that he had meant that the Czechoslovakian army would be a part of this. They had simply not thought about it.

1c. The low value of life.

The system places a low value on the individual. When one has to queue for three hours for toilet paper it has an impact on the self-worth. People suffer under the continual sense that they as individuals are of little value. This is true in the work place. Fulfilling the norm is more important than personal initiative. There is frustration at the low quality of life. Men made in the image of a creative God are not able to express their creativity freely and in a way which glorifies Him. They must continually deal with anger and frustration. There is a great deal of frustration at the low quality of life, the corruption and officially sanctioned lying which is a part of every day life. It is soul destroying to have to live in this environment. It clouds the thinking and makes objective judgement harder.

1d. Compromise with personal values and beliefs.

This is, for many the most painful area of all. It begins with the instruction Christian parents often give the smallest children going to Kindergarten. These instructions are not given to stop persecution but rather to keep ones personal file, a document which has all the personal records and comments of previous employers, from getting a letter which might suggest an above average interest in the church. This letter coming from a neighbour, school teacher or employer could be enough to block all future advancement.

The May Day demonstrations at which, for many years, attendance was required is a good example of this. Many Christians join in the parade past the statue of Lenin and Marx.

They gain no benefit from this but only save themselves from possible future problems. One man from Czechoslovakia asked with some frustration, what the difference was between bowing down to Marx and going to the heathen temple to bow to the Roman Caesar? They had only to bow down once and they could carry on their normal life. He was more angered by those who found biblical justification for doing it. The non-believer has also learned to live this double life. In her excellent book **Private Poland**, Jane Wedel describes this well.

"Poles participate in the standard rituals of public life but, literally, to survive in the Society they must continually show different sides of themselves. One moral code is reserved for the private world of family and friends, another one for the Public"¹

"Dishonesty had become so ingrained in my approach to bureaucracy and formal relationships that when I returned to the United States several friends complained that I lied too much."²

"People have an enormous stake in preserving a public persona: it is in almost no one's interest to unmask "public life". Consummate survivors, Poles have learned how to say one thing, do another and not go mad in the living of this ambiguity."³

Poles tend to talk about things they think foreigners respect and omit more dubious parts foreigners may approve less of, even if they are the bane of Polish existence."⁴

These are problems which appear in different forms in many of the countries we work in. They are major struggles for many believers.

1e. The unofficial economy

is a part of everyday life in Central and Eastern European life; it would be very difficult to survive outside of it. However, this raises difficulties . A young believer says that he can only get parts to repair his washing machine from a man at work. He knows these are stolen. In order to get over the problem he goes to a supermarket and buys goods which he then leaves on the shelf. Both his factory and the supermarket are owned by the state and so he rationalises and says he is actually paying for them. Others say that the state is the people and therefore we cannot steal what is already ours. His biggest difficulty he says, is that, as a new believer, he cannot find any one in the church willing to talk about this or other problems.

Another believer asks a missionary to buy him a bottle of whiskey in the Dollar shop. Not often confronted with such a request and wanting to offer pastoral assistance, the missionary asks why he should need it. His reply is that his mother needs medical attention and the only way to get it is to give the Doctor a bribe.

A church needs new windows. One of the members works in a factory which makes them. There is no way to obtain the items needed in the shops. He is able through his "connections" to "obtain" them from a friend. He does not ask but knows the friend has stolen the items from the factory.

A pastor has the opportunity to print a book officially. He has a quiet word with the printer who agrees to work a few hours longer. He is able to double the print run. He has to pay the man a sum of money. This does not appear in the church accounts or in those of the printer. The paper used comes from the state. The books are printed in state time by printers who are paid by the state. This is praised as a victory by many in the church. Many questions still remain. How does the pastor then preach a gospel of righteousness to such a

man? This is a great moral dilemma for the pastor. What should he do? If he does nothing has he not also failed?

A brother wanted to give a missionary a gift. It was a Sunday and the shops were closed. The missionary refused, saying that he would have to tell the customs officer where he got it if he was asked. The brother was surprised, saying he would have told a lie. "You are spoiled in your moral life" he said, "you live in moral luxury"

Western moralising and platitudes do not help. The whole of society functions in grey areas. These are just a few examples which give an idea of the problems.

The churches do not have a Christian worldview which is adequate to give answers to these issues. Very little thought is given to examine where their worldview is inadequate. Moral issues are dealt with on a purely pragmatic level. This leaves the church weakened when they come to face persecution.

2. Persecution and effects on the church

We are familiar with the strengthening effect of persecution. The negative effects of persecution are less well known and not often considered.

2a. Isolation within and without.

For two generations the churches were cut off from the Christian world by the Iron Curtain. They have been allowed only staged visits by foreign spiritual dignitaries. Visits from other East Bloc countries were hindered by lack of funds and the restriction of movement. Congregations were cut off from one another by restrictions on preaching outside of the home parish. The fellowship within the local church was broken by rumour, scandal, mistrust, and the placement of spies in the church spreading suspicion between believers. The leadership was separated from the church either through imprisonment, exile or mistrust. The church was isolated. This has not provided the climate to develop proper theology or healthy fellowship. Survival was the main goal. The state has tried to "divide and conquer" the church. The churches were separated from resources for study and other streams of life. The ability of each denomination or church to survive this isolation was relative to the amount of theological and spiritual reserves it had.

2b. Forced submission.

Pastors are occupied with many petty rules. They run from office to office for permission. The socialist system breeds minor despots who amass great provincial powers to themselves. This has a demeaning and intimidating effect. Some pastors act in the same way with their congregation! Many unwritten rules govern church life. There are subjects which the pastor must not speak about and an invisible line around his activities which he must not cross. The congregation does not hear what they need to hear and on a deeper level they are aware that they are bowing down to another power. A pastor once told me that he could not preach about the sovereignty of God. "The government believes that it is sovereign" he said. The pastor is a government employee, Often paid by the state. This puts him under very real pressure. His family and job security are in the hands of the opposition.

2c. Privatisation of faith.

The authorities have attempted to cut religious belief off from the main stream of life, to make faith a private matter. The theology of the Protestant churches, and the historical influence on them of the Pietist movement with its view of the world as something intrinsically evil and its inherent subjectivism and legalism have lent themselves to the pressure applied by the authorities to disengage from society. In many countries activities which would make the church socially useful were banned. The churches were not allowed to do social work. The effect of this has been to cut it off from the social reality. Faith became irrelevant to everyday life. The church was not supposed to meet outside the building assigned for that purpose or at times other than officially permitted. This took faith out of the public sphere. Freedom of religion was narrowly defined as "the right to worship" in its most narrow sense. The prevailing theology of disengagement from the world does not allow the development of a worldview consistent with the Bible and vigorous enough to confront the issues facing the Church. The church becomes merely a place to retreat to. The sub-culture blocks open discussion on important issues. Sex, money and the relationship of the church to the world are rarely subjects for discussion. The young must learn to conform to the example or must suffer silently with unanswered questions.

Separation from the world and legalism also come from living in a society that is legalistic. Where laws define what people can do and not what they cannot do.

2d. Propaganda.

The use of propaganda both to intimidate and to ridicule has been effective. Not in the short term, it is too primitive for that. In the long term the effect has been to make believers question, if not openly then privately, how valid their faith really is. It has enhanced the minority complex. "You are the remnant, the unscientific, the out of fashion, the old and decaying minority". To believe was to have abandoned reason, which is unfortunately very much in line with the theology.

2e. Control of the church.

State persecution means control over the most significant areas of church life. The Churches have to account to the local authorities for money the congregation gives to the church. Some countries levy a tax on this money. There are specific limitations, which vary from country to country, on the use of this money: building maintenance, pastors salaries and a few other items. It may not be used for social aid, children's work, printing or other areas which the State considers its exclusive area. The state must approve the budgets and give permission to withdraw and spend the money. In Bulgaria a tax is levied again when the money is spent. Many churches, attempt to by-pass such restrictions by operating a "black box" system of accounting. Enough money is put through the official accounts to give a good impression. The treasurer keeps most of the money in secret. Often there is no record kept of unofficial income. Some churches have several "black boxes". There is little accountability for the income and expenditure. Discussion about money and financial matters is emotional and subjective. The church has little open discussion about financial matters. Subjects such as pastors' housing, salaries and pensions are rarely discussed. Money is a worldly subject, worldly in the negative sense.

The authorities put pressure on the churches by interfering in the selection of pastors. One pastor was told to ordain a man he did not consider to be a believer. For four years, he had, tried to get permission to rebuild his church destroyed in a redevelopment program. The office of church affairs implied, not in writing, that permission to build might be granted if he ordained this man. What should he do? Whatever decision he makes he will have opposition in the church. Thus the church is weakened. Once men, not recognised by the faithful, are in the hierarchy of the church, there is not enough unity or spiritual strength to resist state interference.

In order to control the authorities need information. The response of Christians to this is often either to tell everything (the secret police know anyway) or to tell nothing. The initial motivation for this secrecy is to keep a body of information secure. However other attitudes develop from this. No accountability means no danger, "You only know what you need to know". If nobody knows what I am doing then I cannot get into trouble. Lack of accountability leads to suspicion. Many people have no idea about biblical concepts of accountability. They have lived for so long in a society where the car park attendant must fill out receipts in triplicate! Trust is at a minimum. There are very strict controls yet everyone knows ways around the system. In a society which has no basis for truth or moral values; where the lie is a tool of social control; there is a lack of trust in formal accounting methods.

Information is power, weaker souls enjoy the power they hold over others by knowing something others don't. On the other hand jealousy is aroused at being excluded from those who know. An elite easily forms of those who know. Knowledge becomes a

point of prestige. Some involved in secret work retreat into a private world, slowly cut off from all but the initiated, losing the ability to relate to those who are not involved. This raises many pastoral problems. The pastor/church leader is responsible before the secular authorities. He finds it better not to know what some of his congregation are doing. What he does not know he cannot tell, but how then can he provide proper pastoral care?

2f. Education.

Contrary to the popular mythology about the Eastern Bloc, many believers have a higher education, but this is not without its price. One either has someone in a higher position who protects him or one has to hide that he is a believer. At least he must not be seen to be too active. Even though some are able to be active many compromise. This compromise of conscience weakens the individual and the church. The pressure to compromise in some areas is so strong that it appears as though the authorities make compromise itself the aim. The theological development of the church has been affected by this. Some have tried to find justification for compromise within Scripture. Once one has compromised with a clear conscience, it is hard to go back; one compromise leads to another. For some it is a slow descent from rigorous objections through silent acquiescence, to open compromise. Once someone is compromised he is weak. It is hard to return and there is little forgiveness. The church whose theological basis is legalism has recourse only to Law and not to Grace. Those who fail to meet the standard are sometimes treated harshly. For others the issue is swept under the carpet, depending, sadly, on the connections the person has.

3.How do these pressures effect the church?

3a The church as a sub-culture.

A study of any minority group, whether Gypsies, guest workers in Germany, Indians in England or Baptists in Russia shows similar behaviour patterns. This is especially true when the minority is persecuted, mistrusted, despised or seen to be a threat, or perceive themselves to be so.

- a, They have fixed rules.
- b, They marry within the group.
- c, They are defensive.
- d, They react negatively to change.
- e, They are conservative.
- f, They cling to tradition,
- g, Those who break with tradition are ostracised and excommunicated from the society.
- h, They tend toward legalism and authoritarianism and have a well defined authority structure.
- i, They feel threatened by approaches from the outside.
- j, There is strong social pressure to remain in the group when initial belief has gone.

These are defence mechanisms through which the minority has learned to survive and to keep its identity intact. One cannot say that these are the result of persecution as they can be found where persecution does not exist, however persecution certainly speeds up the process.

The main achievement of the last generations of believers is that they were able to survive. It was a noble achievement and one to be praised and respected. To some extent, however, this defensive posture is the legacy.

Where the church has developed primarily through family growth and marriage within the sub-culture, there is the problem of second generation Christians: Those who believe because their parents believe. Two pressures are at work here. On the one hand, the young person is in the minority culture. To leave is to desert the ship, to abandon, to be disloyal. On the other hand he doesn't know why he believes or sometimes if he believes. Weak teaching in the church does not leave young people equipped to face the challenge of Marxist society. An inadequate worldview leaves them defenceless. In some parts of Eastern Europe family ties are much stronger than ours. In spite of possible oppression, the young person remains within the sub-culture, albeit on the periphery, rather than joining the main culture. The result is to produce another generation which does not fully understand the gospel or the Bible. Of course these are great generalisations and it must again be emphasised that this is by no means the total picture. The positive side to this is that the family tie is strong. Loyalty within the family is strong and provides a network of people who trust one another. In the Balkans where trust amongst believers is minimal, this is important.

3b. Tradition becomes law

in such groups. One sees this in the authority that folklore has in Soviet Baptist circles. There is a story to cover every situation. Where theological argument fails these stories gain immense importance. It is extensive and covers every situation.

3c. A persecution complex develops.

People expect the worst: "The persecution here is worse than in the next village."; "Whatever the future holds it cannot be good.". They take on a defensive stance. They become suspicious of the outsider.

The hospitality of Eastern Europe is legendary, however friendship often only extended to those within the circle. For those on the outside it is not always offered so freely.

3e. Trust.

The need for confidentiality and the lack of accountability is another major area where the church has been effected. Theology rarely divides the church, most are theologically conservative and these issues are almost always secondary. Jealousy, envy and suspicion are a more serious matter. It is impossible to estimate the damage caused by relationships wrecked through suspicion. This of course plays into the hands of the authorities who are masters at using such situations. In the East, generally speaking, trust must be earned, whereas in the West trust is more a right which can be lost.

3f. Compromise.

Where a church leader is even suspected of moral compromise with the Government he loses his credibility. His preaching and pastoral ministry become fruitless and the church stagnant. This can also be true if the church feels that he his getting something for nothing out of a Western mission agency. These rivalries stifle church growth and are hard to deal with in a climate that does not foster openness.

A secret policeman told one pastor that he would never consider belief in God. When asked why he replied that other pastors had been calling him repeatedly, without his asking, to report on each other. He could have no respect for such a religion he said.

In **Private Poland**, Wedel told of an American religious couple who said, "We find ourselves lying more and more". Many missionaries who have worked for extended periods of time in unofficial work find the lack of openness spreading to other areas of life. How then is it for the person who has grown up in the society. There is a loss of inner strength. Lingering in the background is unexposed sin which the authorities could use to discredit if it comes to light. The damage done by rumour is great. The non-believer looking in, sometimes finds the whole thing an irrelevant joke. Rather than representing God's alternative society, the churches can be in danger of becoming a caricature of the world and a reflection of its values.

3g Some historical considerations.

Historical factors go some way to explain the lack of theological maturity in many of these churches. The disruptive effect of two world wars followed by the aggressive action of militant atheism, especially in the 1950's, have deprived the church of leadership. It has been difficult to establish a more profound theological understanding. (a similar situation has developed in recent years in Romania as many of the leadership were forced to emigrate.) It took time for a new leadership to develop and for the church to begin to find its feet again. In some parts the new leadership had little or no training and large social problems to deal with.

In some places because of the way the church grew there is a great deal of syncretism. During the Second World War in Yugoslavia, it was safer to be a Baptist than an Orthodox. The Catholic Croats were, for political reasons, killing the Serbian Orthodox. In the immediate post war years several Western denominations responded to the very real and urgent social needs. They spent large sums of money on aid to the churches. When people are hungry they go where the food is and so they went to church. Most left when their needs were met. Some remained, untaught and unconverted. Conversions of convenience brought with them people who had a completely different basis for their membership of the group. A generation has grown up within the system. They have few heroes to look to. They have no one on which to model their lives.

3. Missions response to Persecution.

4a. Relief as the dominant theme in mission strategy.

In the immediate post war period there was a desperate need for physical relief. The advance of communism left churches unable to provide themselves with Bibles. Missions responded to the need. The difficulty of travel to and in staying in these countries meant that we had to settle for a more superficial understanding of the situation than we would have liked. Persecution and relief became the dominant issue in developing strategy. "The suffering church" has been our slogan. Our thinking has been dominated by the idea of helping the church in her suffering. Relief is, of course, right and biblical. It is not wrong to think in those terms but it is wrong to think **only** in these terms. We saw the relief of suffering as the whole, rather than seeing it as one aspect of overall strategy. Service to relieve the suffering of the church has taken precedence over equipping the church to confront society with the gospel.

We have been involved in a crisis situation. The first need was for aid and relief of various kinds. The need was real but we should not mistake this for normal mission activity. Service to the church was very narrowly defined: A pastor needed a car, that church needed a building, a house or food. This was important and it should not be under-estimated but it was one-sided. An "us to them" mentality developed; the survivors receiving from the benevolent. If we fail to distinguish between normal missionary activity and crisis situations we fail to see other major needs such as the education of the church and evangelism. We fail to develop an overall long-term strategy. We think in terms of them and us instead of working together. We concentrate on external short-term needs and neglect the less visible. Financial aid will be needed in Central Europe as long as there is non-convertible currency, but this is not the norm. The churches are now better able to provide for themselves. We must not take this privilege or responsibility away from them.

4b. The lack of re-evaluation.

As travel became easier and the situation changed we did not re-evaluate as perhaps we should have done. Continual re-evaluation is essential to make sure that what we are doing is the right action for now.

4c. "Strategy and Marketing".

The difficulties of living in the countries have until recently meant that goals have been set by people who are not familiar with the field situation. Strategy has been made by those responsible for raising the funds rather than by field personnel. There has long been a tension in many missions between those on the field and those trying to raise the funds. We sometimes make decisions by how marketable a project is rather than by its effectiveness. We have developed short-term goals which give us statistics for our publicity but we have not always related them to a long term design.

4d. Lack of cultural awareness.

In establishing our goals we have been often unaware of or have failed to understand the social and cultural dynamics of our field. We have underestimated the need for reciprocity on the part of those who are constantly receiving "from the west" and between the national who administers aid and those who receive from him. Some have developed a hardness of heart, "why should we pay our pastor when they will pay him anyway". The

need to maintain the self-respect of the receiver has been overlooked. We have failed to take into account the cultural impact of our giving. In an economic climate of need those who have access to the source of supply have prestige and power. This we have given to certain people without realising it and without the necessary accountability.

Missions desire to see change. We confront those things we consider to be hindrances to growth. Often and without realising it we attack emotional foundation stones which have little or nothing to do with the theology of the group but far more to do with their sociological binding. We are perceived by them to be attacking their security. The effect of this is to upset the equilibrium of the group. Those who accept the "new teaching" become outsiders. If we are to meet needs then we have to replace these emotional building blocks rather than confront them. We need to examine our methodology.

4e. The "Iron Curtain" a reality which has become a myth.

We have assumed that the church is suffering without asking which church and where, and to what degree. We have used the terms "Eastern Bloc" and "behind the iron curtain" without going beyond them, without allowing for change. The "Iron Curtain" was a reality which has become a myth. The specific has been generalised. We have created the impression that all the churches are suffering. Our supporters believe this, although it has been wrong for years to talk in terms of severe persecution in many of the countries where we work. We present an unbalanced picture. Two thousand Baptists have been imprisoned in the Soviet Union since the mid-1960s. Many of these repeat offences. This is a terrible thing and we are right to protest. However, if we make them representative of the whole church in the Eastern Bloc, we are not telling the truth. A mother in the Soviet Union has her child taken away because she teaches him about God. This is a terrible tragedy, but we must keep it in its context.

4g. Temptation to sensationalise.

In our desire to arrest our constituents attention we are tempted to be sensational. We say nothing dishonest but in failing to give the context and scope, we can imply that an isolated incident is a common occurrence. On occasion we stretch the truth. In the 70's I saw, on the front cover magazine of a large Eastern European mission, a picture of some men working in a quarry. The sub-title read "Priests in a labour camp". As far as I knew there were no such labour camps in that country. Some months later I came across the same picture in a more serious journal. The caption read "Priests in labour camp in 1951". No doubt they achieved the desired impact but what does it have to do with the message of truth that we claim to believe? The method does matter.

To provide the best scoop there has been horse-trading in the latest big name from the East, of someone who has been in the headlines because of persecution. This has caused grief to sensitive people who have come from a state of prison or real persecution to massive culture shock only to parade like the latest prize fighter or pop star, with little regard for their emotional needs. They tour the Christian circus to tell their story. Some have been asked to sign over the rights to manage their financial lives and to give exclusive stories to a mission. This is the mission equivalent of chequebook journalism. This competition amongst missions for stories and exclusive rights has sometimes lacked the meekness and unity of our message.

4h. Victims of our own propaganda.

The zeal to make the story of persecution known has other drawbacks. We become victims of our own propaganda. Our constituency expects stories with emotional appeal.

We fear that they will not respond if we give them anything else. This is to a certain degree true, suffering stories bring in dollars. We orient our information gathering to supply such stories. Our national co-workers in Central and Eastern Europe become offended at what they see as an over simplification of the issues. Our new recruits come under these false assumptions. The first training they receive is at a public meeting or through our mission magazine. Persecution sounds exciting. To Westerners who are bored with the lack of challenge it appears very attractive. The publicity attracts people who have something to prove. Some years ago I was involved in training people to go to the Soviet Union to serve. The first training was to desensitise them to the common misconceptions about the country. Our relationship to churches on the field is tarnished by use of unprepared people. There will always be a place for well-organised short-term personnel who come to do a job and then leave. They have played a very significant part over the years. However some come with the intention of staying. Their preconceived ideals and dreams are dashed as they learn there is no super church. They discover that the church in the East is very ordinary, and that the enemy is within as well as without. They either learn the discipline of living and working within the reality or leave. More tragic are those who stay but never see that the reality is different.

Because our information gathering concentrates on persecution, we do not always have the other information necessary to evaluate our work. We are not always sure when our work is done. We are in a vicious circle. We concentrate on information which highlights the suffering. Lack of resources doesn't allow anything else. We ask for stories which interest our readers. Our information gathering is about situations rather than about context. We then confirm our worst suspicions because we look for and report the persecution. The stories are chosen and written by the development department who often have little field experience. We have little background/context in which to place and analyse our findings. A one-sided picture makes long-term strategy development difficult. A high turnover of personnel develops a lack of continuity in research and relationships. We respond to immediate felt needs rather than praying through long-term goals and planning with our national co-workers. Our failure to evaluate the impact of a specific project on the whole church scene works against us as the following examples show.

A pastor receives his salary and a car to make his work easier from a well-meaning mission agency or church in the "West". He speaks the foreign language and does some translation for the mission when they bring guest speakers to the church. In the next village is another pastor who does not speak the language and has no Western friends. He does not have a car nor does he get invited to the conferences in the West. Jealousy is unavoidable.

A man receives books from an agency, he does not sell them but gets money for his expenses by those who receive them. His intention and handling of the money is righteous but he is anxious about what people think when he next goes to buy some furniture. There is no protective accountability.

Another man makes recordings of the church choir on equipment and tapes given from a church in America. He sells the tapes and puts the money towards the ministry. Several people in the church question his motives and actions. Because dealing in money is seen as worldly he must live under a shadow of suspicion if he is to fulfil his calling. There are enough cases where suspicions were well founded to make people think that they are justified in their beliefs.

Only 3000 copies of a very popular book are printed and sent unofficially into the country. One brother gives 700 copies of another book and some cassettes in exchange for 200 copies of this book. There are no set values and conflicts arise.

A pastor sold some bibles he had received officially from the denomination. He had been receiving and distributing literature unofficially for years. Someone accused him of profiteering. Rumours started about him, that he had two houses, a summer house in the mountains and several cars. A mission investigated after the rumours reached shocking proportions. The summer house turned out to be a very small hiking hut on the side of a hill. His son, who is an auto mechanic, owned one of the cars. The lack of clarity in communication caused a man of God to lose credibility in his church, undermining his spiritual authority and caused much bitterness. The missions had very little background information about the man.

A man receives money from several aid agencies. He receives many times the national average wage. He knows the agencies don't talk to one another, that they only come once a year to see him.

A church leader distributed money for a Western aid agency. They asked how much money each pastor received. He told how the pastors receive very small state salaries augmented by the little the church could give. However research showed that most pastors had about the national average in that country.

A church wanted to provide a house for its pastor. It sought money from a mission and received it. When the pastor died his extended family refused to give the house to the church. They saw it as a part of their inheritance. The church had to buy another house. The next family did the same. The church had to find another agency to provide more funds. They are the poor suffering saints and so no one asks the hard questions. The church has no retirement plan. The issues are left unclear. The theology of the country says that the subject is taboo. The issue is not just that the pastor has a house but what sort of house. One gets a good house the other not. Each man has his group of supporters who fight against each other. In countries where the goods are in short supply we should not assume that materialism does not exist. On the contrary it merely takes on a different form. This does not mean that these projects are bad or that they should not be undertaken. Quite the contrary a great deal of good has been done. However it is the way we do them which causes problems. We have rarely invested enough time to really understand the context to know what the right approach should be. Because we have not known the context we have failed to see our part in the light of the whole picture. Too often we have seen what we are doing as the whole and over estimated the importance of it. We have taken sides in issues where we did not understand what was going on rather than objectively standing back.

We have lost the respect of some nationals. They feel misunderstood and used. They read the missionary magazines. They see the appeals, they see people come with misconceptions about their situation, they see the high turnover of personnel. It would be wrong to exaggerate the extent of this frustration but it lies beneath the surface of many relationships. This loss of respect has leads to a lack of honest communication and feedback, which in turn makes evaluation even more difficult. People want to please, they are hospitable by nature. They are also afraid of losing aid and so they compliment. Too often they are insincere or perhaps over enthusiastic in their compliments.

4i. The Generalist.

The difficulties of staying in one country a long time meant that the work demanded much travel. This has given rise to the generalist who travels to many countries and knows a little about them all, rather than the specialist who knows one country well.

A man from a Western country comes to visit any main central European city. He may be either a tourist, a missionary, or perhaps he comes from a local church to ask about Eastern European church life. He assumes that he has come to help or provide encouragement but he is in a queue of people doing the same, all asking the same questions. He hears the routine answers. One church in Hungary reported that they had 52 guest speakers in one year. A couple in Bulgaria reported that in two summer months they had visitors almost every night. The hospitality alone nearly bankrupted them. A church leader in Czechoslovakia put it like this "two weeks in the spring with a Westerner in the church and we know that summer has come. Two weeks in the Autumn without a Westerner and we know Winter has arrived. Not knowing how to judge who is likely to provide real help and who is just passing by, they feel bound to receive everyone. The easier a place is to get to, the more people in the church who speak a foreign language, the more guests they receive. Rather than say the truth, it is easier, and occasionally more lucrative, to let the people hear what they want to hear. These are the well-known churches. There are others who never see a foreigner from one year to the next, they are off the beaten track and harder to get to.

The misconceptions and the great contrast in lifestyles between East and West with the resultant paternalism, the desire to help and the occasional feeling of guilt whether true or imagined makes thorough and objective investigation difficult. We have sometimes responded emotionally.

4j. Iron curtain vision.

We have not helped them to learn how to analyse their own situation in terms of world needs. God's vision is for the world and not just the Eastern Bloc. If one can talk of greater or smaller needs we have to see that the need is greater in the Islamic world; yet the Eastern Bloc has consumed millions of dollars. We have a responsibility to see beyond what we are doing and to help our fellow workers to see beyond their own borders. Isolation has made some insular thinkers. We should not have an "Iron curtain vision"

4k. Intermission relationships.

We have also suffered from poor inter-mission relationships. The same suspicions and mistrust which hinder good relationships in our national friends is found between our own missions. The reason given is security, but competition and politics also play a role. Great progress has been made in recent years but there is more we can do as we realise that working together, serving the same Master is more important. We are learning that we can do far more together than separately.

Our mistakes do not make very good reading but we need to be honest. We have been influenced by the nature of the work. We need to examine our methods in the light of the message we preach. We cannot expect better of our friends and brothers if we are not willing to go the hard route ourselves.

5. Some ways forward.

In spite of these problems much good work has been done. We must not lose sight of this or get these problems out of perspective. We should see them in the light of the good work and keep a balance. Few are guilty of all the mistakes mentioned here. Most of us are, if we are honest, guilty of some. No one is perfect and it belongs to the lot of the missionary to clean up some of the mistakes of his predecessor, while making his own. We can learn from our mistakes. It would be fatal if we were to shut our eyes and pretend that they just did not exist, just as we have such new opportunities. Too much money and time, and more important, too many lives are at stake. There is great hope that the normalisation of the situation in Central and Eastern Europe will help us. As missionaries are able to live in the country and work from a new perspective we should expect change for the better.

The following are some ideas which may help us to correct our vision and may be worth some discussion.

5a. The long term view.

We must learn to take the long-term view. The education process takes time. It is not always possible to "package" it in terms of short-term projects. The pressure to produce statistics for our supporters is great but how do you measure relationships. It is these relationships with our national co-workers which are our most valuable asset. Sometimes our supporters and sponsors are responsible for this to project and short-term orientation through their donation policies. Sometimes our desire to respond to real needs drives us to overestimate the value of money or some other project against other values and we do not consider the impact. We have to understand the other aspects of the work. When is it perhaps better to hold back on a project for the sake of the long-term impact it might have? We come from the quick fix culture, we have to learn that there are no short cuts to make saints.

5b. Knowing the field.

Eugene Nida wrote that "Good missionaries have always been good anthropologists"⁵. An understanding of the mechanisms at work in Central and Eastern Europe will be helpful whilst remembering that "Cultural anthropology is not a cure-all for missions. It is just one tool of a well-prepared missionary. Neither does cultural anthropology replace the Holy Spirit"⁶ The well-prepared missionary will go into his work seeking to understand what is going on around him. There can be no substitute for knowing the context and culture. We must be prepared to learn continually.

5c. Redefinition of our role.

We must re-define the role of missions in Central Europe and the Soviet Union. We are going through a time of momentous change. The longer it continues the less likely is a return to older systems. Too many people have committed themselves and the only way back will be likely so violent that normal mission activity would not be possible. We should anticipate a time of extended change. What this change is and how long it takes is outside the scope of this paper but the issue must be addressed if we are to be effective in the next decade.

5d. Theology and world view.

We need to help build up theological capital. To help develop a Christian worldview in a Central and Eastern European context. One which is culturally applicable and able to stand up to the new challenges of the coming decades.

We need to help to provide answers to the questions thrown for decades at believers by crude atheistic propaganda. In order to build confidence in the gospel.

We must help the church to think objectively and come out of the subjective mire. We need to teach and practice mutual accountability. This may not be a western model but does need to be based on biblical principles. We should provide an ear for those who have been wounded in battle, who because of the years underground, have been cut off from the main stream of church life. We must be active in rebuilding confidence, confronting where needed, pouring oil on the troubled waters of mistrust. We need to confront attitudes of self pity ("we are the suffering church") and dependence (unjustified requests for aid). Also important is providing exposure to other world needs, putting the Central and Eastern European situation in a world context and helping churches to see their responsibility to provide for themselves and reach out in mission. We will help to open up taboo subjects in a way which will not offend and cause reaction. We will be a bridge between the world and the church which has become entrenched in her subculture, providing a model and training in social work. We will be working shoulder to shoulder, not from our hand to their mouth. We will stop facing each other and turn together to face the world with the message God has called us to proclaim.

¹ *Private Poland ch 1 p16*

² *ibid p 17*

³ *Ibid p30*

⁴ *ibid p16*

⁵ *Customs and Cultures p.XI Eugene A. Nida*

⁶ *Cultural Anthropology p.21 Grunlan and Mayers*