

FAITH IN THE SECOND WORLD

By Paul Bock

In Switzerland there is an institute with interests similar to those of Christians Associated for Relations with Eastern Europe (CAREE) but unlike CAREE it has an office building and library, a staff of eleven persons, and a program that, along with research and publication on religion in Eastern Europe, includes also aid to Christians in the East Bloc. That organization is "Glaube in der 2. Welt," and it is located in Zollikon, a suburb of Zurich.

Founded in 1972 by the Protestant Church (Reformed) in Canton Graubunden and the Roman Catholic Bishop of Chur, the Institute receives half of its financial support from Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Old Catholic Churches, but primarily from Protestant churches. The other half comes from individual contributors. Its annual budget runs around 1.5 million Swiss francs. There is a parallel organization in Germany centered in Waldshut which supports the Institute, and there are also supporters in Austria. Its founder and director is Pastor Eugen Voss. Besides the paid staff, there are numerous volunteers who help in translating documents from the various eastern European languages.

The major goal of the Institute is to help persecuted individuals and churches in the Second World through providing information about their conditions and through giving various forms of aid. It seeks to advance human rights, especially the right of religious liberty. It claims neutrality in regard to political parties though it is committed to democracy, and it is inter-confessional in its approach.

A major part of the Institute's work is research and publication. Its monthly journal G2W is mailed to 3500 addresses. In addition to its articles each issue of the journal presents an overview of what is happening in religion in each of the Communist countries. Three times a year 70,000 copies of a flyer or newsheet entitled Betrifft are distributed. Twenty books have been published thus far. Among the titles are: Die Religionsfreiheit in Osteuropa, Russische Jugend im Aufbruch, Kirche im sozialistischen Gesellschaftssystem, Der Islam in Jugoslawien, Osteuropäische Bürger werden Initiativ, Menschenrechtsdokumente der Moskauer Helsinki-Gruppe, Die Katholische Kirche in der Sozialistischen Federativen Republik Jugoslawien, and CSSR, zur Lage der Evangelischen Kirche der Böhmisches Brüder.

All kinds of groups and individuals turn to the Institute for information which later appears in books, reports, and news articles. Over 200 press releases are issued in a year. Thus, for people in the German-speaking part of Europe, it is an important resource center.

However, the Institute does not consider itself to be purely an academic center. It wants to use its knowledge to help people. Consequently, it becomes involved in a variety of activities.

It promotes correspondence among Christians of eastern and western Europe by making addresses available to those interested. It takes a special interest in prisoners of conscience and engages in appeals to free them. In so doing it works with Amnesty International. It links needy pastors in eastern Europe with churches in western Europe which send them food, medicine, Bibles, and religious literature. The Institute itself sends many Bibles and books. Its publications often carry thank-you letters from recipients.

One of the important endeavors of the Institute has been the financing of Russian Orthodox broadcasts to eastern Europe. The radio program entitled "Voices of Orthodoxy" contains selections from worship services, teachings of the holy fathers, Biblical commentary, and sermons. The program originates in Paris, a center of Russian Orthodoxy outside of the Soviet Union. It is heard three times a week. Alexander Solzenitsyn praised this action and called it one of the finest services that can be provided for Russia.

In 1982 on the tenth anniversary of the Institute Andrey Sakharov wrote a letter expressing his deep appreciation for the work the Institute has done in informing the world about the situation in the Soviet Union and other socialist lands, particularly for calling the world's attention to people imprisoned for reasons of conscience. He wished the Institute success in its ongoing battle for religious freedom.

After the Helsinki Accords were signed in 1975 the Institute gave its support to education about and implementation of the Accords, especially to the right of religious liberty. It helped to form European Helsinki groups, enabling western Europeans to be supportive of eastern Europeans in their struggle for human rights. It established a "Helsinki Aid Fund" to help people in eastern Europe who were persecuted for taking part in actions such as Charta 77.

The Institute emphasizes its inter-confessional nature. So often Christians in one country take an interest only in Christians of their own denomination in another country. But the Institute has stressed the importance of Christians caring for fellow Christians in atheistic societies regardless of their confessions.

In an editorial written in mid-1989 Eugen Voss, the director, expressed his joy concerning the new openings in eastern Europe and saw them as a partial fulfillment of the Institute's goals. He commented on the new freedoms in the Soviet Union and in several other East European countries and on the great progress made in Vienna in implementing the Helsinki Accords. He then asked if an organization such as "Glaube in der 2. Welt" is still needed and concluded that it is. There is much to be done, he wrote, to realize the new possibilities. Reconciliation and mutual aid are still needed. There still will be ideological, confessional, and national conflicts among peoples. There is much to be done in realizing European unity. And there is much to be learned from the Christian-Marxist dialogues which have taken place in eastern Europe. The search for peace and justice will go on.

The address of the Institute is:

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