

NEW ROLES FOR CAREE SINCE THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION

by Walter Sawatsky

Adapted from a speech presented at the CAREE annual meeting, New York, March 11, 2000. Walter Sawatsky, editor of REE since 1998, is professor of church history and mission at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and a consultant for Mennonite Central Committee, traveling to the former Soviet Union semiannually.

CAREE'S MEMBERS BEFORE 1989

To recall a few major developments from the the early years of CAREE may be a helpful context for reviewing some of the expectations we held in common during the year of transformation itself. It is striking to observe how little was said by East Europeans themselves during the recent tenth anniversary year about what went on ten years ago. Although there is broad recognition within the academic community at least, that 1989 will remain a significant historical marker, perhaps in the category of 1789 and 1917, what transpired during the course of the decade has rendered those moments of euphoria rather fleeting.

It will help us understand the role and vision of CAREE if we remember how many of its key persons were shaped by their personal experiences in postwar Europe. They came there in some form of church ministry role, whether as relief officer, on a church relations assignment, or seeking ecumenical ties, and then experienced the impact of the split between East and West. In so doing they discovered friends across the East/West division, or met their former professors now living in Eastern Europe; some also hearing persons such as Professor Jozef Hromádka teaching at their seminary in North America. These experiences made a major impact on them. I think, for example, about the experience of Charles West, the stories he has told about the progression of events that led him to become preoccupied with the churches in Eastern Europe personally. I think of Paul Peachey, and of other CAREE leaders not present at this meeting, whose experiences helped shape CAREE. This tells us that CAREE is part of a tradition of critical engagement in North America, CAREE represented scholars and churchpersons who were thinking together with those

persons in Eastern Europe who finally decided that the World Council of Churches' effort at cooperation among churches globally had ended up, after all, as being too much a Western organization, politically speaking. Hromádka's speech at Amsterdam in 1948, calling for Christians to bridge the East/West divide, was generally forgotten in contrast to the warnings of John Foster Dulles about the threat of communism.

Therefore when the vision for starting the Christian Peace Conference in Prague developed after 1958, these were the types of persons who participated in those meetings, either together with Europeans when they were themselves in Europe, or who tried in some way to make that part of an American effort.

A second observation is that the denominational programs for church relations, for mission, or for developing some form of fraternal ties, whether by mainline and non-mainline Protestant denominations, or Catholic ties, primarily through specific orders - were indeed present. The denominations were committed to a long term relationship. But when measured in terms of budget and personnel, these programs remained rather modest. Within that context CAREE's emphasis, as it developed especially after 1968, was largely to concentrate on trying to think and therefore to live in relationship between East and West as if walls do not exist between Christians. Think for example of James Will's book *Must Walls Divide?*¹, where he spoke of the walls of distrust and incomprehension existing between Christians, which needed to be broken down.

¹James Will, *Must Walls Divide?: The Creative Witness of the Churches in Europe*. New York: Friendship Press, 1981, chapter 2. See also his "Must Walls Continue to Divide?" *Religion in Eastern Europe*, X, 2 (March 1990) 34-40 for initial comments on 1989.

Third, CAREE participants were characterized by a “nevertheless orientation”. That included the recognition that some of us shared the vision of many East European Christians for finding a way, whether a way ‘in socialism’, or simply as Christians finding a way in whatever forms of government there were, to live out one’s faith. That included taking seriously the new understandings that were emerging in places like Prague and Zagreb between Christians and revisionist Marxists². When that was broken by the so-called liberation of Prague in 1968, or the collapse of the Prague Spring, the leaders of the Christian Peace Conference (CPC) resisted, but its President Hromádka died, the general secretary Ondra lost his position, unable to find work for some time thereafter.³ Then a new leadership in CPC emerged where it became uncertain how to detect the authentic theological speech from the passport speeches or from political speeches that might be genuine or might not be.

²For example, Paul Mojzes, ed. *Varieties of Christian-Marxist Dialogue*. Philadelphia: The Ecumenical Press, 1978.

³Recent literature reflecting on that history includes Milan Opo_enský, ed. *From the Reformation to Tomorrow. In Memory and Appreciation of Josef L. Hromádka (1889-1969)*. #43 in *Studies from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches*, Geneva: WARC, 1999; *Christian Existence in Dialogue: Doing Theology in All Seasons, Occasional Study Pamphlet #5*. Geneva: World Council of Churches Commission on the Churches’ Participation in Development, 1990 (In memory and appreciation of Josef L. Hromádka); *50th Anniversary of the WCC Challenges of Remembering To the Honour of J. L. Hromádka*, Praha: CPC International, August 1998; Josef L. Hromádka, *The Field is the World. Selected Writings from the Years 1918-1968*. Edited by Milan Opo_enský, Prague: Christian Peace Conference, 1990.

These were the contextual factors that I also as a very young person recall when attending several CPC meetings and there recognizing that the findings statement had been written in advance. One could make a positive contribution two ways, namely, to challenge a couple of words and get them changed and in the process have a form of dialogue, or secondly, to be there and listen and find those times over the table or in the hallways for real talk. That is what I mean by my word “nevertheless”, that there were persons in the West who were not so quick to say ‘this has gone badly wrong and we no longer trust them and will not associate with them’. Such persons decided not to continue a North American CPC so closely associated with the Prague CPC, rather they formed Christians Associated for Relations with Eastern Europe (CAREE) that had a ‘dotted line relationship’ (flowchart analogy) to CPC in Prague, talking to its leaders but not necessarily being responsible for all the central statements issued, nevertheless to keep talking with them⁴.

Characteristic of that orientation was a rather strong appreciation of official church circles, including of the denominational structures beyond central offices, and also an appreciation of the dissidents, particularly of the Christian dissidents, where one also tended to apply a certain kind of criteria of assessment, in terms of persons who were speaking and acting on behalf of God’s Church, in contrast to those with a more personalist agenda or specific political agenda. Seeking to remain in touch and to encourage were central concerns. Then came the changes of 1989. In do not think that CAREE had a strong record of supporting Charta 77, but was informed, was familiar with some of the people, primarily from the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, because of the way that church was associated with both the dissident or unofficial types, and the official leaders.

Recalling Expectations from 1989

⁴Charles West & Paul Mojzes, “CAREE Who We Are and Whence We Have Come: A Brief History”, *CAREE Communicator*, Winter 1999/2000.

As the political changes of 1989 proceeded, there emerged a tremendous euphoria among the people and also among observers. One noticed how the journalists were trying to wrap their minds around the concept of nonviolence, some even started using the language of a “Politics of Decency”⁵. Then we became more conscious of the language of “civil society” and of the search for civil society. This became a part of our conceptual shift, most of us having been trained to think largely in categories of church and state. I come from a tradition (Anabaptist) that tends to think that social ethics is primarily a story of church and state conflict, where the task is to keep the church separate from the state. That tradition used definitions of ‘state’ that I have come to realize are increasingly irrelevant to the modern world. So within my own tradition, for example, I was helped very much by noticing the concept of ‘civil society’ and realizing how one can think about a society of human beings within which the ‘state’ is a less comprehensive level of social institution, and in which churches, when understood as social institutions, also help constitute civil society, but do not encompass the entire society, at least not yet. Hence the testing of what is good church and what is good state, now tended to be on the basis of how does the good state or good church contribute to society where the adjective civil is to have strong moral tones, particularly a morality based on the Judeo-Christian tradition.

That is why there was a return of certain words that had disappeared from public discourse for some time. We are becoming familiar with the word ‘repentance’ as a political word, associated with the word ‘forgiveness’ as articulated in the writings of Donald Shriver, including his article in REE.⁶ There was also the language of ‘truth telling’ as applied to civil society, truth-telling was to be a fundamental characteristic of a politics of decency⁷. It even served as the

⁵For example the introduction by Jonathan Schell to Adam Michnik’s *Letters from Prison*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985 when it first appeared as an essay in the *New Yorker* (February 3, 1986), the phrase was then picked up by Timothy Garton Ash and others.

⁶Donald L. Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995; Shriver, “Victims’ Right to Truth”, *Religion in Eastern Europe*, XVII, 6 (December 1997), 1-19.

⁷For details see Walter Sawatsky, “Truth Telling in Eastern Europe: The Liberation and the Burden”, *OPREE*, August 1991 and in *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 33 (Autumn 1991) 701-729.

measurement of the capacity of new leaders for the body politic, to legitimize themselves on the basis of truth telling. The primary characteristics of a politics of decency had to do with truth, trust, openness and autonomy of action. With Mr. Gorbachev we moved through a progression of opaque openness called “Glasnost”, to a need for “more Glasnost”, and there came a point when too much Glasnost signaled expectations for full clarity, to be open about how one acts.

There was a widespread assumption that nonviolence was fundamental to achieving a civil society, and was fundamental to the way one got there. There was also a recognition that the word Charity is not for wimps, this was a word that needed to be brought back into our nomenclature, so said one of the St. Petersburg intellectuals when he fell on the ice one day, and discovered that they all “walked by on the other side” as in the Good Samaritan story, no one stopped to help. He called for the re-introduction of “Miloserdie” (charity). This was like turning on a switch, for within a year over a thousand Miloserdie societies had been registered in the Soviet Union, almost all of them were inter-religious and inter-political or at least secular-religious constellations seeking to do good to someone. There has been some attrition since then, there have been problems with corruption, yet I am still impressed with the limited number of scandals associated with the Miloserdie structures within the former Soviet Union. That is no small thing, in light of the way corruption has contaminated the body politic there so much, that I do not know many persons who even have a notion of how that condition might change.

In 1989 Niels Nielson published a book, as well as a collection of essays several years later to which many CAREE members contributed, in which the new tasks for the churches were delineated.⁸ The first task was to address the problem of deChristianization. This involved a recognition of its reality, not just in Eastern Europe but also in Western Europe and America, hence the question of how does one reChristianize, one way of speaking about mission. There was, secondly, a recognition of a new church-state relationship. Third was the task of a recovery of

⁸Niels Nielson, *Revolutions in Eastern Europe. The Religious Roots*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991, 21-24. See also Niels Nielson, ed. *Christianity After Communism in Russia* Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1994; and J. Martin Bailey, *The Spring of Nations. Churches in the Rebirth of Central and Eastern Europe*. New York: Friendship Press, 1991.

credibility for church leadership. These were obvious tasks for the churches, as named by Nielson, but he also went on to note the tension between nationalities that would need to be faced. When introducing the complexities of then Yugoslavia, Paul Mojzes described a series of efforts over the past five centuries to try to achieve some form of trans-national unity⁹. The Marxist project, Mojzes noted, was in many ways fundamentally concerned to get beyond the nationalism problem. It is precisely in that Yugoslav territory where one now realizes how serious a problem it was. We are now critical of the Marxist approach to the problem but we are not that certain of the ways in which Christians must deal with the tension between nationalities.¹⁰

Then there was the task naturally of the reform within the churches. Yet already in 1989 quite a few persons were expressing great doubt about the future of ecumenism. I remember an essay that appeared in 1992 with the title “Ecumenical Meltdown” that appeared in *Religion in Eastern Europe*¹¹. We have now become accustomed to much reduced expectations. That fact is rather striking and sharp with reference to Eastern Europe, but the problems go well beyond that region. Think of the degree to which the changes within North American society toward greater regionalism or localism, a kind of a democratization of everything via the technology mode, have resulted in a fragmented ecclesiology. It is now possible for anyone with a computer and modem to be able to raise funds and initiate ministries, only asking for help when necessary. This atmosphere did not contribute to a healthy ecumenism either.

⁹Paul Mojzes, *Religious Liberty in Eastern Europe and the USSR*. Boulder CO: East European Monographs, distributed by Columbia University Press, 1992, pp. 339-342. Cf. Mojzes, “The Despair that is Yugoslavia”, *REE*, XI, 5 (August 1991), 45-49.

¹⁰See for example, the essays in Paul Mojzes, ed. *Religion and the War in Bosnia*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, American Academy of Religion, 1998, many of which were presented at meetings of CAREE Interest Group at AAR sessions in 1994 and 1995, and published in *REE*.

¹¹Joseph A. Loya, “Interchurch Relations in Post-Perestroika Europe: A Short History of an Ecumenical Meltdown,” *REE*, XIV, 1 (February 1994), 1-17.

There was a broad expectation after 1989 that we would now start speaking the truth, and the truth about what had happened, so that the evils that had been done in the name of ideological visions could be done away with. In January 2000 I taught an intensive seminary course on the theme of nonviolence and Christian faith in this last decade. We spent a great deal of time examining the truth and reconciliation processes around the world, noticing that there was such a thing already started by Roman Catholic bishops in Rhodesia (as it was then called) in 1970. There was a limited effort at truth and reconciliation in Chile, but without naming any perpetrators of the violence and torture. There was a secret project in Brazil, where the military refused to disclose the facts, whereby someone managed to get access to archives and xeroxed several hundred thousand pages of official records. This evidence on torture was finally circulated abroad but reduced to a report when published. A secret project that was unsuccessful, yet it too marked a change in that society.¹²

We are more familiar with the question much discussed in East Germany of what to do about the STASI, and how to report on it. In Russia there was a short open period. I sensed by 1992 or 93 that a saturation level had been reached in terms of dirty laundry aired in public. There were so many articles appearing in the press about the evils of Stalin, writers starting to associate the evils with other persons of prominence, so that even the halo around Lenin had disappeared. How much more could they take?

What appears not to have happened is the kind of a managed truth and reconciliation process that we have watched with great fascination in South Africa, where it was the lead story on television day after day. One entered into the lives of individuals, one entered into the facing of now knowing what they did to my son, my father, or my husband, what the man or men who did this to them said and looked like. Take, for example, the excellent video which Bill Moyers recently released, with its interviews with Desmond Tutu and other participants, where at one point, we hear from the husband and children of a woman who died when some blacks entered a church and shot indiscriminately and set off a small bomb, an incident just a few

¹²For an excellent introduction, citing some of the above illustrations, see Walter Wink, *When the Powers Fall. Reconciliation in the Healing of Nations*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.

months before the negotiations for the 1993 elections were in place. The young boys told their story, whereupon the husband of the victim asked them directly whether they were sorry, which they were to some degree and he forgave them. In the follow up interview when asked, 'was the apology good enough', he replied it was something on the way. Everyone watching learned thereby the notions of forgiveness as a process. Even to see the video becomes one of those liturgical moments, to say that 'we' have been through that process.¹³

¹³*Facing the Truth with Bill Moyers*. Video in 2 vols. Princeton NJ: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, FFH8798, 1999. See also Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

This did not happen in that many places in Eastern Europe. In another article on “Bridging the Abyss of Revenge” Shriver identified four key tasks of the reconciliation process¹⁴. One was to break with the past, meaning some national repentance process, Shriver presenting ideas about how this can proceed, as have others who have attempted to think about the process. Secondly he applied a doctrine of small steps, which in many ways also fit even the Soviet atmosphere, where there was a sense that too many times over the last millennia Russia’s leaders or intelligentsia had thought in terms of the ‘grand project’, and the results had been very costly. So ideological purism was out of place, but symbols and rituals toward such repentance were vital. You can see indicators of that at key moments in the period between 1991 and 1993, where even Mr. Yeltsin knew the meaning of the feast day that would mark a transition in that society and referred to it.¹⁵

Third, Shriver called for a serious dialogue with history, to identify what went wrong. The proposed *Charta Oecumenica* under discussion among European churches spoke of the need to “reappraise history”, a rather tame English rendering of the German” terminology of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* or of *Vergangenheitsverarbeitung*. The German term evokes a sense of entering into the past, of moving past it, which is different from simply pushing it aside. When describing the political turmoil over commemorating World War II in Bitburg, Shriver’s book contains beautiful passages showing how the American White House, over the space of a number of months, comes to realize that one cannot just be the gentleman and put those things aside and now merely recall the good memories, but you need to go through the story and then move. German President von Weizacker’s speeches modelled the way.

¹⁴Donald W. Shriver Jr. “Bridging the Abyss of Revenge” *Christian Century*, December 1, 1999, 1169-1173.

¹⁵See James Billington, “Orthodox Christianity and the Russian Transformation,” in John Witte jr. & Michael Bourdeaux, eds. *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia. The New War for Souls*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999, 51-65, especially 52-55.

Shriver also emphasized that there is a great need for a rewriting of history, a rewriting so that the history no longer follows the victimization mode, which has characterized many of the national histories that were written during the age of romantic nationalism, which were then suppressed and are again coming to the fore. In part that is due to the fact that such works easily came to hand for reprinting, to replace the Soviet histories for example, and also because to strike that victimization mode, as Mr. Milosevich discovered ten years ago, now seems to work.

I also want to emphasize, when thinking back over the past decade, that we have been living with a sense of contrast. It is the contrast in orientation between those who seek to work out of a sense of continuity, and are developing arguments on that basis, as I am seeking to do here, and those persons who suddenly discovered Eastern Europe as a place of mission or as a place of many opportunities. In that context, the established church relationships, including those of the WCC and NCC, were perceived to have gone into an extended hiatus. I think we could identify the loss in financial commitments, and in the number of personnel, that our denominational programs had in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, I would suggest that at the end of ten years, we could say that the stability of those kinds of relationships that built on the past and continued forward are becoming much more evident again. I would argue that many of the denominational organizations are now moving toward the kind of serious conversation with East European church leaders of their own traditions, that are more similar to the style of earlier years, with the exception that one can hear the East European and former Soviet Union leaders now speak more from a theological and ecclesiological way of understanding, over against a contextually political one.

I want to relate CAREE to this development because the key resource in CAREE is persons, it is not really money. It is persons who have experience and who connect with group memories including the denominational memories of the longer term, that can still be offered. It is also helpful for us to recognize that the new expatriate workers in Eastern Europe can now be viewed in a more differentiated mode than we did seven or eight years ago when they looked like greenhorns, uninformed persons who came with their church planting strategies or any kind of a

program that had been used in North America, now to be offered in the virgin territory of Eastern Europe and paying somebody to be the translator, for a mechanical translation. I have watched such efforts, whether someone was standing on the street and preaching in English in Odessa and expecting somebody walking by to understand, or accosting you on the subway in Moscow or on the streets of Novosibirsk to try to communicate to you in English. I remember one time teaching and being asked to vacate the classroom, because someone else was coming who had sent around a letter to Protestant pastors in the area to come to his seminar. So my class moved into the cafeteria for our class session, while this man of seventy came in to present his seminar. He spoke in English, another man translated it into German, and yet another translator turned it into Russian, and the listeners were busy writing down the points. Three hours later it was all over and the man with his translators had left.

That too, has changed. Some stayed on and now have knowledge, experiential knowledge, and they have started to read. They have started to learn the language, not just in its simple convertibility, but have started to catch the way one speaks, the unique references and associations. For example, to understand why the Russian interlocutor kept referring to those 19th century Russian philosophers, and to realize to what degree those writers spoke theologically to the issue at hand. Such persons too are signaling, within the limits of their own structures, which are not noted for their ecumenical ties, some readiness to seek the relationship with others. I think that affects how we relate, that we need to forget certain manifestations of craziness of earlier years, in order to now try to work with people who do have a good heart, and are finally finding a theology, missiology and ecclesiology that I, at least, would be more ready to want to build on.

With reference to the former Soviet Union, I think too that we have reached some point of understanding where we need to do more differentiation than we have done earlier. That means to make specific and critical geographic distinctions when referring to the religiosity of the people and to confessional allegiances. Not

everybody in the former Soviet Union is from an Orthodox territory¹⁶. Even within the Russian Federation, I find it helpful to think for example, of Orthodox claims to large parts of Siberia, as having no more substance than the claims that you might remember from our history in America of persons on the Eastern side of the Alleghenys thinking that the Midwest or the West, are parts of our church territory. It was rather a pattern of movement from East to West, of more immigrants coming, as well as the new American churches such as the Disciples, the Methodists and Baptists, moving across the country. There are ways in which one can read the development of Siberia in terms of a frontier thesis, and one must also recognize the multi-confessional nature of Siberia and even Central Asia due to involuntary migration. Persons have settled in and this population mixing will never be reversed.

Another set of observations take me back to one of my favorite journalists, Timothy Garton Ash, who is always reminding us of what used to be, and what a celebrated writer said a long time ago. When interviewed by Radio Free Europe in January 2000, where the interviewer asked him about the paradox, that while there is much talk about the new millennium, there is not much talk about a new morality. Doesn't Europe need a new morality for the new millennium? Garton Ash responded

"Well, it would be very nice, wouldn't it? There is a sense that something is going wrong in the sort of model of consumer democracy that post-communist Europe is taking over from the West--a bad copy of the West. I think in this part of the world--and by this part of the world I mean Bulgaria as well as the Czech Republic [and elsewhere]--you sense this malaise of consumer democracy. My contribution as a writer is to analyze the malaise, to expose it and certainly I think that better political leadership--a leadership that puts the long term before the short term--is one of the answers we need. But we also need more critical intellectuals who point out these problems and try to drag people away from the television screens."¹⁷

¹⁶Newer sociological studies reviewed by Aleksandr Shchipkov in John Witte, Jr. & Michael Bourdeaux, eds. *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia. The New War for Souls*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999 make that point, as do the essays by Lyudmila Filipovich (*REE*, XIX, 5, 1999) and Anatoly Kolodny (*REE*, XX, 1, 2000). For opinion poll research see Kiimo Kaariainen & Dmitrii Furman, eds. *Starie tserkvi, novie veruiushchie. Religia v massovom soznanii postsovetsskoi Rossii*. Moskva: Letnii Sad, 2000.

¹⁷"Timothy Garton Ash Discusses 1989", *Radio Free Europe Newslines*, December 1999, www.RFE.org. See his essays published as *The Uses of Adversity*, New York: Random House, 1989.

That addresses the types of persons involved with CAREE.

In a beautiful long article published in the *New York Review of Books* at the end of 1999 Garton Ash noted that we now know more about the consequences of 1989 and its causes, including who was the agent provocateur who triggered the demonstration in Prague. That is, it was set up by the authorities, but then it went out of their control. Further he claimed that not much new has come out of the 1989 revolutions except

“For the great new idea of this revolution was the revolution itself. It was not the “what” but the “how,” not the end but the means. The new idea of 1989 was nonrevolutionary revolution. In talking of these events, the word “revolution” has always to be qualified with an adjective— “peaceful,” or “evolutionary,” or “self-limiting,” or “velvet”—because the leaders of the popular movements deliberately set out to do something different from the classic revolutionary model, as it developed from 1789, through 1917, right up to the Hungarian revolution of 1956. As I remember people actually discussing at the time in the Magic Lantern theater in Prague, an essential part of earlier revolutions had been revolutionary violence. Here, there was a conscious effort to avoid it.”¹⁸

BUT because it was that peaceful, it lacked the element of ‘revolutionary catharsis’. Instead the approach required compromise, reliance on small steps, HENCE ten years after Garton Ash was calling for some form of TRC: **“such a process symbolically draws a line between the new era and the old without calling for forgetting or even necessarily, forgiving. It is probably the closest a nonrevolutionary revolution can come to revolutionary catharsis.”¹⁹**

PROGRESSION OF THEMES IN REE DURING THE DECADE

I have not done a careful review of all the articles carried by *REE* over the course of the decade to check how balanced was our coverage of the major themes that have arisen. The following cursory remarks are more an effort to show the

¹⁸Timothy Garton Ash, “Ten Years After”, *New York Review of Books*, November 18, 1999, 16-17.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

progression of themes somewhat chronologically, though there will also be some contradictions to that progression.

A very early preoccupation preceding 1990 certainly by at least four years, was the question: ‘when will they change the law’?, so that the Law on Religious Cults of April 1929 (and its revisions of 1962 and 1975) with its very restrictive features intended to eliminate religious institutions, would finally disappear altogether - that would have been the ideal - or it would be revised into a very liberal law. That new law was approved in 1989, only to have the Soviet Union dissolve soon after, but a similar law was passed in 1990 for the Russian Federation. There followed a very short period of living in religious freedom, from a legal perspective. James Krotov’s attempt to show the progression till the new restrictions of 1997 came into effect²⁰, once again revealed the patterns of the previous forty years of the de facto shift in state policy toward religious entities that then required bringing legislation in line with the renewed limits. We have taken note of the danger signs, but one reason why I have not yet found it necessary to publish a new article reviewing the praxis of the past three years, is that the indicators of systematic carrying out of the limitations are still too contradictory, too shaped by local idiosyncracies.

²⁰Yakov Krotov, “The Fight for Freedom of Conscience: Russia 1992 - 1995. The Story of the Law on Religion”, *REE*, XVII, 3, June 1997, Part II XVII, 5 Oct. 1997.

In the first years of this decade, we devoted some time to the themes of nonviolence and truth-telling. Then after that first flurry of new mission initiatives, we began making our contributions to the issue of the problem of proselytization. Those articles continue. A personal observation is that the issue of proselytism in its negative meaning - there were originally positive meanings - is something that needs to be in the conversation constantly if you are living in Eastern Europe. Whereas if one lives in North America, it is hard to get anyone to take it seriously. There one finds the attitude, that if your own church is any good, you will gain adherents, so not to worry. We are a marketing culture. This is fundamental to all our ecclesiologies, regardless of our church traditions, this is a central element to Americanizing those European Christian traditions. This therefore makes it extremely difficult for American Christians to enter into the proselytism problematic seriously. In many ways, our discourse refers to incidents of the problem in Eastern Europe, but for anything to change we need to devise a way for the American Christian culture of denominations in friendly competition to take the problem more seriously.

A growing theme has been the preoccupation with theological education. In 1989 there was an immediate interest to catch up - persons had yearned to study the Bible, wanted to examine theological issues, and they knew about the major theological debates that had shaped the West - so now they sensed the opportunity to catch up as quickly as possible. Numerous schools for theological education sprang up, each claiming to be the best following the highest standards. Then followed a period of shakedown, *REE* publishing several articles seeking to compare schools and programs. More recently, particularly on the Protestant side, there are efforts to speak with each other in a more scholarly mode. For example, persons deeply committed to a Pentecostal perspective participating at a consultation where there were also Baptists, Lutherans and Mennonites, spoke in eirenic style. I as visitor could tell that serious dialogue was starting. Leonid Kishkovsky's reflections on changes within Orthodox theological education [elsewhere in this issue] also underline this noticeable effort to seek dialogue. There are also beginning signs of a readiness for conversation between a few Orthodox and Protestant professors (mainly in Petersburg and Moscow).

CAREE attempted, particularly at its San Francisco meeting in November 1997 to look at the general issue of social reconciliation and to ask whether the CAREE community could help address its theological and historical aspects. That surely needs to continue.

Yet another theme that I have chosen to label ‘who speaks to whom?’ has to do with the recognition that the contributors to *REE* over the course of the past decade has been changing, which marks the achievement of a goal that CAREE set out long ago. As I understood Paul Mojzes during his years as editor, he was seeking out these contributors, but the effort succeeded largely because many CAREE activists have managed to get persons from Eastern Europe to articulate something in writing. They were then able to facilitate publication in the lingua franca of English that now seems to function in the region, and via publication in *REE* the contributor knew that it would arrive in numerous East European libraries where it would be read. This seemed a safer way to confront each other and to write a response in similar form. Who speaks to whom through *REE* is in the first place, I would argue, thinking persons across Eastern Europe who have a Christian commitment, or religious commitment (since we are getting contributions from adherents of Islam) who see this as a medium of speaking to each other. We find ourselves in the West listening in, perhaps offering insights from the way we have done our scholarship.

Much of what we have to offer is in the form of a conversation, I would argue. I mean conversation in the sense of speaking things through seriously, considerately. Here are several conversation projects that I am familiar with. The first is to remind ourselves that in the late eighties we were in the process through CAREE of trying to find new ways of dialogue with persons in the Soviet Union where it was very difficult to find a true Marxist believer, whether in the Peace Fund, or in a circle of university professors. Deep belief was no longer evident, but there were persons with a deep resistance to any form of transcendence. So we had a number of conversations that explored world views, sometimes in the context of citizen diplomacy. Such conversations are now more difficult, partly due to the financial constraints on intellectual life in the former Soviet Union. But we have also been asking what is the value of a conversation unless one has a sense that the interlocutor at the table

opposite you, represents something. Such structures of thought representation are not quite re-formed yet. Nevertheless, I sense that a conversation between those who still envision a secular way for the future and those who are Christian is something we could address more.

We attempted to help facilitate the “Christian Faith and Human Enmity” meetings that took place in Moscow and Budapest in 1994 and 1996, and are thankful that some continuing forum still exists. From conversations with leading Russian Baptists, I got the impression that it is only at moments of local conflict or crisis that they can refer to this forum as a means of calling each other. But the kinds of personal ties that there used to be when leaders of all the confessional bodies had to attend inter-church meetings, because that was seen to be contributing to the official peace agenda of the Soviet Union, where the individuals did get to know each other personally and appreciate each other as human beings, and often as Christians, such relationships have been less possible in recent years. Recently Sharon Linzey, *REE* associate editor, published *God in Russia*,²¹ which consists of papers presented by persons who were Orthodox (primarily Deacon Andrey Kourayev, Frs. Yakunin and Kochetkov), those seeking to mediate from the West such as Jane Ellis from Keston Institute, or persons from Evangelical Protestant mission societies, who sought to engage in dialogue between Protestants and Orthodox. The book presents a record of conversations that are already dated, due to the changing context, not quite the ‘dialogue’ they had hoped for. Part of the problem was that its participants did not represent a broad base, but in terms of its local meaning - I recall participating in at least one such event one afternoon in Moscow - it was a way of focusing on a topic and getting to know someone else, sharing bibliography relevant to the arguments or setting some records straight.

²¹Sharon Linzey & Ken Kaisch, eds. *God in Russia. The Challenge of Freedom*. Lanham/New York/Oxford: University Press of America, 1999.

Several Mennonites, myself included, participated in a series of conversations now known as the Prague Consultations (1986-2000). My own Mennonite tradition became involved in ecumenical conversations in Europe after World War II in what became known as the Puidoux conferences. These were conversations, by and large, between West European Protestant theologians and representatives of the Anabaptist tradition, with special focus on the theme of peace.²² What changed in the mid 1980s was the beginning of conversations by persons from this Puidoux tradition who were now meeting persons from the Czech Hussite tradition, broadly defined. When it began, its convenor Milan Opo_enský, then professor of ethics at the Comenius Faculty in Prague, thought that there needed to be a way in which the ecumenical movement might place a stronger emphasis on social ethics, one emerging out of an eschatological perspective. This had been a key feature of the beginnings of both the Hussites and of the Anabaptists. This showed promise since it involved a different approach than had characterized Faith and Order meetings, and would also draw attention to the Word and Deed concerns of the Reformation era, in contrast to the well known concern for the Reformation of dogma, that has continued to shape confessional discourse thereafter. The Prague consultations shifted in focus at its fourth round in 1994 when Lutheran and Reformed traditions became major participants. My point in noting these conversations, is that they too have established some new conversation partners. By bringing in more representatives from Western churches (after 1994), we observed how the West took over again, much as happened in the World Council of Churches. So we found ourselves asking, how can we seek to articulate a comprehensive view of the Reformation (a stated goal after 1994), if we do not proceed with a keen self-awareness of how local and contextualized it was, and acknowledge that there were similarities, or forms of reformation going on further east. So the Hussite story, as it developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (and about which we learned more during the conversations) reminded us of what was happening in Moscow; therefore we needed to have Orthodox representatives present. As it turned out, though the Prague series were to end in

²²For a historical overview with major texts see Don Durnbaugh, ed. *On Earth Peace*. Elgin IL: Brethren Press, 1978.

February 2000, it was the warm affirmations of an Orthodox representative and of others just joining the conversation, that persuaded the participants to continue that particular conversation.²³

²³The papers were published in *Brethren Life and Thought*, XXXV, 1 (Winter 1990); *Studies from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches*, no. 30 (1996), no. 42. (1999). See also my analysis in “Eschatology and Social Ethics in Ecumenical Perspective: Reflections on the Prague Consultations” in Loren Johns, ed. *Apocalypticism and Millennialism. Shaping a Believers Church Eschatology for the Twenty-First Century*. Kitchener ON: Pandora Press, 2000. 309-325.

Such conversations do not seem to achieve a great deal, when measured in statistical terms. Yet they are ways of conversing where slowly, very slowly, a readjusting of thinking does indeed take place. So I see CAREE seeking to identify for the future, in a quite limited sense, those persons with whom we wish to continue to converse, because we share something in common, or because we need to hear them. That calls for seeking out the new leadership in North America and the new theological leadership across Eastern Europe, and devising ways for establishing relationships. I would suggest to you that the task of overcoming violence, as understood within some need for a truth and reconciliation process, could be longer term agenda for CAREE, as a implicit contribution to the WCC's Programme to Overcome Violence. That includes seeking to clarify how much history we need to bring to bear to the East European setting, whether we are simply speaking out of the experience of the last decade, whether reassessing the past century, or even whether speaking out of the context of the Reformation as the watershed in history - still a fundamental assumption of many western Christians, Catholic and Protestant. Is that assumption not the problem that we need to wrestle with more deeply, so that the East/West conversations we have been seeking gets us at least to a reassessment of the 2000 year Christian trajectory?