



When “soft powers” triumphed: 1989 in Retrospective

Short memories breed short-sightedness. For my generation who witnessed first hand the momentous events of 25 years ago, it is imperative to tell the stories to a generation of Europeans too young to remember, and to reflect on their enduring significance.

This edition of Vista which I have been invited to edit gives glimpses of those heady and euphoric days, of the spiritual dynamics that led up to the events of late 1989 and of the consequences for missions and church planting.

What we witnessed a quarter of a century ago can be described as the triumph over tyranny of the ‘soft powers’ of love, truth and justice. Although the collapse came suddenly and unexpectedly, a longer process had been under way that reached a tipping point in 1989, as George Weigel writes in *The Final Revolution*. The Bible smuggling described by Al Akimoff and Ildiko Kovacs kept hope alive among believers enduring all sorts of persecution,

some of which Mark Elliott warns is returning in Russia for the non-Orthodox. Weigel writes about the specific role that the Catholic Church and John Paul II played in promoting a moral and spiritual revolution at least a decade before that tipping point was reached.

When JP II was elected as pope, the KGB realised they had a serious problem. His message in Warsaw in 1979 to the million-strong crowd to ‘Fear Not!’ was the signal for a revolution of the human spirit that spread from Poland to Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Romania and the Baltics. Lech Wałęsa’s independent trade union, *Solidarność* (Solidarity) was directly encouraged by the pope, and its members drew from personal wellsprings of faith. (When in May 1981 I found myself seated in a restaurant in Warsaw across the aisle from Wałęsa and his friends, I never dreamed I was looking at a future president of a democratic Poland!)

Elsewhere other brave and anonymous individuals were stirred to acts of courage

CONTINUED INSIDE

EDITORIAL

Yeast in the East

“The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.” (Matt. 13:33)

The parable of the leaven is one of the shortest of Jesus parables but one of the most powerful. It’s diminutive size, just nineteen words in the original Greek, seems to echo it’s message: that God’s Kingdom may seem small, invisible even, but given time it has such power that all around it is transformed.

Those who were privileged to observe the events of 25 years ago in Berlin and across Eastern Europe saw an extraordinary transformation unfold before their very eyes. All-powerful regimes crumbled before the irresistible force of individual acts of faith and courage.

As we approach the 25th Anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall on the 9th of November, the editors of Vista wanted to dedicate this issue to the events of that momentous year and its enduring impact on mission, particularly in the East. But to do it justice we felt it best to invite an older brother who was active in mission at the time to serve as guest editor.

We are truly grateful to Jeff Fountain who has not only contributed the lead article, but has drawn together most of the content through his network of contacts of those who were eye-witnesses to the transformative power of the yeast in the East!

Our prayer is that this issue of Vista encourages you to believe in the transforming power of the gospel of the Kingdom in today’s Europe; and that we might show the same faith and courage as the Christians of the East a generation ago.

Jim Memory

and resistance. In Lithuania for example, during Stalin's Soviet occupation, hundreds of thousands were deported to Siberia. In 1956, after Stalin's death, returning Lithuanians erected crosses on a small hill in gratitude and to remember those who would never return. The hill became a place of prayer for those still suffering.

In 1961, the authorities bulldozed the Hill of Crosses, declaring it a place of 'ignorance'. Somehow, new crosses kept appearing overnight. Attempts to flood the area, block the roads and turn the hill into an inaccessible island all failed over time. More crosses just kept appearing. Finally in 1985, the government abandoned their hopeless task. Today hundreds of thousands of crosses cover this 10-metre high hill; some even say millions!

In Leipzig, East Germany, the *Nicolaikirche* became the centre of the Prayer for Peace movement during the 80's which swelled into street marches of 70,000 on October 9, 1989, demanding truth and justice. The marchers responded to armed and violent police provocation in a spirit of peace, love and forgiveness. One month later the wall was demolished.

The Pan-European Picnic that took place on the Austrian-Hungarian border on August 19th 1989, when 600 picnickers burst through a gate to cross over to the west, is seen as the 'pin-prick that burst the communist balloon'.

The Velvet Revolution in Prague led by Vaclav Havel, and the sudden overthrow of



The Hill of Crosses in Šiauliai, Lithuania

the Ceaușescu dictatorship starting with thousands of Romanians kneeling in the city square to pray the Lord's Prayer, and then chanting 'God exists, God exists!', are yet further examples of the triumph of the soft powers over the tyranny of communism.

In September 1988, one third of all Estonians participated in a massive song festival, singing forbidden national songs in what became known as the Singing Revolution. The following year, two million people joined hands to form the Baltic Way, a human chain 600 km long spanning the three Baltic states.

**'God exists,
God exists!'**

Four decades earlier, another event inspired by the 'soft powers' of Christianity, of forgiveness and reconciliation with one's enemy and of love for God and neighbour, had led directly to the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community, and thus the EU. Robert Schuman's announcement of his plan on May 9, 1950, is, in my judgement, the defining moment of post-war European history, more significant

even than the events of November 9, 1989, when the wall came down. For the latter would not have happened without the former. The success and attractiveness of the European project gave hope and aspiration to millions of central and eastern Europeans.

This same dynamic of spiritual and moral revolution triggered Ukraine's Orange Revolution and the recent Maidan protests. The possibility that the Ukraine could play a similar role to that of Poland in inspiring faith, hope and vision among the post-Soviet republics is raised in our closing articles.

May this edition of Vista encourage us to continue to believe and pray for God's kingdom to come in this part of the world.

Jeff Fountain

Director of the Schuman Centre for European Studies

www.schumancentre.eu/

"SOMETHING TERRIBLE IS HAPPENING" - AL AKIMOFF



Al Akimoff's grandparents and parents left the Ukraine in Stalin's time and travelled across Siberia to China where Al was born. Raised and based in the US, Al worked extensively across the Soviet Union for over 40 years as director of YWAM Slavic Ministries. He is pictured (left) preaching in Riga, Latvia.

My first visit 'behind the Iron Curtain' was in 1970 with the Netherlands-Soviet Youth Friendship Society, a communist front group. I had just joined a small band of Bible Smugglers led by a daring young Dutchman named Brother Andrew. We were given VIP treatment and listened to propaganda explaining why there were bread lines but no cars.

For the next twenty years we ministered to what was called the "underground church", expanding our ministry to discipleship and later to evangelism - always under the eyes of the KGB.

Imagine then what we felt when we began to hear the words, "perestroika" and "glasnost" being spoken by the new Soviet leader, Gorbachev. Events began to explode all around us. And then the wall fell!



One day in late 1989 we drove across the border from Austria into Czechoslovakia. After stopping to pray our usual prayers before the border, we then slowly drove to the border control. We stuck our passports out the windows for the officer. He just smiled at us and said, "Today, you do not need passports. Welcome to a free Czechoslovakia!" We drove on to a country

delirious with freedom. People were climbing on statues in Wenceslas Square. Flags were flying, horns blowing and people danced in the streets. It was an incredible experience.

In August 1991, I arrived in Moscow by train from Kiev with my wife and two small daughters in the early hours of the morning. We did not then know, but at the same hour tanks were encircling the Kremlin. At a friend's house early that morning, she turned on her television for the latest news. Music from Swan Lake was all that she could find. "Something terrible is happening", she said. "They only play this music when there is some major happening."

Over next few days we gleaned news from this lady and her upbeat young Russian friends. We learnt that hard-line communists had arrested Gorbachev. A coup was in progress. Finally, the coup leaders appeared on television to explain that they had taken control over the land. Watching these very old men whose voices

"Can this really be true, is this really happening?"

and hands trembled as they spoke, our friend remarked, "Is this what we have been afraid of all these years?"

The next day Yeltsin made his famous stand against the coup leaders. The military refused to obey orders, the coup collapsed and the Soviet Empire became history. In the morning we headed into the city on the metro. As our train came up to street level, everyone gasped at the sight of the white, blue and black Russian flag flying for the first time since the Revolution.

From that time on we went on to experience miracle after miracle in country after country. In Albania a huge banner across the main square declared, "God loves Albania." We preached in a stadium with the new government leaders sitting just below the platform listening to the gospel for the first time in over forty years. In Bulgaria at a Jesus Festival in the main park, the city mayor said, "People, listen to the message these people have brought us. We have not heard this for many years. They have come to tell us about Jesus."



Members of the Albanian government listening to the gospel for the first time.

The Deputy Minister of Religion for Russia invited us to pass out Bibles to every school in the country. Russian soldiers were brought in to help us unload the trucks. "Seventy years ago we made a mistake," he said. "We took God out of our country. Look at what it has done to us. We must bring God back and we need to begin with our children."

Every day we would wake up and pinch ourselves and say, "Can this really be true, is this really happening?"

Al Akimoff

SMUGGLING THE BOOK OF HOPE—ILDIKO KOVACS

The printing of Bibles was not allowed during the 1950's and 1960's in Eastern Europe where the communist ideology reigned. This painful situation was recognized by some brave Christians from the West who dared to cross the Iron Curtain to bring encouragement. Brother Andrew from the Netherlands was the first who started to come and act. We first met him in 1959 in Budapest. My father who was a Baptist pastor and had studied in Hamburg Seminary became his good friend and main interpreter.

At the Soviet border, everybody had to be thoroughly checked. Every item was taken out of our suitcases to make sure no harm would be made to the ideology of the mighty Soviet Union.

Brother Andrew and several other missions like OM and Slavic Gospel Association started smuggling Bibles into our countries. We were among the recipients and distributors. Christian brothers and sisters heard the news and came to our home to collect Bibles as secretly as possible. Many came from Romania since about two million Hungarians lived there. Some also came from Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

The big trouble started when we received Russian Bibles and a friend started distributing them in Russian army camp. When that was discovered in 1966, my father's preaching permit was withheld. Because of that he lost his ministry, home and income. With a six-member family, a very difficult time started for him and for us all.

Despite all these difficulties, I deeply desired to travel to the Soviet Union to pass Bibles to those people who had an even greater shortage than we Hungarians. One year later in 1967, when I was 19 years old, I joined a communist youth group (this was the only possible way to travel) and took a train to Moscow with several Bibles in my suitcase.

At the Soviet border, everybody had to be thoroughly checked. Every item was taken out of our suitcases to make sure no harm would be made to the ideology of the mighty Soviet Union. As I watched the soldiers doing their job I felt fear and loneliness. What would happen to me?



Brother Andrew and Ildiko Kovacs met up again recently in Holland after 40 years

But when it was my turn the officer signaled me to pass. This time Jesus saved me from troubles and saved the Bibles for Russian people. Only God knows what role those smuggled Bibles played in bringing hope and keeping the Christian faith in our countries.

Ildiko Kovács (Ildiko and her husband Géza live in Budapest where they continue to be engaged in pastoring and discipling.)

During the early 80s, as I became more aware of world and regional politics, European politics was dominated by that apparently impregnable wall separating East from West and of the vast empire of the USSR whose ranks were massed behind it. Our home received, as did many other homes of the era, a booklet outlining what to do in the event of a nuclear attack. I remember reading that I should shelter under the stairs and put a bucket over my head (or something to that effect).

Then Gorbachev became leader of the Soviet Union in 1985 and attempted to decrease tensions with the west and introduce political liberalisations in the USSR. As communist governments crumbled during 1989 and the reunification of Germany in 1990 became inevitable, the Cold War finally spluttered to a halt. I shared the amazement, disbelief, and joy of many as we watched on our TV sets the Berlin Wall being physically dismantled.

I've now lived half of my lifetime in the wake of the political, economic, social, and religious changes ushered in by the events of the late 80s and early 90s. Many of those have been beneficial and welcome changes.

However, the economic and political crisis of the twenty-first century's opening decade prompts the need for a fresh evaluation of the role of Christian faith and the contribution that the good news about Jesus Christ can make to contemporary Europe. Here I want to highlight some significant developments of the last quarter of a century and review some ecclesial and missionary developments during that period.

Nationhood, independence and ethnicity

Armed conflict ravaged former Yugoslavia for the eight year period 1991-1999, resulting in some 140,000 deaths and massive loss of infrastructure. Competing nationalist aspirations and ethnic tensions fed these wars. Although armed hostilities in the Balkans finally ceased with the ending of the Kosovo War in 1999, regional tensions remain.

As the European Union extended its borders with the accession of new member states in 2004, 2007, and 2013, the countries of the EU have been forced to face the realities of increasingly diverse populations. This continues to fuel ethnic and nationalist tensions which drive Euro-sceptical movements and political parties,

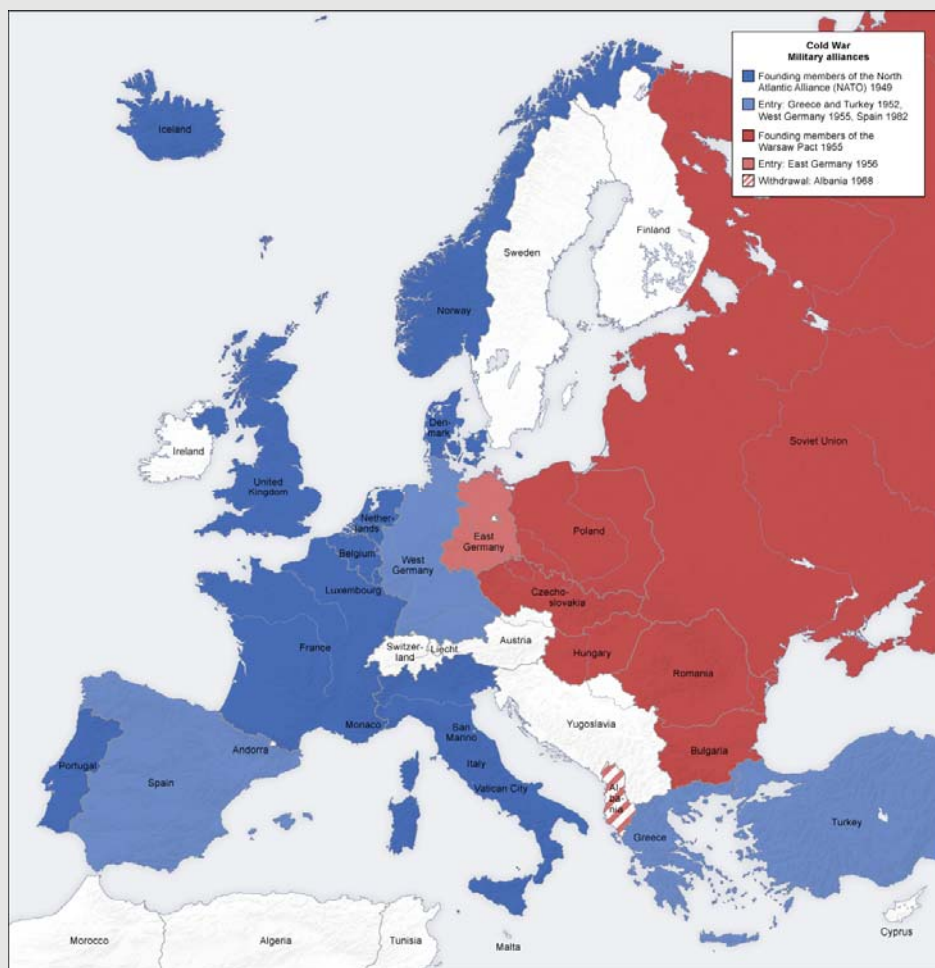


Image: Wikipedia Commons

lend support to forms of political extremism targeted at ethnic minorities, and which become increasingly resistant to particular groups of immigrants.

Of course the aspiration to nationhood and self-determination is not always malignant and, in the case of Slovakia and the Czech Republic, saw the 'Velvet Divorce' between the constituent territories of the former Czechoslovakia. In the case of Scotland it generated sufficient momentum towards a referendum on independence in 2014 (unsuccessful) and continues to stir the desire for independence in Catalonia and other regions of Spain, moves consistently resisted by the Spanish Federal Government.

New forms of political alliance

With the expansions of 2004, 2007 and 2013, the EU went from a membership of fifteen to twenty-eight. Eleven of these new member states were under the hegemony of the USSR twenty-five years previous. A further four former Soviet-bloc territories are either formal candidate countries or have potential candidate status (Albania, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo) and two (Montenegro and Serbia) are negotiating a roadmap towards accession.

The former USSR was replaced by a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) headed by the Russian Federation and through which it promotes its interest in maintaining close ties with ethnic Russians or Russian-speaking passport holders in what it frequently refers to as its 'near abroad'. The presence of ethnic Russians in Georgia and Ukraine lent justification for Moscow's claims of protecting Russians living in Ukrainian territory in Crimea and its control of former Georgian territory in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Moldova is also vulnerable in this regard, having its own ethnic Russian population in the Transnistria region, east of the Dniester River and bordering Ukraine. Whilst the three Baltic states also have ethnic Russian populations they are afforded the relative protection of NATO membership.

Increasing cultural and religious diversity

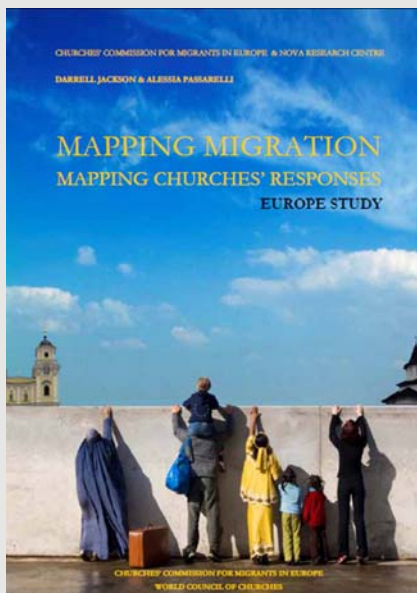
Citizens of a majority of EU states, have the right to travel, reside, work, and conduct business in any of the EU's member states. However, this has come at the expense of stricter external border controls for some. Migrants seeking refuge and asylum experience this on a daily basis as they try to enter the EU without proper documentation.

The presence of documented and undocumented immigrants in Europe has accelerated its cultural and religious diversity and prompted new policy and political responses. During the mid-'noughties', European politicians began to announce the demise of multiculturalism. Accompanying this was a new focus on 'interculturalism' that promoted a more intentional approach to the integration of migrants through policies supporting language acquisition, entry in education and the workforce, and the promotion of national or European values (assessed formally in some countries).

With cultural diversity came religious diversity and an increasing European sensitivity towards Islam in its more radical forms. The secular 1970s did not prepare Europe well for the religious vitality that would become all too apparent during the late 1990s and onwards. Religious conviction was implicit in the various Balkans conflicts with, for example, Serbian Orthodox fighting against Bosnian Muslims and Croatian Catholics. The use of religious labels is unconvincing to most theologians or religious teachers but their adoption by various movements has been remarkable in creating and sustaining committed identity and purpose, especially where these are directed towards the pursuit of violence.

Church and Mission in Europe

Over the last twenty-five years I have noticed a careful re-assessment of the evangelical euphoria that was apparent



during the early 1990s in Central and Eastern Europe. It seemed that the call to conversion was "Repent, believe, be baptised, and take a truckload of Bibles, children's clothes, etc. to Romania!" These early years saw an unprecedented openness to the Gospel, new religious freedoms, and a plethora of church planting ministries, Bible and literature distribution, social ministries, and evangelistic initiatives. This was bolstered by the arrival of large numbers of missionaries from US, Korea, and various western European mission agencies. Effective partnerships led to the establishing of many more local evangelical congregations in parts of Europe.

However, the presence of missionaries was not without its tensions. Their presence was

resented almost unanimously by the traditional churches (Orthodox and Catholic) and not infrequently by existing evangelical churches which experienced the loss of formerly active members to non-indigenous churches that were well-funded and well-resourced from the west.

The missionary activity of recent years has become more sensitive to the local context. Church planting from the west has lost the appeal of its novelty. Sustained and longer-term approaches are seen to be more appropriate. There are also, for example, innovative examples of evangelical co-operation with traditional churches, notably from among mission societies such as the British CMS or the German EMW and agencies such as World Vision.

In taking seriously their missionary commitment to Europe, there are also Christian churches and individuals who understand the need to engage their Christian worldview with the largely secular corridors of political, economic, cultural, social, and educational power. The European Union is now required to serve and reflect the interests of twenty-eight countries. Many of these are much more 'non-secular' than the pre-2004 'club of fifteen'. Engaging with European institutions will not, however, be unproblematic for people of faith but it does at least open up the possibility of a new way of re-introducing the people of Europe to a convincing and compelling account of the Christian faith and the witness it give to the good news of Jesus.

Darrell Jackson

AFTER THE WALL CAME DOWN: CHURCH PLANTING IN POST-COMMUNIST EUROPE—JO APPLETON

In the exciting days after the break-up of the Soviet Union, churches grew and revival seemed to be on its way. Nikolai Ivanov from The Bulgarian Bible League remembers his church in Sophia growing from 200 members to 5000 in less than three years.

"Everything became more colourful," he says. "Before, the streets, the clothes and everything were grey. Everyone was so interested in Christianity because it had been forbidden under Communism. People flooded into the churches.

After praying for the persecuted church in the USSR for many years, Western churches and mission agencies also flooded into the countries as they became more open. Peicho Muhtarov of The Bulgarian Bible League feels his organisation is a good example of Western missionaries partnering with local people:

"The Bible League work with local pastors and teachers, and hire local staff. They allow us to make our own bible study and church planting materials, and don't bring in huge amounts of money that create dependency. We only cover a church planter's travel expenses and push them to receive help from the local churches."

The experience was not so positive however when an organisation came in with their own ideas of how things should be done, and were not prepared to listen to the national Christians.

"In Bulgaria we never had apologetic evangelism – it was always personal testimony and stories of what God has done. But Christian groups come in from outside who have more modernist ways of presenting the Gospel. People become confused and don't know what to do, because this was not in the culture before - the Gospel was always told through stories."

In Ukraine, some partnerships were established before 1990, for example Ukrainian Baptists with the Baptist World Alliance, and the Ukrainian Pentecostals with the Assemblies of God. These recognised relationships gave the opportunity to present the needs of the country and ask for prayer at an organisational level. After 'the Wall came down', it was possible to build more local relationships between churches or ministries in the West with those in the Ukraine.

"We believe very much in partnership and that the body of Christ has beauty in variety," says Victor Kulbich of the Antioch Movement. "Without partnerships with churches in the West we wouldn't have known how to get started or produce new materials because we had never done it before.

"After eighteen years (in 2008), we are now starting to develop triangle partnerships where for example Swedish and Ukrainians are working together to help those in Central Asia and we are working with Germans to



Victor Kulbich of the Antioch Movement, Ukraine

develop a church planting work with street children and homeless people.”

“As we develop experience in church planting in partnership, we recognise that we as Ukrainians can do much more than others, because we belong to the country. We just need understanding and partnership in the consultancy area and training and maybe sometimes financial help to get started. This kind of partnership works well.”

An American missionary who worked in Belarus for many years agrees.

“God is at work doing something among the people – so we need missionaries to come in to find out what God is doing and join in that. In Belarus there are qualified people who just need a partner to add that distinctive flavour to their work, but not come in as an outsider to teach them what to do. One of my Belarusian co-workers was educated at Regent College in Vancouver, and another spent a year in London studying preaching. What could I teach them? But I could partner with them and add to it, rather than trying to tell them what they need to do.”

Joanne Appleton

This article is an extract of a paper exploring the challenges faced by church planters in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Based on interviews conducted in late 2008, the paper describes the conditions in which churches were planted in the Ukraine, Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, East Berlin, Latvia and Russia, as well as issues affecting the growth of the Church in these countries. The paper focuses on three areas: the culture, the Church and the future.

Download the full paper from <http://leadnet.org/docs/ECPN-2008-FEB-After%20the%20Wall%20Came%20Down-Appleton.pdf>

UKRAINE'S UNFINISHED REVOLUTION: THREE PERSPECTIVES

These three articles are reproduced with permission from a special edition examining the impact of the current Ukrainian crisis on the church and ministries in Ukraine and Russia [Vol. 22, No. 3 (Summer 2014)]. It is available in pdf format: www.eastwestreport.org.

SEVEN PREDICTIONS FOR THE CURRENT CRISIS—MARK ELLIOTT

Whether or not Russia ends up seizing more of Ukraine than Crimea, several current religious trajectories will likely continue.

1. Western missionaries will likely continue to face growing impediments in Russia, Crimea, and possibly eastern and southern Ukraine.
2. Western missionaries in Ukraine free of Russian interference will likely continue to be welcome and active.
3. In the midst of ever-mounting violence across eastern and southern Ukraine, it will likely become ever more difficult for missions based in Ukraine to function in Russia.
4. Evangelical churches in Russia will likely continue to face increasing restrictions to their freedom of worship, with the same consequence for any part of Ukraine that Russia might occupy.
5. Relations between Ukrainian and Russian evangelicals will likely continue to remain strained.
6. In an independent Ukraine, the Ukrainian Eastern-Rite Catholic Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kyiv Patriarchate, and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church will all strongly support the country's European orientation.
7. Finally, short of Russian occupation of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate will likely succeed in resisting Patriarch Kyrill's "wide-scale plans for consolidation of the 'Russian world,'" and may, in time, achieve autocephalous status with the support of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

Conclusion

From the perspective of those who favour a stable, independent Ukraine, whether the worst- or the best-case political scenario is realized, the experience of the church in communist China suggests that even a dreaded political outcome need not spell decline for people of faith. The encouraging fact is that Christianity in China has grown dramatically since 1949 despite concerted government attempts to suppress it. Christians in Ukraine and Russia will hopefully take heart in the biblical promise that, in the end, "the gates of hell will not prevail."

Mark Elliott

Editor of the East-West Church and Ministry Report.

AFTER MAIDAN - MIKHAILO CHERENKOV

Maidan – that is how historians will designate the new era in Ukraine and the post-Soviet world. It is a marker not only of social and political change, but of a deep, tectonic shift in thinking, culture, and relationships. Here are some of the consequences of Maidan that have been long in the making.

Russia Apart

After Maidan, Russia launched its takeover of Crimea, and it became immediately clear who supported the Yanukovich regime and its criminal activities. Moscow removed its mask. The "brother at the gates," was armed with weapons and outright hatred. The launch of Russian aggression marked the final end of the "Russian world," about which President Putin and Patriarch Kirill speak so eloquently. Ukraine can be a good, solid neighbour to Russia, but Ukrainians do not believe for a moment the rhetoric about brotherhood and unity among Slavic people. An uncontrolled chain reaction of decay has been set in motion. The idea of Russia as a unifying territorial power in post-Soviet space is receding into the past. None of the former Soviet republics, now independent, wants to join forces with her; she is left alone.

Ukraine Apart

After Maidan, Ukraine, too, is left alone, but for now this is to its benefit. She breaks away from the rough, Russian bear hug. However, her place in Europe is not yet ready, and she herself is not yet ready for Europe. It is a good time for Ukraine to be between East and West, looking around, getting ready, and taking a conscious step toward the European family. At the same time Ukraine should be aware of her special status as a middle ground, on the edge of Europe and in close proximity to Russia. Membership in the European Union will protect Ukraine, but its long-term advantage lies in not belonging completely to either Eurasia or Europe, an intermediary position between two different worlds.

The Force of Civil Society

After Maidan, the entire post-Soviet world can no longer ignore the genuine force of civil society. Maidan demonstrated citizens' remarkable ability to organize and mobilize for battle against a criminal state. Ukrainians themselves were dubious about their abilities, and Russians and Belarusians were even more dubious.



Image: Wikipedia Creative Commons

Maidan has set a precedent of successful action by civil society against a corrupt and out-of-touch regime. Post-Soviet states deaf to the yearnings of their subjects must now contend with this new threat to arbitrary rule and will attempt to crush it. It was not pressure from the West, but rather the solidarity and determination of ordinary people that proved to be the critical factor in Maidan's success.

Students and Journalists as Change Agents

Ukrainian students have no connection with, or remembrance of, the Soviet past and are hardly susceptible to traditional forms of propaganda. In Maidan they proved to be the advocates and engineers of change by their unwavering presence, day in and day out, in the ranks of demonstrators.

The same can be said of journalists. Journalists provided critical support for Maidan protestors and were a primary target of government forces seeking to curb them. In the days to come the best hope for transformation, transparency, and accountability in government, the best hope for checking power-hungry oligarchs, the best hope for effecting modernization, and the best hope of "rebooting" the system rests with journalists.

Maidan and the Church

After Maidan the role of the Church and society's attitude towards it are changing. Previously, in an environment of corrupt institutions, the Church enjoyed the highest confidence rating, but took little advantage of its influence. Instead of serving society, the Church served the interests of the state. Maidan, passing judgment on the state, also passed judgment on the Church. Churches that supported Maidan have a future. In contrast, church leaders who preached neutrality or reassured the Yanukovich regime of their complete devotion have proven themselves to be spiritually bankrupt.

Maidan hammered a stake into the remaining vestiges of Soviet-style rule. Maidan also thrust up shoots of new life, not just post-Soviet life, but life that is totally new. In the

near future we will witness more changes in the wake of Maidan, but it would be much better if we became active participants in building a nation committed to religious liberty, honest government, and economic modernization.

Mikhailo Cherenkov, Vice-president of the Association for Spiritual Renewal, Ukraine

WHAT GIVES US HOPE - ANONYMOUS

For many years, in spite of its often mafia-like political and commercial life, Ukraine has been blessed with a climate in which religious tolerance and freedom have been able to grow far more rapidly than in any other country of the former Soviet Union. It is home to some of the largest churches in Europe. Almost every variety of Christian denomination is represented here, and the trend is not merely to respect one another's right to exist, but to cooperate for the good of society.

For the past 20-plus years Ukraine has been the centre of Christian evangelistic, humanitarian, and social

After Maidan, the entire post-Soviet world can no longer ignore the genuine force of civil society

activity in the former Soviet Union and has long been the major sending country for local missionaries to Russia and other countries, some of which are dominated by Muslims. Christian missions and NGOs of various kinds – both local and foreign – have long worked for spiritual, social, and even political change at national and municipal levels while providing practical assistance to orphans, street children, victims of addictions and disease, and the poor. Ukraine is also home to hundreds of theological institutions of various sizes, and it has the greatest number of Christian schools in the region despite the lack of adequate legislation in their favour.

Spiritual Gains Despite the Odds

None of these gains have come easily. Every parcel of "spiritual ground" has been won in large part through dedication, determination, prayer, and persistence in the face of

enormous financial deficits, shortages of personnel, poor infrastructure, less-than-adequate technology, and sometimes conflicting visions and priorities within the Church. Nevertheless, the advances that have been made by the Christian community in Ukraine that only 25 years ago was dominated by atheistic communism and discrimination against Christians are nothing short of miraculous.

That these developments have occurred over such a short period of time attests to the amazing grace and working of God's Spirit. While we cannot describe this situation as a major, historic spiritual awakening with accompanying large-scale social changes, the region may well be on the cusp of precisely that. Unmistakably the Spirit has been moving, preparing the soil and sowing seeds. Future missiologists may consider this point in the history of this region as truly pivotal and view Ukraine as the nation chosen by the Lord to fulfill particular kinds of missions in this part of the unreached world. For all of these reasons and more, it should have come as no surprise to us that forces of darkness would be unleashed against Ukraine. But surprise us it did and still does every day.

Good Days and Bad

We can only truly speak for ourselves, but we sense that we are not alone in reacting inconsistently to what is going on around us. On good days we see the hand of God bringing good out of what man intends for evil. We see Him moving people and events into place in order to accomplish His ultimate purposes. On other days we confess to giving in to feelings of pessimism and despair. Hearing triumphant clichés, even biblically based ones, often seems hollow and unconvincing because the threats and potential dangers are real. Evil and defeat do seem to be knocking at the door. Some days we feel paralyzed and just want to leave this place.

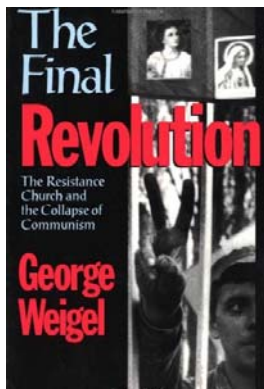
Is it fear? Lack of faith? Maybe some of both? Probably. Forgive us, Lord. It's just that while we know what the final end will be, we can't be sure about what Your will is right now, in this place, for Ukraine, Russia, and the Church.

What Gives Us Hope

We were counselled recently to "just wait." For what, we aren't sure, but we are willing. We are trying to do what we know is right in the meantime, but everything in us cries out for a return to normal life, whatever that is. All we know for certain is that the Lord is good and righteous in all His judgments, and that evil is not of His doing. The current situation is not what He desires for Ukraine, and only He can bring good out of present circumstances. It is this that keeps us going, keeps us praying, and gives us hope.

BIBLIOTHECA

In Vista we normally review recent titles with relevance to European mission but on this occasion, and in keeping with the retrospective theme of this issue, we want to feature two important works written in the years following the fall of the Berlin wall. Both of them emphasise the vital influence of the "soft powers" and the thousands of ordinary Christians whose lives made a real difference. Both are available second-hand at very low cost.

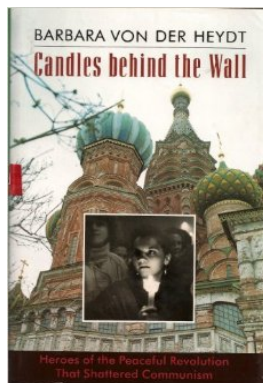


Weigel, G. (1992) *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism*, Oxford: OUP

The story of how the Church helped catalyse the revolution of 1989 in Central Europe by preaching a revolution of conscience, a revolution of the human spirit is told in this book. While many factors played in the collapse of communism, especially in Poland and Czechoslovakia, Weigel argues that the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope were indispensable to what became the Revolution of 1989. The book explores the relationship of democracy to religion, placing the process of communism's collapse in a larger moral context. Weigel rejects arguments that Communism's collapse was due primarily to individuals like Gorbachev or Reagan, or to the Helsinki human rights process or economic failure. The Communist heresy essentially was its claim of human omniscience and omnipotence.

The fall of Communism signified the end of an era of utopian ideology, and resolved the moral and spiritual conflict between democracy and its totalitarian negation. Hence the title "the final revolution" as Weigel uses the term.

The election of a Polish Pope, John Paul II, on October 16, 1978 marked the beginning of the end of Communism in Poland and in the rest of Eastern Europe. For John Paul II came to his new position not content to contain Communism but with a desire to assault its legitimacy, expose its bankruptcy, and ultimately to isolate it and assure its demise.



Von der Heydt, B. (1994) *Candles Behind the Wall: Heroes of the Peaceful Revolution that Shattered Communism*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing

Based on more than 150 personal interviews with people from Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Russia, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, *Candles Behind the Wall* is a gripping account told by people who lived behind the Iron Curtain. Their courage changed the course of history, bringing down a repressive regime with a resounding crash.

Thousands of ordinary but heroic people sparked a moral, spiritual, and political revolution in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union through their courage and convictions, leading to the collapse of Communism.

What gave a young woman the courage to walk up to one of the tanks surrounding the Russian parliament building in the attempted coup of 1991, bang insistently on its side and tell the driver the Bible forbade killing? What gave 70,000 unarmed people the courage to go onto the streets of Leipzig and face down troops under orders to shoot them?

International television correspondent Barbara von der Heydt (Elliott) was based in West Germany prior to the fall of the Wall and witnessed one of the most remarkable chapters of modern history. She launched a private initiative to care for the refugees fleeing communism. Retracing their trails to the countries they had fled, she discovered a moral and spiritual revolution that preceded the political one, a revolution of the heart and mind that began at least a decade before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

CONFERENCE ON MISSION IN POST-SOVIET EUROPE

18-21 Nov 2014
Bucharest, Romania

The European Evangelical Missionary Alliance will hold their annual conference in Bucharest in mid-November and will also be considering the implications for mission of the events of 25 years ago. You can find more information about the conference and how to book a place via the following link:
<http://www.europeanema.org/eema-conference-2014/>

Vista

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