

Editorial

The World Council of Churches has taken an important step forward in undertaking to produce a report on religious freedom in the signatory countries of the Helsinki Declaration.* David Kelly in his article (pp. 4-8) looks at the circumstances in which the WCC's General Assembly in Nairobi took this decision last autumn. Such a report will of course include information on the countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. It is Keston College's hope that such information will be gathered from as many sources as possible, taking into account all the evidence available.

Only two years before the Nairobi gathering, the WCC's Central Committee (August 1973) in a discussion on "Violence, Non-Violence and the Struggle for Social Justice" omitted any overt references to infringements of human rights and discrimination on ideological or religious grounds in communist countries. The final document drawn up by the Central Committee stated only that the situation "in other parts of Africa *and Europe* (our italics) and in Asia and the Pacific" should have been mentioned.

Yevgeni Barabanov, a Russian Orthodox believer, claims that true brotherhood involves spelling out precisely what is meant by such vague phrases. In his article "The Rhetoric of Christian Unity" (*Frontier* Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 200-204), he calls for "genuine brotherhood" among the Christian Churches instead of what he calls "conventional brotherhood" – the product of politicized Christian consciousness. Genuine brotherhood can exist only when Christians speak the truth in love and do not cover up injustices with "theatrical make-up". Away with ideological clichés and rhetoric, demands Barabanov. Christian unity "lies in that depth which cannot be touched by any propaganda. It is more direct than any political consciousness. It is rooted in the solidarity of men who bear in themselves the image of God." Genuine Christian brotherhood demands that each

* Principle number 7 of this Declaration begins: "The participating States will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion."

Christian should hear the demands of his neighbour – and a neighbour is anyone “who turns to us with his call, his need, his suffering”. Barabanov finally appeals to the Churches to be responsible and to hear the cry of the prisoner and the man without rights:

“What does the prisoner really hope for when he turns to the man who is free to travel, who can meet and speak openly with whoever he wants, who can seek, reach and convince others, who can create, and live in the world of books, pictures or thought? . . . It is something deep and basic: from the depths of his obscurity and isolation he turns to that knowledge, that intuition, that experience which he himself actually possesses, and which really does unite men. He turns to another man because he expects some answer, he is appealing to his feeling of *responsibility*.”

The WCC has been charged sometimes with “selective indignation”. This accusation is made in the *Appeal* (dated 16 October 1975) to the delegates at Nairobi sent by Lev Regelson and Fr. Gleb Yakunin (printed on pp. 9-14). Religious believers in the USSR, the writers claim, were disappointed at the way the WCC, though it was concerned for peace in Vietnam, Nigeria, Cyprus, and social justice, and condemned racial and national discrimination, did not include in its programme for active service the persecution of religious believers:

“Among such a wide range of serious problems, however, the matter of religious persecution failed to occupy the place it deserves – although it ought to become the central theme of Christian ecumenism.”

Protests were made over the arrests of Russian Orthodox believers in 1922, but in the 1960s when East European and notably Russian participation in the work of the WCC grew (the Russian Orthodox Church had joined in 1961, after which many other East European denominations joined in addition to those which were already members) no general protest in the WCC was made over, for example, the anti-religious campaign in the USSR of 1959-64, or over the destruction of Christian institutions in China and Albania.

The writers of this *Appeal* stress the central importance of sanctity in the Churches: examples of sanctity in our contemporary world, today's confessors and martyrs, must be given the highest honour and their *podvigi* (spiritual victories) recognized. So the writers suggest to the delegates at Nairobi certain ways of helping religious believers who suffer because of their beliefs – information about them should be circulated, days of prayer organized, material aid sent. Such sharing in and active concern for the suffering would bring all Christians to the experience of Golgotha where alone divisions can be healed.