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Editorial

Two forthcoming events have shaped the contents of this issue of RSS: the Intergovernmental Conference of the European Union to be held in Amsterdam from 16 to 17 June 1997, at which the Treaty of Maastricht will be revised; and the Second European Ecumenical Assembly to be held in Graz from 23 to 29 June 1997 with its theme 'Reconciliation: gift of God and source of new life'. Thanks to special subsidised travel arrangements Graz will be attended by hundreds of Christians from the former Soviet Union and from Central and Eastern Europe.

The First European Ecumenical Assembly, held in Basel at Pentecost 1989, took place in an atmosphere of hope and expectation. Within a few months the communist governments in Eastern Europe had collapsed. A new European order was on the agenda. In 1990 Jacques Delors, then president of the European Commission, challenged the churches, East and West, to take part in a debate on the 'heart and soul' of Europe. One of the few published responses was a report last year by the Netherlands Reformed Church. *Heart and Soul for Europe*? finds that since Basel and the profound political changes of 1989 the churches of Europe have made 'little progress ... in developing a vision of Europe. In particular a broader perspective for the future of the (Western) European integration process is lacking. Moreover, the great dilemmas faced by the European Union are not addressed.'

One of the problems is that the churches of Europe have been having to look in two directions simultaneously: both forwards and backwards. Taking a view on the future of the new Europe involves coming to terms with the legacy of the old Europe. International ecumenical gatherings to set the agenda for churches in a (widened) European Union find themselves grappling as well, or instead, with the problem of '*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*' ('overcoming the past').

The materials in this issue of *RSS* reflect this dual agenda.

In his introductory historical survey, René Rémond sets out to answer the question 'whether, in our century, the Christian churches have on balance striven to unite or divide the continent.' His conclusions are generally positive: the churches at the end of the century, he finds, 'are giving voice to a language of unity; they encourage whatever promotes unity and condemn whatever tends towards exclusion, separation or opposition.' The churches have lost their privileged position in society; but they have thereby gained in independence. 'And they make use of that independence: they speak out more on all the subjects important to society.'

There has also been an increasing readiness among the churches to overcome denominational isolationism. As Barney Milligan asserts, 'We do not deny our own distinctive beliefs by heeding the wisdom of others.' Walter Capps notes that 'the development of a particular tradition always requires contact with traditions opposed to it'. Christianity, in order to define itself, needs contacts with Judaism and Islam. 'No tradition,' he says, 'can achieve self-expression if it remains a self-contained monolith; rather, all genuine self-expression will exhibit evidence of formative oppo-

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sitional influences.' As Michael Sutton points out, 'there could scarcely be a sharper contrast' than that between Samuel Huntington's 1993 vision of the future as a 'clash of civilisations' in which Europe is seen 'as primarily the beleaguered bastion of the West' and the 'ecumenical and religiously rich idea of Europe' of Pope John Paul II. Reviewing the pope's book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Yuli Shreider comments that the pope 'sees in the existing divisions not only the fruit of sin but the revelation of richness, and this leads him to remark that the human race must attain unity through plurality: here he sees the main path for ecumenical dialogue.'

So far, so good. Such developments have undoubtedly taken place and are to be welcomed. They do not, however, mean that the task of the European churches today is by any means straightforward.

Barney Milligan refers to the central message to the churches which came out of Basel: 'a recognition of the damage we have done to one another and the need for corporate repentance ...' But how is this to be achieved? Heino Falcke shows how too facile a 'corporate repentance' can in fact do more harm than good. 'Evildoers eagerly hide behind the idea of collective guilt: everyone is deemed to have supported the totalitarian system to a greater or lesser degree and even the offenders are said to be victims of the system.' He goes on to examine the complex requirements of the process of reconciliation between 'victims' and 'oppressors'. Jesus forgave sins unconditionally; he 'radically and consistently' resisted the temptation, so prevalent today especially among the postcommunist media, to use the knowledge of others' sins as an instrument of power over them. Nevertheless, Falcke points out, it is a matter of mere justice to the 'victims' that the 'oppressors' should not evade facing their guilt. Indeed, 'Forgiveness can be accepted only in knowledge and confession of guilt.' The problem is of course how to bring the offenders to the point where they confess their guilt voluntarily. Falcke's conclusion is that this is in fact an immensely difficult task.

The next four articles in this issue of *RSS* (Hogebrink, Vischer, Linn, Balog) look back at the relations between the churches and Christians in Western and Eastern Europe during the years of the Cold War. Laurens Hogebrink asserts that 'the great failure of ecumenism as regards the communist countries was that for critical Christians in Eastern Europe political excommunication also meant ecumenical excommunication', and he goes on to describe the development of a 'twin-track' strategy by the Interchurch Peace Council in the Netherlands whereby contacts with official church-related bodies in Eastern Europe would always be balanced by contacts with unofficial groupings. Speaking from his own Hungarian experience, however, Zoltán Balog testifies that even this twin-track strategy was inadequate to the circumstances in which Christians lived in Eastern Europe. While the official contacts were heavily publicised, 'the semi-legal contacts were insufficient as alternative evidence; the nods and winks were invisible from afar.' Indeed, according to Balog, the very language spoken in the ecumenical world at large failed to address Christians in communist countries. The verbal affirmation of Western European ecumenical priorities by Eastern European church leaders – and he cites 'Peace, Justice and Integrity of Creation', watchwords of the Basel Assembly – sullied these concepts as far as ordinary Eastern European Christians were concerned. 'Everyone knew that they functioned as substitutes and that they were put in the shop window in place of our own concerns.'

The next two articles (Mehlhorn, Hogebrink) look forwards, focussing on the forthcoming meetings in Amsterdam and Graz. Ludwig Mehlhorn calls for a 'step-

by-step widening to the East' of the European Union, invoking as important catalysts in this process various positive attributes of the European churches which recall those identified by Rémond as twentieth-century achievements. The churches can and should be champions of a 'pan-European' vision; the task of the church is fundamentally universal; it is not confined by political, national or cultural boundaries. Churches are therefore freer than national governments, which do have to take account primarily of national interests. Mehlhorn's general survey of the nature of the current challenge to the churches of Europe is followed by Hogebrink's consideration of specific issues on which the churches could usefully concentrate as they involve themselves ever more fully in the debate on Europe's future. Finally, Jonathan Luxmoore's latest survey of church life in Central and Eastern Europe brings the story up to the end of 1996: encouragingly, in the run-up to Graz he notes a generally higher profile for interconfessional relations, as well as church debate on issues relevant to the widening of the EU, including not only current interchurch tensions but support for a 'churches clause' in a revised Maastricht Treaty and, more generally, the potential contribution of Eastern European Christians to European unity.

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This year *RSS* will come in a distinctive silver cover: 1997 is the 25th anniversary of Keston's unique scholarly journal. It is good that several of the contributors to this issue of RSS find it appropriate to speak well of Keston's achievement. A newcomer to Keston's work, Walter Capps, commends *RSS* for recognising that understanding the experiences of Christians under communism 'will be central to the evolution of the new Europe and of the western world in general in the next century' and commends Keston Institute for taking the lead in exploring a subject of 'such intellectual richness and religious importance'. Looking back, Laurens Hogebrink says that churches in the West did not rise sufficiently to the challenges of East-West Christian contact in communist times, and points out that it is now clear that Eastern European security services had a much higher assessment of the potential of the churches to effect change than was general in the West. 'I think it would be good if here in the West we would just check back on how our churches reacted to the information and appeals for support from Glaube in der Zweiten Welt and Keston College.' Looking to the future, Ludwig Mehlhorn says that churches should do all they can to promote intercultural exchanges, meetings and reciprocal contacts. 'Only in this way can Europe become a reality in the individual lives of its citizens.' The promotion of this kind of contact is at the heart of Keston's programme. Barney Milligan singles out three ways in which Keston will help shape the future. Christians will be enriched by Keston's accumulated experience with the variety in Eastern Europe; by Keston's commitment to serve the cause of religious freedom for all, not just for Christians; and by Keston's furtherance of what is at the heart of the dream for Europe: 'human friendship within the embrace of a loving, holy, just and merciful God.' Keston has a significant part to play, he observes, in the process of 'liberating the soul of the whole of Europe.'

April 1997 PHILIP WALTERS

As part of a commitment to research cooperation between Keston Institute and the new Centre for Russian, Eurasian and Central European Studies at the University of Leeds, the two institutions are planning an international conference in 1998. Please see below for details.

Evolving Conceptions of a Role for Lay Believers in the Christian East and West

International Conference, 30 June–3 July 1998, at the Centre for Russian, Eurasian and Central European Studies, University of Leeds, England, in conjunction with Keston Institute, Oxford

FIRST CALL FOR PAPERS

Offers of papers in any of the following areas are invited:

- Theological reflection on the nature of the laity
  - the historical dimension
  - contemporary reflections
  - variations in Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic conceptions of laity
- Varieties of 'self-identification' among lay believers
- The social and political implications of lay activism
- Laicity and secularisation
- New challenges and problems for lay believers in the conditions of post-Soviet/ post-Socialist society
- Orthodox brotherhoods and sisterhoods
- The monastic way as an expression of lay religious life
- Lay involvement in religious education
- Lay involvement in charity work
- Publishing and broadcasting initiatives
- New reflections on the laity – a focus for East–West Christian dialogue?

The organisers suggest 40–50 minutes' delivery time for individual papers. In each case a total of 90 minutes will be allocated to delivery and discussion. The organisers require an Abstract of 200 to 400 words for each paper offered, to be submitted by 30 June 1997.

The official working languages of the conference will be English, French, German and Russian

If you are interested in attending this conference
and/or in offering a paper, please contact:
Dr Jonathan Sutton, *Department of Russian and Slavonic Studies, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK*

Notes on Contributors

Zoltán Balog was born in 1958. He acted as an advisor at the Basel Ecumenical Assembly in 1989. He is a minister in the Hungarian Reformed Church in Budapest.

Walter H. Capps is professor of religious studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He has written widely on the subjects of the academic study of religion and the relationships between religion and western cultures. He was elected to the US Congress in autumn 1996 and has been appointed to the Congress Committee on International Relations.

Heino Falcke, now retired, was formerly dean of Erfurt. His concept of a reformed socialism was unacceptable to the political leadership of the GDR, who preferred to deal with churchmen they could pigeonhole as conservatives. He played an important role in supporting the informal social groups which sought the protection of the church in the last years of the GDR.

Laurens Hogebrink was born in 1942. He studied theology in Utrecht and New York. He is director of the Department on Church and Society of the Netherlands Reformed Church.

Gerhard Linn was active in church life in the GDR and is now a member of the Consistory of the Protestant Church of the Union based in Berlin.

Jonathan Luxmoore, based in Warsaw, is the Eastern European correspondent of the *National Catholic Register*, and covers church affairs in the region for various European and American newspapers and news agencies.

Ludwig Mehlhorn was born in the GDR in 1950. He graduated in mathematics. From the mid-1970s he was active in the democratic opposition and in the Protestant Church. In 1989 was was a founding member of the civil rights group 'Democracy Now'. Since 1992 he has been study secretary for Central and Eastern European issues at the Evangelical Academy of Berlin-Brandenburg.

Barney Milligan was a parish priest from 1954 to 1979 and then residentiary canon at St Albans where he was director of the Study Centre and librarian. From 1986 to 1995 he was chaplain in Strasbourg and representative of the churches to the European Institutions; from 1990 he was representative there of the Church of England.

René Rémond is professor of contemporary French history. Formerly at the University Paris X-Nanterre, since 1981 he has been president of the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques in Paris.

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Yuli Shreider was born in 1927. He received a degree and a doctorate in mathematics and is now a senior research fellow at the Institute for Information Transmission at the Russian Academy of Sciences. A Roman Catholic since 1970, he is a member of the board of the Russian Bible Society. He is involved in interfaith dialogue and his particular concern is the application of Christian social and political teachings.

Michael Sutton is a research fellow in European Studies at Aston University. He also writes reports for The Economist Intelligence Unit on matters relating to European Union enlargement as they affect Central and Eastern Europe.

Lukas Vischer was director of the Faith and Order commission at the WCC from 1961 to 1979. Thereafter until his retirement he worked for the Swiss Protestant Federation in Bern and held a professorship in ecumenical theology at the Faculty of Theology at Bern University. He was also for many years president of the Study Department at the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.