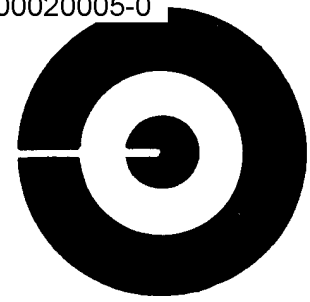


AIM AIM

DEBODT REPORT



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NBC AIRS SOVIET PROPAGANDA

The notion that people in the Soviet Union enjoy freedom of religion and that religion is flourishing there would seem to be an unlikely theme for an American television program. While Americans have not been kept fully abreast of the persecution of believers in the Soviet union and the obstacles the state places in the way of the practice of their faith, they are not totally naive on this subject. However, on July 17 and 24, 1983, NBC television aired a two-part series entitled "The Church of the Russians" which shocked and outraged those familiar with the true state of religion within the Soviet Union today. This was presented as an "NBC religious program" done in association with the National Council of Churches. It was narrated by the Rev. Bruce Rigdon, a Presbyterian who teaches at the McCormick Theological Seminary in Illinois. Dr. Rigdon was awarded a medal by the Russian Orthodox Church for his work on this program. Despite the criticism that it has generated, NBC has plans to air the program a second time on June 24 and July 1 of this year.

Dr. Rigdon said that his program was intended "to examine the life of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union," not to seek out "Baptists, Pentecostals or other Protestants or Jews, dissidents or members of unregistered churches." That meant that he set out to present a view of the Russian Orthodox Church solely through interviews with church officials in good standing with Soviet officialdom and with Soviet officials. By excluding the views of "dissenters," Rigdon made sure that the NBC audience got no inkling of the view of the dissenters in the Soviet Union and many foreign observers that the official church leaders are highly suspect. Evgeny Bresenden, the spokesman for the Soviet Pentecostals overseas has said that they "are seen by believers in the USSR as betrayers . . . and as executors of the will of the atheists."

This view has been confirmed by a former high official of the Communist regime in Poland, Zdzislaw Rurarz, who resigned as Polish ambassador to Japan after martial law was imposed in Poland in 1981. Amb. Rurarz had been in the Polish foreign service for 25 years. He has told of visiting Zagorsk, the Russian Orthodox holy city 44 miles outside Moscow in 1967. He was astonished by the number of priests and the huge crowd of pilgrims that he saw there, and he commented on this to his hosts, high

officials of the Soviet regime. They laughed and said of the priests, "All of them are ours," meaning, of course, that all of them were faithful servants of the ruling Communist Party. The officials pointed out that there were few if any young people in the crowd. Amb. Rurarz believes one reason for this was because the young people in the Soviet Union are sophisticated enough to know that the Orthodox priests are fakes.

Amb. Rurarz says that the Orthodox seminaries in the Soviet Union are controlled by the KGB. He says that the Soviets tried to persuade the Polish Communists to take over the operation of the Roman Catholic seminaries in Poland, pointing out how successful this had been in their own country. The Poles didn't follow this advice. Amb. Rurarz says the Soviets control the seminarians by insuring that those who are not sufficiently malleable are not admitted.

The Rigdon View of the Church

Dr. Rigdon gave the NBC viewers an entirely different picture of the church and the holy city of Zagorsk than that provided by Amb. Rurarz. He points out that some of the magnificent cathedrals are now museums, but he says: "But other churches, as old or older, still proclaim Christ throughout this communist capital and throughout this land. Working churches, meaning those open for worship, many destroyed by war and rebuilt . . . some of wood, some of stone, some simple, some ornate reflecting many styles and periods of architecture . . ." are found. He says that "all the Orthodox churches are held together, not by a pope, but by a common faith . . . and an unbroken tradition of worship." He shows hundreds of priests and thousands of pilgrims descending on Zagorsk to celebrate the Feast of St. Sergius, Patron Saint of Russia. He describes the epoch of St. Sergius in the 14th century as "a time of enormous tribulation and difficulty in the history of the Russian people." But the war of the Communists on the church during the early years of the Revolution is glossed over in two sentences. He says: "After the revolution of 1917, Zagorsk was turned into a museum. In recent years, almost all the churches have been opened again for worship."

Contrast this with Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's description of the fate of the Orthodox Church under communism in his Templeton lecture in 1983. He said: "Orthodox churches were stripped of their valuables in 1922 at the instigation of Lenin and Trotsky. In subsequent years, including both the Stalin and the Khrushchev periods, tens of thousands of churches were torn down or desecrated, leaving behind a disfigured wasteland that bore no resemblance to Russia such as it had stood for centuries. Entire districts and cities of half a million inhabitants were left without a single church." Solzhenitsyn also described the martyrdom of the Orthodox clergy in the 1920s, pointing out that two metropolitans were shot and Patriarch Tikhon died under suspicious circumstances. He said: "Scores of archbishops and bishops perished. Tens of thousands of priests, monks, and nuns, pressured by the Chekists to renounce the word of God, were tortured, shot in cellars, sent to camps, exiled to the desolate tundra of the far north, or turned out into the streets in their old age without food or shelter . . . For tens of millions of laymen access to the Church was blocked, and they were forbidden to bring up their children in the faith: religious parents were wrenched from their children and thrown into prison, while the children were turned from the faith by threats and lies."

This course had been suddenly reversed during World War II, when Stalin sought to marshal the support of the people by enlisting the aid of the clergy. Anton Antonov-Ovseyenko, the son of an Old Bolshevik hero who was killed in one of Stalin's purges and who himself spent many years in Stalin's prisons and concentration camps, describes this reversal in his book, *The Time of Stalin. Portrait of a Tyranny*. He says: "The eradicator of faith, the tireless persecutor of believers, the man who had sent a thousand priests to their deaths, began trying to ingratiate himself with the church. The Gensek (Stalin) not only brought great many high-ranking clergymen back from the camps; he also permitted the theological seminaries and an academy to be opened and established a government Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs. Under the aegis of the NKVD (the secret police), of course. The Criminal concluded a concordat with the church and set up an administrative body in which priests stood on an equal footing with agents of the secret police. This was the creative and original way in which the Gensek implemented Lenin's injunction on the separation of church and state. Metropolitan Nikolai began referring to the general secretary of the Bolshevik Party as 'the Father of us all, Joseph Vissarionovich.'"

The intensive persecution of the church resumed under Nikita Khrushchev, who closed down more than 7,500 Orthodox churches and over 5,000 Baptist churches. Seminaries were closed on flimsy pretexts, and the anti-religious struggle and persecution resumed with new vigor. The French scholar, Pierre Sorlin, said in his 1968 book, *The Soviet People and Their Society*, "Disturbances take place, as though by chance, in the middle of important religious ceremonies; believers are virtually denied access to the universities, trade unions, and social services. Religious life tends to be confined to old people, unemployed women, or very young children."

The Rev. Rigdon alluded to this renewed persecution in this single sentence: "Some churches closed during the

Khrushchev era of the sixties have reopened." The sad truth is that the narrator of the NBC program displayed the same desire to conceal the recent history of the Russian Orthodox Church as have the officials of that church and their political masters, the people that the Rev. Rigdon interviewed for his program.

Believers' Cries Ignored

Although Rigdon's program was produced in association with the National Council of Churches, it made no mention of the appeal made by a Russian Orthodox priest, Fr. Gleb Yakunin, to the delegates of the 5th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi, Kenya in 1975. Yakunin pointed out that as early as 1930, the official leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church were acting as pawns for Stalin. He reminded the WCC that the worldwide prayer movement for the persecuted Russian church in 1930 was actually denounced by the official leaders of that church, who denied that any persecution was taking place and who "lied before the whole world by stating that those who appeared to be martyrs suffering for their faith were, in reality, just political offenders." Fr. Yakunin observed that in the very year that the Russian Orthodox Church joined the World Council of Churches, 1961, with governmental approval, there was an increasing wave of anti-religious terror, marked by the closing of churches, monasteries and schools. He charged that over 10,000 Orthodox churches were closed from 1959 to 1965. Fr. Yakunin expressed his regret that the World Council of Churches had failed to protest this persecution, as it had failed to protest the persecution of the Baptists, Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Among the requests that Fr. Yakunin made of the WCC was that efforts be made to bring to the attention of Christians all over the world, using the mass media, the plight of Christians suffering religious persecution, no matter what their denomination might be. He urged that a campaign be started to pressure the Soviet authorities to free Vladimir Osipov, an Orthodox Christian and editor, who had recently been sentenced to 8 years in prison. He cited the arrest of Andrei Tverdokhlebov and Sergei Kovalev who had been arrested for their activities in defense of dissidents. He said they had done much to acquaint the world with the courageous struggle of the Baptist dissenters and the Lithuanian Catholics and urged that they not be forgotten.

Fr. Yakunin noted that many Christians in the USSR had been punished for attempting to print and distribute Bibles and other religious literature. He asked if the delegates knew that Soviet customs officials confiscate and destroy Gospels seized from foreign visitors who bring in more than one copy. Did they know that Bibles are not available to ordinary readers in Soviet libraries and that inmates of prisons and labor camps are not allowed to own Gospels and spiritual literature? He asked that everything possible be done to help the Russian Christians meet the urgent need for Bibles.

Fr. Yakunin and Lev Regelson, who joined him in signing the appeal to the WCC in 1975, were both arrested in 1979 and tried. Their appeal to the WCC was used as evidence against them in their trial.



NOTES FROM THE EDITOR'S CUFF

By Reed Irvine

AIM Report

March-A 1984

LAST YEAR, ABC'S MOVIE, "THE DAY AFTER," SHOULD HAVE WON AN AWARD AS THE OUT-standing propoganda movie of the year. In the words of an ABC vice president, Alfred Schneider, it graphically showed the core of the argument for the nuclear freeze, and the nuclear freeze has been one of the prime goals of Soviet propoganda. AIM has joined with four other ABC shareholders, Mr. and Mrs. James B. Saylor of Casper, Wyoming, Carlisle Madson of Hopkins, Minn., and E. R. McChesney of San Antonio, Texas, to submit a shareholder resolution asking ABC to investigate the production of this movie. The idea is to try to find out how the movie came to be made, who was behind it, and what their motives were. Nicholas Meyer, the director of the movie, has said that he was told by ABC officials that he didn't have to worry about producing a movie that would make money, nor did he have to worry about getting ratings. One is left to infer that someone at ABC was willing to sink an estimated \$8 million into this production for the purpose of putting a message across, i.e., the core of the argument for the nuclear freeze.

ABC HAS ASKED THE SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION TO CONCUR IN THEIR DECISION NOT to include our resolution in the proxy material that will be sent to all ABC shareholders on the grounds that it concerns the ordinary business of ABC. That is one of the arguments commonly used to reject shareholder resolutions. We have submitted a five-page letter to the SEC in which we argue that the resolution deals with an issue that transcends the ordinary business of ABC and impinges on the welfare and security of all the American people. We strongly contested ABC's assertion that it is false and misleading to suggest that there is a danger that ABC's facilities may be used to disseminate Soviet propoganda. Noting that the late Raymond Aron, the noted French writer, had said that the USSR operates the most astonishing propoganda machine the world has ever known, we cited figures from James L. Tyson's book, Target America, on the size of that machine.

WE THEN POINTED OUT TO THE SEC THAT STANISLAV LEVCHENKO, THE FORMER CHIEF OF KGB active measures operations in Tokyo, has said that in 1975, shortly after the signing of the Helsinki accords, a representative of the Central Committee of the Communist Party made the following statement to the staff of the Soviet embassy in Tokyo:

By all overt and covert means, we shall manipulate public opinion of Western countries as we like and drown out criticism of our military buildup. We have the resources to create dozens of new organizations in the West and to reinforce existing frontline organizations. Our glorious intelligence services will seize all the new opportunities to operate on a much higher and wider scale, taking advantage of the friendlier attitude toward the USSR. We shall turn public opinion in the West, particularly in Western Europe, against the USA. Everywhere we shall plant seeds of mistrust against the main enemy. (John Barron, The KGB Today, p. 147)

WE SAID THAT IT WOULD BE THE HEIGHT OF FOLLY TO ASSUME THAT THE SOVIET UNION'S "glorious intelligence services" would voluntarily abstain from making any effort to penetrate and manipulate any mass media organ in the USA, including ABC. According to KGB manuals, penetration of the mass media is a target second in priority only to the penetration of our intelligence services.

IF PENETRATION IS THE SOVIET GOAL, WHAT DEFENSES HAVE OUR MEDIA ERECTED TO PROTECT themselves? The answer is that they have no effective defense, and ABC in resisting our

call for an investigation has shown that they are not even aware of the seriousness of the problem. This suggests that they are naive, and being naive, they are all the more vulnerable. In my letter I said:

If ABC's auditors found that several million dollars were missing and recommended that an investigation be made to determine whether or not there had been any embezzlement, ABC's management would not react, I trust, by charging that the auditors had libeled them. (ABC had suggested that our resolution and supporting statement were libelous). We believe that we have made a prima facie case that a great deal of ABC money was put into a movie that was questionable from the point of view of the normal objectives of the company and which was widely perceived to be promoting a cause that corresponded with a major Soviet propaganda objective. All we are asking is that management make an investigation to determine what lay behind this and report to the shareholders.

I THINK THAT WE MADE A STRONG CASE, BUT THERE IS NO TELLING WHAT THE SEC WILL DECIDE. We will keep you informed. I would like to urge that those of you who own stock in ABC, CBS, RCA and The Washington Post plan to attend their annual shareholder meetings. If you buy a few shares now, you will be eligible to attend. This is a unique opportunity to question the heads of these companies and let them know what you think. The dates of the meetings are: CBS--April 18; RCA (NBC)--May 1; Washington Post--May 11; and ABC--May 15. AIM has received a substantial gift of RCA stock, and we will be happy to sell any AIM member as little as a single share to qualify you to attend the RCA annual meeting.

ONE OF THE MOST BLATANT EXAMPLES OF THE USE OF OUR TELEVISION TO SPREAD SOVIET disinformation and propaganda is discussed in this AIM Report. The culprit was NBC, and this is a case that I plan to discuss at the RCA annual meeting. "The Church of the Russians" was presented as part of NBC's religious programming, and we didn't become aware of it until some time after it had been aired. However, it is still very timely, since I understand NBC is planning to air it again this summer, and that is something that ought to be protested.

ONE OF THE POINTS WE MAKE IN OUR ANALYSIS OF THE NBC PROGRAM IS THAT THE RUSSIAN Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union has been taken over by the state and is being used by the KGB to promote communist ends. There is additional information on this in John Barron's 1974 book, KGB. He points out that a section of the KGB known as "the 5th Directorate" clandestinely controls religion in the USSR. It seeks to ensure that the churches serve Soviet policy ends. It places KGB officers in the church hierarchy and staffs the Council on Religious Affairs. Through this Council it controls the assignment of church personnel. AIM HAS PREPARED A RESEARCH REPORT ON THIS NBC PROGRAM. I RECOMMEND IT TO THOSE INTERESTED IN MORE DETAILS. SEND \$1.00 TO COVER MAILING COSTS.

THE COUPON IN THE FEBRUARY-A ISSUE OF THESE NOTES FOR ORDERING ADVANCE COPIES OF MY book Media Mischief and Misdeeds and to pledge support for our project to reply to the PBS history of Vietnam carried the wrong zip code. If yours was returned, please re-submit it.

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() I want to order ___ copies of Media Mischief and Misdeeds at the pre-publication price of \$5.00 each, a saving of \$4.95. () Check enclosed; () Charge VISA/Mastercard

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I would be willing to help this project with a tax-deductible contribution of \$ _____.

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All of this was ignored by NBC. The Rev. Rigdon included in his program an interview he had with Archbishop Pitirim, who has headed the publishing department of the Moscow Patriarchate for the past 20 years. The Archbishop proudly displayed a Bible, which had gone through four editions, the latest being 50,000 copies. The Rev. Rigdon did not compare this modest press run with the demand for Bibles among the estimated 65 million Christians in the Soviet Union, nor did he indicate that he had raised with the Archbishop Fr. Yakunin's plea for a greatly increased supply of Bibles. Nothing was said about the unavailability of Bibles in libraries or about their prohibition in prisons and labor camps.

Bruce Rigdon's interview with the Archbishop was a perfect illustration of a statement made by Robert C. DeCamara in his article, "Gulag Fodder: Christians in the Soviet Union," published in the March 14, 1981 edition of *Human Events*. DeCamara had written: "Every few years, major denominations are permitted a token printing of Bibles—which are then presented to foreign visitors to impress them with the USSR's religious tolerance."

Control of the Religious Press

The NBC program gave the impression that the Church is perfectly free to print whatever it chooses. Rev. Rigdon asked Archbishop Pitirim, "In your experience has the government made any attempt to offer suggestions or to influence or even to control the publishing department in any way?" The archbishop replied: "Under our constitution, church and state are separate. The state does not interfere with internal church affairs. I have meetings with state organizations. The first one is when I ask for paper for the next year. The second point of encounter is my request for the printing house . . . So I meet with representatives of state organizations only on technical matters. It is up to us to decide the contents of any publication."

That seemingly satisfied the Rev. Rigdon, who showed no awareness of the complaint of Vladimir Rusak, a deacon in the Orthodox Church who had worked under Archbishop Pitirim for many years. Rusak had written a book on the history of the church since the Revolution, which he completed in 1980. In a letter addressed to the World Council of Churches dated July 1983, Rusak said: "Having always regarded Archbishop Pitirim as my spiritual father, I told him about this book as frankly as in the confessional. It is difficult to describe what efforts he has made since then to persuade me to destroy (!) the manuscript. As I refused to do so, he dismissed me from my post." Rusak was transferred to a church in Vitebsk, but he ended up being exiled to a monastery after giving a speech that bothered his superiors. He was subsequently harassed by the KGB; his manuscript was confiscated; and the KGB demanded assurances that the book would never be published in the West and that he would never touch upon the theme of the book again.

Rusak said that another high church official, Metropolitan Filaret, who also figures in Rev. Rigdon's program as a spokesman for peace, made the same demands upon him as had the KGB, "employing virtually the same words." Rusak said that Metropolitan Filaret met with him 15 times after he had lost

his job and that at the final meeting he had told him that "there are nameless forces above him against which he is powerless to help me, no matter how much he would like to do so."

Rusak observed "that any attempts by the clergy to venture beyond the parameters sanctioned by the Soviet authorities in depicting the history of the Russian church are severely repressed, on occasion even with the direct cooperation of the church leadership."

Concealing the Control

The Rev. Rigdon may not have seen Vladimir Rusak's letter before his programs were aired, but he could not have been ignorant of the confidential report of V. Furov, Deputy Chairman of the Council on Religious Affairs, written in 1975 and smuggled to the West in 1980. The Soviets denied the authenticity of the report, but knowledgeable Western experts think that it rings true. On Rigdon's program, Peter Markartsev, vice chairman of the Council on Religious Affairs and Alexei Buevsky, executive secretary of the External Relations Department of the Moscow Patriarchate, are both shown stating that the state does not interfere with the church and vice versa. But the Furov report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party stated flatly that the six-member Synod, which with the Patriarch governs the Orthodox Church, is controlled by the Council on Religious Affairs, a government agency. The Council selects the Synod's permanent members. All topics to be presented for discussion at the Synod are first submitted to the Council for its approval. The Council also approves the final decisions.

Furov wrote: "In exercising its constant and unrelenting control over activities of the Synod, appropriate officials of the Council conduct systematic work to educate and enlighten the members of the Synod, maintain confidential contacts with them, shape their patriotic views and attitudes and exert necessary influence on the entire episcopate through the members of the Synod with their help."

The Furov report confirms Amb. Ruraz's assertion that the seminaries are totally under the control of the state. Furov wrote: "The commissioners of the Council in close cooperation with local authorities (the KGB) took steps to prevent fanatics, extremists, and mentally ill individuals from being admitted to theological schools." In other words, those with strong religious beliefs were kept out. But control is not limited to admissions, Furov made clear. He said the Council helps choose the faculty and administrators of the theological schools and edits the textbooks "to safeguard the interests of the state." He noted that all this enabled them "to influence future clergymen in a specific way beneficial to us and to expand their theoretical and practical knowledge in the spirit of materialism." He added: "In our opinion, this will undercut the religious and mystical ideals of the future clergy and in conjunction with other objective and subjective factors, it may bring them to understand their own uselessness as clergymen."

They might be useless as clergymen, but the government-trained priests were, in Furov's view, very useful in handling foreign visitors such as the Rev. Rigdon. He commended three priests who had handled a delegation

from the U. S. National Council of Churches particularly well. Furov said that the priests "adopted a patriotic position and countered the slanderous tenor of some questions posed by members of the National Council of Churches in the USA, particularly Prof. Price and Redigon (Rigdon?). Bishop Gedeon demonstrated with examples of church activities in the Novosibirsk province that the constitutional principle of freedom of conscience is strictly observed in the USSR."

The Propaganda Value of the Church

This explains why the Soviet Union, which is still militantly atheist in its official philosophy, is willing to not only tolerate, but probably also to subsidize the Russian Orthodox Church. Rigdon said on his NBC program that all the expenses of the church are paid for from the "rubles and kopecks of the faithful" that fill the collection plates, adding, "This is a very wealthy church." He would have us believe that those rubles and kopecks paid for a \$2 million overpass built by the government to facilitate the travel of the pilgrims to Zagorsk. He would also have us believe that the government exercises no control over what the church prints. One is about as credible as the other.

Vladimir Rusak in his letter to the World Council of Churches described the role of the "official" church in the Soviet Union this way: "One should not overlook the fact that the aim of the Soviet authorities in using the church is purely propagandistic. It helps increase the political dividends reaped by the authorities on the international scene and rationalizes the continued existence of the church in a socialist state as the inter-church and international activity of our church's representatives is directed, first and foremost, to serve the interests of the secular (i.e., Soviet, atheist) regime to the detriment of the interests of the church and all the faithful."

The NBC program is a perfect illustration of how this pays off for the Soviets. They are portrayed as pluralistic and respectful of freedom of conscience, not as Godless atheists intent upon crushing all religion. With an interviewer who is impressed with the colorful liturgy and the church art and architecture, it was easy for the skilled Soviet propagandists to pass themselves off as genuine pluralists. Peter Makartsev, the vice chairman of the Council on Religious Affairs, insisted that the policy of the Soviet government could not be called "atheistic." He said: "The policy of the Soviet government is aimed at providing opportunities for believers and non-believers to exercise the freedom of their conscience." The Rev. Rigdon was not shown asking how this squared with the pervasive discrimination against believers in education, employment and the strict controls on the exercise of their religious beliefs.

Evgeny Bresenden has pointed out that not one of the many evangelical Christians in the Soviet Union is a scientist or professor. He claims that the professions and supervisory jobs are off limits to them "because they are prevented from receiving education and promotions." To get into a university, the student must have passing grades in scientific atheism, and much of the college curriculum is ideologically repugnant to Christians. Many Christians have suffered discrimina-

tion on the job. Communist Party membership, the passport to advancement in many fields, is off limits to believers.

Even the Rev. Billy Graham came back from the Soviet Union impressed by the crowded churches that he had seen. He and others who have been so impressed probably did not realize that the Orthodox Church has one church building for every 7,500 members and one priest for every 3,500 members. The church has only three seminaries and two theological academies, which enroll about 800 students. The Furov report noted with satisfaction that the church was unable to replenish the ranks of its clergy, much less increase their number. But in the NBC documentary a favorable propaganda impact is achieved by focusing on the fact that seminary enrollment has grown rather than on the fact that it is grossly inadequate to provide the number of priests required to serve the members of the church.

But the greatest service to Soviet propaganda is the use of the Orthodox clergy as propagandists for the Soviet "peace" campaign. There was a lot of this in the NBC program, with Metropolitan Filaret, the priest who told Vladimir Rusak that he couldn't help him because there were "nameless forces above him against which he was powerless" explaining that there was nothing political about his peace activities. Filaret explained "that at the moment the peacemaking cause of our church just coincides with the foreign policy of our country." Bruce Rigdon accepted that, expressing his own conviction that "peacemaking" is one of the most fundamental and passionate concerns of the Orthodox leadership.

Incredible as it may seem, the Soviet Union has succeeded in converting its persecution and control of the Russian Orthodox Church into a propaganda asset, thanks to the naivete or the ideological bent of the Rev. Bruce Rigdon, the National Council of Churches and NBC.

What You Can Do

Rather than repeating the airing of this disgraceful series next June and July, as it now plans, NBC should be producing a program that tells the truth about religious persecution and the manipulation of the Russian Orthodox Church to serve the goals of government policy. Write to Grant Tinker, Chairman, NBC, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. 10020. Send a copy to Thornton Bradshaw, Chairman, RCA, at the same address.

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