



A Media Breakthrough in Russia *An International Report*

Recently, Hannu Haukku, longtime international producer of Christian programming, conducted a historic, first ever *Russian Christian Broadcasting Conference*. It was held in Moscow, with more than 400 delegates from all over the former Soviet Union. Some traveled as far as 5,000 miles to learn how to produce effective Christian programming.

The excitement and interest was remarkable. 400 were pre-registered, but by the first day, another 200 had arrived. Thirteen workshops, two media breakfasts, and three general sessions later - including a CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) missions banquet – they felt God had spoken.

While together, representatives from 20 nations were elected to form working groups to respond to the media needs of these former Soviet-dominated nations. The peoples represented are: the Burjat, Komi, Mari, Mordvin, Udmurt, Tatar, Chukchi, Jewish, Chuvcash, Kazakh, Kirgiz, Kalmuk, Azeri, Bashkir, Armenian, Estonian, Latvian, Karelian, Belorussian, and Ukrainian.

Speakers were invited from Russia, Finland, Canada, and the United States. Among those featured were Dr. David Clark - President of both the NRB and the FamilyNet Network; Ron Harris - Executive VP & CEO of Criswell Communications and KCBI Radio in Dallas; Rod Payne – Christian TV Station owner from Wichita Falls, Texas; and Phil Cooke – Producer and Director with Phil Cooke Pictures, Inc. in Burbank, California.

In spite of the severe economic conditions prevalent in Russia, Christian leaders are experiencing a remarkable interest and fascination with media as an effective tool to reach the nation with the gospel. Each of the American speakers were invited because

each had particular experience, information, and expertise that could help these fledgling Russian programmers.

Dr. David Clark has written about his experience in his monthly NRB Magazine column, so we asked the other three American speakers to share some thoughts about the current and future outlook for Christian media in Russia...

Planting Seed in Fertile Ground

Ron Harris

It was a frigid January morning in Moscow, 1995. Snow was falling outside the flat where several of us were staying, Russians, bundled against the harsh winter, were walking through the streets, heading to work, school, or the market for the day's food. It was my second trip to Russia, to minister to orphans in regions around Moscow. This trip we spent a couple of days in an apartment of a Russian family.

Water was heating for tea, and we were eating a light breakfast before our first trip to the detski dom, or orphanage. It was then I noticed the radio on the wall. It was a plastic box about eight inches square, with no dial and only one knob. You turned it on...or you turned it off. There was no choice of which station to select. You listened to what the government wanted you to hear. We were not so far removed from the Soviet era after all.

What a change now to meet with some 200 Christian broadcasters from Russian and the CIS, the Commonwealth of Independent States. These excited and committed men and women came together for an historic event... forming the Russian equivalent of National Religious Broadcasters.

In the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, evangelical Christians have taken steps unheard of during Communist years. Christian radio programs, once jammed by the Russian government, now are heard on government stations. Charles Stanley, Billy Graham, and others have provided spiritual insight to millions in this spiritually hungry nation.

Now, Christian broadcasters were coming together for fellowship, inspiration, and a series of workshops to improve their skills and maximize their opportunities. A handful

of Christian broadcasters from America and Canada had come to Moscow to lead workshops, encourage their Russian counterparts, and observe this great event.

We found a wide range of interests and skill levels among those who attended the gathering. Television, film, and radio were all represented. There were students, Russian professionals, pastors, and others interested in using the electronic media to proclaim God's Good News to the people. Some are quite advanced in their skills, and have access to current production equipment. Others are just learning, but have a strong desire to capitalize on the opportunity before them.

After one workshop I visited with a pastor. He had been given fifteen minutes twice a week to preach and teach...on the state run television station. An amazing opportunity. However, because of the pressure of the Russian Orthodox church, he could not give the name of his church or its location. The broadcast station said that constituted advertising, and they wouldn't allow it. Yet the pastor wanted to draw the people of his town to the worship experience offered at his church. I offered him a simple solution. Ask listeners to write their questions about the Bible, God, or his messages, and mail them to the television station. He would then be able to correspond with this person who was wanting to know more about Christ. Production tips were shared, and after about ten minutes, this pastor left beaming, with a plan, with encouragement, and with our prayers...ready to proclaim God's Truth.

Many challenges remain for the Christian broadcasters of Russia. The devastated economy, the confusing religious laws, and the years of misinformation make it difficult to take big strides. Yet there is a core group of committed, determined broadcasters who serve the living Lord, and who are proclaiming Truth. We know the power of Christian radio and television in our country. Let's pray for God's Spirit to bring about an even more powerful impact in Russia and the CIS.

The Clock is Ticking

Rod Payne

Russia, like the rest of the world, is running out of time. For this loose federation of nations, in a geographic area so large they have approximately eleven time zones, the clock is ticking faster because of the sheer number of people involved.

For Russia the scripture from John 8 is both encouraging and challenging. "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." (John 8:32)

Will Russia run out of time before they have heard the "truth"?

One of the secondary problems facing Russian Christians, and as such Russian Christian Broadcasters, is one of "public relations". The Russian Orthodox Church has firmly established itself as the nation's primary church. Speakers from around the Russian Federation shared with their counterparts during the first meeting of Russian Religious Broadcasters. One of the problems which was voiced over and over was the difficulty many evangelical Russians face as false stories are spread about their work. A Baptist pastor on the outskirts of Moscow related people would often go out of their way to walk around his church because they had been told church members "drank blood" and conducted sacrifices.

It becomes a matter of public relations for the church in Russia. They need not only to share the truth of the Gospel but also to dispel rumors, which keep potential listeners from being receptive to their message. A pastor from St. Petersburg encouraged the group as he shared how God had opened up a way for his church to operate a television station. But while he waits on equipment, MTV has moved into the Russian market.

Like their broadcasting counterparts throughout the world, the Russian Christian broadcasters need funding and the equipment/airtime this funding makes possible. God calls the church to faith – to trust in Him. For North American Christian broadcasters this faith can mean believing the hard drive won't fail until the program is edited. For Russian broadcasters this faith may be found in their belief God is bigger than local officials who may shut them, or local churches down without any real reasons, or notice.

From simple cuts only editing systems to full-blown non-linear systems, there are great equipment needs in Russia. The urgency of the appeal may mean some reevaluation on the part of Christian broadcasters who have greater resources.

Russian Christian broadcasters have the opportunity to reach literally millions with one spot placed in the country's most popular program, a game show that is aired weekly. The most effective way to reach people in Russia, and the rest of the world for that matter, may not be the standard long form programming made popular by Western Christian broadcasters.

On the other hand, another form of long form programming may be a very effective way to reach the Russian people. The infomercial has found its way into the European market. It is common to find programs run in the overnight time slots featuring weight loss schemes, cleaning devices and old rock music collections. Instead of selling products, the body of Christ may want to give away Jesus.

Whatever the method chosen this much should be clear to those of us who have so many resources, *time is running out*. For the world, and *especially* for the people of the Russian Federation.

The Case For Cultural Sensitivity

Phil Cooke

From the perspective of a television producer, the critical thing I discovered in Russia was the importance of helping them learn to produce programming within their own cultural context. It's true for any country - if we are to be effective in reaching the world for the gospel, we have to produce programming that reflects local values, cultural backgrounds, and perspectives.

As I said in a *Religious Broadcasting Magazine* interview a few years ago, Sony Corporation is now the most prolific producer of LOCAL programming in the world, because they understand the power of local programs in local countries, and realize that exported U.S. programming isn't always the most effective way to gain a foreign

audience. That's why there's an *MTV Europe*, *MTV Latin America*, *MTV Asia*, and during the week we were in Moscow, they introduced *MTV Russia*.

During our visit, I had the opportunity to scan the Russian television and cable networks, and see the types of *Christian* programming that originated from the United States.

Sadly, nearly all of the programs I viewed were broadcast just as they had been in the United States, with little or no changes for the Russian audience. In the case of some national U.S. television ministries, the programs were broadcast only in English, (*even though very few Russians speak English*), and even used their U.S. mailing address when asking for financial support or making a product offer. Others, were sub-titled into German or French, and were broadcast on a European-wide network that covered a number of countries, including Russia (not a very targeted approach). Out of all the U.S. ministry programs I saw, only one made the effort to over-dub the program into Russian, and use Russian graphics for their scripture references, sermon points, and names.

None had gone to the trouble of making a complete special program just for the Russian audience.

That's why we desperately need to help these local Russian producers produce their own Christian programming. Hannu Haukku is doing a remarkable job of producing Russian programming out of Finland. Many Russian producers and ministry leaders are travelling to Helsinki to use the studios and facilities of *International Russian Radio and Television* to produce programming they then take back to Russia.

My reaction from the trip? God has blessed us so much. We are upset because we don't have a Betacam or the latest non-linear editing system. But in the words of one participant, "*A decade ago, we would have all been imprisoned for a meeting like this. But now the doors are opening, and I want to do whatever is necessary to reach the Russian people with the message of the gospel. We don't have sets, program openings, music, or video clips. All we have is our Bible. What can we do to make our programs more interesting and effective?*"

We now have the platform and the access, and the window is open. Let's join them in partnership to help produce the kind of programming that will make an impact on that struggling country.

#1: Training Has Started

Since that historic Moscow Christian Broadcasting Conference, Hannu Haukku has announced that Canadian producer and television instructor Zack Davidson and American producer Phil Cooke have initiated plans to conduct a 4-month course in Christian Television and Communications. Training could take place in Moscow sometime next year. Any NRB Members that would like to participate or help financially with such an endeavor are invited to contact Hannu's U.S. office at Box 740995 Dallas, TX 75374. His U.S. Phone is (903) 389-4402. Hannu's direct e-mail is: **"irrtv@hsrtv.pp.fi"**.

#2 – The Internet is Making a Difference

During the Conference, instructor Phil Cooke had the opportunity to meet Darius Abromaitis, a Christian producer from Vilnius, Lithuania. Many readers will know the Cooke Pictures internet web site (<http://www.cookepictures.com>) has a "Production Library" section filled with free educational documents and articles on various aspects of producing effective Christian programming. Two years earlier, the Lithuanian national network had offered Darius' church an weekly time slot to produce a Christian program. But no one in the church had any experience or knowledge about how to start. Since there weren't any books or media training centers in Vilnius, Darius and other church members began searching the internet for information on how to produce television programs. They found the CP site, and began downloading all the documents. Based on that information, they began holding media classes at their church, and now produce an excellent weekly program. At the conference, Phil was able to view tapes of the program for the first time, and saw the power of the internet firsthand. .

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