Troyanovsky's "Religion in the Soviet Republics: A Guide to Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Other Religions" - Book Review

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This collection of essays, speeches, documents, and information was written in the waning months of the USSR. At that time it was both an accurate and courageous assemblage of data and reviews collected by Troyanovski, a Soviet journalist, chief of the religion section of the agency Novosti. Harper /San Francisco attractively printed it with color plates and a comprehensive list of denominational officers and their addresses and telephone numbers under the assumption that it would be timely and lasting. However only a few segments of the book continue to have an importance other than historical because of the rapidity of changes in the area.

Open acknowledgements of persecution due to glasnost and grateful praise of and commitment to perestroika and the Union of Soviet Republics already give the impression of being antiquated. This is not to say that the book is useless. The treatment of the religious communities is even-handed and mostly self-generated; the secret letter of Lenin ordering persecutions is presented in toto; the list of national offices continues to be very practical for those who wish to get in touch with various religious institutions, though there will be the need to add correct country names and changes in re-named streets. What will be less helpful are traces of loyalty to socialism and the now defunct federation, an exaggerated optimism that all will be well soon and the unclarity of the authorship of many of the segments of this multi-authored book. By and large the translation from Russian is accurate and cast into excellent American idiom, with only rare infelicities such as "Baptist priest" and "Islamic temple."

The book is an excellent example that even 'prophetic' pieces such as Metropolitan Kirill's "The Church and Perestroika" quickly sound obsolete in the face of extremely rapid social and political change. In any case this book is based on the least propagandist and most accurate texts on the status of religion that was primarily generated in the Soviet Union.

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