

# EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

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## Evangelical Review of Theology

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obedience of faith*

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abstractize or 'spiritualize' it p. 59 in terms only of salvation of the soul in the next world.

- (2) Until the consummation of our salvation at the eschaton, our Christian life is marked by a dialectic of salvation and suffering. Any attempt to resolve the dialectical tension into a one-sided theology of prosperity without a theology of the cross is to ignore the eschatological reservation, to reduce salvation to a few materialistic values, and to encourage a life contrary to the double command of Jesus (i.e. mammonistic idolatry and exploitation of neighbour). The Corinthian *Enthusiasmus* is a perennial reminder of these dangers!
- (3) The preacher of the gospel must point to both the joy of salvation in Jesus Christ and the cost of discipleship. He must encourage Christians to persevere in the sufferings that arise out of their obedience to the Lord Jesus' double command, convincing them that only by living in such an obedience they can have salvation—their own as well as others—in the kingdom of God realized and hope to have the consummation of their salvation at the eschaton.

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## The Communist Impact on the Church in Eastern Europe

Peter Kuzmič

It is a well known fact that wherever Communists came to power their long-term goal was to create not only a classless but also a religionless society. Christian faith was viewed as superstitious, obscurantist, obsolete, pre-scientific and thus a totally irrelevant way of thinking. Christian institutions were treated as a reactionary remnant of the old order and a hindrance to the progress of the new society and full human liberation of their citizens. Since Communists had a monopoly on both power (which they abused) and truth (which they have distorted) they developed comprehensive strategies and powerful instruments for the eventual elimination of religion. This included restrictive legislation, total atheization of educational institutions and media, control of selection and activity of church leaderships, discrimination in the work place, active persecution and other measures. The policies and methods have differed from country to country and in different periods even within the same countries, depending on what was politically expedient during various historical periods and in different regions. Generalizations are impossible for Eastern Europe has never been totally monolithic when it came to the treatment of religion, due to the complexity of the national, cultural, and religious history of different nations, and depending on international relationships and considerations. At best, however, Christian faith was barely tolerated and Christians marginalized and discriminated against as 'second class citizens', and at worst they were brutally persecuted. In Albania, for example, all visible expressions of religion were, from 1967, totally eradicated, as that small country prided itself on becoming the 'first atheistic state

in the world'. The story of Christian persecution under Stalin in the Soviet Union and during the Krushchev era is well known and does not need to be retold.

With the massive collapse of communism a new spirit of hope filled the widened horizons of new freedom. Since the end of 1989 we have seen a rapid dismantling of what Orwell, Hannah Arendt and others [p. 61](#) regarded as 'the pre-eminent political phenomenon of our time': totalitarian states ruled by party elites that control all political, economic, cultural and even religious life. We have been witnesses of what is expressed in a somewhat overstated triumphalistic title of the American edition of the latest book by Michael Bordeauz—*The Gospel's Triumph Over Communism* (1991). Fifteen years before it actually happened, Trevor Beeson in his excellent study based on first-hand observations, when comparing the two competitors for human minds and hearts, came to a similar conclusion. He summarized it as follows: 'The basic doctrines of Communism have neither convinced the mind nor satisfied the emotions of the intelligentsia or of the proletariat. On the other hand, religious life has displayed remarkable resilience and, far from disappearing, has in many instances found new vitality and power.'

Though the recent dramatic changes contain many elements of unpredictability, the followers of Christ all across the lands of formerly communist Eastern Europe are aware that this is the work of the Lord of history who has seen their suffering and longing for freedom, answered their prayers and provided them with a special *kairos* period to call their nations back to God and to the spiritual foundations for a free and truly 'new society'.

## **SOME PROBLEMS OF THE PRESENT TRANSITION**

The general euphoria of East Europeans with a newly found freedom, however, has quickly given place to a sober encounter with the grim realities that threaten the prospects of a free, peaceful and prosperous future society. Eastern Europe is presently going through a very difficult political transition in moving away from the one-party totalitarian regimes toward some kind of multiparty parliamentary democracy. Mistakes have been made, and are being made as the ABCs of democracy first have to be learned, and new institutions and traditions of democracy have yet to be established. The transition is equally painful economically as Eastern Europe moves away from the centrally planned 'command' economy towards some kind of a viable free-market economy. Economic recovery will be slow as the huge bureaucratic apparatuses have to be dismantled, many state-subsidized factories closed (potentially causing massive social unrest and thus bringing instability to the society) and the mindset of the people changed. Re-education towards creativity and initiative, which was formerly stifled but which is so important for the free-market economy, may take considerable time. Social unrest, disillusionment of the impoverished masses and the general mentality of dependence may create environments conducive to new dictatorships or at least tempt politicians to control the economy in similar ways to those of the Communist period.

The major problem for the Christian church and its mission may be the temptation to return to a quasi-Constantinian model of church-state cooperation. In the process of replacement of Communist ideology by nationalistic ideologies there is an [p. 62](#) intense and somewhat valid rediscovery of national-religious identity. The churches are given rightful recognition for having historically preserved the sense of nationhood, language and culture, especially in the Balkans under the centuries of the Islamic Ottoman-Turkish imposition. They are also rightfully credited for their opposition to the Communist system and for keeping alive certain endangered national and spiritual values. On the negative side, however, the discernible shifts 'from totalitarianism to tribalism' (issuing in inter-ethnic conflicts and wars) and 'from rights to roots' threaten the democratic processes in

most of the East European countries. They also present a dangerous resurgence of new national-religious totalitarianisms. National churches, especially the Orthodox church in several republics of the former Soviet Union, Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia, and the Catholic church in Poland, Hungary and Croatia, are reasserting their claims of monopoly on religious life and activity in their nations. In these countries, belonging to the national church is becoming less a question of theological persuasion and allegiance to Christ and more a question of patriotism, and bona fide citizenship.

Protestantism in general is looked upon with great suspicion as a radical movement which in the past has divided Christendom, and as a modernized, western faith, and thus a foreign intrusion which at present, in its various fragmented forms, threatens the national and religious identity and unity of the people. Democratically and ecumenically illiterate clergy and militant fanatics among laity, are frequently opposed to Protestant evangelicals as disruptive sectarians involved in dangerous proselytizing and unpatriotic activities. Violent clashes, legal and illegal discrimination, and cultural marginalization are not excluded. It is not inconceivable that some evangelical and other leaders of religious minorities could become the new 'dissidents' of the post-Communist era in Eastern Europe.

The nature of this paper demands that we now leave the future in the hands of our sovereign Lord and return to the analysis of how Communists treated the Christian communities and their faith and what the followers of Christ have learned in that antagonistic context. It is against the backdrop of the lessons learned from the past and in active participation in the creation of the anticipated future that we continually ask the question about the ways in which we can 'enlarge our hopes and diminish our fears'.

## **STATE (PARTY) POLICIES AND PROPAGATION OF ATHEISM**

'The struggle against religion is not a campaign, not an isolated phenomenon, not a self-contained entity; it is an inseparable component part of the entire ideological activity of Party Organizations, an essential link and necessary element in the complex of communist education.' This statement is taken from *Pravda*, January 12, 1967 and summarizes well the ideological position and comprehensive programme of former Soviet policies toward believers and the religious communities.

In 1929 the USSR introduced a [p. 63](#) law on religious associations which became a model for similar legislation introduced in the late 1940s in the other Soviet bloc countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The law contained some sixty articles which articulated what religious organizations could or could not do and what the rights and duties of believers were. The law underwent several revisions. During the Stalinist period, especially up to 1941, limiting articles were vigorously applied and almost regularly over-enforced by the abuse of political power during the intense persecutions of the Stalin era. From 1941–1959 the law was in effect but was almost totally disregarded. The period is considered by historians to have been marked by an unwritten 'concordat' between the church and the state. During the Khrushchev era especially after 1959, a period marked by vigorous anti-religious campaigns, the 1929 law was again rigidly applied.

The following statements from the law are particularly relevant to the topic of Christian education:

Religious associations [that is: congregations and denominations] may not: organize for children, young people and women, special prayer or other meetings, circles, groups, departments for biblical or literary study, sewing, working, or the teaching of religion, etc., excursions, children's playgrounds, libraries, reading rooms, sanatoria or medical care.

Only books necessary to the cult may be kept in the prayer buildings and premises (art. 17).

The activities of the clergymen, preachers, teachers and the like shall be restricted to the place where the members of the religious association reside and in the area where the prayer building or premises are situated. (art. 19) (see Hill, 465 ff.)

From the time of the revolution until the collapse of communism, the Soviet government, through educational agencies and youth organizations, pursued a comprehensive campaign of militant atheization, especially of its younger generations. On Easter Day of 1925, the 'League of Militant Godless' was founded. It was led by a group of Communist intellectuals and was under the patronage of the government. Its main goal was the spreading of atheism and the destruction of all religion. By 1935 it had approximately five million members organized in about fifty thousand local groups. 'Godless Youth' and 'Societies for the Dissemination of Scientific and Political Knowledge' were established with a similar purpose—to spread atheism and develop mass membership throughout the nation. The group called 'Octoberists' specialized in training children aged seven to nine and had 14.5 million members. Twenty million children aged ten to fifteen were involved in the systematic training programme of the old union pioneers. The 'Komsomal' involved youth aged fourteen to eighteen and had 28 million members. One of its main goals was to prepare candidates for membership of the communist Party.

In contrast to the organizations training children and young people in atheism, Christian organizations for youth and children were forbidden. Sunday schools, at least officially, were non-existent, and youth under the age of eighteen years old were forbidden to attend p. 64 church services. The Soviet government proudly claimed that one of the successes of its educational system was evident in the fact that around ninety percent of the young people, aged sixteen to nineteen, adhered to atheism as their world view.

The educational nature and role of Soviet museums of atheism is well known. Also, within the university system, twelve specialised departments existed for the main purpose of promoting 'scientific atheism'. Some 160 newspapers were dedicated to the spread of atheism. Prior to 1957 there were few anti-religious books in the [USSR, except for the monumental series of collected articles published by the Academy of Science under the title, *Problems in the History of Religion and Atheism*. After 1959 anti-religious literature was produced on a large scale and disseminated widely. A few examples:

*The Bible for Believers and Unbelievers*, reprint of the classic by E. Yaroslavsky, crudely frivolous in its treatment of Old Testament stories, 150,000 copies;

*Considerations on Religion*, same author, 150,000 copies;

*The Origin of our God*, by early Bolshevik writer Skvortsov Stepanov;

*Sputnik Ateista* (voluminous manual of atheism), 2nd ed. 1961, 180,000 copies;

*Foundations of Scientific Atheism*, 1961, 455 pp., 100,000 copies.

Pamphlets:

*On the Opposition between Christian Ideology and Scientific Communism*, by Ju. Krianov, 1961, 300,000 copies;

*Why is Religious Morality Harmful in Socialist Society?*, by A. Rakitov, 1960, Moscow, 48 pp.;

*What is Atheism?* 1961, 100 pp., 300,000 copies;

*On the Devil and on Miracles*, 1959, 100,000 copies;

*Unmasked*, 1960, 108 pp., 150,000 copies;

*Religion and Women*, 1960, 50 pp., 50,000 copies;

*Relics*, 1961, 113 pp., 100,000 copies;  
*I Take a Look at Believers*, 1961, 113 pp., 85,000 copies;  
*The Fanatics*, 1961, 54 pp., 175,000 copies;  
*We were Baptists*, 1960, 110 pp., 100,000 copies;  
*Before the Judgment Seat of Science*, 1960, 64 pp., 178,000 copies;

Other titles: *Religion and Daily Life*; *Attempts to Modernize Religion*; *The Proceedings of the Holy Fathers of the Vatican*; *God and the Conquest of Space*; *Men, Idols and God*; *God, Adam and Society*; *The Story of a Former Priest*; *In Search of Biblical Hell*; *Did Christ Exist?*; *The Myth of the Immortality of the soul*; *The origin of Life*; *War and Religion*; 355 titles, with a circulation of 5,422,000 were published in 1961 (three times the amount in 1954, when there 119 titles, circulation 1,944,000, and two times that in 1930 when anti-religious propaganda was most intense).

Monthly anti-religion review *Nauka i Religia* (90,000 copies in 1970, 132, 280 copies in 1961, 140,000 in 1963, compared to great literary reviews *Nouvi Mir* and *Oktiabr*, with only 110,000 and 130,000 copies). p. 65

Monthly *Voiovnicky Ateist* (The Militant Atheist), from 1961 until the fall of communism, at Kieve in Ukranian,. 60 pp., 47,000 copies.

These are listed as just a small sample of examples (largely unknown in the West) of the massive anti-religious propaganda at the time when all religious instruction and publishing was outlawed. There are many other examples of the way in which Christian faith was assaulted and religious freedom denied.

In their famous letter of complaint (which earned them many years in prison), the Russian orthodox priests Eshliman and Yakunin (now members of Parliament!) list the following abuses (as summarized by Beeson):

1. Illegal registration of the clergy as a means of interference in their placement.
2. Illegal campaign of the mass closing of churches and monasteries and illegal liquidation of religious societies.
3. Illegal insistence on registration of baptisms and other religious rites.
4. Illegal restriction on the freedom to conduct burial services at cemeteries and to administer communion to sick people in their homes.
5. Violation of the principle of freedom of conscience by forbidding children to participate in public worship.
6. Violation of the principle of separation of Church and State through administrative interference in the financial affairs of a church congregation.
7. Illegal limitation of the number of members of a religious society to the *dvadsatka* (the twenty) and denial in practice to the large majority of believers of their legal right to participate in managing the administrative life of the Church.
8. Illegal limiting of the number of clergy and inhibiting the performance of religious rites. (Beeson, pp. 46–47).

## TEMPTATIONS FOR THE CHURCH UNDER PRESSURE

### The Withdrawal-Emigration Syndrome

Christians who live under repressive political systems which are antagonistic to their faith face severe temptations. The first temptation is to *withdraw from the society*, literally to 'flee the world'. This can take place either by *internal or external emigration*. Both are caused by fear of the new system which is conceived as evil, powerful and bent on the total destruction of those who would dare to oppose it. Until recently most of the



communist countries refused to allow their citizens to emigrate to other lands. History, however, records several examples of large exodus movements of soviet evangelicals, Pentecostals in particular.<sup>1</sup> Their desire to leave their homeland has been motivated by two factors—severe persecution and warnings of even greater calamities. According to some estimates, even p. 66 at the height of the perestroika-glasnost opening, up to seventy thousand Pentecostals wanted to leave the USSR. The numbers of those officially allowed to emigrate have significantly increased since 1988 due to Gorbachev's 'glasnost' policy. That year alone, some 3500 Pentecostals left the Soviet Union with 10,000 projected Pentecostal emigrants for 1989.<sup>2</sup> This is an unfortunate trend as it weakens the evangelical witness in their own spiritually needy land at a time of greater freedom and increased opportunities for evangelism.

Those who opt for the easier internal withdrawal by isolating themselves from the surrounding secular society are by and large also lost for effective evangelism. They very often develop a ghetto mentality with a reactionary life-style. They are marked by a high degree of legalism and insulation that prevents them from having a positive 'salt and light' influence on their society. They develop their own pietistic subculture with its own pattern of behaviour, language, dress code, etc. This is very often understood as an apocalyptic escapist eschatology and as a whole seems to validate certain aspects of Marxist criticism of religion. Extreme examples of such isolated groups of conservative Christians (Baptists, Pentecostals, and Mennonites) have unfortunately at times been highlighted in the soviet anti-Christian propaganda to prove the socially and mentally harmful effects of Christian faith.

This internal withdrawal very often leads to a loss of relevance, denies the mission of the church and undermines Christian impact on society. It is tempted to deal with outdated issues, answers questions that are no longer asked and has very little to say to the contemporary man and to the socialist/post-socialist society. Although some conservative Christians have succumbed to this temptation, it is not an option for authentic biblical evangelicals. Withdrawal is preoccupied with survival; Spirit-filled evangelicals are concerned with revival.

## 2. Crusader Mentality

A second temptation for followers of Christ who have suddenly found themselves surrounded by an enemy and ruled over by an atheistic system is to *react by fighting*, taking a posture of *active opposition* to the government and its policies. The simple reasoning is that the new system is ungodly and evil, inspired by the devil and should be neither obeyed nor tolerated, but rather actively opposed in the name of Christ. There are several dangers in this posture of unrelieved hostility. It is at times based on an oversimplified political and correspondingly spiritual division of the world with the accompanying character of an eschatological struggle between the children of light and the children of darkness. Recent history provides many examples of such perceptions. 'During the times of the "Cold War" when the political antagonism between the Western and Eastern bloc countries came to a very critical and dangerous climax, there was in fashion much over-generalized and simplistic speaking of the "Christian West" and

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<sup>1</sup> See Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches* (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 274; Kent R. Hill, *The Puzzle of the Soviet Church: An Inside Look at Christianity and Glasnost* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1989), pp. 292–296.

<sup>2</sup> Hill, K. R. *Puzzle*, pp. 292–293.

“atheistic East” and p. 67 mutual denunciation in almost mythological terms.<sup>3</sup> The perception that Christianity and Marxism are irreconcilable enemies which can meet only on a battleground has enormous destructive potential for the international community and the future of humanity. This crusader mentality is a betrayal of the gospel for it reduces Christian faith to a politico-ideological force. It may also be a distortion of Marxism by reducing it to militant atheism, without a proper understanding of the genesis, nature and widespread influence of atheism. Many evangelicals who have emigrated from the Soviet Union to the United States were dramatically disillusioned by the realization that the so-called ‘Christian West’ is also deeply permeated by humanistic atheism and that while in the East, Christian truth and values are officially opposed, in the West, they are often only verbally honoured while practically ignored or even totally rejected.

Evangelicals who lived and evangelized in Marxist dominated areas ultimately learned that such reactionary attitudes were counter-productive. They ended up in unfruitful negativism and caused the Marxist authorities to treat the believing community as a ‘fifth column’ representing foreign ‘imperialistic interests’ rather than Christ and his gospel of redemptive love. ‘A church’s intransigent opposition to socialism may either relegate it into obscurity or catapult it into the focus of opposition ...’<sup>4</sup>

History records that in most countries the first years of the communist takeover were marked by bitter and at times violent confrontation. In some cases the state resorted to the most brutal repressive measures that produced countless Christian martyrs and caused enormous devastation of church property and institutions. Christians who were trapped into the assumption that their major task was to fight communism handicapped themselves by becoming incapable of winning the communists with the Good News of Christ. As I argued some fifteen years ago, evangelicals should be free from all ideological captivity and geopolitical bias in order to

make it clear that Christianity is not the official ideology of the West and that capitalism is not the economic theory of biblical faith. Old extreme positions must go: Christianity should no longer be identified with anti-communism nor should Marxism be reduced to militant atheism. In this respect, both sides must undergo a change of mental attitudes and recognize that open confrontation does not bring results desired by both and is commonly based on faulty conceptions of each other. (8)

### 3. Compromise with the Authorities

The third temptation in the new ideological environment is to *conform or compromise*, to tailor the p. 68 message and the method to the new situation and to *accommodate to the prevailing ideology*. Some Christian leaders in both Eastern Europe and China have yielded ground theologically and otherwise to establish rapport with the new rulers and gain some concessions, if not privileges, in the areas of religious freedom, social status, international travel, etc. Accusations of opportunism and careerism by the suffering believers were not uncommon. Although this approach was at times naive and its motives questionable, in many cases it led to a temporary *modus vivendi* between church and state. In China it found expression in the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and in Easter

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<sup>3</sup> Kuzmī, Peter. ‘Christian-Marxist dialogue: An Evangelical Perspective,’ in *Proclaiming Christ in Christ’s Way: Studies in Integral Evangelism*. ed. by Vinay Samuel and Albrecht Hauser (Oxford, Regnum Books, 1989) p. 161.

<sup>4</sup> Mojzes, Paul. ‘Impact of the East European Churches Upon Their Own Societies,’ in *Information Letter of the Lutheran World Federation, Marxism and China Study No. 37* (Genoa, Switzerland: LWT, Feb 1983) p. ?.



Europe in the minority approach known as 'religion for socialism' movement. The unregistered and persecuted evangelicals of the Soviet Union used to accuse the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (the major and until recently the only recognized evangelical body, composed of Evangelical Christians, Baptists, Pentecostals and Mennonites) of having made serious compromises with the atheistic authorities.<sup>5</sup>

Although in all the socialist countries there was a formal and constitutionally defined separation of church and state, religious activities were controlled through special legislation and government apparatus. Illegal activities such as non-registered 'underground,' and house-churches, itinerant evangelism and religious instruction of children were especially abhorred by the government and were punishable by law. The government used the recognized church bodies to implement its policies. In the Peoples' Republic of China the government's apparatus of control involves United Front Work Department (UFW) of the Communist Party, the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB), operating under the State Council and local governments, the Public Security Bureau (PSB) which stands for China's police system, and the patriotic organizations, including those that are under government supervision, organized as religious bodies, such as the Protestant TSPM and Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA). At the central level the Party's UFW formulates religious policies which are supplemented at the provincial and local levels through the Religious Affairs bureau and with the cooperation of the patriotic church organizations such as TSPM.

An example of the church's subservience and compromise in China was the process of implementation of the 'Document No. 19' which is the definite statement on current Chinese communist religious policy. It was issued in March 1982 by the Communist Party's Committee. In September of 1982 the national leadership of TSPM was called to Beijing to hear UFW and RAB officials elaborate on the document's religious policy and instruct on its implementation. The leaders of the TSPM then organized similar meetings in their provinces and cities for the TSPM pastors and with UFW p. 69 and RAB officials explaining the policy. The same procedure was then applied at local levels. The result was that several local TSPM committees produced 'patriotic covenants' which Christians are asked to obey. Since early 1983 these patriotic covenants were also used to exert pressure on the house churches (many of them distinctly Pentecostal in belief and practice) to join the TSPM and abide by these regulations. These 'patriotic covenants' are a ten-point summary of the 'Spirit of Document 19'. Some of the essential points of this restrictive document are as follows:

1. That Christians will uphold the four basic principles of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), namely, insist on Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, insist on walking the pathway of socialism.
2. That Christians should not interfere with politics, education, marriage or family planning.
3. That Christians will not proselytize or baptize those under 18 years of age; that they may not pray for the sick or exorcise demons.
4. That Christians will abide by all the laws and policies of the State and will resolutely resist all infiltration by churches abroad, including Bibles, literature and economic assistance from abroad.

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<sup>5</sup> See Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener, Ont: Herald Press, 1981); K. R. Hill, *Puzzle*; Steve Durasoff, *Pentecost Behind the Iron Curtain* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1972) and *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals in the Soviet Union, 1944-1964* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses Inc., 1969).

5. That the churches will practise the three-designated policy: Designated place, personnel, and areas (time added later).<sup>6</sup>

The obedient attitude to the government is shown by some leaders who are sincerely motivated, and is justified by their patriotism, and by appeals to the apostle Paul's admonition to 'submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established' ([Rom. 13:1](#)). The submission, however, has at times led to idolatrous adulation and extravagant praise that have no justification whatsoever. For example, on August 1, 1989, an 'Interconfessional Conference of Homage' sent the Romanian dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, a telegram congratulating him as 'the most beloved son of the Romanian nation, a hero among the heroes of our country, a brilliant founder of socialist Romania ... a man whose mind and soul have realized the interests of the people'.<sup>7</sup> No wonder that some of these and other churchmen went into hiding or were swept away by their believing communities only a few months later with the downfall of the tyrant.

The church of Jesus Christ is a pilgrim community—*communio viatorum*—'in the world' but not 'of the world,' still on the journey to the eternal city and, therefore, never comfortably at home in any society. As Jan Milic Lochman, a Czech theologian remind us, 'any attempt to relate the gospel too closely to an ideology is dangerous for its integrity p. 70 and its identity'.<sup>8</sup> An uncritical identification with the world inevitably leads to critical loss of both identity and spiritual authority.

## EVALUATION AND PERSPECTIVES

### Strengths and Hopes

Evangelical believers in Marxist dominated lands were marked by a *theology of the cross*. The words of Jesus—'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me' ([Mk. 8:34](#))—have a deep experiential meaning for them. They were not adherents of popular religion offering ready-made answers to all of the problems and needs of their vulnerable existence. Their Christian life had a depth of commitment and a spirit of sacrifice going far beyond anything known as a superficial and self-centered response to the 'cheap grace' and its pseudo-Pentecostal variables such as 'health and wealth,' 'name it and claim it' or the 'prosperity gospel' all popular in some segments of Western culture-dominated Christianity. Their faith and suffering have taught them that external pressures, legal restrictions, social discrimination and even physical persecutions serve the noble purpose of purifying and strengthening the church. They have empirically learned the truth of the prophetic assurance that it is 'Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty ([Zech. 4:6](#)). Relying totally on the Lord, they have not only survived but also grown under difficult circumstances.

William Fletcher, a noted authority on religion in the USSR, concludes his study, *Soviet Charismatics: The Pentecostals in the USSR* with the following observations: 'The

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<sup>6</sup> Chou, Jonathan, ed. *The China Mission Handbook: A Portrait of China and Its Church* (Hong Kong: Chinese Church Research Center, 1989), p.38.

<sup>7</sup> *Newsweek*, January 29, 1990, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Lochman, Jan Milic. *Encountering Marx: Bonds and Barriers Between Christians and Marxists* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), P. 15. Lochman, an active Czech participant in the Christian-Marxist dialogue of the sixties and following 1968 a 'Czech theologian in exile,' has given us a very helpful case study of Christian-Marxist relations in Czechoslovakia in *Church in a Marxist Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

Pentecostals in the USSR can look to the future with some confidence. Should the state revert to unrestrained severity in its policy against them, the past history of the movement has demonstrated that Pentecostalism can endure whatever measures the state can apply ... Pentecostals have a demonstrated ability to survive handily and even to grow ... (I)n the massively unequal struggle against the hostility and the concerted might of the state the Pentecostals ... have been winning handily.<sup>9</sup> The same has been stated of the church in China which has miraculously survived the fiery furnace of the cultural revolution. 'In spite of the dark days of trial the true church has not only survived but flourished, emerging from virtual invisibility to be seen clearly by all.'<sup>10</sup>

*Prayer* is considered a holy task, the most vital part of Christian life and the supernaturally efficient weapon in everyday struggles and spiritual battles. Emphasis on prayer is evident in both individual spirituality and congregational worship. Many lay p. 71 pastors raise daily at four o'clock to spend a couple of hours in prayer before their secular job requirements. Very frequently the first hour of the Sunday morning service the entire congregation will spend on their knees in fervent prayer. Weekday congregational prayer meetings are a regular feature of the church life and are taken as seriously as Sunday worship services.

Ivan Efimovich Voronaev, the well known Assemblies of God missionary-pioneer in the Soviet Union, wrote of the significance of the individual's private prayer life. 'Our daily, private conversations with the Lord, by some unique and inexplicable means, concentrate the divine presence. If only we consciously personify, embody the truth of Christ in ourselves, His presence immediately begins to act within us in every direction, and after such conversation and inspiration we can perform the most excellent actions.'<sup>11</sup>

*Church membership* was taken with utmost seriousness, for the cost of publicly identifying with the believing community had been counted in advance and fostered unwavering commitment. The faith of those who were baptized—usually after prolonged periods of waiting and preparation to see the genuine 'fruit of repentance'—and thus received as church members, had been experienced and tested. There was a deep solidarity of love, mutual support and protective confidentiality between those who are bona fide members of the new spiritual household. Every church member was expected to live a life of holiness, have a good public reputation, contribute sacrificially to the church, care for the poor, widows and needy, attend all services and prayer meetings and witness for Christ to unbelievers. If a member was caught in sin or his behaviour was not deemed in accordance with biblical standards, church discipline was practised. In milder cases it meant temporary prohibitions to participate in the Lord's supper and more serious failures resulted in public excommunication from church membership.

Evangelicals in most Marxist dominated lands have practised the biblical *priesthood of all believers*. Church leadership was both plural and pluriform and the clergy-laity divide was practically non-existent. Due to persecutions and legal restrictions in the Soviet Union and China there was no professionalism in the ministry, very few or no salaried and trained clergy. In most countries the professional terms like 'clergy' and 'reverend' were abhorred by the evangelicals as they smack of the religious functionaries of the traditional churches and have no biblical foundations. Every-member ministry of 'preachers' rather than controlled by a professional pastor. Evangelicals under pressure discovered the

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<sup>9</sup> Fletcher, William C. *Soviet Charismatics: The Pentecostals in the USSR* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985), pp. 161–162.

<sup>10</sup> Lyall, Leslie, *God Reigns*, p. 179.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted by W. C. Fletcher, *Soviet Charismatics*, p. 72.

biblical patterns of shared ministry under the lordship of Christ who by his Spirit gives gifts and ministries to all members of the body for the common good of edification.

The Marxist revolution in China used two steps to weaken and finally destroy the church. Firstly, all the pastors and church leaders were separated from their congregations [p. 72](#) and sent to labour camps in far off places. Secondly, most of the church buildings were destroyed or appropriated by the government and transformed for state or other public purposes. The intent was to destroy the congregation by taking away from it the two basic pillars of organized church life—leadership and buildings. This, however, has not weakened but rather strengthened the Chinese church which was forced to discover New Testament principles of congregational life and growth and thus started on the pathway of an unprecedented revival in the history of the church universal.

By separating the pastors from their congregations, the Communists have forced the Chinese Church to seek leadership from within the congregation. These leaders are laymen or laywomen who, for the most part, were not indoctrinated with the Western concepts of leadership. The result has been that the Chinese Church has sought its own level, a level in which it could function most effectively. Thus the church in mainland China has formed itself into family units where leadership would already exist. The present form of the Chinese Church is both the ideal form in the Chinese culture and the closest to the New Testament pattern.<sup>12</sup>

*Evangelism*, although often discreet in proclamation, was amazingly effective because of the attractive quality of new life evident in believers and their families. In the persecuted church in China the explosive growth in the house churches is in many cases ascribed to ‘power evangelism,’ the Holy Spirit confirming the Word of God by extraordinary phenomena, the biblical signs and wonders. East European evangelicals are known for taking evangelism very seriously and for using a variety of approaches to reach their friends and neighbours for Christ. Weddings and funerals are two totally different public occasions when non-believers present are regularly challenged to receive Christ as their Saviour. Personal evangelism is thorough and most effective. A book published by Moscow University on *Certain Peculiarities of Contemporary Religious Ideology* contains the following interesting note.

In one of the Moscow Districts the notebook of one Pentecostal was found. There she had transcribed the names and addresses of those she intended to entice into the sect. No prayers were written in the book. In it, with thorough practicality, several biographical data were written: Opposite each name what disturbs the person in his life and what difficulties stand in his way were noted.<sup>13</sup>

Until recently evangelical believers have suffered when caught openly evangelizing. Soviet courts have interpreted article 52 of their constitution to allow only worship (confined to the walls of the registered church building) while forbidding ‘religious propaganda’. The article referred to in the 1977 Soviet constitution reads: ‘Citizens of the USSR are guaranteed freedom of conscience, that is, the right to profess or [p. 73](#) not to profess any religion, and to conduct religious worship or atheistic propaganda. Incitement of hostility or hatred on religious grounds is prohibited. In the USSR the church is separate from the state, and the school from the church.’ Still Fletcher concludes: ‘Pentecostals in

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<sup>12</sup> Kaufman, Paul E. *China Tomorrow: China's Coming Revolution* (Hong Kong: Asian Outreach, 1977), p. 132.

<sup>13</sup> Fletcher, W. C. *Soviet Charismatics*, p. 112.

the USSR seem thoroughly committed to reaching out to others in Soviet society with their faith.’<sup>14</sup> This is true of most evangelicals across other lands of Eastern Europe as well.

## PROBLEMS AND WEAKNESSES

Evangelicals in communist dominated areas were a small but growing minority that faced many problems. They lived in societies where Marxist dialectical materialism imposed itself as an all-encompassing world-view and atheism was given the privileged status of a new ‘state religion’. Various state policies, administrative measures and educational methods were systematically employed to speed up the process of the, to use a Marxist expression, ‘withering away’ of religion.<sup>15</sup> Christians were at a great disadvantage in combating Marxist atheism due to none or limited (different from country to country) opportunities for providing Christian education for their children and young people, lack of solid Christian literature, and no access to public means of communication. By special restrictive legislation their faith was confined to the privacy of one’s inner piety and to the walls of scarcely available church buildings. As a result, the chances of evangelical Christians making a significant impact on their societies and influencing current affairs were minimal. They lacked trained leadership, were usually marked by a weak organizational apparatus and had no public platforms to articulate their convictions.

Lack of systematic theological training, coupled with the pressure of external circumstances, often led to speculative escapist eschatology that in turn justified the Marxist charge of alienation, Christian faith was often, in most cases unfairly and at times justifiably, suspected of reactionary ideology as a remnant of the old bourgeois order or an infiltration of the ‘imperialistic’ Western influences. Due to such associative accusations some religious activism has been considered synonymous with political dissidence.

The generation gap was and still is another problem evident in many segments of evangelicalism. Older Christians with their time conditioned forms of piety, traditional ways of worship, coupled with legalism as the norm of Christian life, and a lack of concern for larger human and social issues, have often alienated the more enthusiastic and better educated young people who are facing the challenges of modern life and new society and are attracted to a more innovative, lively p. 74 and reflective presentation of the gospel. Unfortunately, until very recently, the evangelical establishment was marked by a retreat from the world, forcing them into the undesired position of a merely tolerated and a largely irrelevant minority.

Evangelicals in most of the communist countries were by and large isolated from the broader international evangelical community and lacked information about it. Very few leaders have been able to travel to world conferences and other international gatherings. International publications were hardly accessible while their own limited (some had none) publications suffered in content and creative exchange of ideas.

In some places evangelicals have to grow out of prevalent suspicion of education and legitimate intellectual pursuits if they are to make an impact on the youth and intelligentsia who are increasingly searching for acceptable spiritual realities. Believers,

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>15</sup> For a comprehensive and well documented study of various Soviet means and methods to fight religion see David E. Powell, *Antireligious Propaganda in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1975). For Marx’s original views on religion see Saul K. Padover, ed., *Karl Marx on Religion* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974) and the most helpful study by David McLellan, *Marxism and Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).



and especially ministers, will have to overcome widespread ignorance of Marxism and other secular streams of thought. They need to study and take seriously secular world-views so as to be able to relate their own faith and experiences in terms and concepts that are firmly rooted in the Word of God while also relevant to, and understood by, the secularized man trained in 'scientific atheism'.

For the evangelizing minority this is an enormous and complex challenge. The vast majority of the people in Eastern Europe, China, etc. are biblically totally illiterate. The radical ideologically inspired secularization has totally distorted, if not completely abolished, the basic facts of the Christian faith. The message of the cross and salvation can hardly have any meaning and argues with the authority of the 'goddess of science' that belief in God is superstition and a dangerous escape from reality. As noted earlier, Soviet government, for example, used to claim proudly that one of the successes of its educational system was that around 90 percent of their young people aged 16–20 adhered to atheism as their world-view. All of these and until hundreds of millions of others must hear and read the gospel, translated and interpreted into their language and thought-categories, in order to understand its significance for their own lives and salvations.

## TASKS AND PROSPECTS

Twentieth century evangelicalism understands itself as a recovery of the full-fledged apostolic Christianity, of the whole gospel. The whole gospel means total commitment to all the demands of Jesus, including the whole spectrum of ethical (personal and social) requirements that are inherent in the gospel message. The whole gospel implies joyful celebration of God's gift of salvation and continuous openness to the Holy Spirit to confirm the Word by resultant spiritual fruit and power. The whole gospel covers proclamation of truth and exhibition of love, manifestation of power and integrity of life. It is in word, deed, and sign.

Only such a gospel in its totality of beauty, truth and power, faithfully proclaimed, consistently lived, lovingly exemplified and powerfully [p. 75](#) demonstrated, will restore credibility to the message of Christ in Marxist dominated and/or Marxist influenced areas of the world. Evangelicals have to recognize that Christian religion has a long and heavy historical ballast which presents a serious hindrance to world evangelization. In Eastern Europe we have learned that Marxist criticism of religion—with all its stereotypes, abuse of science and false propaganda—is not all wrong and have come to acknowledge that the rise and spread of (Western and) Marxist atheism is proportionately related to the shrinking credibility of the institutional Christian church. Free-church evangelicals, due to their ecclesiological self-understanding and historical experience agree with the Czech theologian Hromadka who stated: 'The real Church is always being born anew, always in tension with tradition and its official labels.'<sup>16</sup> Much of communist atheism is at least partially a reaction against backslidden Christianity and may legitimately be interpreted as God's judgement on the historical unfaithfulness of the church. This is why when going out to evangelize I used to tell our seminary students in former Yugoslavia that our preliminary task may be to 'wash the face of Jesus,' for it has been dirtied, distorted and made unrecognizable by both the compromises of the Christian church through the centuries and the antagonistic propaganda of atheistic communism in this century.

We must humbly acknowledge that religion was frequently used as a manipulative tool of the powerful and mighty and has often served as an ideological screen to justify the actions of powerful oppressors to pacify the poor and exploited. White-washing unjust

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<sup>16</sup> Hromadka, Joseph L. *Thoughts of a Czech Pastor* (London: SCM Press, 1970), p. 100.



wars, justifying economic injustices and blatant exploitation, and smoke-screening racial discrimination are only some of the obvious evils that the church has practised for ages. Although somewhat over-generalized, and overstated, the statement of Girardi is historically demonstrable: 'Whenever the working class expressed its aspirations and demands, the Church stood with the opposition against the workers. The workers grew up, therefore, considering the Church as their class enemy.'<sup>17</sup> We humbly agree with Charles West:

It is the disgrace of Christian theology that Marx found it, not the Gospel of Good News to the whole man, body and soul, especially to the humble and the poor, not the promise of the coming of an already risen and ruling Christ, but only the division of body from Spirit, the hope of a spiritual eternal life, and the neglect or the sanctification of the material arrangements of this world.<sup>18</sup>

The evangelicals as the 'church of the working class'—as they have been occasionally labelled in some parts of the world, especially Pentecostals in Latin America—and as a movement of the life-transforming gospel of Jesus Christ, are in a unique position to overcome this p. 76 and other Marxist prejudices and stereotypes.

In order to do so, it is imperative that we practise Christian love without creating our own ideological prejudices and stereotypes that would blind us to real human needs and problems. Marxist analysis of social realities often uncovers concrete situations which have definite implications for Christian ethics and should not be suppressed or ignored merely on the basis of the fact that they have been exposed by the enemies of the faith. As Hordern puts it, 'No Christian has a right to condemn communism until his own passion for social justice equals its passion and supersedes it. To paraphrase the saying of Jesus, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Communists and Capitalists, ye shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of God".'<sup>19</sup> The famous exiled Russian philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev, himself a convert from Marxism to Christianity, concludes his book *The Origin of Russian Communism* with the following statement about the human need in our world and the spiritual answer to it:

The world is living through the danger of a dehumanization of social life, the dehumanization of man himself. The very existence of man is in danger from all the processes which are going on in the world. When Christianity appeared in the world it defended man from the danger arising from demonolatry. Man was in the power of cosmic forces, of demons and spirits of nature which tormented him. Christianity focused man spiritually and subjected his fate to God; thus was prepared the possibility of man's power over Nature. At the present time Christianity is again called upon to protect man, to protect his whole image from a demonolatry which tortures him anew, from servitude to the old cosmic and the new technical forces. But this can only be done by a rejuvenated Christianity which is true to its prophetic spirit and which is turned toward the Kingdom of God.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Girardi, quoted by J. M. Bonino in *Christians and Marxists*, p. 60.

<sup>18</sup> West, Charles in *Opening for Marxist-Christian Dialogue* Thomas W. Ogletree, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), p. 331.

<sup>19</sup> Hordern, William. *Christianity, Communism and History* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 105.

<sup>20</sup> Berdyaev, Nicolas. *The Origin of Russian Communism*. (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 188.

Today Berdyaev's own homeland and to a great extent the other lands so long captivated by the forces of the most powerful secular substitute religion, stand on the threshold of a new era. The formerly Marxist societies are in a period of rapid transition with a new spirit of hope and immense expectations on the widened horizons of new freedom. Though the drastic changes contain many elements of unpredictability, the followers of Christ are aware that this is the time of special grace—*kairos*. The problems are many, but the spirit-filled believers recognize both the problems and the whole range of new possibilities as occasion for the kingdom of God. May the evangelical movement be at least in part an answer to Berdyaev's insight and plea for a 'rejuvenated Christianity' and thus, God's answer to Marxism.

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## Suffering in Latin America

Pedro Arana Quiroz

Suffering is inherent in human life as we know it. The central figure of the oldest book of the Bible is Job, the sufferer. At the heart of the gospel is the suffering Servant of Jahweh who, even after his resurrection still carries the mark of that suffering in his body. The Christian hope, according to the seer's vision is: 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, ...' and he heard 'A loud voice from the thron saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them ... He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the order of things has passed away.'<sup>1</sup>

### SOCIETAL SUFFERING IN LATIN AMERICA

However, in talking about suffering in Latin America,<sup>2</sup> we pass from strictly personal or family suffering to the suffering of society in general. We would like to point out those traumatic and painful experiences of the people which have left lasting scars. Overcoming these experiences or their results may well correspond to a resurrection or a miracle of healing. There are many examples in history similar to the liberation of Israel from Egypt, or the resurgence of the Allies after the Second World War. Without a doubt, other examples will come to mind.

There had been suffering among the Mayas, Aztecs and Incas, but the discovery of the sub-continent by Columbus and the following conquests by the Spanish and Portuguese marked the beginning of the first painful traumas in our indigenous America. The very humanity of its inhabitants was questioned and when it was decided that they were no better than animals, the floodgates of slavery were opened wide. The Dominican priest,

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. 21.1,4.

<sup>2</sup> German Archineigas, *America Magica*.