

**Religion and Communism
in the Soviet Union
and Eastern Europe**

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The starting point for many a discussion of Communism and religion is the statement by Karl Marx (surely one of his most frequently quoted passages) that religion “is the opium of the people.” The context in which this particular passage occurs, however, is less sarcastic:

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.¹

In this case Marx saw religion as a compensation to those who were deprived of happiness in this world and who therefore sought it in looking forward to better conditions in the life to come. While he was charitable toward those who, in his view, were forced to turn to religious fantasies in order to find satisfaction, he was harshly critical of the *bourgeoisie*, whom he considered to be cynically making use of religion—wittingly or unwittingly—as a tool in their suppression of the working class.

Marx’s concept of historical materialism, which holds that the social and political systems determine phenomena in the sphere of consciousness and that the social and political orders are ultimately determined by the underlying economic base, provides the basis for atheism and criticism of religion in Communist ideology. In his writings on the alienation of man, he declared that man must create himself, must become what he essentially is, instead of losing himself in a religious dream. Religion provides pseudoself-realization; by accepting a religious view man accepts the shadow of self-realization rather than its substance, seeming rather than being. For Marx, then religion was a delusion or an expression of false consciousness.

In his dialectics of nature Engels moved one step beyond historical materialism, creating the metaphysical system known as dialectical materialism, which is stronger yet in its implied atheism. Lenin was also more explicit than Marx in denying the existence of anything nonmaterial, and thus also in denying any basis for religion.

The philosophical and ideological foundations of Marxism-Leninism’s atheistic and antireligious content, however, are only one aspect of the relationship between Communism and religion. Of no less significance is the political question of how these ideological prescriptions are interpreted and applied by Communist parties once they have come to exercise political

power in a special state. Ideologies of any type do not long survive as abstract philosophies; they seek to capture for themselves a power base—either a party, a social class, or, ultimately, a state. Such a conquest, however, results in a transformation of both the ideology and its power base. The demands of the ideology and the requirements of retaining political power force the creation of a symbiotic relationship. Constantine's decision to adopt Christianity profoundly influenced the Roman Empire, but at the same time this transformation could not have taken place if the church had not adapted itself to the demands inherent in serving as the official creed. Just as the state officials satisfied demands of the church, so the church acted to further goals of the state.

The ideas of Marx and Lenin as interpreted by the Communist parties of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have undergone a subtle process of transformation as they have confronted their national historical inheritances and contemporary realities. This does not mean that the atheism inherent in Communist doctrine has been abandoned. It does suggest, however, that in practice the Communist attitude toward religion has been subject to significant variation, and thus the relationship between Communism and religion is subject to dispassionate analysis, just as are other less emotional topics.

There are a number of aspects to the political relationship between religion and the Communist states in Eastern Europe, each of which has required a different type of response from the Communist regimes. Three main areas are particularly relevant in considering church-state relations. First are the ideological or philosophical differences which have resulted in party and church competition to influence the beliefs of the population. Second are state efforts to control the organizational or institutional elements associated with religion—the hierarchy, church schools and seminaries, property, the administrative organization. Third, and peculiar to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, is the effect upon the church-state relations of the close link between religion and national consciousness; religion is a major factor in determining nationality in this area of the world.

Religious Faith and Militant Atheism

The first aspect of the relationship between religion and Communism in Eastern Europe is the struggle to influence the belief of the population. The ideological atheism of Marxism-Leninism and the obligation of the party to propagate this view conflict sharply with the religious concept of a supreme being and the consequences of this premise. Although there are a number of true nonbelievers in the party ranks who feel an obligation to convert the world to atheism, the campaigns against religious belief are conducted as much for political as for ideological reasons.

A primary consideration that lies behind the militant atheism of the party is the fact that religious belief challenges the ideological justification for Communist party rule. The official version of Marxism-Leninism casts the party in the role of the “vanguard of the working class”; it rules as the expression of the interests of the proletariat in the process of bringing about social, economic, political, and ideological revolution. Although most members of the working class may not yet have reached the point of recognizing their own true interests, the party seeks to educate the proletariat in this respect and claims to act on behalf of this class. As Zbigniew Brzezinski phrases it, “Ideology has the important effect of transforming the party’s power into authority.”² If this justification for party rule is to be valid, however, one must accept the idea of class conflict advanced by Marx and Engels and the concepts of historical and dialectical materialism upon which it is based. Marxism-Leninism, therefore, presents itself not merely as an economic, political, or social theory, but as an integral *Weltanschauung* which seeks to explain the nature of the world. Since the party rules as the incarnation of official ideology, to admit the validity of any other world view opens the door to potential challenge of its position and power.

Another reason for propagating atheism is related to the party’s compulsion to dominate all institutions in society and to eliminate any serious rivals for power. One of the fundamental sources of the influence wielded by the church as an institution is the allegiance the faithful give to it because of their belief in God and their conviction that the church is a means through which they can draw closer to him. In pre-Communist times the power of the churches was also based on the property they possessed and their connections with the ruling elite, but Communist rule has resulted in the seizure of church property and the imposition of severe restrictions on the church as an institution. As a result the spiritual allegiance of the faithful is now the most important source of the church’s strength, and in seeking to destroy belief in God atheist propaganda seeks to undermine this remaining source of influence.

Communist authorities are very careful to make a distinction between state and party attitudes toward religion. The state, according to their view, must see that religious institutions are completely separated from the state and the school system, and that they restrict their activities to the performance of religious rites. Individuals, so long as they do not violate the laws of the state, should be permitted to follow any religion, but they must also be permitted to hold no religious belief if they so choose. In any case, personal beliefs should not be cause for discrimination, and all religious institutions should be treated equally. The Communist party, on the other hand, has an obligation to work actively to liberate the population from religious prejudices, and to this end engages in extensive atheistic propaganda.

This distinction between state and party responsibilities, however, has not been strictly adhered to in practice. Although a separation of functions exists, the lines between party and state are blurred and it is often difficult to distinguish where party functions cease and state ones begin. The control of religious organizations is essentially a state function, but the motive for this control is to eliminate any competing center of power that might rival the party. Although waging the campaign against religion is primarily a party function, the state has actively assisted the party in this task through, among other things, the school system. The educational system is specifically commissioned to educate youth in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism, and the state carefully limits or prohibits religious education of the young.

Despite this overlapping of functions with the state, the party has assumed the primary responsibility for combating "religious prejudice" among the masses. Party propaganda organizations have led the attack on religious belief, but since their responsibilities include the whole spectrum of party propaganda concerns, antireligious activity has received somewhat sporadic attention.

In most Communist countries special antireligious agencies have been set up under the party to deal primarily with the task of spreading atheism. In the Soviet Union, where atheistic propaganda has probably been the most vigorous, a party Commission on the Implementation of the Decree on the Separation of Church and State attached to the Central Committee was established in 1922 to guide antireligious policy. In 1925 a mass organization, the League of the Militant God-less, was created to foster the spread of atheism, and by 1932 its membership was said to be over five million. During the Second World War and until Stalin's death in 1953, a more tolerant attitude toward the churches led to the dissolution of the League and to a decline in antireligious propaganda. Although no new mass organization was established in 1954, when the antireligious campaign was renewed, the Znanie (Knowledge) Society, an organization designed to mobilize the intelligentsia to provide adult education and spread propaganda among the masses, was encouraged to take the lead. But although its lecturers frequently deal with atheism, it has not become a purely antireligious institution.³

Generally speaking, there has been an attempt to link science with the campaign for atheism. In most cases the national scientific academies have sections that produce and disseminate "scientific knowledge" which discredits religious beliefs. The Slovak Academy of Sciences, for example, has among the numerous institutes attached to it an Institute of Scientific Atheism. The antireligious propaganda campaign has received a lower priority than other problems facing the parties, and this aspect of party work

has thus been allotted to or has attracted fanatical but less competent party cadres than have other areas.

There are certain elements of Communist ideology which make it a substitute for religion. A Communist must be converted, and once he is converted he is expected to convince others; and the ideology demands full devotion. There are prophets (Marx, Engels, Lenin) and sacred books (*Das Kapital*, *the Communist Manifesto*, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, to name only a few). In its antireligious campaign the party has gone still further and has sought to duplicate church ritual in order to fulfill the need for special celebrations at certain points in an individual's life. Secular naming and burial ceremonies are analogous to religious baptism (christening) and burial rites, and much effort has been made to add pomp and ceremony to marriage in order to discourage religious weddings.

Despite official restrictions on church activities and the party-sponsored propaganda campaign against religious belief, the number of believers in Communist states is still surprisingly large. Precise figures are not easy found, and are still more difficult to verify. Nevertheless, there are some indications. In Slovakia, the results of a survey published in 1970 showed that 73.4 per cent of the blue-collar workers, 91.2 per cent of the peasants and farmers, and 54.3 per cent of the white-collar workers are believers, and only 14 per cent of the total Slovak population could be classed as atheists. The published report of a similar sociological survey in Rumania did not give specific data but concluded that the study "provides proof of the persistence of religion." In Hungary the party has officially criticized party members for permitting their children to be baptized and to participate in religious instruction, and for participating themselves in religious ceremonies, including weddings and burials. It is frequently noted in reports on Eastern Europe that religious belief persists primarily among the older generation and that young people are less influenced by it. This is probably true, but nevertheless many young people are still believers. In Rumania the party leader criticized members of the Union of Communist Youth not only for attending church services on special holidays but for being "in the first rows bowing and praying."⁴

The Church as a Rival for Power

The system of governing which the Communist parties of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe sought to establish when they came to power included what Brzezinski calls "an organizational compulsion . . . to absorb and/or destroy all social groups that might even constitute passive obstructions to the movement's dynamic need to subordinate society totally to its power."⁵ This unwillingness to tolerate competing centers of power and the effort to eliminate any form of pluralism is one of the major characteristics

of Communist political rule. This is not to say, however, that this end has been successfully achieved. Circumstances have required adjusting the goal of achieving monolithic power to the realities of politics. It must also be kept in mind that there are significant variations among the Communist states of Eastern Europe, and over time there are differences in the degree of control achieved within any single state.

The goal of eliminating all rival loci of power, although it has not been completely achieved, has brought the Communist regimes into conflict with church institutions, which in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union wielded considerable political and economic power prior to the establishment of the Communist governments. They claimed the allegiance of sizable portions of the population; the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches exercised control over large amounts of property; extensive charitable activities increased their influence; and education was dominated or heavily influenced by the local established church.

Once the Communist parties succeeded in consolidating their authority, the pattern of action against religious institutions was much the same. Laws and constitutional provisions were adopted which granted freedom of religion, but at the same time the right to disbelieve was expressly specified. The Soviet Constitution of 1936, for example, provides: "Freedom of religious worship and freedom to engage in antireligious propaganda are recognized for all citizens."⁶ In most cases however, the "freedom to engage in antireligious propaganda" was interpreted rather broadly, while the "freedom of religious worship" was rather narrowly circumscribed. Laws were enacted under which church-operated schools were nationalized and church property seized. In some cases buildings used for worship were ultimately returned, but since a large proportion of church revenues had come from other land holdings, charitable activities had to be curtailed, the clergy had to undergo considerable hardship, and the funds available for the upkeep of the buildings that were retained were limited. The nationalization of church-operated schools was a serious blow to religious influence. In Hungary, for example, some 60 per cent of the schools in the country were Roman Catholic. The activities of seminaries and other institutions for the training of clergy were restricted; severe limitations were placed on the number of students they could admit, and many were closed altogether. Church and state were legally separated, and each Communist government created an office of religious affairs to control church activity. These government agencies exercised considerable authority over all religious denominations. The state provided funds for the church, regulated appointments of the clergy, and approved the election of officials to the hierarchy. Church officials were required to proclaim loyalty to the state and its policies, and those who opposed these measures were brought to trial and imprisoned.

Because the issue was one of control, churches that were willing to acknowledge the supremacy of Communist authority and reach accommodations with it fared better than those that resisted. Generally speaking, the Eastern Orthodox churches were more willing to cooperate than was the Roman Catholic. The Eastern Orthodox traditions of separate autonomous national churches having only superficial links with each other and with the ecumenical patriarch in Istanbul and of close cooperation with state officials—both of which long predated commodation easier. Clergy who were willing to accept Communist demands were given preference, and those who opposed the new restraints were incarcerated.

In the Soviet Union, the process of bringing the Russian Orthodox church under state and party control was given high priority after the Bolshevik coup d'état of 1917. Because of the very close relationship between the church and the tsarist regime that had existed before the October Revolution, the Communist party regarded this as a particularly important task. In the period between 1917 and 1941 the church was subjected to three major campaigns involving persecution of the clergy and the placing of restraints on the right to worship coupled with antireligious propaganda. Each of these campaigns was in turn followed by a period of moderation, during which antireligious activities did not cease altogether but became less vigorous. Germany's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 marked the beginning of a new period of toleration toward the Russian Orthodox church. As Soviet troops sought to hold back the invading Wehrmacht, the Orthodox hierarchy rallied to the defense of the motherland by issuing proclamations encouraging the war effort and making financial contributions. Faced with the task of defeating Germany Stalin altered his earlier approach and adopted policies favorable to both the Russian Orthodox church and Russian nationalism. The church benefited from this arrangement; there was a revival of religion, and the number of Orthodox congregations increased significantly. After the war the church was permitted to maintain and even improve the position it had achieved, in return for its support of Soviet foreign and domestic policies. But the relative tolerance of religion that marked Soviet policy under Stalin after 1941 did not continue long after the dictator's death. In 1954 an intensified campaign against the church and religion was initiated, and has continued with varying degrees of vigor since then. The situation of the churches remains far from favorable, but the persecution to which they are subjected is relatively minor compared to that of the 1930s although it is still serious. Nevertheless, the size and influence of the Russian Orthodox community are significant. There are more functioning Orthodox congregations at present than there were in 1944. Statistics must be treated with caution, but the number of people actively practicing religion in the Soviet Union is in

the realm of 40 million, with some estimates as high as 64 million.⁷ The Russian Orthodox church survives in the Soviet Union because it is no threat to the regime. Church dignitaries call upon the faithful to pray for their “God-protected country and its government.”⁸ The government in return acknowledges the services of the church—for example, Patriarch Aleksei received the Order of the Red Banner of Socialist Labor three times.⁹

The process of achieving an accommodation between the Orthodox churches and the Communist governments after 1945 went more smoothly in Eastern Europe than it had in the Soviet Union. The Serbian Orthodox church in Yugoslavia and the Bulgarian and Rumanian Orthodox churches came to terms relatively quickly with the new governments, although the activities of all three were restricted and in all some members of the clergy were uncooperative. The Serbian church has retained somewhat greater autonomy because of the unique political situation in Yugoslavia. The Bulgarian and Rumanian churches, however, have become essentially instruments of state policy.

Dealing with the Roman Catholic church has been a more complex and difficult task for the East European Communist parties. The Catholic faithful and clergy acknowledge allegiance to and accept guidance from a supreme authority beyond the boundaries of all individual states. The Catholic church’s strong international connections give it a resiliency that autonomous national denominations do not have. Also, the Catholic tradition in Western and Central Europe has not been one of subservience of church to state, as was the case with the Eastern Orthodox denominations. The resolve of the East European regimes to establish control over Catholic religious bodies within their boundaries was strengthened by the anti-Communist stance of the Vatican and its links with Catholics in Western Europe.

One of the actions taken by the Soviet and Rumanian government was to force the merger of the Uniate or Greek Catholic churches with the predominant Eastern Orthodox church. The Uniate groups acknowledge the pope as supreme head of the church, but their liturgy and organization follow the Eastern Orthodox tradition, which they have observed since their conversion to Christianity before the ninth century. Uniates living in Transylvania (now western Rumania) accepted papal authority in the seventeenth century, when the area was a part of the Austrian Empire. The Uniates of the Soviet Union were ethnic Ukrainians who inhabited territories that were annexed from Poland and Czechoslovakia after World War II. They had likewise accepted papal authority in the seventeenth century, when they were under Austrian rule. When the Communist party came to power in Rumania and when the Soviet Union annexed Eastern Galicia from Poland and the Carpatho-Ukraine from Czechoslovakia

during World War II, there were approximately one and a half million and three and a half million Uniates in the two states, respectively. Since these Christians observe the Byzantine rite, which the Orthodox churches also follow, it was considered simple for them to sever connections with Rome and “return to the fold” of Orthodoxy. This served two purposes—it broke the Uniate link with the Vatican, and it emphasized to the more compliant Orthodox hierarchy the value of cooperating with Communist officials, since the reconversion of the Uniates had been an Orthodox aim for generations. The Ukrainian Uniate congregations were merged with the Russian Orthodox Church in 1946, and the Transylvanian Uniate congregations joined the Rumanian Orthodox church in 1948. These moves were accomplished under official pressure, and members of the clergy who opposed it were imprisoned.

The Roman Catholic Church in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and northern Yugoslavia, however, proved to be more of a problem to the new Communist regimes. Catholics made up the major portion of the local population, and since they were solidly Latin by tradition they could not easily be merged with the Orthodox Church. The leading Catholic clerics in all four countries became focal points of opposition to the new Communist regimes, and all were subsequently restricted to a greater or lesser degree in the performance of their pastoral duties. This was the fate of Archbishop Stepinac of Zagreb (Yugoslavia), Cardinal Mindszenty of Hungary, Archbishop Beran of Czechoslovakia, and Cardinal Wyszynski of Poland. Communist authorities were more successful in ultimately securing the compliance of Catholic leaders in Czechoslovakia and Hungary than they were in Poland and Croatia, although in all areas resistance was vigorous. In Czechoslovakia and Hungary the Catholic population, while still substantial, represents a smaller proportion of the total. Calvinist Protestants make up a quarter of the population of Hungary, and there are Lutherans as well. Protestant groups are also to be found in Czech areas. In Hungary, Slovakia, and Croatia some of the Catholic hierarchy were tainted by association with the fascist government of these areas during World War II, and in most cases at least some were found who were willing to cooperate on terms acceptable to the new regimes, and this in turn led to division within the church. Associations of Catholic laymen and clergy were formed which accepted Communist authority, but the more staunchly anti-Communist hierarchy supported the Vatican, refused cooperation and vigorously opposed any state encroachments upon church prerogatives.

By and large the parties in Hungary and Czechoslovakia succeeded in weakening Catholic influence and in undermining the church as a center of power outside party control. In Croatia, the break between Tito and Stalin in 1948 and the political and economic reforms that followed forced

accommodation between the party and the Catholic church. Although Archbishop Stepinac was not permitted to resume his duties, church officials acceptable to both the Vatican and the Yugoslav League of Communists were found. As Yugoslav society and the country's economy have evolved in the direction of greater pluralism, the Catholic church (as well as other religious groups in Yugoslavia) has been given greater latitude. The recent strengthening of the party and the concern for ideological revitalization that has been evident since 1971 have led to renewed conflict as the party has sought to limit church influence.

In Poland the Catholic church has been most successful in maintaining its power despite efforts of the Communist party to undermine it. The Catholic position in Poland is strengthened by the fact that, as a result of the boundary changes which resulted from World War II, the country is almost entirely Polish and overwhelmingly Catholic. Polish nationalism has been linked with Catholicism, and the church played a significant role in Polish life before the Communist-dominated government came to power. To a greater extent than in any other East European country, the Polish Catholic church has remained a strong, dynamic, alternative center of power.

The unique position of the church in Poland before World War II prepared the way for the continuation of its influence, but political developments since 1945 have also contributed to this. Throughout Eastern Europe, at times when the party clearly has the upper hand the campaign against religion is rigorously pressed; but when Communist control is threatened, the party relaxes its campaign against the church. In the wave of unrest that swept through Eastern Europe in 1956, Poland very nearly suffered the chaos and disaster that befell Hungary in its ill-fated revolution. As part of his program to stabilize the situation the new Polish party leader, Wladyslaw Gomulka, reached an unwritten *modus vivendi* with the church, in which the latter would support his efforts to avert chaos in Poland in return for full freedom of religious activity. Neither Gomulka nor Cardinal Wyszynski nurtured any illusions about the other's intentions, but it was in the interest of both to reach a government. Once the party had reestablished its control, it began a policy of petty harassment of the church whose power made the consequences of a frontal assault too costly. The church, for its part, used the temporary respite to strengthen its position in the struggle with the party. By the mid-1960s, however, the party and state had again regained the initiative and attacks on the church were intensified. In the internal crisis that followed the Polish workers' riots of December 1970, the Polish regime again made conciliatory moves toward the church. Nevertheless, the underlying differences were not resolved and, following a period of improvement, their relationship is again strained.

On the question of relations between the Catholic church and the Communist governments, the Vatican is a significant issue. The appointment of bishops and higher church officials requires the approval of the Vatican, as well as that of secular authorities. At various times East European governments have sought to weaken and divide the national Catholic hierarchies by making direct approaches to the Vatican. This was encouraged by Popes John XXIII and Paul VI, both of whom showed interest in reducing the hostility between the Catholic church and the East European governments. The Polish government approached the Vatican in the early 1960s and indicated interest in direct Warsaw-Vatican negotiations, in an attempt to undercut Cardinal Wyszynski's position in the Polish hierarchy and to encourage those elements who favored a more flexible approach to church-state relations. Rome, however, insisted that Cardinal Wyszynski must be involved in any Warsaw-Vatican negotiations, and little progress was made. In the aftermath of the events of December 1970 and the changes in government and party leadership that followed, the Polish government established official contacts with the Vatican for the first time, and other high-level negotiations have subsequently taken place. A limited agreement was reached to maintain permanent contact, but a number of important issues remain unresolved.

A limited agreement was also reached between the Hungarian government and the Vatican in 1964, under which a number of long-vacant sees were to be filled, although full resolution of all outstanding issues was precluded by the problem of the primate of Hungary, Cardinal Mindszenty, who had sought asylum in the American Legation in Budapest in 1956 and had remained there. In September 1971, however, the Hungarian government and the Vatican came to an accord under which Mindszenty eventually went into exile in Vienna and certain personnel changes were made in the administration of the church in Hungary. Although the Vatican formally continued to recognize Cardinal Mindszenty as primate until early 1974, the Hungarian government has not done so since his trial and imprisonment in 1949. The Vatican's desire to retire Mindszenty as archbishop and primate of Hungary—a decision with which the cardinal did not agree—led in January 1975 to agreement between the Vatican and the Hungarian government on the appointment of a series of new bishops.

In early 1973 Czechoslovakia also took a first step toward improving relations with the Vatican by working out an agreement on the appointment of four new bishops, though negotiations were difficult and protracted and both sides were required to compromise.

The efforts of the East European governments and the Vatican to reach compromises reflect a new attitude on the part of both. The Vatican has shown increasing willingness to come to terms with the political realities of

Eastern Europe, in the interest of preserving what remains of the church's influence and of creating a climate in which it is hoped the clergy will be given more freedom to carry out their duties. This has produced certain conflicts of interest between rigidly anti-Communist elements in the East European clergy on the one hand, and other members of the clergy and Vatican officials who are more flexible on issues of church-state relations on the other. The East European governments also have their own reasons for permitting the churches greater latitude than in the past. In part this is because the regimes feel a good deal more self-confident today. The economic and social progress achieved in Eastern Europe has been in large measure responsible for an increasing degree of popular acceptance of Communist rule, and in response to the growing interest in détente the governments have been anxious to show good will and resolve outstanding East-West conflicts. Improving relations with the Vatican is part of a more conciliatory policy toward the West which has been emerging generally in Eastern Europe over the last few years.¹⁰

In their efforts to eliminate rivals for power, the Communist parties of Eastern Europe have had the greatest success in establishing dominance over the national Eastern Orthodox churches. As noted above, the Catholic church has resisted far more vigorously owing to its stronger international ties with the Vatican and a tradition of greater assertiveness vis-à-vis the state. Communist success with Protestant groups has been mixed. Generally speaking the traditional Calvinist and Lutheran Protestant in Eastern Europe have close relations with similar foreign religious groups, but at the same time they are less numerous and less centrally organized. For the most part they have come under state control and receive state financial support, in return for which they have had to accept restrictions on their activities. The more radical sects have been perhaps the least willing to compromise, and as a result have suffered the greatest persecution and restriction. The Jehovah's Witnesses and certain Pentecostal groups have encountered the most severe penalties—in many countries in Eastern Europe, for example, they are legally prohibited—primarily because of their refusal to acknowledge loyalty to the state, to serve in the armed forces, to salute the flag, etc.

The Communist parties have in general been successful in their attempts to dominate the churches of Eastern Europe. The weapons available to the state are formidable. Restrictions—including imprisonment of church members and clergy and the physical power to enforce state decisions—and inducements—financial support, control over buildings used for worship, and permission to train clergy—have been used in carrot-and-stick fashion to secure compliance and establish state control. There are however, individual variations. The Polish Catholics have retained the greatest

freedom of action, and the Rumanian Orthodox church represents perhaps the other end of the spectrum, at which the church accepts state control and cooperates with political authorities in achieving Communist goals.¹¹

National Consciousness and Traditional Values

An additional element which complicates the relationship between religion and Communism in Eastern Europe is the role of religion as a primary element in determining the nationality of the peoples of this region, particularly in the Balkan Peninsula and Poland. In the Balkans, nationalism developed even later than in Central Europe because the social conditions that foster its rise were less advanced in areas which had been part of the Turkish Empire. The Turks virtually eliminated the local nobility as they conquered the Balkans, and controlled their subjects indirectly through Greek religious leaders. Nationalism in the area was strongly influenced by religious identification, because the struggle against the Turks was linked to the struggle for church autonomy. The Serbian independence movement became a struggle to obtain a Serbian patriarchate. Greek national identity was maintained primarily through the Greek Orthodox church. Montenegrins, who were never officially subject to the Turks, were led by priest-princes who ruled in both secular and religious affairs. The real beginning of Bulgarian nationalism was the Sultan's recognition of the Bulgarian exarchate in 1870. Serbs and Croats have the same racial origins and the same language, but Serbs are Orthodox and Croats are Roman Catholics. The Serbo-Croatian-speaking Moslems of Bosnia-Herzegovina have preferred to call themselves Yugoslav Moslems rather than Serbs or Croats in post war Yugoslavia. (Albanians are the exception—about 70 per cent are Moslem, 20 per cent Orthodox, and 10 per cent Roman Catholic.) Hence national identity in the former Turkish territories is primarily determined not by territorial or ethnic considerations, but by religion.¹²

In Poland the Catholic Church and Polish nationalism became linked in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the failure of attempts to bring about national unity under the political leadership resulted in sentiment for unity shifting to the Polish Catholic church, and Poles outside it were considered to have doubtful national loyalties. This trend was strengthened as first parts and eventually all of Poland became annexed to Prussia, Russia, and Austria between 1772 and 1795. With the bulk of the Polish population and territory under Protestant Prussian and Orthodox Russian control from 1795 until 1918, a primary distinguishing feature of the Polish nation was its Catholic religion. Particularly in that part of the country dominated by Prussia (and later the German Empire), religious channels were used for the expression of Polish political views and the institutions of the church were utilized to preserve Polish culture. The

church became the rallying point for Polish nationalism, and the struggle between German and Pole became, at least in part, one between Prussian Lutheranism and Polish Catholicism. Bismarck's policy of *Kulturkampf* against the Poles ultimately succeeded in strengthening Polish nationalism and tied it more closely to the Catholic church. In those parts of Poland under Russian domination the struggle to control the restless Poles likewise assumed many of the features of an Orthodox-Catholic conflict. This very close identification between Catholicism and Polish nationalism continued after the establishment of an independent Poland in 1918, and was one of the primary reasons for the strong position of the Catholic church even after the Communist party came to power in 1945.¹³

Because of the link between religion and national consciousness, Communist governments in Eastern Europe have on occasion made use of religion when it has served their goals. A classic instance was the creation of the Macedonian Orthodox church in Yugoslavia. The crux of the question is the nationality of the Slavic inhabitants of Macedonia—an area that has been the source of conflict between Serbia (Yugoslavia after 1918) and Bulgaria for the last century.

During the Second World War Tito, in line with his plan to solve the Yugoslav nationality problem by creating a federation of different national republics, recognized the existence of a "Macedonian" nationality which was neither Serb nor Bulgarian. Under Communist direction a Yugoslav People's Republic of Macedonia was founded in 1944; linguists and literati began the process of creating a separate Macedonian literary language in 1945, historians began writing Macedonian histories, and a Macedonian culture was developed.

Initially the Bulgarian party accepted the existence of this Macedonian nationality, but in 1956 it reversed its stand. During a period of strained relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in 1958, Bulgarian leaders proclaimed the population of Macedonia to be Bulgarian. Concerned that the Bulgarian claims might find an echo among some of the Macedonian population, the Yugoslav League of Communists approved the convening of a church conference which proclaimed the establishment of an independent Macedonian Orthodox church. The League of Communists and the Yugoslav government were deeply involved in its creation, although the basic hostility to religion was not altered. The party, however, recognized the importance of religion as a means of affirming national existence and stimulating national consciousness. The independent Macedonian church was a means of emphasizing Macedonian nationality, and hence it was encouraged.¹⁴

In the Soviet Union as well religion and nationality have tended to reinforce each other. In both tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, however,

the Russian Orthodox church—in the interest of preserving its own power—and the state—in the interest of furthering its nationality policy—have opposed autonomous Orthodox churches for the non-Russian nationalities. Particular objections were raised to the establishment of an autonomous Ukrainian church (a separate Ukrainian Orthodox church had been merged with the Russian Orthodox church in 1686). Because the Ukrainians are closest in culture and language to the Great Russians and represent the largest non-Great Russian nationality in the Soviet Union, the desire to integrate the Ukrainians into the Russian group has been an element of both tsarist and Soviet nationality policies. Similar considerations underlie the opposition to separate status for the Byelorussian Orthodox church, which was terminated by the Soviet government in the 1930s after a short-lived struggle for autonomy. Autocephalous Orthodox churches existed in Estonia (where about one fifth of the population are Orthodox) and Latvia (where only about 9 per cent of the population are Orthodox) during the period when these countries were independent after 1918, but they were merged with the Russian Orthodox church once the Soviet Union annexed these Baltic States during World War II.

The Georgian Orthodox church, which was absorbed by the Russian Orthodox church in 1811, shortly after the tsar acquired Georgia, declared itself autocephalous in 1917, in the confusion following the collapse of the tsarist government. A century of Russian domination, however, led to the russification of the church and to its estrangement from the Georgian population. Its independence was acknowledged by the Russian Orthodox church in 1943, shortly after Stalin had removed a number of restrictions on the hierarchy of the latter. Although there is no direct evidence linking him with the decision to acknowledge the Georgia church, in his youth Stalin, who was a Georgian, had studied at a seminary in Tiflis, and he had first-hand knowledge of the conflict between the Russian and Georgian churches.

The Armenian Apostolic church, which still retains certain historical distinctions from the Orthodox churches, has also succeeded in maintaining its independent status in the Soviet Union, although its activity has been restricted by the Soviet government and its membership has suffered as a result of antireligious campaigns conducted by the party. The church is a major factor in Armenian national consciousness. More Armenians live outside the Soviet Union than within its borders, and hence the Soviet government has found the church and its head, the Catholicos of All Armenians, useful adjuncts to Soviet foreign policy.¹⁵

The proportion of Roman Catholics in the Soviet Union is not large, particularly since the Uniate or Eastern rite Catholic groups were forcibly merged with the Russian Orthodox church after World War II. Nevertheless, the population of the Soviet Republic of Lithuania is about 80 per cent

Latin rite Catholic, and Lithuanian nationalism has been linked with that religion. The Catholic hierarchy in Lithuania has been placed in a very awkward position. Soviet officials have demanded compliance with the government policy of discrediting dissident elements, but significant segments of the clergy and population are pushing the hierarchy to represent Lithuanian national interests more vigorously to Soviet authorities. The pressure on the hierarchy was particularly intense in May 1972, when a wave of national and religious unrest swept the republic after a Lithuanian student immolated himself in protest against Soviet policies vis-à-vis the church.

Mohammedans constitute the second largest religious community in the Soviet Union. Their primary influence is concentrated among the less-developed nationalities in the Caucasian region and Soviet central Asia. Here again culture and national consciousness are very closely tied to religion. Although the campaign against Islam is pursued along much the same lines as that against the Christian religions, Soviet foreign policy has occasionally required that the campaign against the Moslems be toned down. When the USSR has sought to establish good relations with the Moslem states in the Middle East and Asia, attempts have been made to soften the worst features of the anti-Islam policy. In the case of the Moslem groups, however, an additional element has conditioned Soviet policies. Their religion is seen as one of the major impediments to the social and economic modernization of the peoples of Islam. As a result Soviet policy vis-à-vis the Moslems is based on the assumption that Mohammedanism encourages adherence to “backward, reactionary customs” and is opposed to education and modern culture. In discussing the problem as it affects Soviet central Asia, a Soviet newspaper¹⁶ noted that “old and harmful traditions, customs, and ceremonies are as a rule linked with religious beliefs,” but “our Soviet way of life demands new customs.”

The Communist concern to eliminate traditional ways of life and induce social and economic modernization is a serious and sincere effort. Because religion, and particularly Islam and other non-Christian religions, tends to encourage and perpetuate traditionalism, the campaign against them in central Asia and the eastern Soviet Union is as much a function of the ideological drive for modernization as it is an effort to promote atheism. In their ideological activity the Communist parties have emphasized the link between ideological indoctrination and technical modernization, making “modernization seem like the consequence of ideologically inspired action.” The “organizational compulsion of the party for ideology-action thus becomes the source and means of modernization.”¹⁷ Religion—particularly the non-Christian variety—is seen as an obstacle to economic and social progress, and the antireligious struggle becomes linked with the antitradition campaign.¹⁸

Latter-Day Saints and Eastern Europe

In light of the policies toward religious institutions in Communist Eastern Europe, the injunction to preach the restored gospel to “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” is at present difficult to obey. In most cases religious belief and worship are permitted within certain limits, but the collection and any disbursement of church funds are handled by the state and the publication of religious literature is carefully controlled and censored by government agencies. These regulations would cause difficulty, but the church could probably live with them. The most serious obstacle is the general prohibition on proselyting. The problem is not just the difficulty of bringing missionaries into Eastern Europe from other countries, but the restriction on proselyting generally. As noted above, the Soviet Constitution of 1936, which is still in force, specifies that all citizens are entitled to “freedom of religious worship and freedom to engage in antireligious propaganda.” The right to engage in “religious propaganda” is not guaranteed, and Soviet authorities have generally opposed or prohibited such activity. A representative of the Church was told that the Latter-day Saints could have a meetinghouse in the Soviet Union, but missionaries would not be permitted.¹⁹ The other East European states also generally restrict religious proselyting. In Rumania, for example, changing one’s religion is made difficult by administrative measures. The Baptist Church there, whose situation is somewhat analogous to what the Latter-day Saints situation would be, cannot baptize a new member without first receiving permission from a local official of the Department of Cults, and permission is generally given only for those who come from families that are already Baptist.²⁰

A related problem that would face the Latter-day Saints in initiating activity in Eastern Europe would be the small number of local members of the Church. Most Communist governments permit existing religious groups to practice their faith, but they are reluctant to permit the introduction of new ones. Yugoslav government officials said, for instance, that an LDS Church would be given the same status as other churches in Yugoslavia, but that it would have to be founded and operated by Yugoslav citizens.²¹ The only area of Eastern Europe today with a sizable Latter-day Saints community is East Germany, where a number of prewar members of the church have remained. They are permitted to conduct services, and the Dresden Mission, headed by an East German citizen who is a member of the church, is currently supervising their organizations, but the church is subject to a number of restrictions, some of them severe.²² In the other countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union membership has never been large, and most Latter-day Saints have now left these areas.

The Latter-day Saints' connections with the United States would also make the initiation of missionary work in Eastern Europe more difficult. Although state-to-state relations between Moscow and Washington have improved considerably in the last few years, Western influence is still seen as a challenge to Communist ideology. Soviet attitudes have moved beyond the claim made in 1951 that Mormon missionaries in Finland were "engaged in war propaganda, kindling revanchist feelings, maintaining active liaison with representatives of outlawed fascist parties of Finland, etc."²³ Nevertheless, the fact that the Church headquarters are in the United States, that the bulk of the Church membership lives there, and that the Americas are considered to be the Promised Land would make the task of the Church more difficult.

In order to lessen the identification of the Church with America, if missionaries are eventually permitted to enter East European countries they probably should be citizens of countries other than the United States—particularly the neutral European states of Austria, Switzerland, Finland, and Sweden. Even more favorable would be the use of missionaries from other Communist states. If the opportunity for missionary work does develop, Church members from East Germany would be in the best position to gain permission to preach. The Catholic church and its current success in improving relations with the East European governments might help the Latter-day Saints. If agreement can be reached with the Vatican, which has extensive international influence, agreement with the Latter-day Saints is also possible, since Mormon connections with Salt Lake City would be seen as a threat of lower order.

Political conditions do not yet appear to be ripe for the Church to expand into Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, however, although the current climate of *détente* may mark the beginning of a new period in which conditions may arise that will ultimately permit this. The process of improving Soviet-American relations has begun and promises certain improvements in terms of a reduction of international tension. The Soviet Union and the East European countries are anxiously taking steps to prevent Western ideas from influencing their internal development, as they improve interstate relations with the West. Nevertheless, it seems probable that as interstate relations improve, Western ideas will more easily reach Eastern Europe. As progress is made toward *détente*, increasing East-West contacts should provide an opportunity for citizens of Communist states to travel in the West and to meet Westerners who visit their countries, which will create opportunities for them to hear and accept the gospel. (Missionary work in Italy, for example, started among the Italian *Gastarbeiter* living in West Germany. In view of the large numbers of Croatian workers also in Germany, the way to begin missionary work directed toward

Yugoslavia right now would be to develop a program for these people in West Germany.) The larger the number of Church members in Eastern Europe, the easier it will be to secure permission to expand Church activity and ultimately introduce missionaries.

Although the Communist party is currently the major obstacle to church activity in Eastern Europe, it is the party itself that is creating the conditions which may help the Church to be successful once the opportunity to proselyte presents itself. One of the more serious problems is the link between religion and nationality. In Poland and the Balkans, at least, changing one's religion is almost the equivalent of denying one's nationality. The Communist governments have set in motion social and economic changes that are beginning to weaken this link, however, and the process of social and economic modernization, industrialization, and urbanization that is taking place under the Communist aegis is likewise weakening the traditional-minded rural population, which has been a primary source of strength to the established churches in Eastern Europe. The Latter-day Saints have had considerable missionary success among people who have found themselves separated from their traditional society, or who are searching for stability in a world from which their traditional values have disappeared. Hence missionary work in urban areas has been more successful than in rural areas; conversions in nineteenth century England, for instance, were particularly rapid among the Lancashire workers, who were among those most affected by the industrial revolution, and today Latin America, undergoing the upheaval of modernization, is one of the most rapidly expanding areas for the Church. And by encouraging social, political, and economic change the Communist parties in Eastern Europe are preparing the field for the harvest.

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