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CHURCH, STATE, AND SOCIETY¹

Reflections on the Life of the Church in Contemporary Yugoslavia¹

by Miroslav Volf

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Socialist societies (in the Marxist-Leninist tradition) are not known for their love of the Christian faith. And Christian churches (at least traditionally) have shown very little sympathy for the socialist project. Until recently, the history of their relation was for the most part one of bitter mutual animosity. Since socialist societies encompass almost half the human race and are here to stay², and since hundreds of millions of believers continue to make up a significant portion of the population of these societies, it is imperative to look for ways in which the mutual hostility which persists can give way to mutual respect. Both parties seem presently interested in improvement of the relations, if for no other reasons than because Communists have learned that socialist society "cannot be constructed either against religious believers nor without them"³ and because believers have realized that their life projects are inseparably bound to the enduring socialist systems in which they live.

My intention here is to illuminate some aspects of the struggle over mutual hostility but also of the striving for mutual respect between the government of the socialist society and Christian churches in Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia provides an interesting case study of the relation between socialist societies and religious communities. On the one hand, much like other socialist societies, its political order is defined by the Communist League, and its legal specifications and theoretical formulations of the relation between religious communities and society are firmly rooted in the Marxist-Leninist tradition. On the other hand, through its efforts consistently to implement political and economic self-management, Yugoslavia has become one of the most open socialist societies with

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one of the most liberal policies toward religious communities in the socialist world today. Conversations with church leaders from socialist and Third World societies have made me realize that Yugoslavia's solutions to the problem of the relation between churches and state and its ways of dealing with still unresolved issues can be instructive and even paradigmatic for the relation between churches and state in other socialist societies.

First the relation between church and state in Yugoslavia will be analyzed (Section II). This will be followed by dealing with the relation between religious communities and society in Yugoslavia, an investigation that in many respects is more fruitful than the analysis of the relation between churches and state (Section III). In the next section some unresolved issues of the relation between church and state and religious communities and society will be discussed (Section IV). The paper will end with a short reflection on the possibility of mutually enriching co-existence between Christians and Marxists in a socialist society (Section V). The treatment will be prefaced by making a few loosely related introductory comments which should make the treatment more intelligible. (Section I).

I. Introductory Remarks

Trevor Beeson starts the section on Yugoslavia of his classical volume of religious conditions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Discretion and Valour, by stating: "Yugoslavia is the despair of tidy minds. . . [its] historical, political, cultural and religious backgrounds combine to create a minefield which even the most sensitive and well-informed commentator can only cross in fear and trembling."⁴ In a short article it is particularly difficult to do justice to the complexities of the Yugoslavian situation: brevity cannot do without generalizations and the Yugoslavian situation does not suffer generalizations. A compromise will be made here by indicating in this section the complexity of the situation and in the following sections proceeding with--generalizations.

First, Yugoslavia is a *highly diverse country*. Ethnically and culturally it is home to some 24 ethnic groups, some smaller, some larger. In Europe Yugoslavia is the place where East intersects with West. Religiously it comprises three larger distinct religious bodies (Islam, Orthodoxy, and Roman Catholicism) and numerous smaller Protestant Christian communities. It may come as a surprise to some that Yugoslavia is characterized also politically by a relatively high degree of decentralization, so that local governments exert significant influence on both national policies and the lives of the people within their jurisdiction.⁵

Even within one locality one finds a significant degree of pluralism. For instance, in his dissertation on the social role of religion in Yugoslavia, Gerald Shenk has analyzed the situation in the Republic of Croatia and discovered that three main positions on the social role of religious communities exist simultaneously: "a clear and sometimes strident negative perspective," a moderate or "somewhat less negative than the former, traditional official view," and a positive (though not uncritical) view maintaining that "society has a positive public interest in religion."⁶

Second, as is generally recognized, Yugoslavia is presently in a deep crisis. Zdenko Roter, the dean of the School of Sociology, Political Science, and Journalism of the University of Ljubljana, maintains that the crisis

cannot be considered temporary or momentary, or a crisis resulting merely from the departure of a charismatic leader, which Josip Broz-Tito undoubtedly was, from the historical stage. Rather, this is a 'long wave' crisis, deep and structural. It encompasses all sectors of societal and individual existence, from the economy, culture, and education to politics, morality, and religion. Individual and social life as a whole is disturbed. Relationships, standards, and values, previously considered unquestionable and permanent, have been destroyed.⁷

The crisis itself is, of course, not a purely negative phenomenon, for it can function as a catalyst for significant positive social changes. But because it puts things in a state of flux, crisis creates problems for social analysts because it hinders not only accurate descriptions of the present situation, but makes it also nearly impossible to predict future developments.

II. Churches and State

One can divide the history of the relation between churches and state in Yugoslavia in various ways.⁸ Here a very simple periodization will suffice: first, a period of confrontation immediately after the liberation of the country until the early fifties, and second, a period of increased accommodation between the churches and state after the early fifties. The first period corresponds roughly to the initial years of Stalinist influence on Yugoslavian internal policies, and the second, to the years of indigenous attempts at theoretical development and practical implementation of self-management.

Confrontation of the Post-War Years

After World War II when new Yugoslavia received its first constitution, "the pattern was derived from the Soviet constitution of 1936. The personal freedoms of religion, speech, association and assembly, looked no better (nor worse) on paper than the formal guarantees available under Stalin."⁹ Article 25 of the Constitution--which is almost identical with Article 174 of the most recent Constitution (1974)--provided that:

- (1) Citizens are guaranteed freedom of conscience and of religious profession.
- (2) The church is separated from the state.
- (3) Religious communities whose teaching is not contrary to the Constitution are free in their religious affairs and in performing religious services. Religious schools for the preparation of priests are free, and come under the general oversight of the state.
- (4) Abuse of the church and faith for political purposes and the existence of political organizations on a religious basis are forbidden.
- (5) The state may materially assist religious communities.

As the relation between churches and state is formulated in the 1946 Constitution, it clearly expresses one of the main principles of the Marxist-Leninist approach to religious communities: the

legal separation of church and state which makes religion the private affair of every citizen. In spite of the formulation that "Religious communities . . . are free in their religious affairs," the legislation was interpreted not only as barring the political activity of religious communities but also as prohibiting any appearance of religion on the public scene. Religion had to remain locked in the private, spiritual chambers of individuals' lives, 'religious service' being technically the only occasion when a believer could show that as a believer she or he is a social being. Religious liberty could thus have only a narrow meaning: the freedom to believe or not to believe and the freedom to participate or not to participate in the liturgical life of the church.¹⁰

The second principle of the Marxist-Leninist approach to religious communities was implemented as vigorously as the first. The principle states that the task of Communists as the vanguard of the working classes is to assist actively in what is considered the inevitable fading away of religion.¹¹ If religion were only an opiate *of* the people, as Marx claimed, then it would be sufficient to work on transforming the alienating circumstances which make people hunger for religion. But Marxists have come to consider religion also an opiate *for* the people. Hence one needs to fight against religious superstitions which people were fed in order to numb them to exploitation and satisfy them with present conditions.

Despite the constitutional protection of the freedom of religion, zealous government officials, especially at the local level, mounted an all-out attack on the churches, both ideologically and administratively. The goal was clearly to liberate people from religious superstitions and create new atheists. Harsh measures were undertaken against religious institutions and individuals, including imprisonments, incitement of mob violence and destruction of property. In fact President Tito had to call for a halt to physical assaults on clergy in a public speech in Ruma in 1952, and a top government official, Eduard Kardelj, had to underline to party members that there is a distinction between the anti-state political activity of some clergy and the convictions of religious people.¹²

But the sharpness of the confrontation between churches and state in Yugoslavia immediately after World War II cannot be explained simply by Marxist-Leninist theory. In a number of ways the churches contributed significantly to the restricted role of religious communities in post-war Yugoslavia. First, the largest churches had a privileged position in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and later in the so-called "Old Yugoslavia." Unbelief "was itself an offense punishable by the state. As convinced atheists would have been acutely aware, the bureaucratic regulation of such important life stages as birth, marriage, and death was in the hands of religious officials."¹³

Second, there was a very pronounced anti-communist and anti-socialist attitude on the part of the churches. Before and during the war ecclesiastical bodies were adamant in their condemnation not only of the "godless bolshevism," but of all "ideologies and social systems which are not founded on the eternal principles of revelation and Christianity." For some years after the war many churches were then "not able to accept realistically . . . the victory of the socialist revolution" and continued to fight it or hope for its downfall.¹⁴

Third, churches collaborated with Nazi forces and participated in fratricide during World War II.¹⁵ "The outbreak of World War II and foreign occupation provided a cover for numerous old scores to be settled in unimaginably vicious ways . . . A part of the religious hierarchy in each of the large communities was visibly and publicly implicated in atrocities committed in communal violence during the war."¹⁶

Modus Vivendi

Though there were significant elements in the churches which continued to think of the churches as against or alongside socialism, but not *in* socialism,¹⁷ as a whole the churches slowly adjusted to the new socialist society. Socialist society itself, though not lacking in "sectarian elements," as they are called in Yugoslavia, has also proven to be developing in the direction of increased democratization. Despite tensions between churches and state which continued to exist (cf. Section IV), after the early fifties their relations as a rule started slowly to be described both by church leaders and public officials as "generally correct."¹⁸ Especially in the sixties, churches and state entered a period of detente.

In the conclusion of his dissertation Gerald Shenk gives a helpful summary of the present parameters in which churches are expected to operate in Yugoslavia. He states that

the boundary between religion and the larger society in Yugoslavia at present appears to be drawn to include:

- (1) substantial autonomy in liturgical affairs, within designated public facilities;
- (2) substantial autonomy in selection and training of religious leaders;
- (3) extensive publication activities (and distribution through public book stores);¹⁹
- (4) religious education for children, on a voluntary basis, on religious premises;
- (5) ecumenical contacts and dialogue among the diverse constituent groups (at home and abroad);
- (6) other, non-institutionalized activities, such as general moral instruction and socialization of youth, and preservation of the religious elements in the general cultural heritage, especially of distinct ethnic groups.

But the present boundary excludes:

- (1) public involvement by religious leaders in political affairs, on any other basis than their individual citizenship;
- (2) religious involvement in selection of general educational curriculum content in public schools;
- (3) religious operation of institutions for social welfare, or for economic production;
- (4) religion as an arbiter of secular culture and public morality;
- (5) Religion as defender of the political and cultural interests of a particular ethnic group or region against the interests of society as a whole.²⁰

III. Christians and Society

Some Distinctions

If we concentrate our investigation on the relation between churches and state our attention will be focused on the history of conflicts and accommodations between two sets of bureaucrats, the

hierarchy of religious organizations and the administrative apparatus of the government.²¹ But socialist societies are not identical with governmental apparatuses and churches are not one and the same as their hierarchies.

With respect to civil community, we have to differentiate carefully between state and society.²² State (*res publica*) refers to the formal, public organization of the society for purposes of government, society (*civitas*) to the sum-total of citizens and their nongovernmental organizations and activities.²³ It is true that most Marxists have denied the conceptual separation of state and society. Yet, at least in Yugoslavia, some philosophers and political scientists are slowly coming to realize that there is a sphere of responsible social action that does not necessarily infringe on the political realm.²⁴

With respect to the ecclesial community we have to make a parallel distinction between churches as institutions headed by their leadership and individual believers which constitute Christian communities. Such a distinction allows involvement of Christians in the *political*, and not merely social, realm. They participate in the political processes not in the name of their respective churches, but in their own name, bringing into the political arena communally mediated Christian values which have shaped them not only as Christians but as human beings.²⁵

If no distinction is made between state and society and between churches as institutions and as communities of individual believers, it is impossible for churches to conceptualize and practice their prophetic role in society--"the preaching of the whole gospel of God's grace, which as such is the whole justification of the whole man, including political man"²⁶--without seeming to assert themselves as competitors with the state for political power. Furthermore if such distinctions are not made, the actual social influence of Christian communities in socialist societies will probably escape our notice. Despite the pronounced attempts to lock Christian faith in the private chambers of individuals' lives, governments of socialist societies have always actually treated religion as having some social function.

In the following sections contains a brief discuss how some Marxists in Yugoslavia have come not only to recognize the actual public function of religion but also to value the positive role that authentic Christian faith can play in the life of a socialist society.

Change of Climate

In the late seventies and eighties it became apparent that secularization in socialist societies, including Yugoslavia, was not advancing as fast as most Communists had hoped and most Christians had feared. As sociological investigations show, secularization slowed down markedly, possibly even halted, giving way to the process of the revitalization of religion.²⁷ The Yugoslavian government's reaction to the resurgence of religion was not to step up ideological propoganda and administrative measures to control and suppress the religion. Rather it showed concern to maintain and develop

good relations with religious communities. One important example of this concern is the increasingly positive way in which the mass media in recent years has treated religious communities.²⁸

One reason for the relatively positive attitude of the state toward religious communities in Yugoslavia is certainly significant advances in the democratization of the society over the past decade. In the following two additional reasons which have also served to pave the way for the appreciation of the positive social function of Christian faith will be elaborated. The second reason is radical changes that have happened in the Roman Catholic Church--in many respects the crucial religious community in Yugoslavia--during Vatican II and the appearance of the theologies of liberation. The documents of Vatican II, in particular *Gaudium et spes*, stressed dialogue with and participation in the modern world. It opened the church for the outside world, thus signalling an end to an era of fierce attacks against modern developments made from behind high ecclesial walls. The appearance of liberation theologies testified to Marxists about the will of at least some Christians to make their concern about justice concrete. As Yugoslav Marxist Nikola Skledar states, these developments in the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches created a basis "for dialogue and cooperation (of the churches) with contemporary Marxism in creating conditions for free and universal progress and development of human beings."²⁹

The third reason for the changed climate in relation to religious communities is the influence of philosophers' return to the original Marx and sociological study of religion. In their search to free themselves from Stalinist dogmatism Yugoslavian Marxists gradually abandoned the typical Soviet approach to religion as an *opiate for the people* and substituted for it Marx' understanding of religion as the *opiate of the people*. Hence the proper attitude toward religion was not so much direct as indirect struggle against it: one should strive to eliminate alienation in economic and political spheres which provides fertile soil for the wild growth of religious superstitions. The rediscovery of the original Marx was later supplemented by a consistent sociological study of religion. Early sociological investigations treated religion under the rubric of alienation, but in more recent years younger Marxist sociologists have suggested that religion is not essentially alienating. As a form of human cultural production caused by alienating circumstances, why would religion not be as "capable of surviving the conditions and the reasons of its origin as other social products" have,³⁰ they asked. In fact, should not Marxists (as well as Christians) expect in communism not a disappearance but a refinement of religion? "As far as religion and its future is concerned," write two younger Yugoslav Marxists,

we can suppose that it will become more and more deinstitutionalized, individualized (not privatized!), and personal in the long process of progressive historical-social change. As a form of spirit it will become more and more a world of poetic images of the metaphysical but connected with . . . [the] liberation of man and of [the] entire society *Can one not say of it [religion] that it appears as alienation only in certain historical situations and forms? Could it not in its struggle for a spiritually transformed future exist, like art, in an unalienated, creative, human form?*³¹

Such formulations about the nature of religion, Christian faith included, may not satisfy Christians as theological proposals,³² but they are significant advances in Marxist valuation of religion. Though such views are clearly radical for the majority of government officials, their less radical forms have exercised significant influence on government policies and the general public's perspectives on religious dynamics. Thus the way has been paved for the first steps toward an appreciation of the positive social role of religion.

Positive Social Function of Religion

Talk about the social utility of religion in socialist societies might be taken as a case in point of the "cultural management" thought to be characteristic of these societies. But whether the recognition of the public utility of religion "is to be equated with the instrumental use of religion for political ends depends on how well that religious contribution is envisioned in accordance with what the religious communities themselves want to provide to the larger society."³³ Hence Marxists' talk about the social utility of Christian faith will constitute a significant advance over their negative valuation of religion only if they perceive the social utility of Christian faith to be based on authentic Christian values as interpreted by Christian communities. Although the governments of socialist societies constitutionally excluded religion from the public sphere, it could not escape their attention that religious bodies by their very existence function as public actors. Moreover they desired the cooperation of religious communities and their leaders (precisely as religious leaders, not merely as responsible citizens!) in building socialist society.³⁴ This is best illustrated by the fact that prominent religious leaders have received state awards in socialist societies.³⁵ But the positive social role of religion was perceived as a rule to consist either in "avoidance of proscribed behaviors" or in "external cooperation between established religious leaders and established political authorities" and had "virtually nothing to do with the internal values of religions" and hence was not based on approval of "distinctively religious activities deemed as socially beneficial."³⁶ Because governments of socialist societies did not show appreciation for authentic religious values, the state could continue the apparently contradictory practice of polemicizing against negative social consequences inherent to religious beliefs and publicly awarding religious leaders.

During the past decade in particular in Yugoslavia there has been an increasing appreciation of the social utility of authentic Christian values. The unthinking recital of the classical Marxist tenet that all religions inhibit human development is giving way to an appreciation of the contribution which religion, and in particular Christian faith, can make toward the realization of authentic humanity and the full emancipation of society. Recognition of the positive social function of Christian faith ranges from timid admission "that in some of its aspects religion can transform itself so as to foster human development more than it hinders it,"³⁷ to the bold statement that the beliefs of a church which "remains faithful to the basic biblical messages in the contemporary world

and society," which teaches and practices forgiveness, and is a bearer of the desire for mercy, and love, are compatible with the values of Yugoslav self-managing socialism.³⁸

Such perspectives on the positive social role of Christian faith in socialist society are still more or less private views of individual Marxists in Yugoslavia. They have yet to be translated into consistent governmental policies. As a sociologist with a strong interest in religion, Srdjan Vrcan writes that the system still "undertakes to prevent any possibility that religion could become socially or politically significant."³⁹ But "the system" seems to be slowly changing, too. In a recent speech a top government official in Croatia, Josip Zmajić, pointed out that in the context of a consistent separation between church and state "religious communities have *their own* function, mission, and a share of responsibility *in our society and with our people*. After all, daily life itself reminds us that religious communities, religion and socialist self-managing society not only can exist along each other, but that they can and must cooperate constructively with one another."⁴⁰

IV. Some Unresolved Issues

There are a number of unresolved issues in the relation between churches and state which are presently hotly debated in Yugoslavia. The openness itself in which the debate is taking place indicates the level of democratization in Yugoslavia today. For Christians in Yugoslavia the degree of openness is in some respects even more significant than the immediate positive results of the debate.

Some of the unresolved issues will be highlighted which are perceived most important *by the religious communities*. This will, of course, make the discussion one-sided. To counteract this one-sidedness one would have to address the unresolved issues between churches and state which the state considers important. Space, however, permits only to enumerate some of these.

First, churches are perceived as reluctant to accept the legitimacy of socialist society and to support its efforts to humanize life; they are seen as being either against socialism or existing merely "alongside of" it, even, in worst cases, functioning as repositories of opposition.

Second, religious communities are charged with reluctance to recognize and accept as legitimate "the ideological autonomy of other groups in a pluralist society."

Third, they are suspected of unwillingness to accept "the autonomy of the political order"⁴¹ and of striving to recapture former privileged positions.

Fourth, there is concern on the part of the state that churches are fostering separatist ethnic sentiments which threaten the integrity of the nation.

Fifth, there is a fear that international contacts of churches may be manipulated by political and military blocks to undermine Yugoslavia as a socialist or/and a non-aligned nation. Sixth, the sharp tone of churches' polemics have given the state the impression that atheism and atheists are their sworn enemies, to blame for all the evils in society. Churches would do well to make an effort either to show that they are innocent of these charges or to mend their ways.

As is to be expected, churches (and religious communities in general) have a somewhat different list of unresolved issues with respect to their relation to the state.

First, there is the problem of inconsistency in enforcement of existing laws. Yugoslav laws with respect to religious communities may constitute one of the most favorable sets of law in any Eastern European socialist country. But the character of a society is not determined merely by its legal provisions, but also by the ways in which these provisions are translated into practice.⁴² Although the situation has been consistently improving over the years, one still occasionally encounters abuses of authority especially at the local level in the implementation or nonimplementation of laws.⁴³ Such abuse seems of ten condoned by the higher authorities. Regions differ greatly, however, with respect to nonenforcement of the laws because of the different legacies in the relation of local government officials with religious communities in various regions.

Second, religious communities find it highly problematic that the Program of the Yugoslav Communist League--the leading force in the political life of the nation--obliges Communists to fight "against religious and other kinds of superstitions." Even though public officials do state that "atheism is not a basic and essential constituent of Marxism" and that "atheization . . . is not decisive for socialistic development,"⁴⁴ the wording of the Program gives the impression that the struggle for abolition of religion is an inalienable part of the struggle for a socialist society. Reflecting on the Program's statements on religion, Roman Catholic theologian Tomislav Šagi-Bunić asks:

Would it be an exaggeration to say that I have the impression that we are still in the Middle Ages inventing ways to eliminate effectively "heretics," or at least in the period after the Augsburg Peace acknowledging that other societies can have a different attitude on the question of religion, but here we are in power, so our attitude is normative and in the Program we are explaining how to get rid of those who have problems with our views on religion?⁴⁵

If freedom of religion is an undisputed achievement in the process of civilization, then a negative valuation of religious belief in the program of a party is certainly "a lagging behind in the advance of civilization."⁴⁶

Important attempts have been made, however, to reinterpret the formulation of the Program. In a recent interview with a leading Protestant monthly a top government official in Croatia, Vitomir Unković, indicated that the phrase need not be interpreted to imply that all religious beliefs are superstitions, but that there are religious as well as other kinds of superstitions which religious people, no less than Communists, have an interest in fighting.⁴⁷ Such an interpretation of the Program would then imply, in the words of Josip Vrhovec, a member of the Presidium of the Yugoslav Communist League, that Communists "cannot and should not ask citizens who have sincerely and with dedication joined the building of socialism to renounce their religion."⁴⁸ But affirmations of the acceptability of religion in socialist society need to be uttered more forcefully so that they can be heard clearly at all levels of government and by the public.

Third, despite the constitutional proclamation of equal rights of all citizens irrespective of their religious persuasions, believers have only limited access to significant social and government-

tal positions. As Zdenko Roter points out, "empirical investigations have shown limitations of religious freedoms especially in the advancement in the political careers of believers, in the upbringing and education, in the Yugoslav People's Army, and in the mass media. Marxism still functions as a preferred ideology."⁴⁹ This implies that although the acceptance of atheistic Marxist ideology is legally considered a private affair of individuals, in practice it is treated much less as a private affair of individuals than is religious belief.⁵⁰

One can see the "non-privacy" or social preference of atheism particularly clearly in two areas besides the practice of discrimination against believers in employment and promotion. First, the educational system is actively promoting atheism. It is generally recognized that believers can be competent and honest workers and intellectuals and that the future of socialism and of socialist state does not depend on atheism. Why then force atheism in schools against the preference of the majority?⁵¹ Second, a necessary prerequisite for membership in the leading force of the political life of the country, the Communist Party, is the profession of atheism. That implies that believers--a majority of the population--can play only a secondary role in the political life of the country. Does not the constitutionally guaranteed equality of believers and atheists demand that the state be separated as consistently from atheist ideology as it is from religious belief?⁵²

Fourth, religious communities are discontent about the way in which separation between church and state and the privacy of religion are interpreted. For the most part they affirm these pillars of civilized life in a pluralistic society. But for them the separation of church and state and the privacy of religion mean only that, on the one hand, religious life is freed from the jurisdiction of the civil government, and that, on the other hand, the church accepts the autonomy of the political sphere and renounces any claims to political power.⁵³ But they insist that the privacy of religion is not synonymous with disappearance of religion from the public scene.

For one, by its very public existence as a community of believers, the church has social influence.⁵⁴ In most socialist societies--exceptions are Albania and possibly North Korea--governments have recognized and accepted *some* social role of religion even beyond the social consequences of its sheer existence.⁵⁵ Legislation on the privacy of religion cannot be consistently applied if it implies more than barring religious communities from publicly discussing social and political concerns and in this way influencing government policies.

But Christians have another reason why they cannot accept a disappearance of religion from the public scene: it is the inalienable social dimension of the Christian faith itself. For what "counts" in Christian faith is not merely faith, but "faith expressing itself through love" (Gal 5:6). The Christian church cannot be true to itself and dispense with evangelizing about salvation by faith in Christ. For it believes that the eternal destiny of human beings is at stake. And as Albrecht Schönherr, a Bishop of the Evangelical Church in GDR, rightly stresses, neither can the church dispense with "prophesying in the service of the whole human organism, when what is at stake is human life and dignity."⁵⁶

Finally, the interpretation of the freedom of religion is an unresolved issue. Two aspects of the issues are generally discussed. The first revolves around the question of the *nature of the freedom* guaranteed by the constitutional provision on the freedom of religion. In their relation with social institutions in Yugoslavia (as in other socialist societies) believers are often unsure "whether their personal religious attitudes are protected permanently as something good, or merely strategically because they cannot be forbidden."⁵⁷ Authentic freedom of religion cannot mean that religion is merely tolerated; it must mean that it is truly respected.⁵⁸

The second aspect of the problem concerning religious freedoms revolves around the *nature of the religion* whose freedom is constitutionally guaranteed. For Christians freedom of religion cannot mean merely *freedom of belief* (as the official interpretation seems to imply), but *freedom of the believer* to live out in an unhindered way all the dimensions of her life as a believer. It must be freedom not only to accept certain religious beliefs but also to act in accordance with their moral implications without deliberately negative social consequences for the believer. "The freedom of religion ensured by our constitution must mean the freedom of . . . creed which the believer actually believes and not the freedom of some religion which a non-believer imputes to a believer and then interprets what he/she imputed."⁵⁹ Of course, no society that wants to promote human well-being will allow unrestricted freedoms for adherents of just *any and every* religious belief. To give a drastic example, a religion which requires human sacrifices could never expect its freedoms to be guaranteed. In a pluralistic society Christian faith--as any other ideology--can enjoy full freedoms only to the extent that it does not interfere with the freedoms of others (whether they are religious or not) and promotes truly humane values.

V. Mutually Enriching Coexistence?

To the extent that both Christian believers and governments of socialist societies accept the well-being of humans as a basic value they will be able to find solutions to these (and other) unresolved issues and learn to respect one another despite their differences. Socialist societies need to persuade Christians (and other religious people) that socialist values are not essentially atheistic but that "man is the beginning and end"⁶⁰ of their struggle for liberation. And although Christians will always confess God as their highest value, they will do well to remind themselves continually and to assure their socialist neighbors of their belief that the incarnation makes human beings the measure, though not of all things, but certainly of a humane society.⁶¹

To be sure, Marxist humanism is not identical with Christian humanism. Hence their visions of a humane society will differ. It might be possible, as Fidel Castro recently stated, "to be Marxist without ceasing to be a Christian."⁶² Christians will, however, be able to agree with this statement only under carefully defined conditions: Marxists would have to accept revisions of Marx' theory in three important areas.⁶³

(1) They would not have to concede that two aspects of Marx' *critique of religion* are not essential to Marxism: his theory that religion is only a human product, the God of Jesus Christ only a human projection, and his seemingly general charge that religion is the opiate of the people.

(2) Marxists would have to revise one important aspect of Marx' *anthropology*: they would have to treat as accidental to Marxism Marx' persuasion that dependence on God's grace is incompatible with human freedom.

(3) As regards to Marx's *theory of emancipation*, Marxists would have to give up the universal requirement of methodical atheism which requires human beings in all their pursuits to act "as if there were no God." Such atheism is incompatible with some central aspects of the Christian doctrine of salvation.

These conditions for the full compatibility of Marxism and the Christian faith are very strict. Not many Marxists will be willing or able to satisfy them. But these conditions need not be satisfied before Christians and Marxists can start dialoguing about their respective beliefs and cooperating on the project of more humane societies. For important convergences in their understanding of human beings and humane society already exist.⁶⁴ These convergences are the basis on which Marxists and Christians in socialist societies should strive to achieve a creative and mutually enriching synthesis between the authentic Marxist and Christian social vision⁶⁵ The success of such a synthesis and of the common social project based on it will in part depend on the willingness of both Christians and Marxists to give up all claims to ideological monopoly.

ENDNOTES

1. The substance of this article was presented at the international theological consultation on 'Church, State, and Nation Building' in Hong Kong, October 17-21, 1988. I want to thank Dr. Judith Gundry Volf and Dr. Gerald Shenk, both my colleagues at Biblical-Theological Institute, for their valuable comments on a previous version of this article. Much of what I have to say here on the relation between churches and society in socialist societies I have learned from discussions with Gerald Shenk, and from his dissertation "*The Social Role Of Religion in Contemporary Yugoslavia*" (Evanston: Northwestern University [Ph.D. Dissertation], 1987).

2. The more or less radical changes which the internal dynamics of social life in socialist societies are forcing upon them do not call into question the permanence of these societies.

3. Roger Garaudy, *From Anathema to Dialogue. A Marxist Challenge to the Christian Churches* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 32.

4. Trevor Beeson, *Discretion and Valour. Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe* (rev. ed: London: Collins and Fontana, 1982), 288.

5. Cf. Jon Lovenduski/Jean Woodall, *Politics and Society in Eastern Europe* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 270. To a somewhat lesser degree this is also true of other Eastern European countries, so that even in these countries one cannot understand the relation between church and state as a "relationship between monoliths" (Pedro Ramet, *Cross and Commissar. Politics of Religion in Eastern Europe and the USSR* [Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987], 3)

6. Shenk, *op. cit.*, 195-203

7. Zdenko Roter, 'Yugoslavia at the Crossroads. A Sociological Discourse,' *Occasional papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 8 (1988), no 2, 11. Cf. also Vojmir Franičević, "Izazovi restrukturacija; SKJ pred promjenama" [The Challenges of Restructuring: Yugoslav Communist League Facing Changes]. *Naše teme* 32 (1988), 1085f.

8. For one attempt, cf. Paul Mojzes, "Religious Liberty in Yugoslavia: A Study in Ambiguity," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 6 (1986), no. 2, 25-27.

9. Shenk, *op cit.*, 100.

10. Mojzes, *op. cit.*, 25.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Stella Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 230.

13. Shenk, *op. cit.*, 88.

14. Bono Zvonimir Šagi, *Kršćanski laik u socijalističkom društvu* [A Christian Lay Person in a Socialist Society]; (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1986), 54.

15. It should be noted that many of the lower-rank priests did not collaborate with Nazi forces and that some were actively involved with Partisans in the struggle against them.

16. Shenk, *op cit.*, 88f. A highly controversial version of the atrocities committed by religious bodies during the World War II was recently republished in Yugoslavia: Viktor Novak, *Magnum Crimen* (Beograd: Nova knjijga 1986).

17. On this decision of the Evangelical church in GDR to be neither *against* socialism nor a church for socialism (i.e. not a socialist church, though a church whose members may be socialists), but a church in socialism, cf. Albrecht Schönherr, "Opportunities and Problems of Being a Christian in a Socialist Society," *Concilium* 154 (4/1982), 47f.

18. Cf. Todo Kurtović, *Crkva i religija u socijalističkom samoupravnom društvu* [Church and Religion in Socialist Self-Managing Society]; (Beograd: Rad, 1978), 219.

19. The words in parentheses are my additions.

20. Shenk, *op. cit.*, 218f.

21. Cf. Shenk, *op. cit.*, 50f.

22. So also, for instance, Šagi, *op. cit.*, 71.

23. Cf. P. Shapiro, "Social Deviance in Eastern Europe: On Understanding the Problem," *Social Deviance in Eastern Europe*. Ivan Volgyes, ed; (Boulder: Westview Press, 1978), 8.

24. For a discussion about state and civil society, cf. Bogomir Kovač, "Libertarno demokratska socijalistička alternativa" [Libertarian-Democratic Socialist Alternative], *Naše teme* 32 (1988), 1101ff.

25. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 76.

26. Karl Barth, "Christian Community and Civil Community," *Community, State and Church* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1960), 184.

27. Cf. Srdjan Vrcan, *Od krize religije k religiji krize. Prilog raspravi o religiji u uvjetima suvremene krize* [From Crisis of Religion to Religion of Crisis. A Contribution to the Discussion on Religion in the Conditions of the Contemporary Crisis]; (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1986), 156; Roter, *op. cit.*, 21.

28. In 1987 an informed, objective, and respectful six part series was shown twice about smaller religious communities in Yugoslavia.

29. Nikola Skledar, *Diјalog kršćana i marksista* [Dialogue Between Christians and Marxists]; (Beograd: Mladost, 1984), 44.

30. Marko Kerševan, "Atheism: is it Essential to Marxism?" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22 (1985), 503. Cf. also Marko Kerševan, "Mogućnost religije u Marxovoj misli i suvremenoj marksističkoj praksi." [The Possibility of Religion in Marx' Thought and in Contemporary Marxist Practice], *Kulturni radnik* 15 (1987), 131ff.

31. Nikola Skledar/Mislav Kukoc, "Toward a Critique of the Marxian Criticism of Religion," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 3 (1985), 91f.

32. For a critique of such Marxist understanding of religion from a theological perspective and for an analysis of the implication of this understanding of religion for the relation between Marxist and Marx' thought, cf. Miroslav Volf, "God, Freedom, and Grace. Reflections on the Essentiality of Atheism for Marx and Marxism," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionswissenschaft* 31 (1989).

33. Shenk, *op. cit.*, 61.
34. A distinction is made between how churches have cooperated with the old capitalist systems and the way they are expected to cooperate with socialist governments. The latter should theoretically take place in the context of consistent separation of church and state. (cf. Kurtović, *op. cit.*, 68).
35. Commenting on the reception of state awards by religious leaders, the Yugoslavian Roman Catholic theologian, Špiro Marasović, writes: "Since the work of the Church and believers is evangelism, pastoral care, catechism, theology, spirituality, charity and the like, and as we know that the state does not give out awards for such activities, the question arises: what other reasons were there for these to be awarded? If we set aside several cases where it is a case of obvious cultural or scientific achievements, it is clear in the case of these bishops, that these things were not the reasons. This is why we wonder: did they not receive rewards for political services--i.e. for services carried out precisely in the field where they should not be involved by law?" (Spiro Marasovic, "The Privacy of Religion in the Self-Managing Society," *OPREE* 8 [1988], no. 3, 16).
36. Shenk, *op. cit.*, 141f.
37. Nikola Dugandžija, *Religija i nacija. Istraživanje u zagrebačkoj regiji* [Religion and Ethnic Belonging. An Investigation in the Greater Zagreb Area] (Zagreb: Stvarnost, 1986), 21.
38. Srdjan Vrcan in an interview to *Svijet* (May 1981), as translated and quoted by Shenk, *op. cit.*, 146. For a recognition of the "revolutionary content" of the Biblical message by an important leader in a socialist world cf. Frei Betto's book of interviews with Fidel Castro (Croatian edition: Frei Betto, *Fidel Castro i religija* [Zagreb: Stvarnost/Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1988]). For critical comments on the book cf. below, footnote 49.
39. Vrcan, *op. cit.*, 70.
40. Quoted by Šagi, *op. cit.*, 71 (italics mine).
41. Shenk, *op. cit.*, 220. Shenk here also discusses some other problems in the relation of the churches and state from the perspective of the state.
42. Cf. Zdenko Roter, "Modern Society and Religious Liberties. Contribution to the Christian-Marxist Dialogue," *OPREE* 8 (1988), no. 2, 4.
43. For a list of examples taken from Yugoslav publications from October, 1982, to September, 1985, cf. Mojzes, *op. cit.*, 30-34.
44. Kurtović, *op. cit.*, 23, 50.
45. Tomislav Šagi-Bunić, "Tematizacija religije u programu SKJ" [Religion in the Program of the Yugoslav Communist League], *Kulturni radnik* 41 (1988), no. 3, 70.
46. *Ibid.*, 69.
47. Vitomir Unković, "Probleme treba rješavati zajedno" [The Problems Ought to be Solved Together], *Izvori* 31 (1988), no. 9, 18. Cf. also, Kerševan, "Mogućnost," 139f., who states that the struggle in socialist societies is not against religion but for human liberation. The struggle against religion can be acceptable only "if religion functions as a promoter" of human enslavement. "To take the struggle against religion as such," Kerševan continues, "and the struggle for the establishment of atheism as independent goals, would lead only to new divisions between peoples, new forms of humiliation and despoliation of human beings. Liberation from religion can be exclusively a task of believers themselves. It is either self-liberation or it is not a dimension of human liberation at all." (140)
48. Stella Alexander, "Church-State Relations in Yugoslavia. Recent Developments," *Religion in Communist Lands* 5 (1977), no. 4, 239.
49. Roter, *op. cit.*, 7. One of the most unsatisfactory aspects of Frei Betto's important interviews with Fidel Castro is the way in which it deals with the problem of discrimination of believers in Cuba. While Castro's admissions of discrimination against Christians in Cuba, even those who support the revolution, are a step forward, it is most disconcerting to read of his concern to eradicate discrimination only against, apparently, those who are "fulfilling their social duties exactly as do all other people," i.e. of those who "want to participate in the revolutionary process" (Frei Betto, *Fidel Castro i religija* [Zagreb: Stvarnost/Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1988], 139f.) What about those Christians in Cuba who have a vision of a humane society which differs from the official ideology? Castro's reflections on religious discrimination betray a typical collectivistic understanding of human rights present in most socialist societies by which these are given by the state in exchange for fulfillment of prescribed social behavior and are not something inalienable (and hence

unconferable) which an individual has over against the state (cf. on that issue Vučina Vasović, "Socijalistički 'zaborav' ustavnosti" [The Socialist 'Forgetfulness' of Constitutionality], *Naše teme* 32 (1988), 1114). The political discourse on "giving--which, by the way, in its various forms permeates the whole book *Fidel and Religion*--is a discourse about the power of the state (or the Communist Party) and not the power of the people (cf. Ivan Prpić, "Društvo i država" [Society and State], *Naše teme* 32 (1988), 1161).

50. Cf. Šagi, *op. cit.*, 57.

51. So, recently the former Archbishop of Split, Frane Franić in Vojko Mirković, "Nacionalizam nam zadaje strah. Interview with Frane Franić" [Nationalism Frightens Us: An Interview with Frane Franić], *Slobodna Dalmacija* 6. November 1988, 19.

52. Cf. Drago Šimundža, "Ustavni i stvarni položaj vjernika u društvu" [The Constitutional and the Actual Position of the Believers in Society], *Crkva u svijetu* 20 (1987), 292. In recent debates about the perspectives of socialism in Yugoslavia important voices have been calling for separation of the Communist League and the state (cf. Kovač, *op. cit.*, 1101 ff.)

53. Cf. Šagi, *op. cit.*, 57.

54. This has been an important insight of the "political theology" (cf. Jürgen Moltann, *Politische Theologie--Politische Ethik* [München/Mainz: Chr. Kaiser/Gruenwald, 1984], 152ff.).

55. Nikola Dugandžija writes, for instance: "In spite of the principle that the church is separated from the state and that ethnic issues must be articulated in the context of the secular and not the religious sphere, *these relations are in actuality much more complicated*" (Dugandžija, *ibid*)-italics are mine.

56. Schönherr, *op. cit.*, 47. For similar statements by church leaders in Yugoslavia cf. Šagi, *op. cit.*, 72.

57. Šagi, *op. cit.*, 62. On this point see the repeated assurances of Fidel Castro that the alliance between Marxists and Christians is not merely a tactical but a permanent one (Betto, *op. cit.*, 7).

58. Cf. Šimundža, *op. cit.*, 291.

59. Marasović, *op. cit.*, 17.

60. Kurtović, *op. cit.*, 51.

61. Cf. Barth, *op. cit.*, 172.

62. Cf. Betto, *op. cit.*, 188. It is important to note that Castro is speaking here "strictly politically" and does not venture a general statement about the compatibility of Christian faith and Marxism (against Reinerio Arce Valentin, "Christentum und Revolution: ein Gespräch mit Fidel Castro," *Evangelische Theologie* 48 [1988], 175).

63. For more detailed treatment of this issue, see Volf, *op. cit.*

64. For an analysis of both convergences and divergences, see Miroslav Volf, *Zukunft der Arbeit--Arbeit der Zukunft. Der Arbeitsbegriff bei Karl Marx und seine theologische Wertung* (München/Mainz: Kaiser/Grunewald, 1988), 105ff.

65. For an analysis of Marx' vision of the future, cf. Volf, *op. cit.*, 52ff., 73ff. On Christian and Marxist synthesis cf. Frane Franić, former Archbishop of Split, in Vojko Mirković, *op. cit.*, 18.