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# Editorial

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### EDITORIAL

In the best of times Christians and Marxists have approached each other warily, each with a right hand outstretched in a gesture of peace, but alert to what the left hand of the other is doing. In the worst of times Christians and Marxists have identified each other as the enemy, and their hands have been clenched in anger and menace. That the holders of two apparently diametrically opposite world-views--some would say absolutist world-views--should regard each other in such ways is not surprising. History has not been kind to either Christians or Marxists in the 20th century. Both have been victims as well as victimizers. That both faith and ideology have survived, even against each other, is really the amazing thing.

For the Leninist brand of Marxism that emerged in the Soviet Union after 1917, the "problem" of religion was seen as relatively simple of solution. Religion was alienated consciousness that would disappear as the new socially integrated human personality developed. The state would play an active role in this process. This view and approach would be adopted throughout Eastern Europe after 1945. What occurred in fact was something quite different. Some "developed socialist" states, because of changing historical circumstances and the continuing vitality of faith among the people, have modified their conceptions about religion and the positions of the churches in their societies. Religious believers, as J. A. Hebly points out in his article on churches in Eastern Europe, also have adapted to new realities. What can be said is that a variety of uneasy and perhaps mutually unsatisfactory accommodations have been reached between states and churches, but they do exist. For the time being, it appears, both Christians and Marxist-Leninists have found ways of co-existing and even cooperating, at least on certain practical levels.

As Paul Peachey notes in his article on religion in Soviet Marxist societies, accommodations between Christians and Marxist-Leninists, however, are fraught with contradictions. To the Marxist-Leninist, for example, how is the persistence of religion among the people to be reconciled with a society in which it has no place? Or, for the

Christian, how is his or her faith to be kept exclusively private when its public practice gives it a social dimension that brings it in conflict with, or control of, the state? These are not merely theoretical questions. They contribute to making religion, as Peachey writes, "intrinsically problematic" in Soviet Marxist societies.

Yet, in this writer's view, progress has occurred in the relationships between Christians and Marxist-Leninists. The stage of open persecution of religion seems to have passed; the states and churches of Eastern Europe have reached an era of cautious accomodation. Cooperation, if only on the practical level, is a fact. Further progress depends upon many factors, not least of which are the attitudes of those in the West. The churches of Eastern Europe developed their present relationships with the states during the historical period of a generalized "thaw" in the Cold War. Surely there is a lesson in that.

In this issue, with Wilhelm Kahle's review article, "A Report On Lutheran Christians In The Soviet Union," OPREE expands its format to include book reviews. The editors believe that these book reviews will provide a needed service to our readers. The editors encourage the submission of reviews for consideration for publication. These may be either short reviews (500-700 words) or longer review articles. If readers are aware of recently published books that they believe should be reviewed in OPREE, they are urged to write Richard E. Sharpless, who now serves as book review editor.

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