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THE POSITION OF THE CHURCH THROUGHOUT THE CHANGES
IN CZECHOSLOVAK SOCIETY

By Jakub Trojan

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I.

In February, 1948, the Communist Party assumed power in Czechoslovakia following a cabinet crisis which lasted several days. Immediately it enforced a number of political and social measures that began to change the social system from its very foundations. Radical changes were made in all areas of ownership; initially this concerned industry, trade and banking, and after the beginning of the 1950s to an ever increasing degree, agriculture. The process of nationalization of large, medium and small companies and businesses, the dispossession of land in agriculture and the involuntary establishment of so-called United Farming Communities was completed for the most part by the second half of the decade and legally consummated with the passage of the new constitution of Czechoslovakia in 1960, when the country was declared a socialist republic allied to the Soviet Union.

However, unlike the other satellites in the Soviet block (East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria), socialism did not gain the upper hand in Czechoslovakia by mere external force; the idea of social injustice and the equality of citizens without conspicuous differences in ownership had been alive in our nation for decades, ever since the end of the nineteenth century. Another contributing factor was a positive bias toward Russia which was seen as the land of our Slavonic brothers. Even after its adoption of a bolshevic orientation at the close of the 1920s, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held a strong position within the democratic system. During World War II, it was engaged to a significant extent in the resistance government. The post-war change in Czechoslovak foreign policy, agreed to by all the parties of the National Front, including even non-socialists like the People's
Party in Bohemia and Moravia and the Democratic Party in Slovakia, as well as by President Eduard Benes, also played to the Communists' advantage. The failure of the western powers, Great Britain and France, the closest allies of Czechoslovakia during the period between the wars and the guarantors of her independence since 1918, was still a vivid and painful memory. At Munich, the British and French had signed a humiliating agreement with Hitler and Fascist Italy which they forced upon Czechoslovakia and which immediately resulted in considerable territorial concessions to Germany (autumn, 1938) and shortly thereafter, in the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia (March 1939). The broad spectrum of post-war Czechoslovakia, restored to its original borders of 1937, adopted a pro-Soviet position quite naturally, for it was regarded as having defeated the enemy and liberating the land.

The Communist Party exploited the anti-German attitude of the population to perfection, demanding immediate expulsion of the sizeable German minority (around 3 million) from regions where they had lived for as long as anyone could remember. It also gained support by emphasizing the sacrifices made by the Soviet Union in fighting for our liberation. The standing of non-Communist parties was shaken by the mere fact that the people associated their pro-western, albeit democratic, orientation with the betrayal at Munich and the depression of the 1930s which had brought with it nearly a million unemployed, as well as other unresolved social problems of the First Republic (1918–1939).

The self-confident, cultural and intellectual strata of the population seeking fundamental changes in the system were attracted to the propaganda of the Communists, while the restoration platform of the democratic parties received a cool reception and could scarcely compete for their favor. In the sensitive area of agriculture policy the Communists won popularity by promising land to those who worked on it. In the context of that time this appeared as an attractive slogan. Owners of large farms were portrayed as parasitic exploiters of paid labor, similar to their colleagues in trade and industry. Therefore it is hardly surprising that the Communists and Social Democrats won more than 50 percent of the vote in the first free post-war election. This victory of the left reflected primarily the desire of the majority of the population for greater social security, to be accompanied by the necessity to carry out structural changes which would penetrate into the realm of ownership. Such changes occurred immediately after the Communists acquired absolute hegemony by means of their adroit maneuvering in 1940.

II.

From the birth of the modern Czechoslovakia, churches remained more or less on the periphery of social events. Until the beginning of the war in 1939, the majority Catholic church found it difficult to recover from its weakened position incurred by centuries-old
cooperation with the Austrian monarchy. After 1918 more than two million Catholics withdrew to join the newly founded national Czechoslovak Church, or the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB), or even to remain without any church affiliation at all, due to a post-war wave of secularization. Enfeebled in its theology and church-life, Czech Catholicism began to acquire a new self-confidence initially in the cultural realm and later in a political context during the Munich crisis. During the war it rather successfully aspired to be the defender of national identity, even at the cost of problematizing the policy of Masaryk which had been wholly acceptable to the public throughout the entire period of the First Republic.

Protestant churches in Bohemia and Moravia had traditionally been in the minority. Even the largest, the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, was numerically only a fraction of what the majority church could claim (Catholics: approximately 8 million, ECCB: 250,000). However, even as a minority, it made a notable impact on the history of the country. In the first years of statehood, as it freed itself for the first time from the position as a church which had only been tolerated, and experienced the favor of political leaders—in particular of President Thomas G. Masaryk—through systematic mission and cultural efforts it hoped to assert the moral and spiritual postulates of the Czech Republic on a national scale. Its desire was that the Czech nation become once again the nation of Huss, rooted in the truth of Christ, devoted to the Scripture, faithful to its spiritual heritage. From the pulpit and in church publications it conscientiously strove to connect basic biblical motifs with the social problems which had begun to develop dramatically at the close of the 1920s, during the Depression, and after Hitler's accession to power in neighboring Germany. But despite these and other similar efforts, it remained on the margin. Other churches fared no better. In general Christianity in Czechoslovakia offered no program which would have addressed all areas of life, both personal and societal. There was an obvious closed-mindedness and an inability to grasp the most profound questions and problems of the modern world as it was becoming increasingly secularized. Ideas which could have borne any weight were lacking. What prevailed was fruitless ecclesiasticity, manifested in Catholicism by empty ceremoniality and in Protestantism by a gradual escape into congregational seclusion with a judgmental attitude toward the world.

Not even after World War II in the decisive period from 1945 to 1948 did the churches stand in the forefront of the struggle for a new spiritual and moral obligation, unable to present the public with a well-thought-out conception as to how to solve burning domestic and international problems. At best, when they did venture out beyond the walls of their churches and cathedrals, they pled for tolerance and loyal discipline and encouraged people to orient themselves around fundamental values. In principle, however, the churches were unprepared for the enormous changes which post-war developments brought to all aspects
of life. Let it be repeated: we are talking about changes which had deep domestic roots and were not enforced upon us from the outside alone.

The churches were also unprepared for the fundamental turning point which occurred in February, 1948. From the very outset, it was obvious that the changes which were to take place would inevitably have a profound effect on religion and the life of the churches, and indeed, they swiftly ensued. As early as October, 1949, under Communist pressure, the highest legislative body enacted laws which were to govern state policy regarding the church for what turned out to be 40 long years. Without allowing the churches to present their own views on the subject, much less persuade, the state proclaimed its decision to assume the burden of paying the salaries of all the clergy in all the churches. Of course, prior to this, all church property had been nationalized. The Catholic church was most affected since it was one of the largest landowners. Another provision of this legislation gave the state the sole right to grant permission to perform church service and ministry on all levels, significantly limiting the free choice or appointment of clergy according to internal church order. This meant a marked step backward from the situation which had prevailed in the democratic order of the First Republic and in many aspects even from that of the period of the Austrian monarchy. It enabled state officials to control the church in one of its most sensitive spots for decades. What is more, neither the laws passed in 1949 and thereafter, nor the constitution of 1960 guaranteed unhindered development of church life. Instead they compelled the churches into dependency on a state bureaucracy which was essentially run by the party apparatus and security agents of the Ministry of Interior, all in harmony with militantly atheistic propaganda.

After seizing power and liquidating their political opponents in other parties, the major concern of the Communists became the disposition of the potentially dangerous opposition on the side of what they were convinced was a threat, the Catholic church. Unlike in Slovakia, in Czech society a certain mistrust of Catholics prevailed, especially among the older generation. Young people were significantly influenced by post-war developments, which placed the Communist Party and the Left in a favorable light. In addition to this outward propaganda, however much it might have simplified the situation, the minds of the people were touched by the internal logic of developments as a whole which pointed to radical socio-political transformations for ideological reasons. These were anti-western, largely anti-Christian, because—and this was where that internal logic was clearly and unequivocally headed—the Soviet Union was built on atheist foundations. In the Czech environment, long before replete with secularizing tendencies, these circumstances tended to reinforce the non-church, if not frankly anti-church orientation of the majority of the population.
The principle aim of the Communists was to isolate the Catholic hierarchy from the masses of believers. Still taking advantage of the aftermath of the thrust against the congregation of bishops, the government adopted the tactical maneuver of pretending that the attack on leading representatives of the Catholic church was not an attack on religion as such nor by any means on the church itself.

Protestants were even allowed to establish new congregations during the 1950s, arousing the false hope that they were to be counted upon to morally and spiritually nurture society, as the regime proclaimed for purely tactical reasons. The same strategy was employed to win over the lower ranking Catholic clergy and their ordinary parish members.

A concentrated attack, however, was directed against the Vatican, with propaganda which classified it as belonging to the imperialistic camp. People within the church found themselves under the pressure of the authorities who alleged they were submissive instruments of Rome. Methods in this conflict ranged from administrative manipulation to outright violence on the part of the state. Monastic orders were dissolved. Their members were sent away to prison or military work camps for years, along with others who for one reason or another were undesirable to the regime.

And so after a few years, ruling forces succeeded in ‘pacifying’ the society. Leftist oriented strata actively and enthusiastically participated out of conviction in building a new totalitarian order, while others passively adapted themselves in the end.

III.

The first shock to deeply penetrate the society ruled by the centralist Communist Party came in the last half of the 1950s, when Nikita Khrushchev revealed Stalinist crimes at the 20th Party Congress in the USSR. The first wave of criticism to raise fundamental questions of morals, culture, and politics swept through the country, with the participation of writers, journalists, intellectuals, those within and without of the Party. Still alive were the vivid memories of the shameful mass mock trials during the first half of the decade, which resulted in the deaths of about 180 communists and non-communists throughout the century. For the first time voices were heard demanding more respect for domestic democratic and spiritual traditions. There was an isolated appeal of the churches calling for a moral and spiritual renewal because--as was stated in a memoranda to the cabinet conceived by Josef L. Hromádka and his colleagues--the entire society had found itself in the midst of a deep crisis. The society which had been silenced for so many years was attempting to start a modest dialogue spanning across all the structures and institutions despite all the continuing pressure from above.
At that time, however, the regime was still sufficiently strong enough to swiftly initiate a counter-offensive. This severely afflicted those from the ranks of heretofore loyal citizens, especially Party members, who had expressed criticism. The principles of the purportedly cultural revolution, which was to be consummated with a political and social one, began to take the upper hand throughout the society. One of its aims was to overcome so-called remnants of religion, and so the church was pushed into an even more marginal position. The leading motto became: keep the church from interfering with problems of society. Religion was proclaimed a private affair. No official documents recorded church membership. Atheistic propaganda increased, supported by significant contributions of money and personnel from the state. The only officially acceptable view became Marxism-Leninism, and subscribing to it became a pre-requisite for anyone who sought a position in the field of education.

This struck a sensitive chord for Czech Protestants in particular, who had highly prized education for centuries. Young people from Protestant families had traditionally attended pedagogical schools, on a secondary or university level. Ever since the time toleration was declared in 1781, many congregations had set up independent church schools until the beginning of this century with exceptional teaching personalities with remarkably good reputations. In Protestant circles, the teaching profession was among one of the favorite career choices young people made. The same was true for the medical professions—in other words, for the humanitarian sciences in general. So when the regime laid down ideological barriers to entrance into universities, especially in the pedagogical field, and accepted only those who professed the officially proclaimed ideology, that meant the young people were forced to either accommodate the demand or to abandon all hope of a future in the field of education. The result was a blatant violation of human rights. While the teaching profession was accessible solely to those who had become members of the only legal youth organization and who were not burdened with "religious prejudices," it was forbidden to those who for generations had been raised in home environments favorably oriented toward that very profession, to those of whom it could be expected to possess superior potential for fulfilling the requirements of excellence in education. Of course, this was not the only profession so affected. The practice had a negative impact on the whole society.

One of the painful experiences of those years was that neither pastors nor church leaders, especially Protestant, resisted such manipulation. The oppression suffered by the younger generation in particular was wrongly termed the cross of Christ that every Christian must bear. A slight but significant theological shift occurred which deformed and obscured the notion of he cross. The correct interpretation of the oppression would have led to the only possible conclusion: mobilizing civic courage and protesting against discrimination, defying the violation of fundamental rights, without which the whole society would swiftly suffer.
Instead of this, the cross of Christ was transformed by means of a theological maneuver from the shoulders of adults to those of children, who were persuaded by their parents and pastors not to even attempt to study pedagogy. They were told it was better to make a sacrifice for Christ and abandon the profession they would have enjoyed, where they would have so effective in serving others. The result paradoxically appeared to be in harmony with the Gospel: the regime practiced discrimination, and we accepted it as the cross of Christ.

This example serves to illustrate what a profound deformation of thought and position continuous long-termed oppression can produce.

Within the framework of the cultural revolution, worship was practically the only activity the regime allowed the church. This applied to such traditional forms of activity as adult Bible study, Sunday School for children, occasional specialized courses involving Christian services, youth, and so on. In small towns in particular, congregations were watched by a network of informers. On county and regional levels, state appointed "church secretaries" controlled pastors who were constantly under threat of having their licenses to minister revoked. Because all fields of activity throughout society were ruled by one party and its ideology, even the traditional forms of church life had to count on their church membership, especially if they were active, resulting in the disfavor of the authorities. This was first manifested in difficulties their children experienced when they sought entrance into schools, especially at higher levels.

But in the sixties when it was preparing a new law concerning the family, the regime went too far. As the proposed law was discussed, the opinion appeared in the press that parents were compelled to raise their children in agreement with the Marxist-Leninist worldview. There was even a paragraph which formulated the right of the state to take children away from their parents should they fail to fulfill the task the state and society required. It was probably due to this ambiguous formulation and fears that children might be taken away that about 30 congregations of the ECCB wrote letters of protest to the Minister of Justice. The most impressive of these were based on the reasoning that the acceptance of such an opinion would be harmful not only to Christian families, but to society as a whole, where freedom of conscience should be respected. Shortly after that, the congregation received letters from the authorities assuring them that the proposed law would be modified. The law as it was later formulated, stated that parents were responsible for raising their children in agreement with a socialistic morality; this appeared acceptable to those who had protested. They considered a socialistic society as a viable framework in which they could create ethical values from the position of the Christian faith.

I have presented these two attitudes, one with a doubtful theological position in regard to discrimination and the other as civilly and theologically responsible, as evidence that the existence of Christians under totalitarianism was very difficult. Conflicting relationships
developed within their own ranks, and they had to reach down to the principles of faith to a penetrating reflection of the biblical message and its actualization. In this they were only partially successful and the results were usually ambiguous. The most successful attempts proved to be those made in Protestant churches where the presbyterian polity was respected, the last bastion of democracy which was suppressed everywhere else in the society.

IV.

The beginning of the 1960s brought the first signals of financial deterioration, when the possibilities of extensive development of the Czechoslovakian economy were exhausted. The development of heavy industry to the detriment of traditionally prosperous light industry, in which pre-war Czechoslovakia had been considerably successful, overburdened all our resources. In 1961–62 the economy experienced a negative growth in the gross national product for the first time in its history.

A new period of critical re-evaluation of the way things had been done up until then began. A second and even stronger wave of criticism within the society swelled. In magazines, theatres, research institutions, schools, and even in factories problems which had once been taboo were thought out. Reforms in economic life included revisions of those principles classical Marxism and Leninism had considered untouchable (property rights, the production of goods, the market, etc.).

A dialogue was opened between Marxists and Christians. The former began to stress the anthropological dimension, which had held an important place in Christian theology from the very beginning. The foremost Marxist philosopher, K. Kosik, gained recognition for this in a most pronounced manner in his book, The Dialectic of the Concrete. Other representatives of Marxism: Gardavský, Machovec, Krejčí, and others sought dialogue with Christians because they considered them their natural partners in discussions about questions which the previously politicized ideology had refused to deal with. The dialogue soon reached truly ecumenical proportions as both Catholic and Protestant theologians and laity joined in.

At this point it is necessary to mention J.L. Hromádka, one of the initiators of the dialogue who had a profound impact on the entire post-war history of Protestantism.

V.

J.L. Hromádka was a thinker of the caliber few could equal in the Czechoslovakia of this century. His impact could already be felt in the spiritual and cultural life of the country between 1918–1939 when he markedly influenced theology within and without the Protestant church. He was co-editor of the magazine The Christian Review and belonged among the
scholars and critical interpreters of Masaryk's work. When it still appeared to the Czech public that it would never recover from the wounds Catholicism had inflicted upon it immediately following World War I, Hromádka was already regarding Catholicism with a positive bias. He recognized the severe crisis which was breaking out in Nazi Germany and the ill effects it would have on all of Europe. He pondered the deepest roots of European culture and civilization and in exile in America (1939-47) became strongly disturbed by the internal weakness of western Europe in particular.

The domestic Hussite and Brethren reformation were a major source of his thinking, and he adopted the point of departure and method of so-called dialectical theology of Karl Barth and his colleagues. At the same time, he was capable of creative consideration of the emphases of liberal Protestant theology and so was a theologian of synthesis and dialectics, who realized that in human history a partnership of the Gospel with culture is impossible. While in the pre-war period he defended the dialectic position; after his return home and especially during Communist rule he strove to promote understanding and cooperation between the East and the West in all areas of renewal of the post-war world. At this point the synthetic position dominated; although throughout all his theological existence Hromádka was aware that the very sovereignty over the world of God's truth remains unshakable, leaving every attempt at synthesis under the judgement of that truth.

In all of his inner make-up Hromádka was a man of the West, who respected all the values which the western democracies of France, Britain, and America had contributed to the world. The emphasis on the sanctity of the person, the creative initiative of the individual, rationality, civic and civilizational responsibility and political freedom are what comprise the core of western civilization, which is itself incomprehensible without Christian sources. At the same time, he followed with anxiety the disintegration of those values, which he witnessed from the convulsion of the First World War to the flimsy and inconsistent peace of the 1920s, and especially the social injustices in Europe. He found unsettling the feebleness of western democracies manifested in their relationships to Hitler's Germany and the Munich crisis. In Hromádka's eyes the depth of this crisis defied all political and sociological categories and assumed planetary proportions, as was soon to be proven in the conflagration of World War II.

Hromádka carefully followed developments in the Soviet Union and reached the conclusion that only in the cooperation of the victorious forces could there be any hope for renewing our deeply stricken world. Just as transformation of the world order into a functioning community would be impossible without the values contributed by western civilization, so would it likewise be impossible without the emphasis on the equality of people and social justice which comes from the East. Without the former, the world would plunge
into an era of modern barbarity. Without the latter, social tensions in post-war Europe and other parts of the world would sooner or later lead to a conflict.

Because Hromádka depended especially on Christian churches on both sides of the divided world to become the focal point of trust, openness and understanding amidst the gigantic changes necessitated by post-war peace arrangements, at the close of 1957 he founded the Christian Peace Conference (CPC). It was intended to be the place where Christians from the East and West who sought peace as the essential presupposition for solving all the grave problems dividing the world could meet together.

The document Hromádka wrote in 1948 for the American council of churches is a clear testimony to his awareness of the ambiguity of the way things were developing in the Soviet Union, as he made no attempt to conceal his concern over the possibility that neo-Stalinism could prevail in the end and lead the whole world to the brink of a disastrous conflict. Nevertheless he still believed that a humanistic version of socialism would succeed in the Soviet Union which would cooperate productively with the western world. He called on the West to open itself up to necessary changes in its own domain (decolonialization) and to remedy its ailments in the social sphere in particular, where the domination of private property interests were leading to the gradual extinction of moral, spiritual, and political responsibility.

After February 1948, Hromádka stood unequivocally on the side of the Communists. Because his name carried a lot of weight in the Protestant context (he even gained the respect of Communists for his pre-war public opinion), he was able to help fellow Christians orient themselves in the first phase of difficult decision-making. Among Protestant circles, which usually belonged to the middle class, a general inability to cope prevailed and people were afraid of what lay ahead. Here Hromádka appeared clear and decisive, not surprised by what had happened. He counted on the active participation of Christians and the churches in the affairs of society in the long run, "after storms of rage had past" (Comenius). It was his belief that the question of the meaning of human life would sooner or later lead Marxists and Christians to a fruitful dialogue. Until the mid-1960s, he was convinced that socialism was an alternative capable of bearing its own weight compared to the system of the West, which he blamed for not having learned from the debacle of the war, for not having perceived the depth of the crisis of civilization for which it was in large part responsible.

The self-satisfaction of the church, both at home and abroad, bothered Hromádka. In his opinion its preaching and its pastoral and mission ministry were superficial, for it dissociated itself from those who were attempting to create a new order. It failed to challenge the political leaders and parties of its countries to be responsible, not willing to bear the guilt of itself and others, and thereby making the general crisis even worse. In this point as well, Hromádka proved the force of his prophetic vision.
Of course, his errors and failures cannot be ignored. In my opinion, it was a mistake to place a moratorium on criticism after the Communists became omnipotent. Although he had his reasons for doing it, they cannot stand up to deeper analysis. He believed that the offenses and failures of the church in the past in the social and economic realm were so far-reaching that its witness in the new situation bore no authority. Hromádka felt that only through repentance could the churches and individual Christians prepare themselves for a future participation in the areas of social responsibility from which the Communists had for a long time--and justifiably--expelled them. His students in the New Orientation used to discuss this erroneous assumption with him, but nevertheless in critical moments such as the Hungarian uprising in 1956 and the Cuban crisis in 1962, Hromádka maintained his loyalty to the regime and to Soviet foreign policy. A revision of his position was impossible because of the assumption mentioned earlier: his belief that a humanistic version of socialism would eventually prevail in the Soviet Union. We can learn here from Hromádka how absolutely essential it is to scrutinize with persistent thoroughness the phenomenon of power, which deformed the socialist movement and eventually led to its defeat. It would seem that the Communists and even Hromádka himself understood power solely as an instrument. No matter how perceptive his warning about the idolatrous behavior of religious and non-religious people may have been, he failed to perceive the utter pervertedness which always appears wherever people succumb to the utopia of the Tower of Babel and ruthlessly use power to assert it. Ever since the end of World War II, Hromádka had a tendency to favor those in power, as if in spite of all his bad experiences, he repeatedly made illusions about the good will of those at the top. I can recall how, as late as the Autumn of 1967, he and his colleagues in the CPC could not warm up to voices calling for reform which had been heard for years from all corners of our society. Hromádka was still counting on the leaders the establishment, for whom, of course, reform was an anathema. In spite of all this, however, I cannot conclude this passage without confessing that for a number of my friends and for myself personally, Hromádka remains in all his work--even with his "great" mistakes--a spiritual teacher and a source of theological inspiration.

VI.

The so-called Prague Spring is known abroad only for the outwardly perceptible sequence of dramatic events from January to August, 1968. It was indeed the period in which reform efforts in the Czechoslovak society culminated. Socialism with a human face became the policy which enjoyed the support of practically all levels of the population. Historically speaking, it was the last hope for a renewal of socialism drawn from its essential presuppositions provided it would reach down deep enough from its fundamental ideas. To
reach to the sources which were at the birth of the desire for a society in which fraternal and companion-like relationships prevailed and where the mutual communication of all would take place without the elimination of competition and the alienating conditions of production. These ideas, essentially those of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, reached the fathers of socialism after a number of transformations, the most considerable of which was related to the Enlightenment and the bourgeois revolutions which characterized modern Europe.

The attempt to humanize socialism began in Czechoslovakia in the early 1960s when the second wave of criticism emerged opening up all of society to a dialogue into which even Christians were drawn. By that time they had already discussed within the church in the last half of the previous decade the secular interpretation of the Gospel and were theologically prepared for an encounter with "the world." Included here, to say the least, were a Catholic lay-movement inspired by Vatican II and the "New Orientation," comprised of pastors and laity form the ECCB. In the latter group, where students of Hromádka played the decisive role, they did not cling to their teacher with any sort of imitative adherence but attempted to independently develop and practically apply some of his most important motifs (solidarity, civic responsibility, the universal range of biblical message). For the first time since 1948, theologians were able to publish in the secular press, and journalists and outstanding personalities in the fields of culture and literature were invited to lecture and join in discussion of alternative views, as well as cultural and spiritual problems. This filled the atmosphere of society to the dismay of the powers that were. But even among them a diversification was occurring which culminated in the January election of Alexander Dubček as general secretary of the Communist Party. Socialism with a human face became the political doctrine of the day.

Alongside the idea of humanism, an emphasis was placed upon non-violence, a classic principle of one of the major traditions of our national history as expressed in the Brethren reformation, best elaborated by its spiritual father, Petr Chelčicky. Present throughout the entire Prague Spring within the reform movement, the notion of tolerance was evident. It was a tolerance which had little resemblance to cool apathy but instead took the form of promoting a dialogue where the most serious of questions were raised without any presupposed answers.

Once again the churches became conscious of their irreplaceable function in the life of the nation and society and resolved to bear witness to the most profound sources of pastoral and communal life. They attempted to break down the walls of the ghetto into which they had been pushed by their oppressors, although at times they had sought refuge there themselves when they had chosen to adapt to the situation in an effort to survive. Numbers of Catholic priests and monks who had been forbidden for years to perform their spiritual
offices returned to the ministry. A sense of service prevailed among them which surmounted any feeling of injustice, and the will to forgive won out over the desire for revenge.

Before it could bear its irrevocable fruits in all areas of society, the reform movement in Czechoslovakia was crushed by the brutal intervention of the armies of five socialist countries in August, 1968. The unified opposition of the population forced the Brezhnevites to slight scrapping of their policy, and for the first few months of the occupation, after their return from captivity in Moscow, the favorite leaders of the Prague Spring were still in office (Dubček, Svoboda, Smrkovsky). But by the Spring of 1969, after serious struggles within the Party, which had their parallels in the other structures of society, the reform movement was definitely defeated. Power was transferred to the Husak regime, which introduced a strict process of "normalization," where the ruling party had to leave its ranks, losing the leading position in economic, political and cultural life. The decisive criterion for advancement or termination of one's career became approval or disapproval to the encroachment of the armies of the Warsaw Pact. A new wave of immigration to the West set in. The violent enforcement of adaption and the repression of freedom of speech meant the death of personal initiative, demoralizing the broad spectrum of the population. In the eyes of the public, socialism lost all its attraction, once and for all.

The Husáček regime's largest problem was "normalization" within its own party. The revolutionary enthusiasm of the 1940s was long gone. Purges dragged on for months, resulting in the expulsion of around 400,000 members. Only after their own party had been put in order did they deal with other political institutions and alliances in the National Front.

Churches posed a very specific problem for the normalizers, and here the process lasted longest, for the manipulators of party and state organs were unable to penetrate into internal church structures. Small Protestant churches (The Brethren Church, Baptists, Methodists, The Union of Brethren) reacted to the changing situation by retreating back into the old framework to which they had become accustomed before 1968, emphasizing primarily one's innermost spiritual life, repentance of the individual, and moral charity. The situation in the ECCB was more complex, for it had experienced considerable exposure in the Spring of '68 as it had spoken out for reform. In February 1969, its highest legislative body adopted the "Proclamation of the Synod Addressed to the Nation," in which it defended the fundamental motifs of societal renewal from the position of the Gospel as they had been crystallized in the reform efforts. Its departure from the ghetto in the early 1960s had been the subject of theological reflection by the New Orientation, which matured into such practical forms as the open dialogue with political power and Marxism and the organized samizdat publications of youth and young adults on both congregational and church-wide levels. The pressure of normalization after 1970 began to concentrate on these very extended forms of church activity.
The authorities began their method of "slicing off salami" on county and regional levels by dealing with figures in key positions. Soon ecumenical cooperation among Christians on a congregational and parish basis were disrupted. The regime permitted it to continue solely at the highest levels, creating an artificially maintained facade of ecumenical relations which it employed to prove its toleration.

From the early 1970s, the regime did everything in its power to push the churches back once again into their cathedrals and meeting houses, forbidding any activity which they might be able to influence events in the society. Official rhetoric was void of any mention of the positive contribution of churches in moral training—a fundamental departure from the position proclaimed by the state when the Communists gained power. Christianity as such was regarded as a hostile ideology which had to be eradicated. The pressure of normalization had its way. Middle-aged church members in particular dropped out, because they still wanted to function in society. Unlike the situation during the cultural revolution, this time their departure was not accompanied by having a bad conscience. A secularized way of life, whether expressly atheistic or not, became much more "normal" during the normalization process than it had been in the early 1950s.

Within the Catholic church there was an attempt to organize an "underground" church, alongside the heavily destroyed official one, with a strong laity, secretly consecrated priests, and a few bishops. Simultaneously, the regime was cultivating a peace movement of Catholic clergy called Pacem in Terris, naturally condemned by the Vatican, through which it wanted to split the church apart from within.

A similar attempt to divide Protestants was made which even went so far as to employ the secret security apparatus. In systematic attacks on the ECCB, for example, it created through the assistance of state church secretaries on county and regional levels a so-called "agency of influence" from the ranks of presbyters and pastors, which was to intervene in church institutions, influencing the work of their administration, their convents and synods. The primary aim was to weaken the position within the ECCB of affairs of the church even after a considerable number of its adherents had their ministerial licenses revoked by the state.

The authorities were attempting, with varying degrees of pressure—sometimes using gentle persuasion, sometimes outright rough—to force the leadership of the church on all levels to conformity with official teachers of the Comenius Theology Faculty, where young preachers of several Protestant churches were educated. The appropriate Ministry influenced the number of students who could be accepted and forced faculty members to expel students who had displayed a non-conformist spirit. Loyalty to the regime was the pre-requisite for foreign ecumenical contact for both church leaders and faculty members. A similar situation was created in the leadership of other churches as well as at the Huss and Roman Catholic
theology schools. The work of the foremost ecumenical body, for many years the Ecumenical Council of Churches, was inhabited in the same way. Here as well an "agency of influence" was at work, just as it was in other important church associations. The cooperation of church functionaries with the security forces, evidently compulsory for the most part, weighed heavily upon solidarity within the Christian community for many years.

This painful lack of power to resist the repressive regime was manifest in Czechoslovak society outside of the church as well. Every facet of its life was inhibited by administrative manipulation and pressure, affecting institutions, companies and organizations of every sort. The sad reality is that the churches did not demonstrate greater spiritual resistance but let themselves become mutually divided, allowing the social dimension of their witness to be taken away, while all congregational and parish life was essentially limited to acts of liturgy and worship. For the most part this was undoubtedly the result of the continuous pressure of all the factors compiling such a system of oppression. Nevertheless, the internal weakness of the congregation and individual Christians combined to create a climate of submission. Here Christianity in Czechoslovakia stands face to face with a stain it will have to come to terms with for generations to come. Unacceptable is the excuse uttered almost unconsciously that churches in other parts of Europe where Communist rule was avoided would have fared no better had they been faced with oppression. The disturbing question remains: Why did the power of "the world" prove stronger than the spiritual power of the Gospel, which was publicly proclaimed and professed in houses of worship?

VII.

The period following the inception of Charter 77 represented an extraordinary test of political and spiritual maturity in the Czechoslovak environment. At the close of 1976, the basic document itself carried the names of 242 original signers: former Communists who had been expelled from the Party after Husák came to power, democrats, humanists, and by no means least of all, members of various churches, including several Catholic priests and a group of eight preachers from the ECCB. The number of Protestant and Catholic laity was numerous.

The fundamental purpose of the Charta movement was the renewal of civic responsibility. Charter 77 was created following the publication of a number of pacts and treaties regarding civil, political and cultural rights, which had been incorporated into the laws of our country in the autumn of 1976. By signing the Charter, members expressed their decision to enter into a dialogue with those in power which would lead it to respect in the domestic sphere all the internationally valid legal norms. Chartists, who were striving for the unity of personal and civic life, were aware that preserving this integrity would require a
great deal of spiritual and moral strength. To rehabilitate the notion of citizenship as the responsible attitude toward the affairs of the community (polis) in a situation where the extent of moral, economic and political devastation was so grave was an enormous task. The difficulty of the situation was intensified because the administration of the country, the very ones who for the most part were responsible for the defiling of the whole society by forcing it into the appalling image of what for years had been called a "naturally" functioning conformity, did not seek dialogue in the slightest. All it was interested in was maintaining its own power, not in solving the crisis.

One could have expected that the churches would adhere to the efforts of Charter 77 for a radical renewal, but not even they had been able to avoid onerous deformations which, along with pressure from outside, confirmed only their will to survive. Instead of a courageous witness and a willingness to support those citizens who had taken the risk of a non-conformist position upon themselves, under state pressure, the voices which could be heard from church headquarters expressed at best bewilderment and at worst dissociation from Charta members. As late as the close of the 1970s, when the activity of the first Chartists began, official documents of churches and of Comenius Theology Faculty (as well as others) reiterated their opinion that socialism was to be considered a framework within which we as Christians can carry out our work. The post-Constantinian epoch, into which the church was pointed due to the fundamental changes which occurred in central and eastern Europe after World War II, was regarded as a more appropriate environment for ministry than the previous era. Under the new circumstances the church could allegedly depend only on the power of the Gospel instead of the privileged position it had enjoyed for centuries of European history thanks to the powers of this world.

A deeper analysis of the phenomenon of "real socialism" and in particular of the absolutization of power which characterizes it was lacking. There was not even an attempt made to ponder more deeply the temptation into which the post-Constantinian church was driven. It may have been deprived of its powerful position in society, but it was vulnerable at the flick of a hand becoming a lackey to the power of the deprivers, a predicament even more seductive the more power the regime acquired. After the military incursion of 1968, one can talk about the kind of power which under Brezhnev's real socialism dragged citizens down into a dependence comparable only perhaps to those we know from the days of ancient despots.

The work of Charter 77 continued despite the fact that it was isolated and received support from the society only in secret and most often from individuals. Gradually it put out through samizdat a series of documents in which it adopted positions on various social problems, stimulating within the heretofore silent and silenced society a discussion concerning questions that official propaganda either played down or passed over. Soon after
the original Charta document came out, rather intensive discussions began, initially within
the movement itself, where it was not exceptional for theologians to be invited to lecture in
surroundings where they would hardly have gone before.

Such encounters transversed all confessional barriers. Shortly after that, a vast range of
groups and seminars began to work together regularly on social, economic, and political
issues. Philosophical and theological seminars took shape, and samizdat of all kinds was
"published." Home theatres as well as unofficial art exhibits were organized. A second
culture was born.

In this manner, for the third time in the short history of our country, an attempt at
critical self-searching took place at all levels of life--personal, civic and societal. New
concepts were born and an alternative to socialism was considered. We were witnesses to the
process of searching for a way out of the prolonged crisis into which the whole society had
been growing that it had exhausted all its energy. Its powerful elite was concentrating on
nothing but preserving the status quo, which of course led to increased tensions within the
society. It was plain to see that we were standing on the threshold of major changes.

In this context, I consider it important to stress that these changes had been under
preparation intellectually speaking for many years, and modest beginnings can be traced back
even to pre-Charta days. The third wave of revision of our historical journey can be linked
to impulses which appeared after 1956 and to others following the early 1960s in particular.
Of course, this time everything occurred in an altered international context; socialism had
been on the defensive for years and had gradually lost its attraction not only in Europe but
also in areas where its success had seemed nonproblematical (Asia, Africa). And so the
connection of the third critical wave with the two preceding ones was selective. It could not
accept the notion of socialism with a human face because humanism and socialism had
definitely parted ways after 1968 and after the invasion of Afghanistan. Notwithstanding,
there is a connecting link in the systematic analysis of societal problems like the ones
attempted by various strata in the 1950s and 1960s and by the Christians after 1977. And so
one can say that Czechoslovakia was probably better prepared for changes ever since the late
1960s than many of the other formerly socialist countries, although it might have appeared
to the rest of the world that it was dragging incomprehensibly behind compared to the
swiftness of change in Hungary and Poland and during October 1989, in East Germany. Our
society, however, actually had the right to a time-out because the Prague Spring, and
especially its preparatory stages in 1961-67, could be recorded as a headstart in the pages
of history as a considerable force for reform in central Europe.

And what about the churches? How did they become involved in the process of
intellectual preparation for fundamental changes in society? The answer is not simple.
Catholics chose the way of seeking a new spirituality. As I have already mentioned, a secret
community of believers was formed, led by active lay people and priests whom they trusted. There was a strong emphasis placed on spiritual nurturing within the family, and Catholic samizdat literature of a theological, philosophical and general nature was of relatively high quality. Home seminars were operative where ecumenical discussions between Catholics and Protestants took place here and there. In 1987, a well thought-out project of ten-year renewal appeared, which was intended as the foundation for ecumenical cooperation to which Protestants were invited.

During this period within Protestant churches, and especially the ECCB, there was obvious internal tension. A few other preachers signed the Charta, raising the number to about seven percent of the total 250 ministers within the church. The New Orientation, which comprised the largest number of Chartists (ministers and laity), became influential for the youngest generation within the church, a fact which made the secret security police quite nervous, according to their records. On the other hand, approximately ten percent of the clergy became collaborators with the secret police, representing only a slightly smaller amount than those in the Catholic church.

The ECCB leadership, the Synodal Council, was under constant pressure from the authorities to isolate the New Orientation within the church. The rift between the leadership and Charter supporters from within the ranks of church membership grew following the spring of 1977 when a group of 31 ministers and lay people sent an extensive petition to the National Assembly, in which they had gathered material documenting the discrimination practiced against churches and believers. The ECCB leadership considered this a violation of its "competence" and issued those clergy who had signed it official rebukes. The synodal board of representatives, the legislative body which functions between Synods, approved the disciplinary action of the Council, but the autumn Synod merely took it under consideration. It has to be said that the rift between the official representatives of the church and faculty on one hand and adherents of the Charta on the other grew in a downward direction as well; the position of the dissidents upset the wishes of what was probably most of the church, laity and clergy alike, to live in peace and avoid conflicts with state authorities. The latter never hesitated to stimulate the tension even more by spreading around various kinds of fabrications about Chartists and supporters of the New Orientation. Gradually a mutual alienation set in, and except for a few exceptions, dialogue, which had still been possible in the early 1970s, ceased. Thanks to the practical stands it took, the leadership of the church did not contribute to the efforts for fundamental changes in the society. It cannot be denied, however, that it did try to preserve whatever space it had been allowed for its activity. The price was considerable; the contradiction between the Word which was preached and the way it was practiced in life increased. A number of students at the theology faculty and active lay people in congregations were dissatisfied with such
developments. And thus despite the ever more robust intrusion of the state into the life of the church, non-conformist voices could be heard, albeit if sporadically, at some of its most eminent gatherings (convents, Synods), calling for the fullness of the Gospel in private as well as public life. This position, of course, collided with the mentality of the ghetto into which the church's leadership, striving only to survive, was receding more and more deeply as the years went on.

VIII.

The November revolution of 1989 found the church in an ambivalent situation; a smaller portion of its members, lay and clergy, had been involved for some time in dissident movements, while the majority had decided to wait it out and avoid conflicts with the powers that be, whose interference into church life never diminished, even up to the very end of its control. As late as 1988, they threatened to revoke the state licenses of several ECCB ministers. State church secretaries in collaboration with the secret police and the "agency of influence" within the church attempted to push through the interests of the regime by, for example, preventing the election of certain people to church office (e.g. the election of Jan Čapek to the Synod Council). Still operating were such institutions as the tamely accommodating Christian Peace Conference, designed for export, to the increasing indignation of Catholics, Pacem in Terris. The Ecumenical Council of Churches was also still under pressure, to which it conformed. All of these institutions were used by the regime to divide the church from within, as well as for infiltrating foreign ecclesiastical bodies abroad. The ecumenical community of the "First and Third world" was persuaded during various conferences by their representatives that in the global sense socialism was a viable alternative to a system based on market principles. Churches under socialism could allegedly fulfill their call to witness without great problems.

The dramatic events of the ten days beginning with November 17, 1989, when special forces brutally attacked a peaceful and officially approved student demonstration, until the successful general strike of November 27, flung even the leadership of individual churches into action. Cardinal Tomasek publicly proclaimed his solidarity with the formation of the Civic Forum and on behalf of the nation appealed to the cabinet on the occasion of the momentous celebration of the act of sanctification of Agnes Premyslid in the Cathedral of St. Vitus on Saturday, November 25.

The 26th Synod was in session just at the time when the revolution began. It readily reacted to the emergent situation and commissioned the Synodal Senior, Dr. Josef Hromádka, to protest directly to the Premier against the brutal police attack and to discuss with him any further measures. The Synod witnessed appeals for support of attempts for radical changes,
without which the whole society would be plunged into a crisis of immeasurable proportions. In the days that followed, the Senior himself became a deputy premier of the cabinet, first under J. Adamec, the only representative of the former regime who was willing to talk to the opposition, and later in the federal "cabinet of national understanding" of Premier Califa in which Communists were in the minority.

All spectra of society united in unequivocal opposition to the Communist Party and its government. Following enormous demonstrations in the streets of Prague and other cities in Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia, its days were numbered. After ten days in which the nation's history swiftly strode through enormous revolutionary changes every few minutes, it became clear that our society had taken its earlier "time out" so that in the end it could successfully culminate those previous attempts at reform which had come to nothing, due to brutal interference from either within or without.

It is remarkable that the gatherings of hundreds of thousands of people on Wenceslaus Square beginning on Monday, November 20, or at Letna on Saturday and Sunday, November 25 and 26 had more than a merely political character. They manifested to an increasing extent a human moral and spiritual dimension and even displayed their own almost religious ritual. Often the "Prayer for Martha," a favorite song dating back to the time of the Prague Spring, was sung. It expresses the deep conviction that "after the storm has passed, the rule of your own affairs will be returned to you, oh people," an incomplete fragment taken from the "Testament of the Dying Mother of Unitas Fratrum" written by John Amos Comenius, the famous 17th century leader of the Czech Reformation, a pedagogue, thinker, and politician. Here in a pop-music tune was concentrated the desire of the nation as expressed by the last bishop of the Brethren Union!

There were words of confession uttered at the demonstration by lending dissidents, and Václav Havel in particular, that we had conformed for years to a regime which had trampled over our dignity. As citizens we had lacked courage and thus prolonged the rule of darkness by our own volition. For years we had not believed that things could be changed. Instead of rising up to civic responsibility, we had been subservient. This was a public profession of our sins! On Thursday, November 23, when the foremost figure of the Prague Spring of 1968, Alexander Dubček, spoke to the people of Prague, many realized that they were witnessing a great moment of rehabilitation for those who had not forsaken their convictions even at the price of great tribulation. During such moments participants of the demonstrations experienced a moral cleansing. United in guilt from the past and yet in the hope that the end of slavery was at hand, we stood in the streets and squares staggered by the miracle of freedom we had been given.

In such moments we realized that what was happening in the visible changes on the political scene had an invisible dimension of movement in human hearts and souls. It was
a dimension which had been awakened to the individuality of a life which is morally and spiritually integrated, emerging from its roots in the Truth. It was as if during those days in November (similar to those days in August, 1968, when there was still the obvious resolve to remain internally free) once again non-political politics was at work, that unique spiritual heritage of our national history. It had been born in the Hussite and Brethren reformation, but through means of a number of transformations across the Enlightenment and the deepest levels of secularization, in November it was as if it had spilled over into the minds of those who once again caught sight of the fact that there are things in one's life worth suffering for, for which one must assume the risk of peaceful resistance. Such a resistance is not determined by anger and hate but rather by desire for reconciliation and for a renewal of life in truth. The singing by the crowds of the "Prayer for Martha" of a forbidden singer during the normalization era, Kubišova, the confessing of sins as people and as citizens, the political rehabilitation of those who had been courageous enough to confront the violent regime on our behalf were all a manifestation of our standing in historical continuity of moral and spiritual struggles with those who had chosen the path of resistance against inhuman conditions long before our time.

Perhaps I can dare to make the claim that this manifestation of civic resolve, extending beyond the means of routine politics or practices of revolt, was to a certain extent a co-creation of the witness of non-conforming Christians as well as of those who continued to work in official churches, clergy and laity alike, who carried out their tasks faithfully, not dissociating themselves from those who had entered into open conflict with the regime. Many of us who had chosen the path of non-conformity experienced the power of intercessory prayer as well as practical assistance during the years we were forcefully separated from work in the church. A group of ECCB pastors who had been among the first to sign the Charter had tried to express this in a statement sent out in January, 1977. All those who conscientiously prepare their sermons, faithfully provide pastoral care, and seek out the ill, elderly, and desolate stand together in one and the same struggle with us in the Charta movement who are standing up for human rights. At this point I would like to recall the important words of the apostle in I Peter 5:9, that tell us that the brotherhood the world over is united by the same measure of suffering. One does not have to undergo the same risk, bear the same distress, but be united with others, despite all situational difference, by the same measure of suffering. During times of discrimination whenever we stood undivided in solidarity, totalitarian power collided with a wall with which it could not cope. At such times we had a foretaste of the future victory which was finally given to us during the November revolution.
In the first few weeks after the revolution the church was faced with a serious problem: everybody adapted to the new situation very quickly and with undisguised facility. The walls of the ghetto into which the church had allowed itself to be pushed by the former regime tumbled down under the vociferous shouts of those who rushed without thinking into political activity in newly emerging parties and movements, of those who, as they insisted wanted to assist in national and societal renewal. I have already mentioned the fact that the Synodal Senior of the ECCB, Dr. Hromádka, was asked to be a deputy prime minister of the federal cabinet. Other pastors followed the lead and became representatives of Parliament, mayors, aldermen, and active members of various political parties. What was startling was not the fact that Christians, including clergy, became involved in politics, even many of those who had objections to such activity under the old regime, but that now this was happening for opportunistic reasons. By this I do not mean primarily for material advantages. To take up politics at the close of 1989 was comparable to the grueling task of weeding a field which had been defiled for years. Where I observe the opportunism was at the point where such decisions were made without having been critical toward the past; the most typical was the church’s distaste for participation in public life. The New Orientation, which had always sought the organic union of the Gospel with civic responsibility, with work for the good of the POLIS, and not only for the narrow church community, had been the target of criticism for church leaders in the 1970s and 1980s. It was reproached for underestimating the value of congregational ministry and for concerning itself with politics. And now we stood amazed and watched how the very same people had rushed head on into politics without making a profound revision of their earlier positions and opinions. Former dissidents suddenly found themselves in opposition to those who were entering the political arena without sensing the contradiction between what they were doing and how they had acted only a short time before. They had not faced the overwhelming question of coming to terms with their own past where they had expressed more contempt for civic involvement than understanding. The Catholic church had a more deliberate approach to the matter; they forbade priests from entering directly into politics.

Another problem which was dragged out in the life of the ECCB in particular is related to overcoming the mistakes and failures of the past. While other churches seemed to have accomplished the transition into daily routine without much ado, and Catholics have solved the problem of collaboration by their priests from a canonical standpoint, the ECCB has kept discussing these questions continuously at synods, in the church press, and in conversations on various occasions. The more radical group of young preachers is convinced
that it is impossible to accomplish the tasks which lie before us unless the church's deepest past—especially that of its leadership—is not brought to light.

I myself agree with this approach and am convinced that what is at stake above all is to map out those offenses and failures which were contingent on the situation. It concerns political errors and sins and not any common human guilt. We will not be able to avoid certain mistakes and wrong decisions in the future until we elucidate certain stereotypes of mistakes and attitudes and behavior of which we have been guilty over the past decades. I have already presented the theological shift which occurred in the interpretation of the cross of Christ in my analysis of the church's position during the cultural revolution. I shall now offer another example to illustrate a particular type of shortcoming which can be attributed to the leadership in the 1970s.

The members of the church who had sent the previously mentioned petition to the National Assembly protesting the discrimination practiced against churches and believers were not permitted to effectively defend themselves. In this case the church reacted in the same manner as political leaders toward their own opponents. The same practices prevalent throughout all of society were brought over into the church; attacks on anybody, whether normal citizens or prominent government or party officials could not be countered by a defense in the press or before the public. In the same way we could not defend ourselves against the official reprimands which were publicized to the whole church in a letter from the Synod Council.

This is what I call political guilt, a situational sin. The practices dragged into the society by totalitarian power were adopted by the leading representatives of the churches where they were administered with the same zeal. Instead of a debate which could have been followed by the church members, disciplinary actions and punishments ensued. The potential partner was silenced and declared as harmful to the church, while all the while the highest representatives proclaimed their agreement at salient points with the "Petition of the 31!"

The aversion in the churches against coming to terms with the past is related to the phenomena which appeared in the first months after the revolution. Not just Christianity as a whole, but the churches as such were given credit for the mere fact that they had experienced the ill-favor of the former regime for decades. There was a well-wishing attitude toward the churches prevalent among the public, to which they responded—especially the Catholics—with a certain sense of triumphalism. One could hear the churches' leadership proclaiming the time had come for the great rehabilitation of Christianity. The spiritual vacuum created after the liquidation of Marxism-Leninism as the official doctrine had to be filled.

It is startling that in the delightful breeze of this historical rehabilitation the difference between sustaining and misleading traditions was forgotten. By no means can we succumb
to the illusion that it is possible to transplant the Christian message into Czech society, which has been spiritually and morally devastated, without critical self-searching. The spirit of triumphalism has so obscured the minds of some church leaders that they have taken up the struggle to win the souls of secularized men and women without having repented themselves. At this point as well we find ourselves in the midst of an exacting discussion with the majority of the church which refuses to face up to the past and lacks the courage to take notice of its guilt.

X.

It is as clear as day that purifying moral and spiritual sources are essential if we are to overcome the long period of devastation, and it is just the churches and individual Christians and revival movements outside it who can contribute to the life-healing process. No matter how extensive the losses in economy and the environment may be, what is worst hit by the era of totalitarianism lies in the thinking and attitudes of people. The devastated countryside of northern Bohemia and other regions corresponds to the less perceptible apocalyptic destruction taking place in "the hearts of men and the hearts of women," to use the words of a song by a Czech Brethren preacher, Svatoplak Karašek. We have before us here a corrective and reforming task which will last generations.

One specific problem of Czech society is that the form of government has shifted so often in our nation's history. In this century alone the political order, with all its accompanying moral and spiritual implications, had changed several times, a phenomena which has rarely occurred in western societies. It carries with it uprootedness and discontinuity, opportunist behavior and a certain type of political and moral cynicism (Švejk!), a virtuosi ability to conform even in the most contradictory situations and to survive at all costs. All this is yet another burden we shall be coming to terms with for years.

During the last few months the tendency to simplify societal problems has been dangerously on the rise. Everyone seems to have an easy remedy with which one can allegedly handle even the most complicated phenomena. Above all, there is a search going on for the guilty one, where the enemy who supposedly led us into this mess is revealed. Grappling with these iniquitous forces which can go hand in hand with partial knowledge and semi-education, Czech politics has its work cut out for itself in future generations. And we have not even broached the problems of Czech-Slovak co-existence, the market economy or environmental protection.
XI.

The church is faced with new tasks in these changing circumstances. On the preceding pages I mentioned the overriding responsibility to review the past. This will mean overcoming the ghetto mentality at its very roots and not just drifting over it with some kind of opportunistic wind which prods us into political functions. We have to accept the Gospel anew with its universal message which touches all spheres of life, public and private. We cannot tolerate such reduction of that message, as we did in the past, to include only the inner life of the soul and the narrow community of the congregation or parish. The universality of the Gospel commits us to global responsibility.

This immediately compels us to think about a truly ecumenically open theology. Today the matter at hand is the entire inhabitable world, OIKUMENE in the planetary sense of the word. This concerns a newly perceived relationship in nature, which is oikumene of living beings. At the same time, we must not fall into the trap of glorifying nature, which is neither the point of departure nor the goal of our faith and theology. All of creation is headed toward a transformation. We are awaiting a new heaven and a new earth. Just as it is erroneous to cling to the status quo of historical systems, so is it wrong to adore the status quo of nature. Our task is to stand with it in a creative relationship of partnership and to overcome the demonism which would dominate and manipulate it.

Christians in central and eastern Europe must not relinquish responsibility for the modification of the social system now being constituted following the fall of real socialism. In all the varieties of its implementation a market economy must possess a character of service, never becoming an end unto itself. It needs just as much alert critical observation as any other system. Based on biblical presuppositions, we must strive to bring into its structures the motifs of cooperation, partnership, and mutuality and emphasize the deeper sources of life. None of these is an integral part of it. We have to work toward these goals not only at home but also in the international context. The weaker members of our planetary community need our help as badly as those who are shoved into the margins of our own society.

Churches have to understand the soul of the secularized person, who must never become the mere passive object of their mission and evangelical activity. He or she is also raising questions and presenting his or her own self-understanding, which proves that we are all standing in an open cosmos, where no one had definitive answers. He or she must become to us what we must be to them, partners on the woeful path of history where we are travelling with the hope that the groaning of all creation (Romans 8) will not fling us back into nothingness but onward toward new beginnings and the final victory.
Czech Christianity must see to it that Europe as a continent of countless traditions examines them down to the most intrinsic roots, studies them patiently and then illuminates those which overcome egocentricity and demonstrate an inspirational strength necessary for meeting the tasks surfacing before humanity today. It is also essential that we contribute to the birth of a planetary community for whose creation Europe must strive with the same enthusiasm that it displays in the construction of its own house. Here there is a role to be played not only by the largest nations of Europe. All of us are called to bring a specific contribution to the creation of a Europe which will not be a threat but a partner to the other continents. For Czech and Slovak Christians the renewal of Europe must be an outgrowth of the requirements for renewal, truth and tolerance of our own best traditions. Of course, this selective, difficult intellectual work which is no less demanding than monastic discipline, and the results will not be evident for decades. A deep anchorage in the Truth is essential.

Let us all recall with Jesus that "we have been born and for this we have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth"(John 18:37).

Here lies the source of our strength and never-ending hope.