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IMPACT OF THE EASTERN EUROPEAN CHURCHES UPON THEIR OWN SOCIETIES

by Paul Mojzes

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Had Marxist forecasts which were made at the time of the Communist revolutions or take-overs in regard to the impact of the churches or religion been on target, one could have stated that the impact of the churches on society in the 1980s would be nil or so negligible that a paper would not need to be written. But they were wrong about the "withering away of religion", to borrow a Marxian phrase. And so likewise wrong were those opponents of Marxism who gloomily made the same predictions when they witnessed the massive Marxist onslaught upon the churches which caused much suffering and destruction. The reality of the Eastern European religious situation is very different from what most people could have expected and it is much more nuanced and variable than most casual observers and less careful students of the scene are capable of discerning.

Due to different historical circumstances, traditions, church politics and politics, Communist party strengths or weaknesses in application of Marxist precepts to religion and society, there is today an almost bewildering variety of ways in which the impact of the church
is being felt in the Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia
Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania.

The Communist revolution or take-over brought the greatest
challenge to organized religion since Christianity became legally
recognized under Constantine the Great early in the fourth century.
There were other great upheavals since that time, starting with the
brief restoration of "paganism" under Julian, a cousin of Constantine
the Great, emperor from 361-363. Among them one should mention the
great and often violent rivalry between Christians and Jews, between
Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics, and later in the 16th century
between Catholics and Protestants, and the Mongol and Turkish Muslim
dominations which caused incalculable upheavals in the Christian
communities of Russia and the Balkans. But prior to the time of the
Bolshevik revolution in 1917 and the immediate post World War II period
when the rest of Eastern Europe became socialist, the religious
institutions, particularly the large established churches, had a
privilege status in the community and frequently exercised a dominant
role in society. Among Christians this pattern is called the
Constantinian model of church-state relations in which the privileged
church supports the social arrangement which guarantees it a favored
treatment.

It is easy to oversimplify the Constantinian model and present a
situation where a particular church exerts such an influence that it
factually runs the society and seeks for itself a monopoly situation at
the expense of other potentially rival religions. It is already
discernible in this oversimplified pattern that not all churches and
religious institutions found themselves in the favored, Constantinian
pattern. Jews, for instance, never got into such a favored situation and
were lucky to find occasionally various degrees of tolerance. The same
was true of the Protestant "sectarians", i.e. the so called "Free
Churches" (e.g. Baptists, Methodists, Mennonites, Pentecostals,
Adventists) who sometimes experienced severe repression at the hands of
the established state churches. The pattern itself is not fully reliable
because it is obvious that during certain historical periods the state
exercised a paramount influence over the church, as for instance at the
time of Peter the Great and his successors in Russia, who sought to reduce the Russian Orthodox Church to a convenient department of state and strictly controlled church activities. Without succumbing to the temptation to provide a nuanced and detailed picture, it shall suffice to say that many religious institutions enjoyed a status that granted them a great deal of power, influence, and prestige in society. In fact, the relationship between church and society tended to be so close that in many places there was a nearly total identification of ethnicity with religious affiliation. Thus Bulgarians, Romanians, Serbians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Russians, and at times Ukrainians and White Russians were automatically by birth Orthodox. Croatians, Slovenes, Poles, and for all practical purposes the majority of the Hungarians, Czechs, and Slovaks were Roman Catholic, while East Germans were Protestants. Only in Hungary and among the Czechs and Slovaks were there also Protestants and some Orthodox who were not alienated from their ethnicity by belonging to a different religious tradition. Among Albanians there were Orthodox, Catholic and Muslims. It is hard for a person not from the region to appreciate this extremely close identification of church with the nation; an identification which to this day plays a very significant role and accounts for a significant part of the impact that many churches still continue to have. As one of the central persistent factors of religious influence in Eastern Europe it must not be neglected in any analysis.

When the Communists came into power they generally attempted to implement a Leninist formula, only partially inspired by Marx, of legally separating the state and the schools from religion (the American model of separation of church and state had little influence in Eastern Europe prior to the Communist rule), allowing limited legal existence to nearly all religious communities. From the perspective of the Communist Party, religion was a reactionary reflection of former class societies which stands in the way of progress and must be combated by all available means, subject only to avoiding the boomerang effect which causes further fanaticization of religious persons. Since the Communist party exercises in Marxist parlance, "the leading role" in the state, these two theoretically different approaches coalesced in reality into a
single practice of massive state intervention in religious matters seeking to restrict and ultimately abolish institutional religion. The implementation of the overarching policies oscillated depending on the resiliency of the religious communities and the needs of the state. For instance, Stalin needed the support of the Russian Orthodox Church during the Nazi offensive, so he relaxed some pressures and gave permission for the partial rebuilding of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Or, the churches aid might be sought in implementation of certain agricultural policies to induce the population to work harder. The Communist Party tacitly concedes that the Church has influence among certain groups of the population where the party's influence is small. This is done in exchange for certain privileges to the Church.

**New Models for the Churches**

It is understood by both the Party and the churches that the ultimate aim of the Communist Party is a society in which no organized religion will exist or exert any influence. Here no Eastern European Communist Party has seen fit to adopt the modifications introduced by the Italian Communist Party giving fuller recognition to the progressive impact of religious groups. This radically new position of the church has been described by Bohdan Cywinski who coined the phrase "the Julian Church"\(^2\) as he attempts to describe the role of the church in the fully etatized, secularized society. Cywinski wrote,

> The Julian is exactly the opposite to the Constantinian situation. Instead of cooperating, the secular and ecclesiastic authorities are in conflict. The Church is put in a position in which she has no option but to be in opposition. She is devoid of political power but is recognized by society as its principal moral authority. This provides her with a new source of strength.

> The Julian is not a church which on its own volition gave up the participation in power. To the contrary, she is rancorous and bitter that she was excluded from participation in it.

This Julian role is, as described by Cywinski, most distinctly
applicable to the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, which among the Eastern European churches has the greatest degree of popular support in its own country. It applies to many other countries to a lesser degree.

Other Eastern European thinkers, who likewise dwelled on the obvious, i.e. the disappearance of the Constantinian model, have promoted other models for the churches. The theologians of the Church of the Czech Brethren, taking their lead from Joseph Hromádka, their leading theologian, said the church should welcome the new socialist order and become a "pilgrim church" representing the role of the crucified Christ, eschewing political power but seeking to transform and help those who are radical transformers of exploitive and unjust class societies.

The Hungarian Protestants coined the phrase "the servant church" and "theology of service" which is consonant with the model of the Church of the Czech Brethren, stressing service to society. Many of their theologians see the demolition of the Constantinian model a distinct blessing for the church, an opportunity to get back to the real task of the church, namely not to rule but to serve. The early apostolic church is deemed worth emulating.

The Eastern Orthodox Churches, deeply steeped in lilturgical (sacramental) tradition, have embraced neither of these models. Their main concern is to continue to offer the salvific mysteries to their people with the conviction that God shall not allow the church to perish. Empires come and empires go, some friendly, some antagonistic, but the Church of Christ will last eternally. Their policy of acquiescence bothers many a Western activist but it stems from long experience that survival demands flexibility, silence in the political arena, and a dogged determination to provide worship opportunities and preserve the canonical structures of the Church.

Still another model is being embraced by many "sectarians", those belonging to the small religious communities. Dominated by an apocalyptic theology, their perception is that this world is quickly approaching its end and the power of evil is making its last convulsive efforts to dominate this world. Soon, however, it will be crushed forever by God's glorious victory in which all the faithful will be
saved eternally, while those opposing God's reign will be damned. Their emphasis is on personal salvation with little or no interest in making public impact. Yet they often gain adherents, mostly from among the marginal segments of society, as is evident among Evangelical Baptists in the Soviet Union and Romania, because their theology presents a sharp ideological alternative to the official Marxist teaching which leaves many people untouched.

The Attitudes of Churches Toward Socialism

The question of the model of the church activity is of intrinsic interest but its importance is heightened by the fact that the Communist Parties made an effort to eliminate all other political, social, intellectual, economic, and even sports organizations which had any independence from the Communist Party. The churches remained de facto the only major institution which espoused an ideology other than Marxism. It was soon perceived by the Communists that the churches might be used as an instrument of resistance against its mode of organizing society. The same insight occured to those who wanted to show their disapproval of the established order; they would sometimes support the churches not for religious reasons but because they wanted to express an unfavorable attitude toward the government. When one adds to this the undeniable fact that there were very few Communist sympathizers among the active church-leaders it becomes evident that the churches were from the outset counted among those who would oppose Communist policies. This posture can be labeled "religion against socialism" or even anti-socialist religion.

That "religion against socialism" is still the prevalent form of church attitude needs no documentation. The first years of Communist takeover were characterized by a sometimes bitter and violent confrontation. The state resorted to repressive measures causing martyrdom and great devastation institutionally and individually.

The Marxists judged the impact of religion upon social policies as altogether negative. For them the only question was what was the most effective way of confronting the churches. Tactical approaches differed. In some instances the major church in a country was attacked so mercilessly that the smaller churches got the message that resistance
was fruitless and they were cowed into silence. This was the case with the Catholic Church in Hungary and Czechoslovakia where the most bitter resistance against the new socialist society came from Roman Catholics. In other instances the policy was to make an example of a smaller church to show how ruthless the attack can be, thus providing a lesson to the larger church to avoid confrontation. That was the case of Bulgaria where the state targeted its attack on the four small Protestant churches and succeeded in intimidating the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

The second possible posture is "religion indifferent to socialism." According to this approach the life of the churches goes on without either showing active resistance or embracing the new social order. This is usually a form of accommodation which considers all social orders as temporary in nature, while the church has an abiding sense of mission and will survive this social order as it has, for instance the Roman or Byzantine Empire, the Turkish rule, and so forth. Many Eastern Orthodox Churches have assumed this posture of tacit acquiescence coupled with the hope of divine deliverance. The church avoids any explicitly political posture, neither directly aiding nor resisting socialism. At best some church leaders will declare from time to time that certain socialist policies are not inimical to church teachings or that they may be in accord with a long held church position, e.g. on curbing personal greed or trying to bring peace. The latter issue, i.e. working for peace, is by far the most mutually acceptable social issue on which a politically non-involved church and the state can find a common platform. In most socialist societies the churches have been encouraged by the government to work for peace as it was hoped that by careful influence the church's position could be channelled to be inoffensive or in tune with the government's foreign policy.

The third form of accommodation may be called "religion in socialism," or religion within socialism. This particular phrase was coined by the leaders of the Evangelical (Lutheran) Churches in East Germany as they struggled to find a theologically and socially productive relationship to socialism. They rejected the former two models as they felt that it led to a mentality of being an alien in
one's own land. Indeed, many East Germans were in a spiritual emigration, looking forward to German reunion which would free them from the Soviet-type socialist imposition. Others in East Germany aggressively urged a much more intimate endorsement of socialism, a "religion for socialism," which is to be described below. With the phrase "the church within socialism" it was hoped to communicate the acceptance of the fact that the social system for the foreseeable future was a socialist one and that wishful thinking would not change it. Thus the church accepts this as its mission, namely to work in this particular socialist society without nurturing illusions about escape to the West or some magic disappearance of socialism. Within this social system the church has a task of humanizing it and interacting with it in whatever manner possible. With this approach it is possible for the Church in East Germany to continue a number of their social and charitable institutions (e.g. hospitals, old people's homes, youth fellowships) and occasionally the churches do speak out against certain social policies (e.g. universal military conscription or pre-military education in the schools).

"Religion for socialism" is a minority approach among churches in Eastern Europe but it has its adherents. Their motivation and actions vary considerably. Some are simply opportunists or careerists. But others are theologically or socially sensitive people who were shocked by the church's reactionary policies of the past when the church may have been an accomplice of pro-Nazi policies, or sided with the privileged classes, giving no heed to the poor and downtrodden. In their opinion the past behavior of the churches requires total repentance on part of the churches. Socialism is seen either as an instrument of punishment by God, or more frequently as God working outside the realm of the churches, even by means of a hostile atheistic social system, to bring about greater social justice and harmony than the previous society. Many protagonists of this view of "religion for socialism" perceive the world to be shaped through the struggle of two social systems--capitalism, which they see on its way out, and socialism, which they believe to be the wave of the future. There is no third way, they say. Thus one must decide for socialism (East Germans call it
"partisanship") because socialism means progress, peace, justice, equality, dignity, etc. According to this view, sitting on the fence is as bad as being for capitalism. The first to vigorously espouse such views in East Europe was the famous and controversial Czech theologian, Joseph Hromádka, who swayed many young theologians in his church (The Czech Brethren) and outside to follow him on this path of bold acceptance of socialism with the attempt to gain credence in socialist society, so that eventually the church could serve it more effectively.

The Hungarian Reformed bishop Albert Bereczky pioneered a similar approach in Hungary. He led the Reformed and Lutheran Churches, after some bitter inner-church battles, into a posture of officially giving their support, usually without critical perspective, to the present social system. That attitude earned those church leaders who were deemed reliable by the government certain privileges. These included representation in the parliament, analogous to the one they had in pre-socialist times, or clergy salaries being paid by the state. But the price has been that this church leadership self-censored expressions of dissent. The only time when either internal opposition to this course or popular resentment against such policies surfaced was during the 1956 Hungarian Revolt. At the time nearly all the vocal proponents of "religion for socialism" were quickly demoted from their positions, only to be reinstated shortly after the crushing of the revolt.

There is also the group of younger clergy, born since the establishment of socialism, for whom socialism is the only social system they have experienced. For a number of them, there is no feeling of guilt or sentimental wishing for the return of the past. While they accept as normal the life of the church under socialism they also tend to be critical, not so much of the system per se, but of the shortcomings in the implementation of socialist ideals. They are more likely to feel more secure in questioning day to day policies. Usually they lack the zeal or idealistic enthusiasm of their older colleagues and yet they do not even contemplate what it would be like if socialism were not the system in their country. Many of them think that socialism has made some advances which should not be given up. If they oppose on a particular issue it usually does not mean that they oppose socialism;
rather they tend to oppose a specific perversion or malpractice of socialism. One can see such an attitude among the many youthful Christians who were involved in the upheavals in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.

It may come as a surprise to many that there is one more model, on this scale, which we can loosely tag as "socialist religion." That should be a contradiction in terms, but it is not. Perceptive analysts have noted long ago that Marxism may turn into a "pseudo-religion" for some of its adherents. Now even many Marxists recognize that one may have a "religious" attitude toward socialism. One Marxist wrote of "black clericalism" being supplanted by "red clericalism" or "atheist clericalism." While in most instances such "socialist religion" is evaluated negatively by both Marxists and non-Marxist thinkers, it is quite evident that socialism can elicit a kind of response on part of some of its followers which usually characterizes religious movements, though, in the opinion of many, it is idolatrous religion. Therefore, one must use this category very carefully and in a nuanced way. It should be granted, however, that there is such a phenomenon as "socialist religion" and note, as most analysts do, that it is most developed among the socialist bureaucracy (apartachiks). If this is correct, then religion indeed continues to have a most profound social impact under socialism (e.g. in the form of Stalinism, Maoism, or any other "cult of personality").

Not all churches can easily be categorized into this typology. The Roman Catholic Church in Poland, which undoubtedly has the greatest social impact of all East European Churches, may be perceived by different people to fit different categories. Many have seen the Roman Catholic Church as the staunchest social opponent of the branch of the pro-Soviet socialism which is dominant in Poland. Its moral authority is derived from its unflinching protection of certain rights and ideals. Others attribute success to the Polish Roman Catholic Church to its wisdom of not playing an overtly political role but its standing at a perceptive distance from the socialist system itself. At the same time, the church passionately identifies with Polish national interests. Sometimes this produces policies in support of the governing party and
sometimes advocacy of opposition causes. Finally there are those who may perceive the Polish Roman Catholic Church as having come to terms with life within socialism and pursuing a course of critical acceptance, embracing certain features of the new social reality but lashing out at others.

Currently the first three models are the most widely utilized, though it would not be wise to attempt to quantify this generalization beyond an educated estimate that perhaps the largest number of religious people vaguely opted for the second model of "religion indifferent to socialism," for it is the one least demanding and, under conditions of bureaucratic totalitarianism, the one most favored by the structure of the system. In the estimation of this author the most creative option is "religion within socialism" which is based on the presupposition that religion can operate under a variety of social systems and that it can not merely adapt itself to it but engage critically in the process of social transformation, depending on concrete political circumstances. This view holds that no given social system is inherently "Christian" but that the more basic issue is how any social system is made to serve basic human needs, including spiritual ones. The option "religion for socialism" likewise has produced some thoughtful (as well as some naive or sinister) theological reflections which value those features of socialism most in accord with the great humane religious strivings and promotes their implementation instead of systems of injustice.

If one were to ask which of these models is most effectively influencing social policies, no clear answer can be given. It is not so much the model itself which determines the influence but a whole network of historical, national, political (foreign and domestic), economic, and other reasons. A church's intransigent opposition to socialism may either relegate it into obscurity or catapult it into the focus of opposition, depending on factors such as the power of the party, the success or failure of economic policies, international relations, national identification, etc. Should for instance the Yugoslav federation get into political jeopardy and Croatian separatism become a more potent movement, the Roman Catholic Church may be perceived as protector of the Croatian national values and will increase its
influence. On the other hand should the federation succeed and the Catholic Church be unable to adjust itself to this reality it may be relegated to the role of a minor nuisance on such issues as abortion laws. Much depends on a church's perceptive judgment not only of the political moods of the country but also the sense of what is more ultimately right or wrong for the people it represents and for those it does not represent but cares for.

I also venture to express the judgment that the only option doomed not to have long range social effects is a non-critical support attitude. While in the short run this policy may yield some practical results, in, for instance, being able to intervene on behalf of individuals imprisoned or persecuted or in softening the impact of this or that decree, in the long run a position which is merely conveying the views of the policy-makers is neither respected by the promoters (because one did not completely join them) nor by the critics or dissenters or even the passive part of the population, because they perceive the group as being compromised, as being "bought off" or being duped. In any case a Christian who can say "yes" to a society can meaningfully do so only if she or he can also say "no". Mere "yes" saying does not make distinctions between God and Caesar. Potentially and really that is the core of the issue of the social impact of Christians in a society which tends to require absolute allegiance to Caesar. The very fact that Christians (and other religionists) do not share this allegiance makes religion both potentially and really an autonomous source of social influence.

Areas of Greatest Impact

Now one may ask in what fields, or in what areas does religion tend to show the greatest and most constant impact on public policy?

In Eastern Europe, in addition to the traditional impact on ethnic or national policies, one may say that a concern for the implementation of ethical or religio-ethical values has the greatest impact and is appreciated even by those rarely willing to praise religion.

When one considers the question of the relative power of Marxist ideology, or religion, or nationalism, it is important to observe that of the three nationalism is the most potent force. While some people
are ready to live and die for the Communist ideology, this cannot be said of the majority. Many people undoubtedly should be willing to make the supreme sacrifice of life or death in the name of their religion, but they are not in the majority either. Nationalism (and in the multinational states, ethnicity of the component national units) is probably the most potent motivator for the largest number of people. The universal claims of religion and the internationalist claims of Communist ideology both have had to make allowances for the influence of nationalism. The Communists have realized that national Communism is a potent factor among socialist states and parties. The churches have long been willing to maintain a very close relationship with the nationality of their territory. Both church and state must come to cope with the impact of nationalism. Both have often sought to demonstrate their own loyalty to it and, likewise, attempted to cast doubts in regard to the loyalty to the national idea on the part of their adversary. The government finds itself often at odds with a church's impact and attempts to counteract it, being, however, quite aware of the potent effect that the churches can have in volatile nationalistic conflict situation. The policies of a church can either accelerate or diminish the national enmity. The government is usually quite aware of the power of the church in this area and takes it into account in its legislative and administrative policies.

Another area of the impact of religion is in the realm of social and individual ethical matters. While this is an area in which churches have exerted customary influence over the centuries, in socialist societies of Eastern Europe the ethical impact of the churches has been heightened. Two factors coalesced to bring this about. One is that rapid industrialization and urbanization brought about a nearly total breakdown of the traditional interpersonal and social links which reinforced the norms and mores of the prior era. This left many people adrift. On the other hand, Marxism has not paid a great deal of attention to the development of ethical norms and inculcating them into the population despite frequent appeals to socialist morality. In fact the predominant practical approach to ethics among Communists was a pragmatic approach that tended to relativize all norms subject only to
the ultimate goal of their victory.

With large segments of the population set adrift and without constraints, many institutions suffered, including the family, economic enterprises, and the government itself. Low working morale, sabotage, laziness, theft, bribes, nepotism, lack of personal integrity and civil courage were among the results, which harmed productivity and the living standard. Marxist leaders noticed that religiously motivated people often resisted such temptations more effectively than others. They welcomed the church's appeals to its members to stick to the ethical norms, since the government would profit from it. Thus, for instance, the government welcomed the endorsement of the Hungarian Protestant Churches of its agricultural policies of collectivization. Peasants were urged to cooperate for the national welfare. The Roman Catholic Bishops and clergy frequently appealed to a higher work ethic among Polish workers, being, however, careful to balance it with criticism of bureaucratic misdoings. This is one of the reasons why that Church became so successful as a mediator between the government and the Solidarity labor union. In East Germany the Protestant Churches appealed to young people and others to go to the farms and help farmers with the harvest when the government requested such voluntary labor. But the government rejected the use of Christian labor brigades who set out to work in the fields and celebrated a shared communal meal interpreted by participants as Holy Communion.

Sometimes the churches' ethical teachings reflect only the traditional way of doing things and can be seen as an obstacle by the state in making needed social changes. Thus for instance, certain cultural mores and superstitious practices which were associated with religion continue to be advocated by certain church members or leaders. These may be "faith healing" in preference to medical attention, avoidance of certain foods or rejection of public education. In an atheistic state where the propaganda attempts to portray the conflict as a conflict between science and religion, it may be to the advantage of the government to caricature all religion as associated with traditional superstitious folkways and values.

Sometimes the religio-ethical values of a church are in opposition
to the intended policies of the government. This has been the case with the Roman Catholic Church concerning divorce laws, abortion, and birth control laws, not unlike conflicts in the West. The government maintains that this is a mixing of the church into political issues contrary to the principle of separation of church and state; the churches maintain that it is the protection of human rights. One needs to mention parenthetically that Marxist convictions are often totally pragmatic. For instance, in Hungary a liberal abortion law was passed only to be quickly rescinded when the birth rate was deemed insufficient.

While some of the religious impact in the sphere of ethics occurs in conflict with Marxist notions, this is not always the case. There is room for dialogue and mutual influence or complementarity. Marxism has a more developed theory of work and its creative place in human development. On the other hand religion has tended to promote a responsible attitude toward work. In Poland, for instance, Christians and Marxists engaged in dialogue on the nature and dignity of work. Dialogue on ethical issues is only in its inception, but if it were to be pursued it could prove beneficial to both parties.

Another area for cooperation is the struggle for peace and disarmament. Without judging the genuineness of the Communist desire for peace, the proclaimed policy of the Communist governments is peace with justice (on their terms, of course). The countries of Eastern Europe have been frequently involved in devastating wars culminating in World War II. The population genuinely desires peace. Therefore it is not hard for the Churches to recall that it is their task to strive for peace and justice. It is irrelevant at this point whether the Communist governments may be using their churches for certain propaganda purposes. The point is that at least externally the goals seem to be parallel. While the churches rarely had the freedom to take an explicitly critical attitude toward their own government's policies, at least in some instances the church appeals are directed toward all governments to end the arms race and in particular to ban nuclear weapons. Since conscription is universal in Eastern European countries the Churches have shown no endorsement of pacifism, as they hasten to point out, and have not been voicing a defense of conscientious objection. The only
exception to that is in East Germany, where some young Christians have voiced their objections to performing military duties. Some local churches and some church leaders have cautiously defended their young members. The fact that this disturbs the government probably is a greater testimony to the abnormal fear of the Communist government of any dissent than to the actual power of the church to alter state policies.

If being a humane person or a humane society is of value to the churches then the most encompassing influence that the churches could have would be to bring a "human face" to socialism, as the Czechoslovaks coined the phrase in 1968. Whether that is actually possible remains yet to be seen; previous failures do not preclude that possibility for all eternity. An analysis still needs to be made whether contemporary forms of socialism are capable of becoming the kind of liberating societies which Marx dreamed about, but certainly some improvements are possible. In few instances churches have consciously worked in that direction.

In societies in which the government overstresses unity and strives to have complete consensus on all issues, attempting to deny pluralism, the churches have prevented full assimilation and uniformity. In the past it was easier for religions to identify themselves with social forms; but since Communism fosters an atheist society such syncretism is very hard. This guarantees at least some degree of diversity and differences of approach in a given country and is a very distinct factor in the minds of the policy-makers, who experience this as a hurdle for their plans of uniformity.

The influence of a new kind of spiritualism has been noted among the intellectuals and the young in some places in Eastern Europe, notably in the Soviet Union as described by Aleksander Solzhenitsyn and Mihajlo Mihajlov. Its impact is not yet measurable in the estimate of this author. It is a more latent than active impact. Another latent impact is that of the popular religious leaders, such as starpsi (ascetic, monastic old men living in seclusion but revered for their holiness by the masses) and certain bishops, who might, in case of a crisis, provide suitable leadership for dissenters. The population often accords great respect to clergy, in particular to higher clergy. This is
especially true in rural areas. In Romania, for instance, the bishops of the Orthodox Church may have an entire village, including the Communist officials, go out spontaneously to greet them upon arrival; such a welcome may not be accorded to government officials even with considerable prior preparation. The Slavic term "vladika", meaning ruler, is still conventionally applied to many Orthodox bishops. A similar respect is enjoyed by Roman Catholic hierarchs. In Hungary some of the higher clergy are still members of Parliament. While this does not mean that they have outright political power, it does serve as a sign of recognition in their society. They are accorded V.I.P. status at receptions and airports, and in the media.

In two of the Eastern European countries the religious press plays a certain independent and influential role. In Poland this press was particularly vigorous and has never been totally curtailed. They publish journals, magazines and even weekly newspapers, (e.g. Wież and Tygodnik Powszechny). During liberal periods such a press becomes particularly active in providing alternate interpretations. In Yugoslavia the religious press was nearly eliminated after the Communist take-over, but was revived in the 1960s. Currently it is so independent that it criticizes the government, sometimes in veiled and sometimes in open ways. In response certain publications are occasionally banned. The religious press was also vigorous in Czechoslovakia during the "Prague Spring" but is now so tightly controlled that it is innocuous. The Hungarian, Romanian, and East German religious publications seem to have no political influence. The other countries have either a very limited religious press or none at all.

Two countries have political parties or organizations with political representation in the parliament. In East Germany the Christian Democratic Union is guaranteed a fixed number of seats in the legislature. Right after the war it conceived of itself as potentially independent but soon thereafter defined itself as a vehicle of implementation of the "scientific" views of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (Marxist). Currently it is not providing any alternate options. However, leading personalities of this party often
occupy important offices e.g. supreme court justice, president of the parliament, etc. In Poland several Roman Catholic lay organizations, namely "Znak", "Pax" and the "Christian Social Association" have a designated number of their leaders (not more than 5 each) in the Seym. In some instances these deputies have abstained from voting for government policies. A few even voted against the government, which caused much agitation and sometimes replacement of the "errant" deputies. No such political groupings exist in other Eastern European countries.

Schools are another potential influence in society. For that reason a sharp separation of schools from the church was advocated by the Communists and carried out in Eastern Europe. Nearly all church schools became public. The exception, again, is Poland where the Catholic University in Lublin is the only such private institution in Eastern Europe. There are two other academies which likewise train students not intending to be ordained as clergy. In other countries the schools are mostly theological seminaries or preparatory religious schools, though in Hungary a few high schools were left in church hands.

It is common knowledge that there were no independent labor unions in Eastern Europe until the creation of "Solidarity" in Poland in 1980. The impact of the Roman Catholic Church on this independent union movement is fairly well known. Here the labor union leaders included among their demands, the demand for more religious liberty and for the use of mass media for communicating religious ceremonies and sermons. Prayers and priestly counsel, including consultation with the highest clergy, including the bishop primate of Poland, was frequent. "Solidarity" was the largest mass movement in Poland's history and the Roman Catholic Church played a very central role in that movement. One can regard this as the high watermark of political and social influence of a church in Eastern Europe under a Communist regime.

Source of the Churches' Influence

The churches are still the single largest mass organization in each Eastern European country and this undoubtedly contributed to
their impact, although the Communist Party has worked out a fairly
effective domination of society as a minority movement.

Size is enhanced by the perception that the religious
institutions are among the very few institutions permitted to function
in a communist society. Thus, as noted above, churches sometimes draw
the support of dissenters and other dissatisfied people. When at an
Easter Midnight liturgy in Tbilisi, Georgia, (USSR), the church is
crowded with young males between 15 and 30, that is probably less an
expression of religious fervor and more a Georgian nationalistic
demonstration against central government policies of Russification. If
at the grave-site of Alojzije Cardinal Stepinac in Zagreb thousands of
people place flowers or candles, they are not merely coming to pay
respect to a dead prelate but are making a statement about Croatian
nationalism and defying the government which attempted to crush
Stepinac. The crosses made of flowers in Warsaw in August of 1982 are
obviously more a symbol of resistance to the military rule than they
are purely religious symbols. The significant fact is that these
resistances are taking on distinct religious symbolism.

Another reason for the impact of religion is the power of
tradition in a world that shows little appreciation for traditions.
Religion appears to be one of the few stable elements in a rapidly
changing world. Many are yearning for stability and security and are
hoping to find it in institutions which have tended to show stability
and sought to conserve value.

The churches have also tended to help individuals in time of need
and have placed some emphasis on personal salvation. This is
particularly true of Protestants. The bureaucratic totalitarianism
which emerged in Eastern Europe as a result of the interaction of
Marxist ideology and modern industrialization, urbanization, and
secularization seems to show very little interest in the individual
and the individual's problems. Where shall a person go when haunted by
fear, doubt, anxiety, loneliness, rejection, loss of dignity and
respect? Or where shall a person celebrate the festive elements of
life, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death? To whom shall one
unload a troubled conscience? Secular society has not provided enough
avenues for personal concerns and the churches have continued to fulfill an important function.

Many people feel the need for change or transformation, as they are not happy with themselves as they are. Perhaps they are adrift or unfulfilled. Unlike the West, society does not provide for such needs because psychology and analysis are not generally available. Many people have experienced the great transformational power of God in some aspect of church life to such a degree that they consider it the central experience or experiences of their lives. The result is that they place supreme or absolute allegiance in what is for them the ultimate source of all good. To them other goals, such as class struggle, victory of the proletariat, leadership of the Communist Party, the great future society, or anything else that may be held up of supreme value, always come under God's ultimate rule. Religious people have most effectively refused to raise the lesser values of life to the level of ultimacy. Their faith in God helps them to judge these lesser claims and keep their demands in a different perspective. This appears to be the very core of religion's influence. From the government's perspective this is a grave threat because it seems to lessen loyalty on the part of a considerable number of their citizens. Churches have consequently been accused of unpatriotic, traitorous behavior. This was the explicit charge in a number of show trials in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Roman Catholic and other churches with a strong foreign connection have been additionally accused of betraying the state to the Vatican, or the U.S.A. or some other foreign power.

The churches have normally affirmed their loyalty to the state and thereby recognized the government as legitimate. Nevertheless, they have maintained that God's law has primacy over state law when the two are in conflict. Since much of Eastern European legislation discriminates against religion, prohibiting or restricting many traditional religious activities, many religious people do indeed perceive a conflict between their duty to God and their duty to the state. Under great duress in times of intense crisis, such as during 1956 in Hungary, 1968 in Czechoslovakia, and 1980s in Poland, for some
religious people the tension becomes unbearable and they turn against the government, actively or passively. Thus religion may directly turn against the state, which it is unlikely to do in more stable times.

**Implications for U.S. Policy**

From the above it is obvious that it is dangerous to generalize about the influence of the churches upon social policies of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. One should neither overemphasize nor under-rate their influence. The role of the Catholic Church in Poland is not an accurate measure of the secular role of other churches. But, on the other hand, neither is the Russian Orthodox experience the best criterion. The impact varies from country to country and from church to church. For policy decisions one must be knowledgable about the concrete situation.

Nor is one to give unqualified support for the aims of every church with the justification that anything that tends to break the monopoly of the Communist Party is to the advantage of the U.S. or the West. There are some religious groups whose aims may be even less in accord with one's own perceived interest then that of the Communist Party. If some of these groups were to have their intentions implemented grave instability would result not only in that region, but elsewhere as well. On the other hand the correct path is to defend the religious liberties as a fundamental human right for every group, even those with whose aims one may not be able to agree. In that respect one should voice support for their rights, but not necessarily for their aims.

One should not lose sight of the links between nationalism and religion. As was pointed out above, nationalism is sometimes a more powerful motivator in Eastern Europe than either religion or ideology. But when ideology, for political reasons, suppresses nationalism, a church may appear to be the only channel through which nationalism can express itself. Some of the churches have either instinctively or deliberately recognized this and made use of it for their own benefit. This is, after all, not a new trend, but a centuries old tradition, where a church was the defender of national interests in time of crisis. A nuanced and cautious approach should be made lest one encourage the rise of nationalism in order to weaken Communist
ideology. The Communists themselves tended to underestimate the power of nationalism only to discover that national communist ideologies brought about Communist polycentrism, leading to several breakaways and several unsuccessful attempts at breakaway from Soviet domination. Soviet domination and attempts at Russification have embittered not only the other Eastern European socialist nations but also the non-Russian nationalities in the Soviet Union. The churches have sometimes benefited from these nationalistic strivings. But nationalism is a very dangerous ally; it can result in murderous and destructive tendencies which can be encouraged only at everyone's peril. If human life is important then U.S. policy will not be one of indiscriminately encouraging local nationalism.

The U.S. should not use the churches of Eastern Europe for narrow political aims. The churches are attempting to work out their identity and mission under extremely hard circumstances. One way in which they were hampered by their own government was by being accused of being in an alliance with "American imperialism." There is, indeed, a broad sympathy among church people in Eastern Europe, as among much of the general population, for the West and for the U.S. in particular. This is the type of goodwill rarely found even among U.S. allies, and it must not lightly be gambled away by crude exploitation. The worst possible result would be that the government accusations would be justified and the churches would suffer even greater curtailment of their rights than they do presently.

The goodwill of church people is of immeasurably greater worth to the U.S. than any short-range political advantage that could be gained from manipulating a church. The best policy would appear to be the same as the one used domestically, namely the separation of church and state; as in the U.S.A. the U.S. government can be friendly to the churches but keep a strict line of demarcation. The U.S. can show support of the churches, especially those particularly badly treated, by intervening in their behalf (e.g. the support of Soviet Jews or Pentecostals, for whom even highest state officials of the U.S. government intervened with the Communist government officials). But if this is not done judiciously one may achieve the opposite effect, namely getting them into greater trouble and persecution than
heretofore, when they are explicitly perceived as domestic enemies.

Christians in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe do have an alternate world view from the Communists. But one should not conclude that this means that all Christians are against their social or governmental system. Some Christians are very enthusiastic in their support of their government and of the socialist system. Others are merely nationalistic; in a time of crisis many would defend their country out of patriotism though they have little love for its social system. And undoubtedly there are also those who feel totally trapped in their present situation and would do almost anything to get away, including emigration or siding with rebel forces or an outside force in case of war. Some of these people may be explicitly pro-U.S.A., others are not necessarily so. Their right to emigrate should be supported as a principle. Should some attempt to use criminal means, e.g. hijack a plane, they should not be dealt with more leniently by Western countries than similar lawbreakers at home. A safe guideline to follow would be the implementation of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Helsinki Accord.

Finally U.S. churches should be allowed to engage in lively contact with Eastern European churches. The practice of denying U.S. visas to those church leaders in Eastern Europe who are supportive of their government is an abhorrent practice which gains few friends for the government's action either at home or abroad. It only makes it look as if the U.S. government is no better in that respect than the Communist governments. One is not to suppose that U.S. church leaders are unable to discriminate between those who are obediently toeing their government's line and those who represent more genuinely their church mainstream. In order to keep contacts one must meet both those who are pro-government and those who are moderate; that may lead to later contacts with the dissenters as well. When detente prevails and when contacts are not imperilled, there is more room for exercising religious and other freedom. When pressure is applied on the Soviet Union and other Eastern European governments either in general or explicitly in support of the churches, a boomerang effect sets in and the churches find themselves more restricted. It is not surprising that the church members and leaders of Eastern Europe almost
unanimously favor detente; they definitely profit from it. On the other hand it is also obvious that at least some of them appreciate a firm U.S. position because they fear that if the U.S.S.R. has its own way without resistance the Communist slogan about the withering away of religion may ultimately come in time. Thus a U.S. policy which supports religious liberties at home and abroad is one of the brightest rays of hope for those who are anxious about the future of the churches in their countries and on a worldwide basis.
FOOTNOTES


