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Editorial: Bridges to Peace

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Difficult times and problems call for extraordinary measures. There seems to be a consensus that the 1980s have thus far presented extraordinary problems in humanity's quest for peace. Many more obstacles to peace have been raised than cleared. Many Christians, East and West, therefore, have redoubled their efforts in peacemaking and have attempted to build bridges between the antagonists in the hope that they may help prevent the tension from erupting into a nuclear holocaust.

In this issue we are dealing with some recent peacemaking efforts. They are linked to an article in the previous issue by Paul Oestreicher, who described the peacemaking activities of the East German churches. They stress peacemaking efforts between American and Soviet Christians, but without trying to be comprehensive in approach.

First, we present an article by Bruce Rigdon, a former chairperson and vice-chairperson of CAREE, and now the chairperson of the U.S.-U.S.S.R. Church Relations Committee of the National Council of Churches of Christ. He describes a visit by 266 American Christians to the Churches of the Soviet Union in June, 1984. Those of us who know the organizers of the tour and conditions in the Soviet Union know that it was carefully planned and well-organized, and that its purpose of encouraging Christians from the two superpowers to recommit themselves to work for peace was indeed a success. Rigdon ably stated the goals, the theological underpinning, and the limitations of this trip.

The press coverage of the tour, however, indicates that the journalists found plenty to criticize in the trip; mostly, apparently, for the group not having done things which they never set out to do in the first place. They also were faulted for having found some good things in the Soviet Union. Finding anything good in the USSR, of course, makes one suspect of being gullible.

The second article, by Alan Geyer, deals with the issue of the press's response. Alan Geyer is a long-time member of the CAREE Advisory Committee. I know of no one who more ably joins knowledge of theology and political science into perceptive scholarly analyses of the current
political, international, and armaments situation. He describes the processes of repeating faulty news analyses without checking out the dependability of the initial analyses. This not only compounds the error and misleads huge numbers of readers but, in this case, also does damage to the National Council of Churches. Add to these slanted news analyses the articles commissioned by the "new right" movements (such as Rael J. Isaac's "Mainline Church Activism" and Joshua Muravchik's "The National Council of Churches and The U.S.S.R."--articles which, by the way, lack any scholarly validity) and a picture of manipulation emerges. Many people in the U.S.A. are misinformed about the U.S.S.R. and about the state of religion in the Soviet Union. If the question arises as to who profits by this deliberate or "innocent" distortion, the answer seems to be that it is those who seek to deepen mutual hostilities. Groups such as "Bridges to Peace," Clergy and Laity for Peace, Fellowship for Reconciliation, the Institute for Peace and Understanding, CAREE, and the N.C.C.'s U.S.-U.S.S.R. Church Relations Committee are not able to provide the balance which is needed to obtain a more truthful picture. With this issue of OPREE we seek to make our contribution to truth, because putting together several half-truths of the press and the neoconservative analysts, we feel, lead to total error.

To round out this issue we publish Dr. Pedro Ramet's "Hypotheses on the Nationalities Factor in Soviet Religious Policy." Professor Ramet's training in social sciences and his voluminous research provides the reader with helpful theoretical propositions dealing with the complex interrelationship between religion and the bewildering number of nationalities with which the Soviet governmental apparatus is trying to cope.

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During the month of October 1984 "Bridges to Peace" (an ecumenical group based in Vermont and New Hampshire) brought a group of about a dozen clergymen from the Soviet Union to the U.S.A. in the hopes of enabling more of us to have first-hand contacts with Soviet Christians. I had the opportunity to interpret and moderate at two such meetings, one in York, PA, the other in West Chester, PA. These sessions disturbed me deeply. Part of my being disturbed was the immense ignorance betrayed
by the larger segment of the audience and the bitter prejudices and antagonism displayed by some fundamentalists and emigrant groups thinly veiled by a supposed concern for dissenters and religious liberties in the Soviet Union. But the greater cause of concern was that the four clergy did not tell the truth about conditions, particularly the religious conditions, in their country.

Why? What makes them say things which are blatantly false? What makes them inept in at least hinting at areas of difficulty, except in very rare, mostly implicit private conversations with a few people? The most obvious reason is that they do not know with whom they are dealing. Their own context taught them caution, caution which can be removed only after years, perhaps decades, of friendship and sharing. These conditions obviously did not exist during their visit. They know how quickly we in the West publish anything they may say out of the ordinary that can get them, their loved ones, and their churches into trouble.

One can say, then, that the Soviet clergy have very different experiences from our own. Their concept of religious freedom (freedom which they themselves never experienced in the measure which their Western counterparts have) is different. They may simply believe that they do have religious freedom. With regularity they tended to say that since the Soviet laws say they have religious freedom that this must mean that they have it! Being the product of their society, they may have simply fallen prey to the same propaganda manipulation to which the citizens of their country have been so massively subjected.

One may add to this interpretation that those clergy who are chosen to travel on such missions are beholden to the state authorities. Such travel is a rare privilege. They are carefully screened and briefed. By saying what the government expects them to say (by means of self-censorship) they are preserving these opportunities. Some of them may simply look at what the advantages of such contacts to the church are, and what the advantages to the government are, and feel that the trade-off is profitable to the church. They also know that the disadvantages to themselves, and more importantly to their churches, if they step out of line, are simply not worth taking such risks.

Thus many of us have groped, mostly intuitively, to figure out the
behavior of these brothers as well as many others whom we meet at
various meetings who often behave in ways analogous to the visiting
clergymen. Our intuitive answers are sometimes closer and sometimes
farther away from a helpful interpretation, usually depending upon the
degree of knowledge of the situation in Eastern Europe. But something
more dependable is needed. We need some theoretical framework, some
careful analysis of behavior patterns of the leading clergy from the
Soviet Union. Such theoretical works are now starting to appear. Some of
them are coming from Eastern Europe itself, some even written by
Marxists. One such was the book by the Pole Czeslaw Miloś, The Captive
Mind, which appeared in the West about thirty years ago. In a recent
study by the Yugoslav philologist from Belgrade University, Nikola
Milošević, "Socijalna psihologija staljinizma" [The Social Psychology
of Stalinism], as yet untranslated into English, Milošević applied
Miloš's analogy of the behavior of people under Stalinism with the
Persian phenomenon of ketman. Ketman is a behavioral pattern of a person
under great duress who says exactly what is expected of him or her,
sometimes even in an exaggerated way, in order to protect within himself
or herself a belief which is diametrically different from what he or she
publically states. A person taking such a statement at face value would
totally misunderstand the "actor." In order to present Milošević's
thesis we are here reproducing the English summary of his article.

The author rejects the widely accepted thesis that the
persistence of Stalinist regimes is essentially due to the
use of manipulative techniques. Such regimes are primarily
based on terror or the threat of terror, where terror is
defined as institutionalised coercion not subject to
recognized forms of moral and legal restraint.

This method of total domination is naturally unfavourable
to the interiorisation of official ideology, and thus
the social psychology of Stalinism is founded on a
specific kind of "double-think," which is only superficially
similar to the psychological mechanism of introjection: in Stalinist societies people behave as actors, and
their devotion to the official ideology is more pretended
than real. Different forms this "acting" could take are
illustrated by a number of typical examples.

Nevertheless, genuine interiorisation of official
ideology occurs under Stalinism, which shows that manipula-
tion is not totally ineffective in this type of
political regime. The decisive factors here are the degree
of education and the fact, so typical of totalitarian regimes, that there is a monopoly over the means of information and communication.

From my experience in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe I find Milosević's thesis and analysis convincing. I have witnessed it many times as I grew up in Yugoslavia. It seems to me that the statements of the visiting clergy and those similar to them fall into the category of ketman or "double-think." Some of them may deliberately overstate the case of religious freedom, hoping that there might be people in the audience sensitive enough to realize the absurdity of their claim and therefore conclude correctly that the exact opposite of what they claim is the case. Others have "genuinely interiorized" what the regime wants them to believe!

The reason for this behavior is, of course, terror. Terror is the very core of totalitarianism. Many Marxists have found the courage to attack Stalinism as the main culprit, but few have dared to trace it directly to Lenin. That is exactly what Kosta Čavoški of the Institute for Comparative Law in Belgrade has done. In his article, "Revolucionarni makijavelizam" [Revolutionary Machiavellianism], Čavoški makes a parallel between Machiavelli's ideas and their application in Bolshevik thought and practice in the form of revolutionary Machiavellianism. Čavoški points out that Lenin and the Bolsheviks pursued policies with regard only for practical efficacy of their actions, completely disregarding moral considerations. Thus the Bolsheviks used terror in all forms both for the achievement of the interest of the state and for the personal interest of the ruler, which did not necessarily coincide with the interest of the state. The difference between Machiavelli and Lenin is that the former had realistic goals while the latter followed utopian goals stemming from his Marxist heritage. Lenin often ordered the murder of innocents without any judicial process, since he knew that even the most callous court could never order the execution of children.

In my view, such unprecedented terror and total departure from legal and moral restraints are still being practiced in the Soviet Union. The terror, of course, is no longer directed at everyone as it
was during the Bolshevik revolution and during Stalin's times. Now terror is selective; it can crush anyone who dissents or who in any way stands in the path of the ruling elite. Knowledge that this terror can be unleashed at any moment against any given person is a sufficient threat against all but the most brave. Among Soviet believers there are such people of courage. But the vast majority, including the leaders, chose a path of prudent compliance with the requests of those with the power to unleash the terror.

It is my conviction that this analysis provides the most adequate answer as to why our visitors gave such rehearsed answers. They may have been victims of manipulation; they may have traded off benefits; they may not know any better; but, above all, they are afraid. Under the impact of fear they have interiorized convictions which benefit the rulers. Otherwise they could never, from the perspective of their religious ethics which respects fundamental personal rights, condone the amoral policy according to which any and every means is acceptable in pursuit of the ends dictated by the ruling Communist Party elite.

Not all Marxists follow Machiavellian revolutionism of the Bolshevik type. Some Marxists never embraced it. Others, like some of the Yugoslav Marxists, are struggling to extricate themselves from the diabolical hold of this doctrine. But the doctrinaire Marxist-Leninists of Eastern Europe all subscribe to it, following it to a greater or lesser degree in every country of Eastern Europe.

Both Western conservatives and liberals tend to be blind in one eye, failing to notice one part of Soviet reality. Conservatives fail to see the changes, as is apparent from the way the media handled the visit of the N.C.C. delegation. Liberals fail to see the continuities and interpret every improvement in Eastern Europe as the dawn of a new era. The change is that terror is no longer general. That is an improvement. The continuity is that terror, now selective, is nevertheless still terror! Couple this terror with the overwhelming amount of government propaganda (few or no alternative viewpoints available) and one gets a fairly adequate theoretical interpretation for the behavior of many of the visiting clergy, as well as laity contacts in Eastern Europe.

Should we continue to invite them? By all means. But let us
understand them. Above and beyond the theoretical explanation should come our Christian mandate to love them, understand them, and help them in their predicament.

Paul Mojzes

ENDNOTES


2 Ibid., p. 181.


4 Ibid., p. 120.