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TRUTH TELLING IN EASTERN EUROPE:
THE LIBERATION AND THE BURDEN

by Walter Sawatsky

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THE REVOLUTION OF THE WORD

In Christian thought there is a close connection between word, truth, life, and freedom. John's Gospel begins with the claim that "in the beginning was the Word" and then identifies Jesus Christ as the Word, as God. Later in the gospel there is the self-disclosure by Jesus that "I am the way, the truth, and the life." At still another point Jesus declares that "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." This is all quite familiar to the Christian. A Christian may well remember that God's initial self-disclosure in Genesis is as a creator who creates by speaking, "And God said. . . and there was . . . ." Why then, should it be so surprising for many Christians, that the revolution which transformed the so-called Second World, especially in 1989, should be called a revolution of the word? Was that not to be expected? Was not the word more powerful than the sword? Was not the truth stronger than the lie? Perhaps we did not really believe such idealist statements--we were for 'realism'--and so we did not know whether the people of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe could ever discover a powerful word of truth.

There are many descriptions for the revolutions of '89. In Czechoslovakia they were soon calling it the Velvet Revolution, or the Laughing Revolution--it was so gentle. For Poland the word Solidarity may well say it all. One scholar entitled his recent book
Lighting the Night, having in mind the illuminating power of truth finally being spoken and heard. Most of us have already become so accustomed to the politics of glasnost, that we forget the essence of its attractiveness--glasnost meant to speak openly, to have words mean what they say, and that was very new in the context of Soviet and East European "Newspeak" or "Doublespeak".

As was to be expected, most journalists and commentators tried to fall back on the standard explanatory repertoire to account for the "Collapse of Communism," as they put it. The economic factor was primary. A command economy had reached the limits of its growth, could not keep pace with the flexible responses of the Western capitalist market economy to new technology, to the computer revolution. Another factor was the communications revolution that made it much easier for the Western world to inform Eastern Europe about its consumer life style and about the oppressions of their own regimes. Many commentators subscribed to the Great Person theory, as a result of which the explanation always hinged on the Gorbachev phenomenon, and the future depended on his staying in office.

There is no need to denigrate these explanations--they have their relevance. Related to them however, is a body of assumptions about the exercise of power through nuclear deterrence, about beggaring the Soviet Union into submission through the spiralling arms race, about the winning of the Cold War by the West, that do not account for the changes we are witnessing. To tell the story from the perspective of the participants, including even official voices up to the level of a Gorbachev, requires talking in the first place about a moral revolution, precipitated by telling the truth, by a deep longing everywhere to start living in truth.

Let us recall the main events, at least for 1989, before we analyze the moral revolution common to all. Where to start already begs the question of motivation, of explanation. The Soviet Union considers perestroika and glasnost to have been launched in April 1985, but the moments when the transformation became an irreversible popular phenomenon were later. Having permitted multiple candidates for the national election of March 26, 1989, the press immediately published in detail the results which showed many instances where the old Party candidates were not elected, and where persons advocating change, including even four members of the clergy, were elected. When the congress met in Moscow in June, it became a national school for democracy. The entire proceedings were

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shown on national television, with reruns at other times of the day and talk shows analyzing what was happening. When the procurator general was to be reelected, he sat somewhat sheepishly in the front, hearing himself accused of coresponsibility for miscarriage of justice, squeaking by on the actual vote, thanks to the still heavy dominance of the apparat. By June of 1990, the parliamentarians had become more adept and explicit when speaking about systemic faults, but now the Russian and Ukrainian assemblies, or the Moscow and Leningrad city government were the new forums for legislating more radical change.

In early 1989 the Round Table talks between "former prisoners and their former gaolers" had begun.³ Solidarnosc, still deemed officially dead as late as July 1988, was the negotiating partner. The resultant document of April 5 talked about "the beginning of the road to parliamentary democracy," announcing semi-controlled elections for June 1989. Solidarity was eligible to campaign for a third of the seats, and voters could unelect candidates by crossing out their names. "Solidarity" now counted on a democratic election four years hence. To their own astonishment they won, the Party lost, and the Party publicly acknowledged the defeat. Then came more negotiations, but Solidarity's popular support grew,⁴ the economy remaining in severe crisis. On August 19 General Jaruszecki invited Solidarity's candidate for Prime Minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, to form a coalition government. Those former prisoners of scarcely a year earlier now sat in cabinet.

If in Poland it was an election, so remarked Timothy Garton Ash, "in Hungary it was a funeral: the funeral of Imre Nagy, just thirty-one years after his death."⁵ Political changes in Hungary had been proceeding more gradually. János Kádár had been replaced in autumn of 1988, but the new leaders came to realize that the ghost of the past, those repressions after the unsuccessful uprising of 1956, must be confronted. Hence the funeral of Nagy, the prime minister who had been executed on Soviet command. The speeches at the funeral provided the occasion for speaking the truth about the past. It became "not the funeral of Imre Nagy" but his resurrection and "the funeral of János Kádár "⁶ who in fact died three weeks later on the day when the Hungarian Supreme Court announced Nagy's full legal rehabilitation. In May 1989 came the cutting of the barbed wire border between

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⁴Ash remarked "there is nothing, but nothing, to match the legitimacy that comes from the barrel of the ballot-box." Ibid., p. 31.

⁵Ibid., p. 47.

⁶Ibid., p. 53.
Hungary and Austria. That was the catalyst for the revolution to begin in East Germany, ruining the carefully staged fortieth anniversary celebrations of the Honecker government.

East Germans began to escape to the West through the opened Hungarian border. By mid-summer thousands of would-be emigrants were overflowing the West German embassy in Prague as well, and finally a train of emigrants was sent, back through Leipzig, to West Germany. When Gorbachev visited in early October he made clear his leanings when he warned the rigid leadership that history would judge those who came late. The 'peace prayers' and street demonstrations grew exponentially from 30,000 to 70,000 to 300,000 to 500,000. "The whole of East Germany suddenly went into labor, an old world--to recall Marx's image--pregnant with the new. From that time forward the people acted and the Party reacted. . . 'We are the people!' they chanted, and the party leadership opened the Wall."7 Elections were held in March 1990, and a coalition headed by the Christian Democratic Union resulted. The new cabinet included four Protestant clergy. One of them, the new Minister of Defense Rainer Epplemann, had been imprisoned as pacifist only a few years earlier.

Although there was ferment long before, and students had taken action in early 1989,8 it was on November 17, 1989, that the Czech revolution began in earnest. Students had organized a memorial demonstration on Wenceslas Square in Prague to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the murder of Jan Opletal by the Nazis. The police reacted with violence, beating men, women, and children with their truncheons. The students who escaped, appeared at the Synod of the Church of the Evangelical Czech Brethren to report, and the rather diplomatically worded statement to government just approved by the Synod was quickly rewritten to articulate a strong protest against such police actions. The Catholic Church also responded in kind and the messages were spread throughout the churches on Sunday. By November 20, day three of the rapidly moving events, Civic Forum had become the voice of the opposition. Headed by the playwright and co-founder of Charta 77, Václav Havel, the motley assortment of activists met in the basement of the Magic Lantern theatre. Timothy Garton Ash, who was present and had supplied the memorable quip about ten years for change in Poland, ten months in Hungary, ten weeks in the GDR, therefore 10 days in Czechoslovakia, described what he met in that Magic Lantern: Twenty years ago they were journalists, academics, politicians, lawyers, but now they come here from their jobs as stokers, window-cleaners, clerks or, at best, banned writers. Sometimes they have to leave a meeting to go and stoke up their

7Ibid., p. 69.
8Commemorating the death of Jan Potocka. The authorities launched interrogations, but at the Comenius Faculty students and faculty had established solidarity with each other and mediated talks with the authorities were proceeding.
boilers. A few of them come straight from prison, whence they have been released under the pressure of popular protest.9

The authorities began to negotiate. Jakes, Husák, and other badly compromised leaders resigned, and the people continued to gather in the hundreds of thousands on Wenceslas Square. Two men from the police wanted to speak to the crowd, who were in no mood to be friendly to representatives of the oppressors. But Civic Forum leader Václav Maly, a banned priest, called on the crowd to let them speak, saying that one could not condemn before letting them be heard. Both speakers described how badly they felt for having done violence to the people and apologized. Padre Maly then announced to the masses that he was a priest, and in his tradition there was a place for forgiveness. He invited all who wished to join him in speaking the Lord's Prayer. Soon the entire mass of people was praying, some recalling the phrases from a dim memory, others lipreading from neighbors. It was one of many special, unforgettable moments for those who were present.10 Other moments were to see Dubček, followed by Havel, address them from the Castle balcony. Then at the end of December 1989, the Communist authorities had agreed to accept Dubček as Chairman of the Federal Assembly and Havel as President of the Republic—"the Party had to swallow both, the man of '68 and the man of '89."11

Still shorter, but unfortunately more violent, was the Romanian revolution that brought the downfall of "socialism in one family", the Ceaucescu family. The November 20 Party congress had still provided television imagery of full, unanimous support for Nicolae Ceaucescu. But on December 16 the soldiers massacred a crowd of supporters of the beleaguered Hungarian Reformed pastor László Tökés. The Romanian people found the courage to suffer, and by Christmas eve Ceaucescu and his wife had been arrested, summarily tried and executed. The truth about the regime, about its treatment of the people, especially of the handicapped, began to come out. The cup of suffering of the people was certainly full, but the new leaders seemed unprepared to move in a new direction.

TELLING OR LIVING THE TRUTH HAD BECOME INCONCEIVABLE

The Bolshevik revolutionaries of 1917 had assumed that revolution comes about by force and that there would be widespread resistance, especially by those classes in society

9Ibid., p. 86.

10As recounted to the author by a participant from the Comenius Protestant Faculty.

11Garton Ash, Magic Lantern, p. 125.
who needed to surrender power. For the revolution to succeed, force, including terror, soon also a secret police force became necessary. To sustain the totalist project required control of all the mechanisms for propaganda, information exchange and education. When Hannah Arendt wrote her classic on the Origins of Totalitarianism, she had in mind the highly developed state socialism of Stalinism, as well as Nazism. In recent years the debate has revolved around the question whether the problem was Stalinism, the cult of personality, as Khrushchev chose to restrict the statement of the problem in 1956, or whether anti-libertarianism was inherent in the system. The totalitarian model has fallen into disrepute by Western scholars, because it provided inadequate explanatory power for the continuing changes and anomalies within and between countries. Nevertheless, the totalist intent, the common strain in all varieties of Marxism (and perhaps also in Christianity) are the point of reference for East European thinkers who have revived the concept of totalitarianism in order to envision a post-totalitarian mind or a post-totalitarian state.

Their memory is of a society so ideological that truth and liberty became casualties. In order to sustain the rightness of party policy—and the Marxist view was that the Party was following the immutable dictates of historical determinism—it became increasingly necessary to declare as real what was patently untrue. Václav Havel, in his now famous essay of 1978, "The Power of the Powerless," gave a vivid description and analysis of the greengrocer who placed in his shop window the sign "workers of the world unite." The sign did not help to sell vegetables the way a sign about the sale of carrots might, yet it did help the sale of carrots indirectly for this was the greengrocer's way of signaling his conformity with the system and avoiding unpleasantness. The statist system needed the ritual phraseology of workers of the world uniting, even though the actual prospect of such an eventuality would be destabilizing, because to abandon the ideological rituals would require an interlocking network of explanations of reality. It was easier to act as if the apparent was the real. As Havel put it, "because the regime is captive to its own lies, it must falsify everything. It falsifies the past, it falsifies the present, and it falsifies the

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14Because they use it, I am therefore utilizing the word 'totalitarian.' It may be that the term has emerged more widely in Eastern Europe recently due to the lag in encountering Western literature. It now serves as useful bete noir against which to articulate what comes after, and the need to add national and historic differentiation will come later.
future. It falsifies statistics . . . It pretends to respect human rights. It pretends to persecute no one." An individual, such as the greengrocer in Prague, did not need to believe these mystifications "but they must behave as though they did, or they must at least tolerate them in silence . . . they must live within a lie . . . by this very fact, individuals confirm the system, fulfil the system, make the system, are the system."16

In his Nobel speech six years earlier, Alexander Solzhenitsyn had drawn attention to the connection between force and violence and truth: "nothing screens violence except lies, and the only way that lies can hold out is by violence. Whoever has once announced violence as his METHOD must inexorably choose lying as his PRINCIPLE."17 His simple answer to counter violence was for the individual "not to take part, not to support lies . . . once lies have been dispelled, the repulsive nakedness of violence will be exposed--and hollow violence will collapse."18 At the time, Solzhenitsyn could attest to this from his experience with his jailers in the Gulag. Havel, with a more developed logic, argued that "if the main pillar of the system is living the lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living the truth."19 Such observations can be applied universally where violence is to be confronted.

For the East European situation, there was a further understanding because of the way the entire society had to live within a twisted 'as if' ideology. Since Stalinism there had developed the habit of claiming growth in stages toward full communism, real socialism being the current term. 'Real socialism' was what the authorities chose to call the post 1968 Czech society, rejecting 'socialism with a human face' as 'naive political romanticism'.20 Charta 77 signatory Miroslav Kusy quoted the excessive language of Vasil Bilak, a Czech communist who had read a paper in Sofia in 1978, in which he claimed that the goals had been achieved, that the party and the people "have built a just, democratic, progressive, highly human social order." Miroslav Kusy responded that this showed that 'real socialism' had now adopted the ideology of 'as if:' those who preach it behave as if


16Ibid., p. 31.


18Ibid.

19Havel, op.cit., p. 40.

the ideological kingdom of real socialism existed in 'what we have here and now'... the
nation behaves as if it believed it, as if it were convinced that it lived in accordance with
the ideologically real socialism.\textsuperscript{21}

For this "game of as if" to be maintained, both party and people had to keep up the
pretence. That was demoralizing to both partners. That was what Havel meant when in
his New Year's message of 1990 he described the entire society as "morally ill because we
are used to saying one thing and thinking another. We have learned not to believe in
anything, not to care about each other, to worry only about ourselves."\textsuperscript{22}

Social scientist Jeffrey Goldfarb in his analysis of the post-totalitarian mind as
embodied by Václav Havel, or by Adam Michnik of Poland, identified the essence of
totalitarian culture as follows: violence defines truth. Today that truth, which is believed
by no one, permeates the social structure, contaminates language, and becomes the
destructive force of modern tyranny.\textsuperscript{23} The well known word for this violent definition of
truth is Newspeak, so used by Orwell. And the problem with a society living under
Newspeak is that "it makes the expression of other types of thought difficult if not
impossible."\textsuperscript{24} To be against its policies does not achieve anything significant, that is
merely to say 'Big Brother is ungood' (following Orwell's analogy). The Polish poet
Stanislaw Baranczak illustrated the problem but also demonstrated how good literature can
be written not only in spite of but even because of censorship:

These Words

These words from reviewing stands and those in parlors,
these, sewn by the thick thread of a voice
into the official-blue bag of a suit, and
those, stripped naked of their denim
in the probing search of revision;
these, known from having been heard too often, and those,
scarcely remembered from having been seen
so rarely; these words, which easily
let themselves slip through the strainer of a microphone,
and those, which must work themselves through a grating
with immense effort; these,
delivered with unflinching audacity, and those,
whispered softly from shame and anxiety into the ears
of a guard; these, spoken straightforward
into the dry eye of a camera, and those, which at being spoken
one's eyes lower, for it is hard to bear a woman's tears;

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., p. 164.

\textsuperscript{22}Brinton and Rinzler. \textit{Without Force or Lies}, p. 277.

\textsuperscript{23}Jeffrey C. Goldfarb. \textit{Beyond Glasnost: The Post-Totalitarian Mind}. (Chicago:University of

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., p. 48.
these words, which are broken in conference rooms
by stormy, long, unceasing applause,
and those, in visiting rooms broken
by the intervention of a watchful clock; these words,
these words of speeches too long and conversations too short
are--I know it's inconceivable--words
of one and the same tongue.25

THE MORAL BREAKDOWN FROM LIVING THE LIE

By the late 1980s, the moral toll of living the big lie as a Soviet and East European
society became too great. The initial intent of glasnost was to permit more truthful
statistics in order to make planning more realistic and efficient. But where was the
glasnost or truth telling to stop? It seemed that when responsible people looked about
them, they were staggered by the negative results of a totalist project that had succumbed
to systemic falsity. How could Soviet society be considered modern and progressive if its
deficit in birth control devices was so great that the average Soviet woman would have
three or more abortions? Statistics about a soaring divorce rate, about the drug problem,
and especially about alcohol abuse were shocking. They showed how widespread was the
social passivity, the loss of hope and meaning for the people. Now it has become a
desperate need to show the extent of the moral breakdown.

For example, the congress of the Communist Party in July 1990 was overshadowed by
the public showing of a two hour documentary film entitled "That's No Way to Live" (Tak
Zhit' Nel'zia). The film opens with footage about young criminals, murderers, who show
no remorse, who enjoy reenacting the crime. At another point the camera pans the
pedestrians in a small city in Central Russia, noting the shapeless clothing, the ragged
boots, the poverty. As contrast the viewer is struck by the pure visages and orderly
behavior of the crowds thronging Zagorsk monastery for the feast of the Holy Trinity.
The commentator asks how is it that all that anti-religious propaganda has had the opposite
effect? And that is good, he goes on. "These people live in hope, and have an ultimate
hope. The country is seeking after God and it is good."26 But once again the scene shifts
to the Ural region, to the wretched, abandoned churches. Ninety per cent of the cathedrals
have been destroyed, we are told, but for what purpose? This church, the narrator
explains, is unused, except for drinking and drug parties. The camera shows the graffiti
on the wall--"Honda, Toyota, SPID [Aids], a condom,"--the narrator remarking with bitter

25Quoted in Ibid., pp. 99-100.
26Translation mine.
irony—"our spiritual heritage." Sad spiritual music (an Orthodox requiem) cuts in as the eye of the camera rises to see what remains of Christ and the apostles on the ravaged frescoed walls. The narrator then proceeded to attack the party, focusing on one of those ubiquitous banners that proclaimed "the Party is the organizer of all our victories." Given the moral bankruptcy of society, the narrator suggests that perhaps we need a new Nurnberg trial. In any case, as far as the people are concerned "a moral judgement on the party is already in process." That leads finally to footage of the mass funerals in Baku after the army had shot at the demonstrators, and then on to the top of the Berlin Wall as it was being breached--"from this we need to learn a lesson" the narrator concludes. It was reported that Gorbachev had approved its screening, saying it was authentic.

LIGHTS IN THE NIGHT

The changes did not start with glasnost, and certainly not with the courageous people of 1989. Before them came individual people who chose to live in truth, or to stop living the lie. The memories of those purged in the thirties and later have not been forgotten—their stories are being exhumed, and their names morally rehabilitated. There were also the voices of dissenters, who wrote without the eye of the censor, circulating their writings in *samizdat* form, who lost their fear of prison.27 There were indeed many ways in which the night had been illumined, and even now the dead still speak, as one dissident stated so eloquently some years ago:

The dead speak. Without periods.
And without commas. Almost without words.
From concentration camps. From isolation cells.
From houses savagely burning.

The dead speak. Notebooks.
Signature of a hasty hand
on the rough surface of bricks.

With a piece of iron on the frozen cot,
On the wall with a fragment of broken glass,
Life, while it lasted, left its signature
On the prison floor in a trickle of blood.

by Lev Ozarev.28

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MAJOR MOMENTS IN THE SEA CHANGE

There are several events in recent history that help to account for the ordinary person being swept up in the recent revolutions of the word. The first was probably the Papal visit to Poland of June 1979. Billed by both sides as a purely religious visit, a "Pilgrimage of the Holy Spirit," it nevertheless had unmistakable political implications. The one thousand foreign journalists found it necessary to listen to and recognize the political power of the pope's moral rhetoric and the people's response. There was the significance of erecting a high cross on victory square, and the millions participating in open air mass. There was the public chanting: "We want God in the family . . . We want God in parents' concerns . . . We want God in books, in schools, at work and in leisure time . . . We want God in government orders, in books of law . . . ."29 Polish specialist Alexander Tomsky went on: "By concentrating on the spiritual liberation of men, irrespective of political constraints, he transcended the inhibitions of political realism." In Krakow the Pope stated: "The future of Poland will depend on how many people are mature enough to be nonconformists."30

Those who were not at the actual events, could watch them live on Polish television, although the authorities began cutting back on coverage toward the end of the visit. Polish citizens found themselves responding to the church. As one party member put it, when he watched the installation of the Polish pope, "I suddenly found that I, my wife and daughter were on our knees. I, a member of the Communist Party, who had not been inside a church for perhaps 15 years, was now crossing myself. It was a victory for this man, a victory for our Cardinal and the Church. It was also my own victory."31

The former second-class citizens now lost their fear, and also regained a sense of peoplehood. Polish workers had united in strikes against government policy in 1970 and 1976 but with limited success. In 1980 they now formed an independent union named Solidarity that finally gained official recognition following another strike in the Gdansk shipyards. Here Lech Walesa, who had first come to prominence in 1976, became the charismatic leader. Preceding those events was the formation of a Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) by a group of intellectuals, the best known of which were Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik. They provided the ideas, the vision, and debated with the church the

30Ibid., p. 165.
ethics of solidarity. Father Jozef Tischner of Krakow became a respected ethicist for Solidarity.32

It was all over on December 13, 1981, as far as many Western observers were concerned, when General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law and the security forces quickly rounded up and imprisoned the main Solidarity leaders. But the memory of Solidarity's record lived on, one more episode in showing what a liberated Poland could be. The then president of the Polish Ecumenical Council, Dr. Witold Benedyktowicz, listed four major achievements of Solidarity.33 A sense of morality had returned to the work force, many voluntarily staying away from alcohol. There had been a new emphasis on elected persons to office who had personal merit, removing many incompetents. At least initially, Solidarity had lead the way in showing consideration to the non-Catholics. And finally, the country had achieved a sense of national purpose that the subsequent military regime could not harness to its own purposes so easily. As a movement, Solidarity went underground, with many of its key spokespersons showing personal integrity during their time in prison.

Both the personality and the perceptions of Mikhail Gorbachev constitute a key element to account for the change in thinking. He was a child of the 1956 Party congress,34 one who had been shaped by Khrushchev's secret speech denouncing Stalin. In addition, he was a person untainted by the excesses of Stalinism, he could act as a person of integrity. Gorbachev's main instrument turned out to be moral rhetoric. Calling for more glasnost, he started to demonstrate what he meant. In his letter to America of November 1987 he talked about losing one position after another in the global economic race, about "glaring shortcomings in our health services", and he kept emphasizing that "unless we activate the human factor it will be impossible for us to change the situation in the country." The media were beginning to uncover and handle new topics "and

32Some of the debate on ethics between Catholics and humanists such as Michnik can be followed in "Dialogue between the Church and the 'Left' in Poland," Religion in Communist Lands, Vol.7, No.1 (Spring 1979), pp. 42-46; "Poland: the Meaning of 'Dialogue' between the Church and the 'Left'”, Religion in Communist Lands, Vol.9, Nos.3-4, pp. 139-146; and Michnik's own views in Adam Michnik, Letters From Prison and Other Essays. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 160-168; 317-333.

33In personal conversation with the author in early 1982.

increasingly preferring dialogue to monologue." Criticism must be "based on absolute truth and scrupulous concern for justice . . . we need glasnost as we need the air."35

Gorbachev was not alone, that is essential to understanding the persistence of perestroika. Already in 1984 Anatoly Gromyko (son of the Foreign Minister) had helped publish a major book on New Thinking in foreign policy.36 Gorbachev's own book of 1987 worked within the framework of the New Thinking. He had chosen to work within a new general paradigm, as Alexander Yanov soon pointed out,37 although it took most western leaders and scholars longer to recognize what was happening. The initial western reaction was to dismiss the theoretical parts of the book, they could not understand someone who had decided that "Clausewitz's dictum that war is the continuation of policy only by different means . . . has grown hopelessly out of date."38 A very recent book by Ernest Lefever illustrates the frozen mind set of Western critics.39 Other Western political scientists are now beginning to think through what it means to examine international relations from a Beyond War perspective.40 A major moment of change in the Soviet Union was the widespread public screening of the anti-Stalinist film, "Repentance," in early 1987. "By deliberately eschewing facts, Abuladze [the producer] has precisely


38He considered even a "non-nuclear war . . . comparable with a nuclear war in its destructive effect", hence proposed "basing international politics on moral and ethical norms that are common to all humankind . . . " Gorbachev, p. 141.


captured an era when truth meant less than nothing."\textsuperscript{41} The reviewer, Denise Youngblood, went on to observe that "every detail of setting and dialogue is absolutely impossible yet, in this context, absolutely right . . . one learns nothing factual from it--and everything that matters about the Stalin period."\textsuperscript{42} To illustrate: "perhaps no one was executed for digging a tunnel from Bombay to London; perhaps . . . ". Everyone remembered the title and its meaning--Repentance (Pokaiane). And everyone was left pondering the final line of the script: "what use is a road that does not lead to a church?"

Scholars are currently filling books with summaries of the new \textit{glasnost} literature and the scholarly debates, summarizing the new history now appearing in newspapers and journals.\textsuperscript{43} Step by step, the pillars of the system are being scrutinized and found wanting. No longer is it only the sins of Stalin, but also of the Party, and finally, in 1990 even Lenin began to topple from his pedestal as infallible secular god. In doing so, these journalists were "typing out the fear,"\textsuperscript{44} both personally and corporately.

\textbf{THE DOCTRINE OF 'AS IF' FOR CIVIL SOCIETY}

In contrast to the 'as if' game described earlier, what developed between the time of Charta 77 and the papal visit to Poland in 1979 was a self-conscious application of a true "as if" doctrine. The doctrine of As If was applied in both its "qualified" and its "absolute" forms. In its qualified application, the policy of As If would be to say to the persons in power, "Here are your proclaimed standards. Here are your own laws. Now stick to them."\textsuperscript{45} That was in essence the position of the Soviet dissent movement, beginning with

\textsuperscript{41}Denise Youngblood, film review of "Repentance" in \textit{American Historical Review}. Vol. 94 No. 4 (October 1990), p. 1134.

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{44}\textit{Time}, April 10, 1989, p. 124.

the Reform Baptist letters of appeal to the authorities in the early 1960s, and for the rest of the democratic opposition. In their case, they might not have thought through the shaky logic of Newspeak but the courageous dissenters had found an inner liberation when they chose to challenge the authorities’ violations of stated freedoms, whether freedom of religion, of speech, or of assembly. They discovered that the authorities could not always ignore their appeals, especially when open letters circulated in the West, or when the cases of prisoners’ of conscience became internationally known. At the least, governmental prestige in the international community was at stake. For Václav Havel or Adam Michnik, to call on the authorities to act ‘As If’ they believed their own laws and constitutions, also included self-consciousness about what was involved for each partner.

Michnik, for example, illustrates this in a passage from a letter to General Kiszczak upon learning that he would be offered an exit visa to spend Christmas on the Cote d’Azur, instead of facing a long sentence in prison. His letter began by listing four points of agreement, simply by spelling out the implications of the expulsion solution for dealing with Solidarity activists. By so doing, he said, the regime was admitting that it really did not have a case that would stand up in court, that the sentence had been decided in advance, that the indictment “will be so nonsensical that no one will be fooled”, and that the intent is to remove embarrassing political adversaries rather than to implement justice. Then, using the subjunctive tense rather cleverly, Michnik went on to state that one “would have to be a fool” to “admit one’s disregard for the law so openly”; that “one would have to be a swine” to offer a prisoner the Cote d’Azur “in exchange for his moral suicide”; and to expect that Michnik would have accepted was “to imagine that everyone is a police collaborator.” In short, “I would like to suggest that the first thing you need to know, General, is what it is to have a human conscience.” And the letter closes with an appeal, “I ask you to think again . . . to think that you will be held responsible for your actions . . . and I wish you courage.”\footnote{Adam Michnik, \textit{Letters from Prison}, pp. 66–67.} Such qualified ‘as if’ proved to be disconcerting, at times even effective. Eventually the truth of the predictions, that one bears historic responsibility for one’s actions in the system, became inescapable. In 1989 one witnessed Party leaders acknowledging that their claim to power was no longer legitimate. In its absolute application, on the other hand, the doctrine of As If “consists simply in teaching, writing, researching, painting, acting, publishing as far as possible and for as long as possible as if the state . . . has withered away; as if you live in a free country.”\footnote{Ash, \textit{The Uses of Adversity}, p. 116.} Although living in
unfreedom, you "try to live as if you live in a free country . . . though today your study [for example] is a prison cell."48

The focus on civil society, which is now attracting so much comment that some scholars have already begun to think of it as a worrisome new panacea, was based on the 'social imagery' of "state versus society"—that was where it got its moral force. For the practitioners of "As If" there was a vision of a desirable society, according to the rules of which they already now wanted to live, and they wanted to get to a full realization of a civilized society by means that would indeed lead to it. The basic ideas included that "there should be forms of association, national, regional, local, professional, which would be voluntary, authentic, democratic and, first and last, not controlled by the Party or Party-State. People should be 'civil': that is, polite, tolerant, and, above all, non-violent. Civil and civilian. The idea of citizenship had to be taken seriously."49

So the Solidarity leaders addressed themselves to independent public opinion. They advocated a policy of openness, of truthfulness, of trust (as deliberate policy) and a policy of autonomy of action. The later meant giving freedom of choice to each person. Jonathan Schell labelled it a "policy of militant decency."50 And the means to the expanding sphere of free civil society were to be nonviolent. Michnik had decided that violence was "unthinkable" as possible solution. Schell, who wrote when Michnik was back in prison and Solidarity was exercising its freedom underground, declared that nonviolence had turned out to be "especially well suited to fighting" totalitarianism, that "it is now a matter of record that by far the most effective resistance movement ever launched against a totalitarian regime was completely nonviolent."51 After the revolutions of 1989, the non-violent option seems eminently more realistic.

48 Ibid., p. 106.


50 See his introduction to Michnik, Letters from Prison, pp. xxviii-xxix (earlier appearing in The New Yorker).

51 Ibid., p. xxxvi.
Looking around the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in 1990, there appears to be remarkable unanimity that there are at least four important dimensions to the task of emancipation from the totalitarian or totalist culture of the past:\(^{52}\)

1. To rediscover the national past, to reenter history.

2. A revival of religion, either as personal quest or to recapture its contribution to the bearing of culture and values.

3. A serious effort to reconstitute civil society. As Goldfarb described it, this involved the attempt "to expand a zone of independence from totalitarian definitions of control."\(^{53}\)

4. The rise of private enterprise.

This did mean the need to return ownership of land and business to individuals, but much more, it represented the desire to restore the quality of personal identification with any social or economic enterprise, to remove the alienation from one's work-- one of those goals that Karl Marx had been so eloquent about, now stood on its head to achieve the same result.

AFTER THE DELUGE - CAN 'AS IS' BE SUSTAINED?

What happens to "as if" and the project of reconstituting civil society and the withering away of the state after the Revolutions of '89? Now when 'as if' might falsely be thought of 'as is'? Or in more colorful terms: "Former censors, former border guards, former apparatchiki, former secret policemen: what is to be done with them? Or rather, what is to be done with Them--Oni--as the Communist power holders, great and small, were universally known?"\(^{54}\) Earlier the people had chanted "We are not like them." Six months later . . . the answer had been given in advance by one of the major theoreticians of 'As If', Adam Michnik. In an article on "Angels and Maggots,"\(^{55}\) written while still in prison, he recounted Polish history in a way that each Polish hero turned out to have let the people down, had been a turncoat, or had been weakened or broken, had been a maggot rather

\(^{52}\)Ash, The Uses of Adversity, p. 66.

\(^{53}\)Goldfarb, p. 22.


than an angel. From this he drew the conclusion that a healthy civil society needed to avoid political moralism, needed to assume that each individual is capable of betrayal—each must be granted inclusion in the society in order to become more angelic.

By mid-1990, Lech Walesa and others were in conflict with Michnik, concerned to root out the undesireables, unhappy with the working compromises in the mixed Polish parliament. Indeed across Eastern Europe it was common to talk about who did what to whom over the past forty years. In addition there quickly emerged the problem of the temptation by power the urge once again to lead a double life, making a distinction between a public and private life and ethic. That issue will be the ongoing intellectual and moral problem. Is not the essence of parliamentary democracy "working in half-truth?", so one keen eyed Western observer. It might be helpful to recall that thinkers as diverse as Michnik and Gorbachev both envisioned a lengthy maturation process for a new political culture.

THE CHURCHES’ CONTRIBUTION TO CHANGE AND TRUTH TELLING

Lutheran World Federation general secretary Gunnar Staalsett listed at least five significant contributions by the churches to the changes, all of them moral, for, as he put it, "religion... did not function as the opium of the people, but rather as a source of hope and change." There was the moral message of the Slavic pope, John Paul II when he visited Poland in 1979. On December 4, 1989, the meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev and John Paul II provided the occasion for granting legal status to the Uniate Church, and for Gorbachev to affirm the moral contribution of the churches to the perestroika of society. When the new GDR parliament met, it included 21 pastors or theologians. That was no surprise to knowledgeable observers since it had been in the churches that a

56 Ash, "Eastern Europe..." p. 51 lists numerous issues, up to 10 dichotomies to show the complexity of the emerging alignments. For example, Walesa was talking about 'pluralism' versus the 'new monopoly' of his former advisers; Michnik says it is Europeans versus nationalists; other see the tension between underrepresented workers and overrepresented intelligentsia, or between city and country, or between 'the Ins' and 'the Outs'. But distinctions between 'left' and 'right' make the least sense. See also Adam Michnik, "The Two Faces of Europe," New York Review of Books, July 19, 1990.

57 Ash, "Eastern Europe..." p. 52.

platform for independent peace and ecology movements became possible. In Poland the church provided spiritual counsel to Solidarity leaders as well as ethical reflection and moral support. The churches across Eastern Europe could provide "an alternative language to the Marxist ideological phraseology," a nonviolent language that could be freed from Newspeak. When negotiations became possible, the church, since it had regained general esteem for integrity, was called on to mediate the Round Table talks, or even to preside over local selection committees for new electoral candidates. The churches also provided some leadership (depending on the country or denomination) for exercises in public repentance. The Soviet response by Orthodox and Baptist leaders has been consistently cautious, but at least the acknowledgements for their past complicity in restraining church life that younger leaders such as Archbishop Kirill, or the delegates to the AUCECB congress in February 1990 gave, were not countered. Those dissident church spokespersons who had always called on church and state to be true to their words were now seeing the fruit of their efforts and witness, but often could not adapt to the leadership role now expected of them. Pastor László Tökés, soon elected Bishop of the Hungarian speaking Reformed Church in Romania, used his speeches to castigate the international church leadership—perhaps as a result the debate at the World Council of Churches ended in a less than forthright declaration of repentance for not having said enough about abuses and violations known to them, especially with reference to the Romanian situation.

The Christian Peace Conference of Prague, compromised by the events of 1968 but slowly regaining credibility and status chose a rather astonishing metanoia. The CPC Presidential board announced in December 1989 that:

It can now be seen that the hopes of a new social order through socialism have not been able to be fulfilled. Therefore, in the current situation of democratization and restructuring of socialism as it exists in practice, and the complete collapse of Stalinism, the CPC wants to stress that the task and implementation of its Christian witness for peace neither were nor will be linked with the socialist social order. Nevertheless, the ideals of social justice continue to be important for our movement... It is true that during the difficult period of the Cold War and in an atmosphere of strong ideological pressure, the CPC accepted some compromises, made mistakes, and in some cases gave way to pressure. We need to do penance for

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59Ibid., p. 7. Cf. John Anderson, "Courtesy Towards God: Religion and Change in Eastern Europe", Religion in Communist Lands, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer 1990), pp. 100-123 who argues for religion playing a part through the actual representatives of the churches, even if they were "frail ambassadors", religious ideas contributing the development of a human and ethical alternative, and third, by providing a place for dialogue. (p. 101).

60I have in mind particularly the Reform Baptist leaders. Father Gleb Yakunin, on the other hand, was active in attending international congresses on evangelism and was elected to the congress of Russian deputies. A recent sad and anxiety causing event was the brutal murder of Father Alexander Men, respected by intellectuals and simple people alike.
this, and to alter our methods of working and our terminology in the future. . . . To this end a committee has been set up by the CPC Presidential Board to carry out a critical analysis of the history of the CPC . . . the CPC will dare to make a new beginning. 61

Such tones are widely affirmed, but, as Jim Forest notes in a recent book on the Soviet Union, 62 "Bishops as a general category are not renowned as penitents." Some of the issues calling for repentance have to do with those desperate moments of testing of the church, when its leaders decided that the way of discretion was the better way to save the church. "Can they repent of compromises," Forest asks, that "they deemed essential to protect the community from utter destruction? The health of a religious community depends on each believer, not least those with great responsibilities, examining his or her own conscience and repenting." 63 It is true that in many denominations there has been a house cleaning as less morally able leaders have been replaced by others.

For some, an even more difficult task is the need for forgiveness, for reconciliation. When Leipzig pastor Ulrich Seidel offered Erich and Margot Honecker refuge in his home, there were many who found this incomprehensible. After all, Seidel's house had been vandalized, his church ransacked, his children refused an education, and he himself regularly persecuted. Thank God that there are similar acts of charity across Eastern Europe. Mostly, those who are now seeking reconciliation in Eastern Europe are doing so in the recognition that the wrongdoing must be named. "Reconciliation is not a scheme to silence those whose stories of the past need to be told completely. It is not about burying the truth in the disguise of forgiveness." 64

TRUTH FREES--TRUTH BURDENS

As the remarkably insightful British scholar and writer Timothy Garton Ash, who had personally witnessed the revolutions in Budapest, Warsaw, Berlin and Prague reflected back on the year, he reminded his readers that "it is easy to forget that until almost the day


63Ibid., pp. 208-9.

64Staalsett, p. 10.
before yesterday, almost everyone in East Germany and Czechoslovakia was leading a double life; systematically saying one thing in public and another in private.\textsuperscript{65} The most important liberation that had taken place was an inner liberation. The thinkers, actors, and church leaders had already learned how to think and act within the framework of the 'post-totalitarian mind'. They had learned to refocus on society, on helping the state to wither away by no longer granting it ultimate power and authority, by no longer playing the 'as if' game according to the rules of the leaders, but according to the more inherent 'as if' of truth.

The ordinary people, who in the end made the revolution happen, needed to discover that truth and commit themselves to it. In Poland it had happened in 1979 during the papal visit when the state distanced itself from the people and the people decided they were the civitas that was hosting the pope. Others learned to think by the rules of nonviolence and truth during the peace movement, doing their own citizen diplomacy between East and West, until the leaders and diplomats joined them. But there were special moments of truth for the East Europeans in the autumn of 1989. To understand them, Garton Ash remarked "you have first to make the imaginative effort to understand what it feels like to pay this daily toll of public hypocrisy."\textsuperscript{66} Now as they shouted together "\textit{wir sind ein Volk}" or "svoboda" "these men and women were not merely healing divisions in their society, they were healing divisions in themselves."\textsuperscript{67} And Garton Ash reminded those, who might have missed it, that "everything that had to do with the word, with the press, with television, was of the first importance to these crowds. The semantic occupation was as offensive as military occupation; cleaning up the linguistic environment as vital as cleaning up the physical environment."\textsuperscript{68}

In the Soviet Union as well, where the whole process was more gradual and controlled, the watershed moments were the moments of truth. Soviet philosopher Alexander Tsipko, who was also speaking with a new tongue, claimed that the breakthrough came in 1987 when the film "Repentance" was screened, when Soviet society and the intelligentsia

\textsuperscript{65}Garton Ash, \textit{Magic Lantern}, p. 137.

\textsuperscript{66}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{67}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{68}Ibid., p. 138.
secured the right to search for the causes of the crises in the field of history." Then when "history has reentered our minds," Tsipko went on, "it has turned out that perestroika cannot do without repentance ... we depend on it for weeding out what still remains of Stalinism in our hearts and our life ... for cleansing our hearts of the vestiges of slavery." And yet, as we know, moments pass, new illusions and myths arise with renewed temptations to surrender truth to their service. Tsipko was now able to observe that "never before has humanity paid so high a price for its fondness for illusions ... above all in the countries that are building socialism," and in spite of the first steps of perestroika, new illusions were emerging, the Russian predilection for apocalypticism persisting. Rather, the Soviet philosopher recommends a new "philosophy of limits of human ambition." That should include "more trust in truth ... above all, truth about our actual aims." Placing high value in the human personality, in the limits of human nature and in high respect for the law, "avoiding unnecessary sacrifices," he envisions essentially the same modest gradualist program as Timothy Garton Ash was also noticing in Central Europe: a vision for a civil society where there is democracy, legality, and economics, without any qualifying adjectives added.

It seems that the ongoing tasks to sustain the revolution, to live well with 'as is', has much to do with humility, with the expectation of ongoing tension between persons and groups not yet fully consenting to a common vision. To emphasize the more real power of truth, as we have done, might well be misinterpreted as an easy panacea, or as a simplistic.

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70 Ibid., p. ix.

71 Ibid., p. 11.

72 Tsipko illustrates by quoting the astonishingly relevant comments from the Philosophical Letters of Peter Chaadaev (1833): "In a certain way we are an exceptional people. We are one of the nations that don't seem to be part of the humanity and exist solely for the purpose of giving some sort of important lesson to the rest of the world. Of course, the lesson we are called upon to teach will not be in vain, but who can say when we will find ourselves among humanity and how many misfortunes shall we suffer before our predestined task is accomplished." Tsipko, op.cit., p. 129.

73 Ibid.

74 Ash, *Magic Lantern*, pp. 147-151. That is, neither "socialist democracy" or 'Western capitalist democracy', but democracy, etc.
unreflective platitude to 'always tell the truth'. All the Eastern European voices who have finally been freed to speak truth, did so only after the burden of untruth had become too intolerable, or they had discovered that only truth could slay the dragon. It involved learning from experience, from the group, if possible through solidarity, through respect for the person--yes even respect for the opponent and persecutor. And yet, there was also something more, "an additional supra-rational cause at work. Hegel's Weltgeist, said some. Agnes of Bohemia, said others. 'The whole world is moving from dictatorship to democracy', said a third", so Timothy Garton Ash. "But as for myself," he went on, "I'll stick with the angels."\textsuperscript{75} Earlier, when describing how the walls of Jericho (i.e. Berlin) had come tumbling down, Garton Ash had remarked "There are moments when you feel that somewhere an angel has opened his wings."\textsuperscript{76} That approaches the language of the Christian, who remembers that Jesus was truth incarnate, that the living in truth is a total dependency on God. Such Christians, and there are many of them across Eastern Europe who are now constantly asked to explain the reason for the hope that they have, recall the words of the Apostle Paul about being strong when one is weak.\textsuperscript{77} For then the reliance is on God to do the impossible and unexpected. That kind of 'as if' living, or, to put it in more common Christian parlance--the already but not yet quality of God's kingdom--that kind of living will help us "lean most heavily on humility in the face of truth."\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{75}Ibid., p. 128.
\textsuperscript{76}Ibid., p. 63.
\textsuperscript{77}2 Cor. 12:9-10.
\textsuperscript{78}Tsipko, p. 269.