

Reviews

Crkva i religija u socijalističkom samoupravnom društvu

(Church and Religion in a Socialist Self-management Society)

by Todo Kurtović, "Rad", Belgrade, 1978, 386 pp., 250 dinars (£6.25).

Yugoslavia produces a vast amount of theoretical and propagandist literature about its "own special road to socialism". Periodically this "road" is enriched with a new epithet: thus today these ornamental words read, "socialist, self-managing, non-aligned Yugoslavia". This extensive literature includes a relatively large number of items on the position of the Churches and the religious communities in Yugoslavia. But these books and articles are written exclusively by officials and Marxist scholars. No discussion or contribution to public exchanges is sought from believers, and if anyone from the Church were to offer such a contribution, no one would be prepared to publish it.

About eight years ago an article on the position of the Churches and believers in Yugoslavia by Dr V. Bajsić, professor at the Catholic theological faculty in Zagreb, appeared in a German review. This article stated that believers in Yugoslavia are guaranteed equality and the same rights as other citizens by the Constitution and the law, but in practice they have fewer opportunities than atheists for advancement and for obtaining responsible positions in society. This provoked sharp criticism from state officials, in particular from those concerned with church affairs, and who themselves write theoretical articles on church-state relations. This fact alone gives one some idea about the sort of equality of opportunity which exists in this socialist society.

Todo Kurtović, author of *Crkva i religija u socijalističkom samoupravnom društvu*, is a Serbian communist who for a number of years has been president of the Commission for Religious Questions in the republic of Bosnia and Hercegovina. The book is hard to read like most communist theoretical propaganda. If every piece of stereotyped, ritual phrasology were omitted and the real information from the 38 chapters sifted out, the book would, to its great advantage, be reduced to a tenth of its present length.

The following quotation from Marx summarizes the basic idea of Kurtović's book: "We know that it would be senseless to use force against religion; we believe that religion will disappear as socialism develops. Its disappearance will be the result of social development, in which education will play a large part." This is the author's message to communist readers, who would like in practice to resolve the question of religion in a summary fashion, by the use of naked force. On the other hand Kurtović's message to religious readers could be summed up in the following words of the author: "The so-called theory that equal rights for theists and atheists do not exist is simply an open attack on self-management institutions and the basis of our self-managing system."

References to the historic sins of religious communities (Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim) form a "red thread" of accusations running through the book. According to Kurtović, the Churches are the bearers and spreaders of feudalism, bourgeois ideas, capitalism, fascism, anti-communism, and national chauvinism, and even today they are agents of foreign intelligence services; the Churches are always ready to serve all the enemies of the Yugoslav peoples and show no readiness to accept and co-operate with the socialist system. Their deep-rooted clericalism (i.e. the political ambitions of church people) hinders any co-operation and makes the Churches unable to come to terms with the separation of Church and State. Instead they repeatedly try to interfere in matters which are the prerogative of the State: for example, by calling for the Church to represent believers' rights to the State and for schools to be "neutral" (i.e. not teach an atheist worldview and include religious instruction in the curriculum). The author's view is that believers are adequately represented in Yugoslav self-management society. He is also adamant on the issue of education: "every class in power is interested in schools; our working class is interested in schools and in the scientific worldview which is taught in them, in an education which will be in harmony with class interests . . ." By "class interests" the author means the interests of the Communist Party.

The question of clericalism, schools and the equality of believers in a socialist society finds particularly sharp expression in the problem of teachers who are believers. In practice, in Yugoslavia a teacher who is a believer may not teach children and young people. Kurtović argues that a believer should be allowed to teach on condition that he loyally keeps to his subject and does not misuse his own religious convictions or convey them to others. This is not orthodox Party opinion, and Kurtović is here pleading for greater freedom. He supports his thesis by stating that "Lenin himself said that a priest could be a Party member if his conduct does not conflict with the policy and attitudes of the Party". A little later Kurtović contradicts himself, in company with Lenin whom he quotes: "I am in favour of excluding from the Party people who take part in religious observances." This contradiction is characteristic of the whole of

Kurtović's book: everything at the same time can either be one thing or another. This is what communist ideologists call the dialectic. In practice, however, everything happens as the Party, or rather its leaders, order. The Party line is not consistent; it is governed by the laws of its own dialectic. That which is forbidden today may be permitted tomorrow. Today someone may go to prison for something which the Party in its opportunism will tolerate, or sometimes even recommend.

Kurtović probably cannot be numbered among the "hawks" of the Yugoslav regime. He is obviously trying to convince at least the Church that he is by nature a "dove". It is quite clear that he is surrounded by a large majority of hawks, to whom he is trying to prove something which is against their beliefs and practice. And a "dove" like Kurtović is in the unenviable position of being regarded as a "white crow" by both sides, trusted neither by communists nor by believers.

All the dialectical contradictions of communist "doves", all their tight-rope walking, it must be admitted, are not without positive results. In the rare periods of relative liberalization their efforts do from time to time lead towards a thaw, to some practical dialogue (although Kurtović himself does not believe in a dialogue between Christianity and Marxism) and, in general, the Church in Yugoslavia does appear to be moving slowly towards freedom. This freedom is not so much given as won, step by step, in a constant struggle. It cannot be denied that the Church is one of the forces within Yugoslav society, and communists know how to be realists and opportunists when it comes to a trial of strength.

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Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945

by Stella Alexander,

Cambridge University Press, 1979, xxi + 351 pp., £15.

Some time in the mid-'60s an international party of journalists was taken on a government-sponsored tour of Croatia, which naturally included a number of historic Roman Catholic churches—historic, but still used for worship, with the usual stalls, selling devotional literature. The Soviet correspondent was particularly assiduous in buying copies of this literature. The tour ended with a question-and-answer session with the then Secretary of the Croatian Party Executive Committee, Miko Tripalo. When his turn came, the Russian waved his bundle of religious pamphlets and asked how it was possible for so much religious propaganda to be available. "Gentlemen", came the reply from the Communist Party Secretary, "you must understand that this is a Catholic republic."