

Courtesy Towards God: Religion and Change in Eastern Europe*

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On the night of 15 December 1989 agents of Ceausescu's hated *Securitate* came to evict a Reformed minister from his church in Timisoara. Unusually, at least for Romania, pastor László Tőkés' congregation chose to resist and were soon joined by several thousand townsfolk. The crowd was later dispersed by gunfire with many killed on the street, but within ten dramatic days the regime had fallen and the dictator was dead. In this way a religious figure provided the spark which led to the downfall of a system, one of whose philosophical principles — insofar as Ceausescu had principles apart from self-aggrandisement and self-preservation — was scientific atheism. Of course, the Romanian revolution was not simply a product of the defiance of a single pastor. Popular resentment of the dynastic rule of the Ceausescus with its consequent economic impoverishment of the country had been building up over a number of years and was fuelled by the failure of the regime to move with the rest of Eastern Europe. Yet in the person of Tőkés we see symbolised a number of factors contributing towards change in the region: individual resistance, the struggle against religious persecution, and the role of religion in protecting the values of a particular nationality — in this case ethnic Hungarians.

If religion was once ignored in discussions of East European politics, the election of a Polish Pope in 1978 and the key role of the Catholic Church in Polish politics since the Solidarity period reminded observers that religion remains a vital force in much of the region. More recently, reported appearances of the Virgin Mary in Yugoslavia and Ukrainè have brought home the fact that tens of

*This article is not meant to be a comprehensive study of religion and change in the region. Rather, by exploring a few aspects of the question, it seeks to set the scene for the rest of this issue of *RCL*. The title is taken from Heinrich Böll's review of Václav Hável's *Letters to Olga* reproduced in *Václav Hável or Living in Truth* edited by J. Vladislav (London, 1986), pp. 204-212. Böll uses the term 'courtesy towards God' to refer to Hável's acute awareness of the spiritual dimension of life despite his inability to substitute the word 'God' for my 'something' or for the 'absolute horizon' (p. 206).

thousands appear to take apparitions more seriously than the pronouncements of party ideologists. The state sponsored celebrations of the Christian millennium in the USSR, revealed that, for whatever reasons, religion (or religious nationalism?) still exercised a strong fascination for the Slavic population. And at the same time as *formal religion* appears to be thriving, a number of non-believing thinkers in Central Europe have been adopting a more sympathetic attitude towards Christian values, broadly understood, as the basis for the region's reintegration into European civilisation.

In such conditions it is perhaps not surprising that one leading English theologian could claim that:

The Christian churches have played a notable part in the liberation of Eastern Europe. It does seem to be the case that with the transmission of the Christian Gospel, even in flawed form by its frail ambassadors, is preserved the potential of a human alternative to totalitarianism. The love of God provides the space to think otherwise about humanity than one is instructed to think, and the Church itself makes room (sometimes literally) for the meeting of persons and dialogue.¹

The task of this essay is to explore the assertion that the church has played a *notable part* in bringing about change. In particular we seek to place religion in the context of the wider developments that have led to the collapse of the state socialist systems and to ascertain the ways in which religious institutions may, or may not, have contributed towards their demise.

Though religion is by definition a phenomenon hard to pin down and its influence virtually impossible to quantify, I shall suggest that religion has played a part in three different, if inter-related ways. Firstly, by permitting, however reluctantly, the existence of the 'church in socialism', the 'post-totalitarian systems'² revealed a degree of weakness which could be exploited by religion's 'frail ambassadors' and which in some of these countries undermined still further the fragile basis of regime legitimacy; secondly, that religious ideas broadly understood contributed towards the development of a potential human and ethical alternative to these systems; and thirdly, that in a number of these countries religion did indeed 'make room for the meeting of persons and dialogue' and thus contribute to the development of an embryonic civil society capable of providing more concrete resistance to apparently all-powerful states.

¹Stephen Sykes, 'The Truth has set Eastern Europe Free', *The Independent*, 28 December 1989, p. 14.

²A description used by Hável in his essay 'The Power of the Powerless', in V. Hável *et al.* *The Power of the Powerless*, edited by John Keane, (London, 1986), pp. 23-96.

Yet it should not be forgotten that religion was not the major agency making for change in the region. To put the role of religion into context we need to examine, albeit briefly, some of the other factors underwriting recent developments.

The Unexpected Revolution

Few commentators writing five years ago would have predicted the changes we have seen in the Soviet Union and Central-Eastern Europe. Yet this revolution was by no means an unlikely one and Mikhail Gorbachev, as the architect of change did not emerge from a vacuum. Under Brezhnev, deep-rooted changes in society combined from the late 1960s onwards with economic difficulties to undermine the legitimacy of the system.³ The 'social contract', which had helped to maintain party rule as mass terror declined in importance, was being threatened by economic decline and rising expectations on the part of an ever better educated population. And according to leading Soviet reformers such as Abel Aganbegyan and Tat'yana Zaslavskaya the inflexible and outmoded 'command administrative system' could no longer cope with the demands of an increasingly complex economic world.⁴

Though Gorbachev's early speeches focused on economic problems, he soon broadened his critique of the past to take on virtually every aspect of Soviet life. In particular he spoke of the USSR as in a 'pre-crisis' situation characterised by not only economic decline but the growing alienation of the populace from the political system.⁵ This could be seen in the 'gradual erosion of the ideological and moral values of society', the 'gap between words and deeds', false proclamations of a 'problem free reality' and general 'moral decay'. Overcoming these mounting problems required a psychological restructuring — with citizens taking personal responsibility for change and not relying on the 'little tsar' in Moscow — and a 'spiritual revival of society'.⁶

In combating these problems Gorbachev appears to have set himself three initial objectives: to restore faith in socialism at home and faith

³The economic problems facing the USSR — including declining economic growth, energy and labour problems, technological backwardness, and the continued disaster of the agricultural sector — are well known and need not be rehearsed here. One of the best analyses of the social roots of recent developments is Moshe Levin's *The Gorbachev Phenomenon — A Historical Interpretation* (London, 1988).

⁴See their essays in *Perestroika Annual*, edited by A. Yakovlev (London, 1988).

⁵In traditional Marxist analysis 'crises' and 'alienation' were supposed to be peculiar to capitalist societies.

⁶M. Gorbachev, *Perestroika — New Thinking for our Country and the World* (London, 1987), pp. 22-25.

in the USSR abroad, to overcome the alienation between society and the party-state, and to raise living standards. The problem was how to motivate a population when large scale coercion was unthinkable, ideological fervour non-existent and material benefits worthless. His response was to develop a strategy of building 'supports' within society: *glasnost*' is intended to gain the support of the creative intelligentsia; the misconceived anti-alcohol campaign is seen as appealing to Soviet women (not to speak of its contribution to increasing production); economic reform seeks to harness the energies of more innovative managers and 'advanced' workers; and liberalisation of religious policies is aimed at the substantial proportion of the population considering themselves believers. Simultaneously, the democratisation of the political structure and the more recent shift of power away from the party to the soviets — and, unintentionally in some areas, to nationalist groups, factory committees and the mob — sought to provide the system with a new source of legitimacy.

The personal role of Gorbachev in all this is hard to pin down, for in March 1985 it seems that circumstances and the man came together to initiate the process of change. Whether reform would have come so quickly without him is harder to assess. Clearly Gorbachev, rather like Mrs Thatcher in 1979, expressed and represented a certain mood within some sections of society. And like the British prime minister, and for better or worse, the Soviet president has ensured that there can be no going back to the past. And nowhere does this irreversibility of change in the Soviet case seem clearer than in the satellite countries.

By the mid-1980s the Central-East European partocracies confronted many of the same problems as those facing the USSR, and these were compounded by their reliance on occasional reminders of the presence of the brothers in the East to stay in power. To be sure there had been attempts to overthrow or radically reform these systems, but each had fallen under the wheels of Soviet (or Polish) tanks. After 1968, and especially from the mid-1970s onwards, there were also attempts to create 'civil societies' or parallel structures independent of the state which sought by evolutionary means to claw back areas of public life previously claimed by the state.⁷ Yet after the imposition of martial law in Poland such efforts looked unlikely to flourish or develop further. What in fact provided the impetus for change, as it always had for reaction, was the attitude of the Kremlin. Increasingly Gorbachev and his colleagues made it clear that the region's communist parties would have to follow the Soviet example in creating their own legitimacy and that they could no longer rely on

⁷The classic statement of this approach is Adam Michnik's 1976 essay 'New Evolutionism', in his *Letters from Prison and other Essays* (London, 1985), pp. 135-48.

automatic Soviet backing. For a while few could believe that the 'Brezhnev doctrine' no longer applied, but it was only a matter of time before someone tested the water.

The first to try was Hungary whose government announced in late 1988 the possibility of holding multi-party elections and whose communist party, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, split in two during the next 12 months.⁸ In early 1989 the round-table talks in Poland led to the establishment of a parliament (of which the freely elected part contained only two communists) and the appointment of a Catholic prime minister. And then three months at the end of 1989 saw the extension of revolution to East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania. The nature and form of each revolution was shaped by circumstances within the individual countries — of which the religious situation was but one — yet each was also made possible by developments in Moscow. And it was perhaps ironic that whilst few Central and Eastern Europeans felt much sympathy for either state socialism or the Russian dominated state which had imposed it, public demonstrations in their first phase were often notable for their appeals to the spirit of *glasnost*' and *perestroika*, and for the enthusiastic chanting of the name of Gorbachev.

The Church in Socialism

In this process of change there can be little doubt that religious institutions and values have played a part, though their precise contribution is harder to gauge and differs from country to country. It has often been pointed out that in the state socialist countries religious institutions enjoy a peculiar status as the only bodies legally permitted, albeit in restricted fashion, to propagate a world view at variance with the official ideology. And as such their very existence, however tenuous at times, has stood as both a practical and a theoretical challenge to ruling parties in principle committed to the eventual disappearance of religion.

Traditionally official ideologists of the Soviet bloc have argued that religion's disappearance is one of the preconditions for the building of a communist society,⁹ and over the years the party-states have sought

⁸Hungary not only started the ball rolling but played a part in revolutions in East Germany and Romania, in the former by its policy of allowing East Germans to leave the Soviet bloc through its borders and in the latter by taking an increasingly vocal position on the question of ethnic Hungarians in Romania.

⁹This accepted understanding has come under criticism in the Soviet press in recent years, and even the director of the Soviet Communist Party's Institute of Scientific Atheism has rejected it. See V. Garadzha, 'Pereosmysleniye', in *Nauka i religiya* 1989 No. 1, pp. 2-5; partially reproduced as 'Soviet Atheism — The Great Debate' in *RCL* Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 72-85.

to devise policies which will bring this end nearer. These have involved a combination of repression, control and propaganda, though which of these has predominated has varied over time and according to country and religious group or denomination. Most religious communities experienced a terroristic phase soon after the consolidation of power by the communist parties, and tens of thousands of religious leaders and lay people suffered labour camps or even death — in the USSR from almost immediately after the revolution and in Central-Eastern Europe in the years 1948-56.¹⁰ And even very recently religious activists in the USSR and Czechoslovakia or Catholic pacifists in Hungary have faced prison sentences, whilst Polish priests have shown a statistically significant tendency to die of unnatural causes!

Simultaneous with terror and more fully developed once overt repression had eased were attempts to bring religious institutions under close state control. Though it may be hard to credit Voslensky's suggestion that the Russian Orthodox patriarch was on any formal *nomenklatura* list,¹¹ it remains the case that state authorities have shown a keen interest in the appointment of religious leaders throughout the Soviet bloc. Equally important have been attempts to undermine institutional religious life through control over places of worship, the placing of informers within religious institutions, the exclusion of 'extremists and fanatics' from ordination, and the use of church authorities to discipline dissidents within their own ranks. Alongside these processes we have seen attempts to back rival groups within the churches — one thinks of the 'Living Church' movement within the Soviet Union in the 1920s, (which fell because the faithful stuck with the old 'reactionary' patriarchal church), of *Pax* in Poland (discredited by the Nazi past of its founder), and of the *Pacem in Terris* movement in Czechoslovakia (treated with disdain by many Catholics and undermined by John Paul II's ban on clerical participation in such bodies).

Finally, the ruling communist parties have sought to liberate people from 'religious prejudices' by means of programmes of political enlightenment. Though such campaigns with their constant repetition of simple messages must have had some impact on the population, it is far from clear that this has taken the form desired by the authorities. Few take atheist propaganda very seriously and the anti-religious press

¹⁰ It should, of course, be remembered that the initial targets of regime hostility were generally those churches that had been dominant within society prior to the communist takeovers.

¹¹ M. Voslensky, *Nomenklatura* (New York, 1984), p. 75.

in the Soviet Union has frequently complained about the failure of the intelligentsia to participate in such work.¹²

Despite overt anti-religious campaigning it was clear by the time of Stalin's death — except perhaps to Khrushchev — that any hope of religion disappearing was utopian, and in practice the churches right to some form of existence within socialism was *de facto* accepted. True the economic and political power of the churches had been broken, but their influence over the lifestyles of substantial sections of the population remained. Modernisation may have fostered secularisation, but the relationship between the two was complex. Indeed, it has been suggested that aggressive anti-religious policies may have actually slowed down or even reversed the 'natural' process whereby humanity freed itself from religious influences.¹³ The problem of analysing this process has been rendered more complex by the lack of official statistics on religious observance and the ideological constraints until very recently, upon the development of an adequate sociology of religion.¹⁴

We cannot explore this question in any depth here, but such figures as are available suggest that yes, religious practice and influence have declined, but that nonetheless religion retains its influence on a surprisingly large proportion of the population. Even in relatively secularised Hungary a survey carried out in 1980 revealed that around one third of the population attended church 'regularly' and that 50-60 per cent held some form of religious beliefs.¹⁵ At about the same time, in neighbouring Czechoslovakia, some 51 per cent of Slovaks and 30 per cent of Czechs described themselves as believers.¹⁶ And a recent poll carried out in the Soviet Union suggested that there were some 90 million people who considered themselves religious.¹⁷ Although statistics relating to religious adherence in any country have to be treated with a degree of caution, those quoted above do suggest a

¹²This differs from the early years of Soviet power when party intellectuals such as Lunacharsky and Lenin's wife Krupskaya were prepared to participate in anti-religious work. The only writer of note involved in such activities in recent years has been Vladimir Tendryakov (1923-84), although his sensitive depiction of religion sometimes brought him under attack from more conventional propagandists. See, for example, the response to his novella *Apostol'skaya komandirovka* in *Izvestiya*, 27 June 1970, where the writer is attacked for portraying the hero's conversion to religion with greater conviction than his return to atheism.

¹³This is suggested in Maciej Pomian-Szednicki, *Religious Change in Contemporary Poland — Secularisation and Politics* (London, 1982).

¹⁴On this see J. Pankhurst, 'Soviet Sociology of Religion' in *RCL* Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 292-97.

¹⁵Figures quoted in T. Beeson, *Discretion and Valour — Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Second edition; London, 1982), p. 272.

¹⁶These figures are taken from Carol Skalnik Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia — The Making and Remaking of a State, 1918-87* (Princeton, 1988), pp. 294-95.

¹⁷According to a Moscow Radio broadcast in English on 19 February 1990, quoted in *Summary of World Broadcasts* SU/0197 B/8.

sizeable religious constituency in the region. More interestingly perhaps, they compare very favourably with figures produced by a survey carried out in 'Catholic Spain' during 1970 which indicated that, depending upon region, from four per cent to 50 per cent of the population attended church regularly.¹⁸

Not only did the religious section of the population remain substantial, but there were some signs of a 'religious renaissance' by the mid-1970s. A number of churches in the region — including the Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union and the Roman Catholic Church in Poland and Slovakia — were experiencing growth and, perhaps more significantly, were beginning to attract intellectuals and young people.¹⁹ Yet once again we should sound a note of caution for this was no mass revival and the motivations underlying religious adherence varied from deep religious experience to militant nationalism. And occasionally this 'renaissance' exhibited strange characteristics, notably in Poland where although an increasing proportion of Poles have identified themselves with the Roman Catholic Church in recent years, the level of religious knowledge and the extent to which they observe Christian morality has fallen.²⁰ Nonetheless, as we shall suggest below, this influx did have some impact upon the revitalisation of churches in the region and in turn contributed towards a more open attitude to those outside of religious structures who were resisting the 'post-totalitarian systems'.

If the churches were alive and relatively healthy by the mid-1970s this owed something to their own efforts as well as the continued loyalty of the faithful. Needless to say religious organisations took steps to ensure their survival in the face of anti-religious campaigning. Each sought to find the most appropriate strategy and each enjoyed varying degrees of success. Some used overt and often uncritical political loyalty to carve out a small space within which they could legitimately operate. The Orthodox churches have on the whole found it congenial to be content with what the state gives them, so long as they can celebrate the liturgy in such churches as have remained open to them. And by making themselves useful to the state in international matters, for example by giving vocal support to officially approved peace policies, they have sought to expand the space within which they operate. Though they often came in for strong criticism from

¹⁸Édouard de Blaye, *Franco and the Politics of Spain* (London, 1976), p. 407.

¹⁹On 'religious renaissance' in the USSR see Jane Ellis, 'The Religious Renaissance: Myth or Reality', *Candle in the Wind — Religion in the Soviet Union* edited by Eugene B. Shirley, Jr and Michael Rowe (Washington DC, 1989), pp. 252-77; on Czechoslovakia see H. Gordon Skilling, 'Samizdat' and an Independent Society in *Central and Eastern Europe* (London, 1989), pp. 83-89.

²⁰B. Szajkowski, 'The Catholic Church in Defence of Civil Society', in *Poland after Solidarity — Social Movements versus the State*, edited by B. Misztal (New Brunswick, 1985), pp. 67-84.

members of their own flock, church leaders often argued that such 'compromises' were the only possibility open to them in the hostile environment created by the state socialist systems.²¹

Roman Catholic leaders often adopted a more intransigent stance, at least in the first few years after the communist takeovers. Archbishops Stepinac in Yugoslavia and Mindszenty in Hungary felt called to resist many aspects of socialist rule, even if they were not the hardened reactionaries depicted in official propaganda. Poland's Cardinal Wyszynski proved a more subtle politician, capable of firm resistance on matters of fundamental importance whilst prepared to be flexible on tactics and always concerned to bear in mind what he saw as best serving the interests of the nation and the church.²² Hence, on a number of occasions during the Polish spring of 1980-81 he cautioned the free trade union against trying to gain too much too soon and argued that precipitate actions could easily jeopardise gains already made. And here he echoed the warnings of secular intellectuals such as Adam Michnik who pointed to the tendency of many Poles to prefer romantic gestures to patient effort. Elsewhere Catholic leaders have varied in their approach: Cardinal Tomášek of Prague, for example, was notable for his caution and seeming indifference until the early 1980s when he began to take up some of the themes raised by his more turbulent priests; by contrast Cardinal Lékai of Hungary appeared content to become part of Kádár's corporatism.

Protestant leaders have also varied considerably in their response to state control. The leaderships of the smaller, recognised evangelical groups have generally benefited from their size and political quietism; those of the large Lutheran and Reformed churches in the DDR and Hungary have evolved policies of coexistence with the regime. In the latter the evolution of so-called *diakonia* theology sought to place the idea of the church's service to the world in the context of building socialism; in the former the two churches evolved a position of 'critical solidarity' with the regime though, as we shall see, this relationship came under increasing stress in the early 1980s when the churches gave shelter to independent peace groups.

²¹ It has to be said that few went to the lengths of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church which regularly sent appreciative letters to that 'great leader of the nation, creator of modern Romania, and world flagbearer of world peace' (*RCL* Vol. 17 No. 4, p. 365) and it is perhaps worth noting that following recent changes in the Soviet bloc only the Romanian patriarch has been forced to resign.

²² Writing about a rather different situation Norman Cooper has argued 'that it is surely clear that for the Church, survival is the fundamental aim. Believing itself to be the unique means of human salvation, it must insist on its right to teach, proselytise and administer its sacraments. The exact nature of the temporal regime in any one country remains secondary to these basic objectives.' Norman Cooper, 'The Church: From Crusade to Christianity', in *Spain in Crisis* edited by P. Preston (London, 1976), p. 49.

If church leaders sought to find ways of surviving in socialist states, many religious activists, sometimes with the tacit support of hierarchs, moved towards a position more overtly critical of state policies. Religious dissent, pioneered by the unregistered Baptists in the USSR as they fought to maintain their right to evangelise and educate their children in the faith in the teeth of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaigning, had by the 1980s surfaced in most of the socialist camp. Generally aimed at the failure of the state socialist systems to live up to their proclaimed belief in freedom of conscience, it also often entailed a critique of church leaders who were seen as too-compliant. Yet these leaders in their turn could sometimes use this dissent to their own advantage, seeking to convince the state that an easing of pressure on religious bodies would serve to prevent believers opting for more militant, 'underground' churches. And the cause of both church leaders and religious activists was strengthened further in those areas where religious institutions enjoyed mass support, which usually meant in areas where they were closely linked to national communities.²³

Together the combined approaches of the churches have helped to ensure their continued existence, though the mid-1980s found them in varying states of health. Thus it was that the actions of 'frail ambassadors' came together with poorly thought out state policies to preserve religious organisations. For whilst initial harsh policies may have destroyed the power structure of the churches and their direct involvement in political life, they have to a certain extent created an aura of martyrdom around religious institutions making them attractive to many. And by later backtracking and granting recognition to the churches the state socialist systems suggested a weakness in their own position. After all, not only had these organisations survived but they served as semi-independent institutional islands within 'post-totalitarian systems'. Moreover as institutions proclaiming, however feebly, values at variance with the official ideology, their very existence served to undermine the hegemony of the political elites who repeatedly made pronouncements about the socio-political and ideological unity of socialist societies.

Ethical Resistance

At the heart of the difference between the two world views lay the question of morality. That is, however much they accommodated to the party-states, the churches continued to provide an alternative in

²³This is of course a very simplistic summary of a very complex set of relationships which have been dealt with on frequent occasions in the pages of this journal.

their rejection of the notion of subjective and class ethics, instead preferring to speak of universal human values under the authority of a divine being. Their proclamation may at times have been feeble, but they did seek to provide answers to the 'eternal' questions, something which the official ideology failed to do.²⁴ And increasingly they sought to apply Christian moral precepts to realms beyond that of personal behaviour, in particular to the question of how believers should live in a 'post-totalitarian system'.

The impetus for this came in part from the aforementioned influx of intellectuals and young people into the church. They were often suspicious of the compromises with Caesar made by church leaders and were not prepared to confine expression of their faith simply to participating in the liturgy. Such people sought to develop some form of common life within religious communities, and to revitalise the proclamation of the church. And this in turn led away from the narrow defence of institutional church interests in the direction of a more open attitude towards the outside world. If Christianity claimed to be the promoter of 'universal human values' it had to take them outside the walls of the church.

One of the consequences of this development was that religious activists moved closer to other dissidents or non-conformists seeking to change society by refusing, in Solzhenitsyn's words, to live by 'the lie'. Many would have found it easy to identify with Václáv Hável's analysis of post-1968 tendencies in Czechoslovakia where 'surface normalisation' had been achieved, but 'at the price of a moral and spiritual crisis in society'.²⁵ But unlike the Russian writer, Hável did not view the present system as the result of some diabolical imposition from outside. Rather there was:

. . . obviously in modern humanity a certain tendency towards the creation, or at least the toleration, of such a system. There is obviously something within human beings which responds to this system, something they reflect and accommodate, something within them which paralyses every effort of their better self to revolt. Human beings are compelled to live within a lie, but they can be compelled to do so only because they are in fact capable of living in this way. . .²⁶

²⁴ One of the motives underlying the development of secular rites of passage in the USSR from the late 1950s onwards was the desire to add ritual and mythic meaning to the rather drab lifestyle of 'really existing socialism'.

²⁵ V. Hável, 'Letter to Dr Gustav Husak', in *Václáv Hável or Living in Truth*, p. 15.

²⁶ V. Hável, 'The Power of the Powerless', in V. Hável, *et. al. The Power of the Powerless*, edited by John Keane, (London, 1985), p. 38. One is reminded here of St Paul's 'the good that I would do I cannot. . .'

And it is this complicity with the system that helps to keep it in place. Thus the greengrocer who places the slogan 'workers of the world unite!' amongst his onions and carrots may have no desire to preach. Yet his action is not without significance, for it shows that he accepts the rules of the game, thereby becoming a player in that game and thus enabling it to go on. And while passers-by may not even see, or will ignore, the slogan it is not unlikely that just an hour earlier they too had placed a similar item in their own place of work. Hence it is perhaps this mass acceptance of 'prescribed ritual', as much as any coercion, that keeps the system in place.²⁷

Overcoming this public-private behaviour dichotomy requires simply that the greengrocer and the other players should 'live in truth' — though the playwright has no illusions as to how difficult this is in practice — for it is only by so doing that the wider society will see that the emperor in fact has no clothes. What was needed was an 'existential revolution' which meant:

. . . a radical renewal of the relationship of human beings to what I have called the 'human order', which no political order can replace. A new experience of being, a renewed rootedness in the universe, a newly grasped sense of 'higher responsibility', a new found inner relationship to other people and to the human community — these factors indicate the direction in which we must go. . . In other words the issue is the rehabilitation of values like trust, openness, responsibility, solidarity, love. . .²⁸

In the light of such arguments and Hável's general position that the 'basic job' of the dissident is 'to serve truth', it is not surprising that religious activists should move increasingly close to those struggling for human rights. Thus it was that a group of Czech Protestant pastors could justify their involvement in Charter 77 as an expression of Christian service, whilst pointing to the view of Hável's favourite philosopher, Jan Patočka, that above the conscience of individuals and the world of politics there existed a supreme moral and spiritual authority.²⁹

In the same way that believers began to reveal more sympathy for secular dissidents, the latter began to show a greater understanding of religious values. Hável himself suggested that the roots of modern disorder were in the laying to rest of 'traditional myth'.³⁰ and acknowledged his 'closeness to Christian feelings'. Yet he felt that his lack of 'the mystical experience of the enigmatic address and

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-39.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

²⁹ H. Gordon Skilling, *Charter 77 and Human Rights in Czechoslovakia* (London, 1981), pp. 287-88.

³⁰ V. Hável, 'Thriller', in *Václav Hável or Living in Truth*, p. 160.

revelation' made him unable to speak of a personal God. And as Böll puts it, it is this 'courtesy towards God', this extreme reverence for humanity's spiritual dimension, which prevents Havel from using the world 'God' in a casual fashion.³¹

Another East European writer central to the secular reassessment of religion was the Pole Adam Michnik. In a letter from Gdansk prison written in 1985, this left wing critic of the regime could argue that the church was the most important institution in Poland 'because it teaches all of us that we may bow only before God'. Nearly ten years earlier, in a seminal work entitled *The Church and the Left: A Dialogue* he had argued that it was essential that traditionally sceptical, left-wing intellectuals join together with the church in 'anti-totalitarian resistance'. At some length Michnik analysed the traditional, but understandable, hostility between the two sides and their tendency to struggle defensively for their own interests within Poland. For Michnik:

The values of the Secular Left, as has so often been said, grew out of the Christian tradition. These values are today voiced and defended by the Church: exemplified by the constitutions of the Ecumenical Council, by the pastoral letters of the Polish bishops, and by the often lonely but always unyielding defence by the primate of Poland of freedom, tolerance and the rights of man. For many years, however, the Secular Left and the Church had understood these values and their defence in very different ways. In the view of the Secular Left, these values had to be defended against the Church, since the ideals of the rights of man and the aspirations of the Church seemed to be in opposition. As a result Polish culture underwent a split: the 'radical Pole' equipped with secular ethics and the ideas of the rights of man diverged from the 'Catholic Pole' who was conscious of his responsibilities towards God and Fatherland. These were dramatic and lasting conflicts. Only communist totalitarianism and the consciousness that common values were being threatened led to an eventual rapprochement. . . .³²

From the late 1970s, as we shall see below, such dialogue was to become a normal part of Polish political life, as various groups within Poland, moving away from defending their sectional interests, began to co-operate in evolving a form of 'civil society'.

³¹H. Böll, 'Courtesy towards God', in *ibid.*, p. 206-207.

³²A. Michnik, 'The Church and the Left — A Dialogue', in F. Silnitsky, *et. al*, *Communism and Eastern Europe* (New York, 1979), p. 90: a critical but broadly sympathetic Catholic response came from the Kraków philosopher, professor Fr Józef Tischner, and can be found in *RCL* Vol. 9 Nos., 3-4, pp. 139-46.

One of the issues on which Christians and secular dissidents came increasingly to agree was the question of peace. In particular they sought to distance themselves from official uses of the word 'peace' which, according to Hável, 'had been drained of all content'. And above all they argued that without internal peace, peace between the citizens and the state, there could be no guarantee of external peace.³³

For the churches this was an especially acute problem, as they were expected, if not obliged, to participate in official peace campaigns. Led by the Russian Orthodox Church, numerous Central-East European churchmen were drawn into the campaign of the early 1980s to keep Pershing missiles out of Europe. Yet in the same period increasing criticism of state policies in this field began to come from within the churches. Traditionally Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the bloc and members of some Protestant groups had refused military service, but increasingly they were joined by representatives of main stream denominations. In Hungary the Catholic basis communities associated with Fr Bulányi had pacifism as one of their main planks, whilst in East Germany the churches were major participants in unofficial peace activities at the beginning of the decade. What united all these groups with many secular activists was their broader emphasis on the inter-relatedness of peace and human rights.

Thus it was that by the early 1980s the various strands of resistance to the regimes in the Soviet bloc were coming to speak a common language. The secular activists were not 'anonymous Christians', and there were heated debates over strategy and tactics, but believers and secular dissidents shared the basic premise that ultimately their liberation depended upon 'living in truth'. Only thus could they be true to themselves and only on this basis could they set about creating a genuine alternative to 'really existing socialism'. Insofar as this dictum 'to live in truth' was realised in their daily lives the legitimacy of those regimes was undermined. In time this increasingly communal attempt to 'live in truth' brought about common action in defence of human rights and attempts to create a 'civil society' in some parts of Central-Eastern Europe. Of course, the 'legitimation crisis'³⁴ facing these regimes owed much to socio-economic and political developments, but it is arguable that in pointing out that the emperor did indeed have no clothes the moral resisters, both religious and secular, played a major role in bringing about change.

³³The best exploration of this question is Hável's 'An Anatomy of Reticence', in *Václav Hável or Living in Truth*, pp. 164-95.

³⁴For a broad discussion of the notion of legitimacy and 'legitimation crisis' see the essays in D. Held *et. al*, *States and Societies* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 413-97.

The Church and Independent Society

If by the late 1970s part of the 'church in socialism' was moving away from a simple defence of its own interests and towards closer ethical collaboration with secular dissidents, it was also beginning to recognise that resistance had to be rooted in more concrete actions and given institutional form. This awareness of the importance of structures was a feature of much Central-East European writing in this period — with its calls for the creation of a 'civil society' or 'parallel polis' — although Russian activists proved more wary, inclining perhaps to Karamzin's dictum that good men were more important than good institutions.³⁵

Clearly it was Poland that was at the forefront of the attempt to create what some would describe as 'civil society', that is, a public sphere independent of the state.³⁶ Here, where the regime was relatively gentle in its dealings with society, there was by the mid-1970s a strong tradition of intellectual and working class resistance, as well as an alternative power structure already in place in the shape of the Roman Catholic Church. And whilst all three groups had gone their own separate ways until the late 1960s, by the beginning of the '70s there were signs that they were moving closer together. As Gierek moved to re-impose a greater degree of ideological orthodoxy in 1974-75, church and state came into conflict, and when the government sought to impose controversial constitutional amendments in 1975 church and intellectual opposition made common cause.³⁷ Simultaneously the primate began to speak more openly about the government's failure to guarantee human rights and in one sermon suggested that:

A wide organisation of society precludes application everywhere of the same narrow schemata; on the contrary, it provides the opportunity for free and unrestrained activity by various social

³⁵ As a defender of 'autocratic conservatism' at the beginning of the 19th-century Nicholas Karamzin was a strong advocate of the importance of 'people' over 'forms'. See James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe — An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York, 1970), pp. 262-65.

³⁶ Some would question whether it is possible to speak of these developments in terms of 'civil society' which is often described not only in terms of an independent public sphere but as one whose legitimacy is recognised by the state. Clearly the Central-East European states did not accept the right to existence of the independent social forms created by 'non-conformist' elements within society. Yet it is surely arguable that by their failure (or inability) to repress public initiatives the states in Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany were indeed giving a degree of recognition to 'civil' societies. More extensive discussions of the notion of civil society can be found in John Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society* (London, 1988) and *The State and Civil Society* edited by John Keane (London, 1988); see also R. Sakwa, 'Commune Democracy and Gorbachev's Reforms', in *Political Studies*, Vol. XXXVII No. 2 (1989), pp. 224-43.

³⁷ For a general discussion of the situation in Poland at this time see A. Bromke, 'A New Juncture in Poland', in *Problems of Communism* 1976 No. 5, pp. 1-17.

groups and strata. . . This requires a courageous defence of the right to free association as well as the right to freedom of the press, expression of opinion, and unrestrained scientific research. . .³⁸

After the killing of workers in June 1976 both church and intelligentsia came together in condemning those responsible. And when the Workers Defence Committee (KOR) was set up to provide financial and legal aid to the families of workers bereaved or persecuted as a result of the 1976 strikes, the church was to give its backing by permitting a priest to serve on its committee.³⁹

The outstanding theorist of this development was undoubtedly Adam Michnik, a democratic socialist not well liked in some church circles but a man who demonstrated considerable understanding of the role of the church in Polish conditions. In his 'New Evolutionism' (1976) he set out a strategy that would help to create a 'civil society' within the People's Republic of Poland. First and foremost this meant the opposition turning its back on appeals to the government for reform and appealing instead to the public to live as free people. It meant that all those with a broadly anti-totalitarian stance should unite to defend civil liberties, but that they should go further and create alternative structures independent of the state. And here the Catholic Church had a key role to play as the one place where 'attitudes of non-conformity and dignity among the people can mingle'.⁴⁰

In the late 1970s this attempt to create a civil society met with some success through the establishment of a vast *samizdat* network, the 'flying university', the development of personal contacts amongst church, intelligentsia and workers. Then in 1978 this gradual evolution was given a fillip with the election of Karol Wojtyla to the papal throne. During his visits to Poland in 1979 and 1983 he stressed again and again society's right to self-determination but also the responsibility of the population as a whole to overcome obstacles to the free development of public life.⁴¹ More generally the election of a

³⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁹ See J. Rupnik, 'Dissent in Poland, 1968-78: the end of Revisionism and the Rebirth of Civil Society', in *Opposition in Eastern Europe*, edited by R. Tokes, (London, 1979), pp. 60-112; on KOR see Jan Józef Lipski, *KOR — Workers' Defence Committee in Poland, 1976-81* (London, 1985). There are some remarkable similarities here with Spain during the last decade of Franco's life where the church, once the pillar of the nationalist movement, moved closer towards outspoken criticism of the actions of the police in suppressing workers demonstrations and of the regime in denying basic rights to the population. It is perhaps ironic that during the early 1970s there were more priests imprisoned in 'Catholic Spain' than in communist Poland! See Cooper in *Spain in Crises* (1976), *op. cit.*, pp. 48-81, and De Blaye, *op. cit.*, pp. 407-27.

⁴⁰ A. Michnik, 'New Evolutionism', in *Letters*. . . *op. cit.*, p. 145.

⁴¹ On John Paul II's visits to Poland see A. Tomský, 'John Paul II in Poland', in *RCL* Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 160-65 and J. B. de Weydenthal, 'The Pope's Pilgrimage to Poland', in *RCL* Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 69-76.

Polish Pope seemed to give a new lease of life to many religious communities in the Soviet bloc, and not only Catholics.

As a result of these developments it was not perhaps surprising that very soon after the strikes of August 1981 in the Gdansk shipyard there emerged a freely functioning independent society. And even the imposition of martial law at the end of 1981 could not really destroy this society for long. Despite repression the truth rang out from 'church pulpits — the only place where language has not been defiled',⁴² and in 1984 Józef Lipski could write that

Today in Poland only the church lives an authentically free life under the tolerance of the authorities. December 1981 further strengthened the influence and authority of the church, along with its real potential for focusing social energies. The church is looking for a solution to the present situation, though so far it has not yet found one. The highest church dignitaries sometimes make 'risky' statements; but at the same time, the church unites, integrates and offers the possibility of an authentic and open social life to many people. The church often donates its organisational, housing and other facilities for social, educational and cultural work.⁴³

Thus through both its preaching and organisational protection the church was able to provide continuing support for 'civil society' throughout the martial law period, and it is almost certainly the case that without the Catholic church's long tradition of independence such a society could not have developed in Poland.

If in the Polish case one can see a clear connection between the church and the development of alternative social structures, the situation elsewhere is less clear. Despite the efforts of Charter 77 to develop what Benda called a 'parallel polis',⁴⁴ the Czech movement remained largely an intellectual current — though the degree of public support enjoyed by Civic Forum at the end of 1989 might suggest that earlier organisational work was bearing fruit. Only in Slovakia, where Catholic activists formed a majority of dissidents did one see signs of a wider mass movement. Here from the late 1970s onwards some two-thirds of protest documents related to Catholic aspirations,⁴⁵ and here a network of banned priests and secret monastic orders provided that institutional framework within which something resembling a civil society could develop. By the mid-1980s this was becoming a popular movement with major pilgrimages attracting tens of

⁴² A. Michnik, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁴³ Lipski *op. cit.*, p. 464.

⁴⁴ V. Benda, 'The Parallel Polis', in *Palach Press Bulletin* (London, 1979).

⁴⁵ Leff, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

thousands and a petition for religious rights launched in 1988 gaining over half a million signatures throughout the country. The movement was given added strength during this period by the increasingly firm line of the ageing Cardinal Tomášek.⁴⁶

This shift from self-defence to public involvement on the part of the church was also apparent in East Germany. For many years the Evangelical Church had sought to resist attempts to turn it into a supine body and had rejected state attempts to privatise religion.⁴⁷ In March 1978 a meeting of church leaders with Honecker resulted in the state's reluctant acceptance of the church's role in public life and of its stance of 'critical solidarity'.

Yet apparent calm hid continuing tensions over educational discrimination and the issue of alternatives to military service. In particular the church was critical of the state's promotion of hatred of the West and its onesided interpretation of peace in terms of Soviet foreign policy objectives. During the early 1980s such criticism was given added momentum by the development of a larger peace movement within the GDR.

In these circumstances the church chose to embrace, with various degrees of enthusiasm, the wider peace movement. Increasingly, individual parishes and pastors organised peace seminars and peace services, and provided an institutional basis for those seeking change. And by the middle of the decade many of these groups had expanded their programme to cover human rights issues and the question of more extensive political change within the GDR.⁴⁸ This in turn led to some conflict within the churches as congregations found their premises used by a 'rainbow coalition' of peace, human rights, green, and quasi-anarchist groups. Though church leaders sought to establish ground rules within which churches and groups should operate, in practice most churches continued to provide an umbrella within which this nascent civil society could function.⁴⁹

If the cases of Poland, Slovakia, and the GDR enable us to speak of the development of a real or embryonic 'civil society' the situation was less clear elsewhere. In Hungary the small minority of dissenting

⁴⁶On the changing public face of Cardinal Tomášek see various articles and documents in *RCL* Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 48-51; Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 23-53, and Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 162-63.

⁴⁷See the forthright speech given by the principal of the Gnadau Theological College, Dr Heino Falcke, in 1972 where he rejected state attempts to portray religion as something for private life only, and claimed for the church the right to criticise injustice wherever it occurred. Quoted in Beeson *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200.

⁴⁸See P. Ramet, 'Church and Peace in East Germany', in *Problems of Communism*, Vol. XXXII No. 4 (1984), pp. 44-57; V. Tismaneaux, 'Nascent Civil Society in the German Democratic Republic', in *Problems of Communism* Vol. XXXVII No. 2 (1989), pp. 90-111.

⁴⁹On the uneasy relationship between the churches and the various informal groups see A. Gordon, 'Kirche von Unten and Other Basis Groups in the GDR, 1987-88', in *RCL* Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 127-39.

intellectuals was divorced from both masses and church, whilst the burgeoning basis communities, despite their concern for public issues, tended to look inwards. Further south, in Romania and Bulgaria the churches appeared supine, and the people starved or bored into quiescence.

Back in the socialist heartland of the USSR there were few signs of an emerging 'civil society' in the early 1980s. Although dissidents and religious communities had created their own small micro-societies, each with their own rules and customs, any sense of coherence or community was shattered by the 'conservatism' pervading Soviet society during the years of succession struggle. Then in 1985 appeared a new General Secretary who spoke about the need to change the nature of the Soviet Union and to do this with the support of the population. As *perestroika* developed, restrictions on the press were eased and repression of alternative organisations lessened. Informal associations began to appear, initially with the support of the authorities, but they soon took on a life of their own and moved in ever more radical directions. Though it is doubtful whether we can describe this rather amorphous movement in terms of 'civil society', given its lack of structural form or coherent identity, it is interesting to note that Soviet ideologists such as Politburo member Aleksandr Yakovlev have begun to use the term in their speeches.⁵⁰

More important from our point of view is the surprisingly limited role played by the churches in attempts to create an independent society within the USSR. It is true that many individual religious activists have become involved in informal groups and gradually emerging political parties, but church institutions, above all the Russian Orthodox Church, have tended to stand aloof. Only in the Baltic republics, and to some extent in Western Ukraine, have the churches played a major part.

Summing up the decade or so preceding recent developments, clearly the major factors facilitating the process of change have been not just the development of a theoretical or moral critique of the 'post-totalitarian systems' but also the formation of alternative structures. And this mirrors the position in other countries that have seen radical changes in recent years. The Iranian revolution, for example, was in part made possible by the opposition's skilful use of the bazaar and the mosque, two traditional institutions that had not been superseded by the Shah's attempts at modernisation. Indeed, the Ayatollah Khomeini's writings on the use of these

⁵⁰ See his article in *Sovetskaya kul'tura*, 15 July 1989.

institutions bears a superficial resemblance to Michnik's evolutionary strategy.⁵¹

As change has swept across the Soviet bloc it has been interesting to note that in the USSR, Bulgaria and Romania, i.e. the states where there was no real evolution of a 'civil society' during the 1970s and early 1980s, the process of reform is proving problematic. Moreover these are the countries where dissent has been relatively isolated in nature and where the major religious groups have been notoriously compliant in their dealings with the state. By way of contrast, in those countries where public resistance has been more coherent and where the churches have been able to maintain relatively independent structures — above all in Poland and the GDR — religious bodies have been able to provide some form of shelter within which an embryonic 'civil society' can operate. And when change did come during the course of 1989 it was in these latter countries that the churches' role was most visible.⁵²

The Church in Change

The churches role in the process of change has varied according to the willingness of the state to allow public participation and the readiness of religious bodies to take advantage of new opportunities. What is clear is that as the process of reform deepened in the USSR, church leaders throughout the region seemed to become bolder in pressing their demands on the authorities. During the course of 1988 the traditionally quiescent Catholic hierarchy in Hungary began to make demands for greater religious freedom and to suggest that the church play a more active role in combating the various social problems besetting Hungarian society.⁵³ In neighbouring Czechoslovakia Cardinal Tomášek exchanged a series of letters with prime minister Ladislav Adamec at the beginning of 1989 in which he protested the harsh treatment meted out to those involved in public demonstrations and called on the government to listen to citizens' wider demands.⁵⁴

Meanwhile in Poland and the GDR the churches were playing their traditional role as protectors of 'civil society' and mediators between

⁵¹During the 1970s Khomeini repeatedly called on Iranians to deny legitimacy to existing government institutions by refusing to recognise them and instead directing their loyalty to other, Islamic institutions. See Shaul Bakhash in *The Reign of the Ayatollahs — Iran and the Islamic Revolution* (London, 1985), p. 39; the best study of religion and politics in Iran is probably *Religion and Politics in Iran — Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution*, edited by N. Keddie (Yale, 1983).

⁵²Needless to say this is a gross simplification which cannot be explored in depth here.

⁵³See the documents gathered under the title 'The Church and the Law in Hungary', in *RCL* Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 70-81.

⁵⁴*Keston News Service* No. 319, 16 February 1989, pp. 13-14.

state and people? As Jonathan Luxmoore has pointed out, throughout the martial law period the Catholic hierarchy had sought to steer a careful course between the expectations of society and the demands of the state⁵⁵ and, though this cautious approach brought it criticism from more militant union activists, thus helped pave the way for the political settlement reached in April 1989. Similarly in East Germany the role of the Evangelical Church in protecting informal groups expanded greatly as events gathered pace last autumn. In Leipzig, the cradle of the revolution, it was from the churches that the demonstrators filed out to confront the might of the state, and it was the local bishop who sought to ensure that provocations would not lead to violence.⁵⁶ Indeed, it might be suggested that the extremely peaceful nature of the changes in most of the region owed something to the continuing influence of the churches, although this should not be exaggerated⁵⁷ — events in the USSR and Yugoslavia indicated that religious activists are not always to be noted for their pacifism.

In the USSR, where it was a section of the Communist Party that initiated change, religious ideas have perhaps been more prominent in the process of change than have the institutional churches. Since 1985, and earlier in the works of a number of writers, Soviet authors have been exploring broad questions of morality. In particular they asked whether radical campaigns against religion had served to undermine certain 'universal human values' that had worth regardless of the nature of the political system.⁵⁸ Such debates were given political support as Gorbachev increasingly came to speak of the need for 'psychological restructuring' and even 'moral revolution'. As a degree of 'liberalisation' came to affect church life from 1987 onwards and following Gorbachev's meeting with Russian Orthodox hierarchs in April 1988, it became clear that an attempt was being made to draw believers into supporting the reform programme.

Of especial concern to the leadership was the contribution the churches could make to improving the performance of Soviet welfare services. Though, as Danil Granin pointed out, *miloserdiye* (charity) had been something of a dirty word in Soviet society for 70 years, by the early 1980s official provision for the needy was clearly far from adequate. And although, even at the time of writing, religious bodies

⁵⁵J. Luxmoore, 'The Polish Church under Martial Law', in *RCL* Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 124-66.

⁵⁶Special supplement to *The Independent*, 29 December 1989, p. 111.

⁵⁷In an interview with Keston College on 23 February 1990 former Slovak Catholic political prisoner and now deputy prime minister Jan Čarnogurský suggested that the peaceful nature of the changes owed much to the absence of forces believing change was not essential and to a historical awareness that violent change rarely produced good results. The moral influence of the church he put in third place.

⁵⁸On this see William van den Bercken, 'The Rehabilitation of Christian Ethical Values in the Soviet Media', in *RCL* Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 4-18.

are still banned from involvement in charitable activities, it was becoming clear by the mid-1980s that within the churches there were people willing to take on a wider caring role. In these circumstances and not without qualms — ‘how will it reflect on the political and moral image of communists if a patient goes to his death thinking that the Soviet state is incapable of supplying him with someone to bring him a bedpan?’⁵⁹ — the decision was taken to allow believers to participate in charitable work. Thus it was that by the end of the decade members of religious communities were acting as nurses and orderlies in many hospitals and homes, visiting prisons, bringing relief to the victims of natural disasters, and supporting the work of the homes set up by Mother Theresa in Moscow, Kiev and Armenia.

Needless to say the initial motivation for allowing such involvement was pragmatic, but with time it seems that political leaders in the Soviet Union and Central-Eastern Europe have come to see the need for a general ‘humanisation’ of their societies. Indeed, as Stephen Sykes has pointed out, one of the principles that some want enshrined in a new Czechoslovak constitution is *lidskost* or ‘humaneness’, a word encompassing a broad respect for the individual and the values common to all men and women.⁶⁰ And across the region the last few years have seen a flourishing of religious involvement in charitable activities, permitted or otherwise. Over the coming years, and assuming that the liberalisation of these societies continues, the churches are likely to be called on more and more to make good the failures of the old state’s welfare agencies. For the governments of these countries this might allow them to devote resources to fundamental restructuring of the economies, and for the churches it means regaining the legal right to perform what they have always seen as one of their major functions. Yet the extent of their contribution must be limited by the past destruction of their financial bases, and in time we are likely to see arising the same questions about the proper rôle of state and church in these matters that we have seen in the United Kingdom in recent years.

Towards an Uncertain Future

For the churches the coming years are likely to raise new problems, as they face situations not experienced before. Possibly in states that allow ideological pluralism they will lose their attraction as alternative institutions and preachers of non-official values. This already appears

⁵⁹ Konstantin Kharchev, then Chairman of the USSR Council for Religious Affairs, in a lecture given to the Higher Party School in March 1988. *Russkaya mysl'*, 20 May 1988.

⁶⁰ In *The Independent*, 28 December 1989.

to be the case in East Germany where it is becoming evident that for many their allegiance to religious institutions was 'political' rather than 'religious'. And having been shaped by the need to survive and having come to mirror in certain respects the state systems within which they have existed, church leaderships will probably have to come to terms with greater diversity within their own ranks.

For some the move away from a collectivist ethic to a greater stress on the individual will be far from congenial. As Greg Andrusz has put it in the context of the USSR:

. . . it is worth speculating on the similarity between, on the one hand, Martin Luther, and the Reformation in which he played a catalytic role and, on the other, Mikhail Gorbachev who has initiated a change whose magnitude and ramifications in terms of its emphases — for the first time in Russian history — on the individual resemble those of the Reformation. But, its stress on the individual — so admirable in the eyes of Western liberalism — will meet opposition from those prepared to launch a counter-reformation in which, ironically, the Orthodox Church might be compelled to play an unholy part.⁶¹

And the danger here is that spiritualised *sobornost'* has all too easily been brought down from heaven to earth in the form of Soviet collectivism within bodies such as the Russian Orthodox Church, and that the still largely Brezhnevite leadership of the latter body might feel a degree of sympathy with the emerging alliance between conservative bureaucrats and more chauvinistic Russian nationalists.

From here it is only a short step to the religious exclusivity that we are beginning to see generate conflicts in conditions of political freedom. Here one need think only of those situations where religion and nationalism mix, notably in the Caucasus, Ukraine, Yugoslavia and Romania. In the last three cases it is sad to see traditional hatreds re-emerging so quickly, and though some bishops, notably in Lithuania, have condemned simplistic attempts to identify faith with nation, many church leaders have proved incapable of acting as forces for peaceful solutions to old problems. Equally depressing is the appearance of popular anti-Semitism in a number of these countries and the ambiguous attitude to this phenomenon exhibited by some churches.

Throwing off the old has been the easy part of the revolutionary process; creating the new will be far harder. Economic austerity programmes of the type favoured by the IMF and Adam Smith Institute will create new victims, and the church must be ready to serve

⁶¹G. Andrusz, 'Sociology, Social Change and the Soviet Union', a lecture given at Middlesex Polytechnic on 17 January 1990.

them. The construction of democratic institutions and a more liberal political culture will take time, and will require the churches to take on the role of reconciling groups within society. At times this will make them unpopular — witness the reaction to the willingness of the East German church to give shelter to Eric Honecker and his wife. And if, as Havel has suggested, the ‘post-totalitarian system’ is only an extreme aspect of the incapacity of 20th-century humanity to adapt to its new situation in a world dominated by technology,⁶² it will be left to the churches to recreate the sense of community and the spiritual dimensions that have been lost. To do this they have to look outwards, away from their internecine conflicts and theological disputations, and towards a wider world. If the values they claim to preach are ‘universal human values’ they are of little use trapped in the walls of a church — whether that church be located in a state socialist system or a liberal democracy.

⁶² V. Havel, *op. cit.*, p. 90.