

Religion and Communism

THE RUSSIAN CHURCH AND THE RISE OF LENINSIM. PART I.

This essay describes the relationships between mysticism and altruism in the specific institutional and ecclesiastical development of the Russian Orthodox Church and the formation of a Russian national character highly susceptible to the collectivism and statism of Leninist Bolshevism. My general thesis is that Christianity, logically and historically, has given birth to Communism and Socialism and that the Russian tragedy is a direct result of its Christian development.

The essence of mysticism is its rejection of this world for an anti-world which, in any logical and understandable sense, results in a worship of void and stasis. Our world of phenomenal variety which permits conscious distinctions between things and the experience of triumph and failure is abhorrent to the mystic. This world is despicable to the mystic because it involves separate entities and the direction of self. Mysticism is an attempt to escape the limitations of this world by positing the existence of a non-world which is metaphysically the truthful counterpart of our "counterfeit" existence. Psychologically, mysticism is a response to the natural anxieties and anguishment which accompany the failures of human understanding. As organized religion, mysticism amounts to the perpetuation of a fraudulent panacea for problems which can only be resolved through the systematic practice of individual reasoning. Mysticism requires faith in something which is, by definition, beyond human comprehension and contrary to the consistent application of human cognitive capacities. Philosophically, then, mysticism constitutes a rejection of rational epistemology and a metaphysic which asserts the higher reality of nothingness. Psychologically, it serves as a rationalization which permeates the subconscious inducing a pathetic evasion of the objective requirements of existence, identity and consciousness. The subconscious circumvention of reality permits a self-deception necessary to avoid the painful consequences of arbitrary and irrational standards. Politically, the abdication of personal cognitive authority engendered by mysticism, and the wholesale abandonment of rational integrity as a consequence, permits a wholesale duping of the masses and the rationalization of arbitrary authority and coercion.

Whereas mysticism requires a rejection of this world, its ethical correlative, altruism, requires a rejection of one's rational self-interest. Altruism, in its quintessential meaning, is not ultimately concerned with the problem of mutual betterment (although it is often portrayed as such) but with consciously living against oneself as a lifelong rite of self-rejection and sacrifice. The corrosive anguish and self-loathing generated by altruism is the motivation for envy and the age-old intellectual and ideological attack on every expression of rational egoism. On a mass scale, it has been the motivational fuel and the ideological engine of prejudice and political repression against individualist, free-market capitalism. Modern collectivism is an outgrowth of mysticism and altruism -- it constitutes a furious

reaction to the historical challenge presented by industrial capitalism and rational egoism. It is, in essence, a modern transmutation of the messianic-Judaism transformed by the Russian messianic religious mentality into Bolshevism.

In an earlier article (see "MACS: the Killer Ideas" Versus State, volume I #2) I advanced the idea of the "Authoritarian Complex" which relates mysticism, altruism, collectivism and statism as an interrelated and concatenating system of pathologies. Rather than dismissing these merely as a disconnected jumble of erroneous theories, as many are wont to do, I have treated the MACS elements as cause and effect components which must be understood and mastered not only to provide an ultimate resolution of what happened in history, but to define our course for the future. Mysticism is not an accidental miscarrying of human reason reappearing over and over again in the course of history. It is a complex of attitudes which has been invented, exploited, diffused and transmuted in the highly successful enterprise of enslaving the mass of humanity. These attitudes and their intellectual rationalizations are not "innocent" coincidences, they are not "honest" intellectual mistakes, at least they are not in our age.

The Authoritarian Complex is a consciously understood and well organized conspiracy to prevent the mass of individuals from seizing their own destinies against the counterfeit authority and paper-tiger power of the Christo-Marxist ruling class. This is not to declare that the conspiracy of the Authoritarian Complex is necessarily a tightly knit or hierarchically directed group united for the achievement of one objective. It appears more like a loose oligarchy of competing factions maneuvering for position but always on guard against their dreaded common ideological enemies: rational egoism, anarchism and laissez-faire capitalism. There is overwhelming evidence of the existence of (at the very least) a loose international association of power brokers, involving both secular and religious leaders, including financiers, socialists, communists and fascists. There can be little doubt, for instance, of a massive system of collusion and manipulation between the Carter Administration and the Trilateral Commission, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations.

The network of coercive and arbitrary political and economic power, however, depends on a web of intellectual rationalizations and cultural attitudes which have diffused geographically and have been reinforced by religious and political institutions. Perhaps the most awesome example of this lies in the historical development of the Russian Orthodox Church and the rise of Soviet Bolshevism. Nowhere are the links between religious mysticism, cultural altruism and totalitarian collective-statism more clearly evident than in the history of Russia.

Russian Christians have portrayed themselves as staunch opponents of Communism and Bolshevism. This continues today in the Christian dissident movement in the Soviet Union. Emigré Russians, of whom the most famous is undoubtedly Alexandre Solzhenitsyn, have denounced the totalitarian communist state as the antithesis of russo-christian spiritual life.¹ This view is fundamentally erroneous.

Lenin's Bolshevism take-over in Russia is the direct outcome of chris-

tian thought in Russia precisely as it developed from the eleventh century. Christianity in Russia enervated the Russian people and it established the pathetic acceptance (and even the adoration) of absolute despotism. It was partially responsible for producing the vehement reaction against the incipient formation of an industrial capitalist economy in late nineteenth century Russia. Bolshevism is Russian Christianity denuded of its spiritual veneer and magnified in its xenophobia, contempt for reason and intellect, law and property, anti-egoist mania, anti-bourgeois and anti-jewish prejudices. It is the historical, emotional and intellectual fulfillment of Russian messianic Christianity in its eschatological passion to destroy and replace the primacy of the Roman Church. It is a centuries-old Russian Christian hatred of western culture, intellect, industry, science and commerce expressed and continuously nurtured by Russian Orthodox Patriarchs and Saints. At the core of this has been an unabated loathing for the western bourgeoisie and an evangelical, bible thumping hatred for Russian Jews who in Russian ecclesiastical works, occupy the position of an abominated bourgeois people. The Jews and the Jewish nation, in Russian Christian theory, are targeted for contempt by all biblically-deprived peoples for reasons similar with Lenin's vehement hatred of Switzerland and western capitalism.

The development of Russian Christianity is distinguishable from European Christian churches by several important predisposing conditions. The most important being the remoteness of Russian culture from the cosmopolitan influences of western Europe and the Mediterranean cultures. Another major difference, in part caused by the first, is the lack of emphasis on abstract reasoning in Russian literature. Nowhere can be found an attempt to bring reason and philosophy into play as is in the West with St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century.² The great impact of the Aristotelian revival is completely missing in Russia.

In western Europe, the mystical-altruist, anti-world forces, represented in the Manichaean-Waldensian-Albigensian heretical movements, were always countered by the forces of a quasi-rational, romanized (and later aristotelianized) church, and a flourishing bourgeoisie.³ The forces of martyrdom and self-sacrifice, so infamously represented by the mendicant orders of the Franciscans and Dominicans, were ultimately moderated by such as the Benedictines and Jesuits. In Western Europe, the conflicting ethnic diversity, the near-anarchy of political divisions, the quasi-balance of power between feudal lords, free burghers, the church and its numerous religious orders, not to speak of the vast intellectual heritage of competing paradigms -- Platonism, Aristotelianism, the heresies of Arianism, Nestorianism and all of the Persian, Egyptian, Byzantine, Islamic religious-artistic variety -- all of this counteracted the enervating and self-consuming madness inherent in messianic Christian mysticism. No analogue to these conditions has ever existed in Russia.

My thesis has the unwitting collaboration of Russian Christian scholars. The work of George P. Fedotov provides a detailed account of the development of early Christian thought from its inception in the tenth century to the age of the Tartar Yoke.⁴ Fedotov detects a strong inclination towards collectivism even in the pre-Christian Russian paganism. He explains that Russian pagan thought omitted the notion of individual immortality and consciousness: "For the freedom and will of the individual there is left very little place. The

consciousness of personality, of its own ways, vocations, and rights developed tardily...both in pagan and in Christian times. This is the deepest religious root of Russian collectivism."(p. 17).

Superimposed on this primitive collectivist oriental paganism was to be the peculiar disposition of the Byzantine Orthodoxy. If the Roman Catholic suffered from other-worldly madness, the Greek Church promoted an emotional approach to spiritual salvation which at once insulated the Russian Church from a search for intellectual rationales and promoted an unresolvable personal dilemma for its adherents. The Byzantine Church, in contrast to the Roman, perpetuated an oscillation between sacramentalist and transcendentalist tendencies. Meaning that salvation (and release from personal anxiety) could not be attained merely by "good works" but by transcendentalist means i.e. "... the consciousness of one's unworthiness, and the unmerited grace of God." (p.34).

The lack of intellectual development and concern for ratiocinate thought is accompanied very early by a fascination for mythology and eschatological theories. Fedotov notes the unbalanced interest in the "...writings on the Antichrist" (p. 49). He remarks that: "Religious cosmology and history, based upon eschatological backgrounds, were the two theoretical poles of the Russian mind, devoid as it was of metaphysical or rational thought." (p. 50). This tendency, by the way, is strongly exhibited in Lenin nearly eight-hundred years later.

The strong and pervading fascination with all-enveloping theories on the final outcome of history and the notion of a special messianic mission for the Russian people was accompanied by a detestation for the Jews which closely parallels Marxist hatred of the bourgeoisie. It is easy to understand how the early Russian Orthodox pariahization of the Jews for their "stiff-necked" skepticism and rejection of the Messiahhood of Christ could be and ultimately was transferred to a class pariahization of the industrial capitalist and bourgeois classes.

In St. Hilarion's writings of the eleventh century, can be detected a precursive hatred for law and property. The thesis of Lenin's Imperialism is essentially captured in St. Hilarion's work if we transpose Bourgeoisie in place of Jew, and proletariat in place of Christian in this quote by Fedotov: "Jews were justified by shadow and Law; Christians are not justified, but save by Truth and Grace; for the Jews, justification is in this world; for us salvation in the age to come; the Jews rejoiced in earthly goods, but the Christians in heavenly; also, the Jewish justification was limited because of envy, for it did not extend to other peoples...the salvation of Christians is liberal and bountiful, stretching to all countries of the earth." No doubt St. Hilarion would have understood the internationalist aspirations of Marx and Lenin and certainly he would have applauded Lenin's expulsion of the Jewish Bund and the persecution of Trotsky.

In Hilarion's thought can be noted a complete primacy of anthropological and eschatological concern. It is not enough merely to meet sacramental, and transcendentalist requirements for personal salvation but it must, according to him, serve as preparation for a world historical end. The rejection of Christ by the Jews, God's chosen, is not only the burden and opportunity in the resurrection for the non-chosen peoples but an eschatological duty. This world-historical mission becomes the primary moral element of Leninist Bolshevism

which is the direct fulfillment of St. Hilarion.

The strange engrossment of Russian Orthodox theologians with the "Jewish Problem" and its stress on anti-Jewish polemics is characteristic to the present. It can be partially understood by the geopolitical threat of the powerful Khazar state which occupied much of what is today southern Russia.⁵ The presence of the Jewish-Kazhar state and a Jewish population in southern Russia and eastern Europe has always been resented by slavic nationalists. Early chronicles are replete with xenophobia and extreme envy against the generally more literate and skilled Jewish traders. This anti-judaic feeling resulted in the establishment of the Jewish Pale -- a zone restricting the settlement of Jews and defining their economic pursuits. Violent pogroms against the Jews under the Tsars have been replaced by more covert repression under the Soviet regime. The continued Russian Christo-Marxist loathing for the Jews is no better exemplified than in the creation of a Jewish communist homeland -- Birobidjan -- in eastern Siberia. It is not far-fetched to understand the Bolshevik Trotsky jewish betrayal as analogue to the Judas of Christianity in regards to the Marxist savior Lenin.

The psychopathology of altruist self-sacrifice is developed to an extreme in the Russian national saints Boris and Gleb. In Russian context of despotic absolutism, self-sacrifice takes on direct statist relevance. Historically, Boris and Gleb were the younger sons of Prince Vladimir of Kiev in the eleventh century, both of whom willingly submitted to being slaughtered by their older brother Sviatopolk as an act of christianly humility and "love". Fedotov ably summarizes the peculiar russianized form of state altruism: "...the idea of sacrifice, distinct from heroic martyrdom, stands out with particular force; here it is purified from all practical morality, even from the idea of the courageous fulfillment of duty..." (p. 103). The national sainthood of Boris and Gleb eulogized and established a cultural personality based on a veneration of total submission to cruel and obvious injustice. It is not merely a resignation to an evil fate but a pervertedly ecstatic masochism on a national scale.

-Richard R. Slomon

Footnotes to: Religion and Communism

1. I have already started uncovering the monstrous contradictions of a number of key Soviet dissident authors. See my article "Wrong Signposts: A Russian Tragedy" Versus State, Volume 1, #2.
2. See Josef Pieper, Guide to Thomas Aquinas, English translation, Random House, Inc., 1962.
3. Good background on the heresies, Karl Adam, The Christ of Faith: The Christology of the Church, English translation, Pantheon Books, 1957.
4. George P. Fedotov, The Russian Religious Mind: Kievan Christianity: the 10th to the 13th Centuries, Harvard University Press, 1946.
5. Arthur Koestler, The Thirteenth Tribe: The Khazar Empire and Its Heritage, Random House, 1976.

Religion and Communism

THE RUSSIAN CHURCH AND THE RISE OF LENINISM. PART II.

Part I of this essay described the major conditions which influenced the rise of Russian Christian mysticism from its beginnings as a Byzantine Greek Orthodox export into its extreme anti-western, anti-intellectual, anti-bourgeois and anti-judaic, messianic "Third Rome" character. In the Russian cultural context, bereft of the meliorative influence of Greco-Roman rational intellectualism and the powerful bourgeois proto-capitalist, political economic institutions, the internal geometry of the mystical-altruist-collectivism of Christian belief crystallized a cultural mentality totally willing to accept and even adore the injustices of a totalitarian state. Part II analyzes the development of Church and State in Russia as the institutional crystal which flourished in a substrate of orientaling and despotic influences.

Before recommencing the empirico-historical examination of the relation between the Russian Christian Church and the rise of Leninism, it is significant to re-examine the conceptual nature of the problem. In having asserted the logical relationship of mysticism, altruism, collectivism and statism ("MACS: the Killer Ideas" Versus State, Vol. I, #2), I produced an intuitive geometry of relationships between ideas and the impacts of these ideas. Thus, if one assumes a mystical epistemology then one ultimately assumes an altruist ethic and collectivist social norms and an authoritarian state system. For various reasons (previously outlined), everything else being equal, one leads to -- and reinforces -- the other. More specifically, our thesis must be that Christianity has resulted in Marxism and, with greater or lesser culpability, depending on the various circumstances of the form and content of the particular christian culture, is culpable of the various coercive collectivisms. Even more specifically, Russian Christianity played the major role in the rise of a particularly murderous and violently expansionist form of coercive collectivism: Leninist Bolshevism.

Most writers have placed the brunt of the blame for the rise of Leninism on the Tsarist state apparatus. There can be no doubt, that the Muscovite system which grew to prominence during the Tartar Yoke and ultimately became the institutional, as well as the geopolitical, successor to the Mongol Tyranny was the second most important factor in the rise of the Russian slave empire. The state apparatus can be likened to a political-economic hammer but Russian Christianity was the anvil of belief. The rejoinder can be made, of course that China certainly was not Christian and yet it has a long history of despotism and has since become a totalitarian Communist state. It must be understood that China under Confucianism and, later, Buddhism had a social ethic which for over two millennia prescribed the most rigorous anti-egoist, altruist-collectivist code. Admittedly, there are major differences between Christianity and the amalgam of Chinese social codes, but in gross functional terms, they have served the rise of the modern authoritarian states quite well. Both have worked to disarm the individual, morally and intellectually, in a tragic acceptance of arbitrary and utterly barbaric authoritarianism.

In viewing this question more precisely, it must be understood that the State is, and always has been, a distorted form of commercial enterprise. It is a histori-

cally temporary form of parasitic entrepreneurial organization which is permitted to persist by a mass misapprehension -- a set of delusions purposively promoted and perpetuated by the state entrepreneurs and those who benefited from the statist order. The State, however, is an extremely precarious and vulnerable institution which can be overthrown by a miniscule minority if it suffers even the indifferent support of its subject population. The real power of the State lies in its ideological base. Throughout history, a major sector of the state apparatus has been wholly devoted to thought control and the maintenance of ideological orthodoxy. Every government, democratic or otherwise, depends on the acceptance or at least the acquiescence of its subjects.

One can say that this is indeed "obvious" but its relation to the causal geometry of the social order is not obvious. The degree of arbitrary authority usurped by the State ruling class is directly proportional to the prevalence of explicitly abstracted rationally espoused attitudes of individual self-esteem. In every complex social grouping there is (at least potentially) a sub-grouping of persons whose personal orientation is - in brief - "libertarian". If this sub-grouping through the fortuities of history are allowed to flourish -- as was the case in Western Europe in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, then the multipolarities of diffused power are sufficient not only to counterbalance the power of statist monopoly power, but sufficient to give rise to contending ideologies. Historically, this is the beginning of the end for the State -- in the long run.

In Russia, the homogeneity of the Russian Christian ideology was relatively stable. There were indeed sharp differences between certain rebellious sects such as the Old Believers and the state-imposed orthodoxy of the Petrine period. The conformity of attitude was almost monolithic until the beginning of the nineteenth century when powerful liberalizing forces from Western Europe and Neopoleonic France in particular began to have influence in the upper strata of Russian society. (Please excuse the incompleteness of Part II - new materials did not permit late revision of the remainder in time). - Richard R. Slomon

RETALIATORY RECAPTURE (cont. from page 4)

against the State which was using my property to oppress them. In concrete political terms, this means that anarcho-capitalists have every ethical prerogative to use the State apparatus to advantage. However, this prerogative may only be employed as part of an organized program to dismantle and abolish the State. The situation is indeed very complex but we can and must distinguish between one who is fighting against statist coercion and one who has fallen in with thieves. This will require the establishment of our own underground judicial system to pass judgement on the authenticity of claims to retaliatory recapture. This concept was originally discussed in two articles written in the LP of Washington State newsletter, Reason and Liberty in 1976 under the pseudonym "Black Market". We must come to grips with the realization that any movement to abolish the State cannot rely on existing police and judicial institutions, not only because these are generally corrupt and morally bankrupt, but due to their integral position within the State apparatus. As our program is implemented it will of necessity require an independent and parallel judicial system. This will serve to distinguish the authenticity of political claims.

The objective of the Anarcho-capitalist movement is the abolition of government and its massive apparatus of coercion -- all of which we call the State. Anarcho-capitalists are allied with many kinds of anti-statists who still want to retain some form of government, albeit in vastly reduced extent and function. There are three basic strategies for removing the yoke of the State: (1) violent revolution, (2) political reform and (3) education and cultural change. In actuality both revolution

(cont. on page 33)