

Christians in Eastern Europe: a Decade of Aspirations and Frustrations

PHILIP WALTERS

Eastern European circumstances do not encourage the unreflecting believer of the type common in the West whose daily life is unaffected by his theoretical commitment to a faith. Most groups of believers living in countries with Marxist regimes — from hierarchs of the main religious bodies enjoying government favour, through ordinary people who attend services, to uncompromising dissidents spending long terms in labour camps — have to engage in a more or less constant examination of their consciences and their responses to the changing social and ideological demands on them. Over the last ten years Keston College has been privileged to monitor the witness of these believers and *Religion in Communist Lands* has established itself as the only organ in English to present a comprehensive view of developments in this whole complex realm.

The Political and Ideological Background to the 1970s

The “secret speech” delivered by Khrushchev in 1956 set in motion the process known as “destalinisation”, both in the Soviet Union and with varying degrees of intensity in the other countries of Eastern Europe. Khrushchev’s criticism of Stalin’s policies had the consequence of exploding the myth of the great leader’s supposed infallibility, and led eventually to questioning of the inviolability of his ideological legacy. During the early 1960s, “revisionists” were to be found in Eastern European countries searching for ways in which Marxist-Leninist doctrine could be modified and revived. In Czechoslovakia in 1968, the revisionists even came to power. The crushing of the Czechoslovak experiment in “socialism with a human face” by the combined forces of the Warsaw Pact marked the start of the process of slow restalinisation which has characterised the Brezhnev era in the Soviet Union and has set the mood of the 1970s throughout most of Eastern Europe.

Politically, the Soviet régime has proved inflexible when faced with reform movements in its satellite countries, most notably in Poland. Economically, the 1970s have presented the Eastern-bloc countries with world-wide problems which their own agricultural and industrial systems have proved incapable of overcoming. At the same time, there is an ideolog-

ical vacuum in Eastern Europe: Marxism-Leninism during the 1970s has shown itself in most of the countries concerned to be no living creed capable of creative adaptation, but an ossified ideology of power.

A combination of continuing political repression, growing economic difficulties and severe ideological disillusionment has seen the spread of a search in Eastern Europe for true values, and this search has defined itself increasingly as a search for religious faith.

The Pattern of Church-State Relations in the Various Countries

Conditions for the various Christian churches in the Soviet Union and the eight communist countries of Eastern Europe obviously differ widely. It will be helpful at this point to review the broad policies towards religion adopted in the Soviet Union and then, more briefly, to describe the general situation in each of the other countries.

The Soviet Union is by far the largest of the political units and had already been under communist rule for 30 years when its various satellites joined it after the Second World War. All religion was savagely persecuted in the 1930s under Stalin, but conditions improved generally during the war when Stalin realised that in order to win the loyalty of the significant proportion of Soviet citizens who were believers he would have to woo the churches with concessions; and since that time the major denominations have enjoyed a sometimes precarious toleration. The authorities have realised that unless believers are given some measure of official toleration, all religious activity will go underground and be impossible to monitor or control. They are also able to use the church hierarchs to endorse specific aspects of Soviet policy such as the campaign for world peace.

The major denominations are allowed a church hierarchy, some training facilities for priests and a restricted number of publications; but none of these concessions has any legal guarantee. The only legalised unit is the parish with its registered place of worship. Nevertheless, a campaign such as that of 1959-64 under Khrushchev, when thousands of churches were closed illegally, is always possible.¹ The authorities expect believers to confine their religious activities within a very restricted framework as the price for registration, and many evangelical Christians have taken the decision not to seek registration from the State at all, preferring the freedom of the outlaw to meet, worship, evangelise, baptise their children and so on. Anti-religious pressure is constant throughout the education system and in government propaganda at all levels, and there is systematic discrimination against believers in all jobs except the most menial. Conditions for religious believers are worse in the Soviet Union than in any other East European country except Albania.

Mounting religious dissent and a significant religious revival in the late 1960s and 1970s have presented the authorities with increasing problems. Since the mid-1970s the attitude of the authorities towards the Orthodox

Church seems to have been to try to woo the hierarchs in an attempt to use them to persuade the more dissident elements to come to heel. The outspoken Orthodox priest Fr Dimitri Dudko was moved by the church authorities from parish to parish, but was not arrested until 1980. Meanwhile a number of concessions have been made to the Church, such as the provision of a new building for publishing work in Moscow. A similar policy has been pursued towards the evangelicals. The authorities held out freedom to worship as the prize for registration, but refrained from arresting troublesome *Initsiativniki* (unregistered Baptists) while trying to persuade them to register their congregations. The number of *Initsiativniki* prisoners began to fall before 1975 and continued to fall until 1979.²

In 1979 the authorities evidently decided that enough was enough. The number of known Christian prisoners rose steadily from 180 in April 1979 to almost 400 at the end of 1982, and pressure throughout society against believers who want to do more than simply worship in church has increased correspondingly. Virtually all leading activists in the Orthodox, Baptist and other churches are now in prison or labour camp, and except in the republic of Lithuania the open dissent of the 1970s is temporarily at least at an end.

In Czechoslovakia, strong pressure on the churches has been a constant feature of communist policy for 30 years apart from a brief period in 1968-69. The situation here for Catholic priests, Protestant pastors and the average believer is almost as difficult as in the Soviet Union.

In Hungary, the 1970s have seen some improvement in the official status of the Roman Catholic Church, especially since the departure of Cardinal Mindszenty from his refuge in the American Embassy in Budapest to Rome in 1971. The Cardinal had symbolised the resistance of the Catholic Church to communism. Since then, an accommodation has been worked out between the Catholic Church under Cardinal Lékai and the communist authorities, and the Protestant churches have also been involved. Certainly the churches have received some concessions in theological education, church building and the publishing of literature; but the price which has to be paid in compromising with the demands of the regime is too high for many believers.

In Bulgaria, the Orthodox Church enjoys a good deal of toleration, partly because of its historical championing of Bulgarian freedom against the Turks. In Romania, the Orthodox Church is similarly identified with the aspirations of the State, and under the strongly nationalist regime of Ceausescu it is able to maintain a relatively high profile in society. In both these countries, however, the authorities use the official churches to discipline religious activists, and there have been spates of arrests of religious dissenters during the 1970s.

The situation of the Church in East Germany is unique. The regime itself closely follows the Soviet line, but the Protestant Church has a distinct and influential role to play within the socialist State, and conditions for believers



Map drawn by Philip Walters.

are better than in any other East European country except perhaps Yugoslavia. The churches have close links with their sister churches in West Germany; and the need to repair the evil legacy of Nazism has tended to unite the churches with the government in a common cause. At the same time, the Church as an institution is independent from the State, which has no direct or indirect say in church appointments.

The position of the Catholic Church in Poland is also unique. Having the allegiance of 90 per cent of the population, it has always been an autonomous unit with its own structure and organisation, and despite the efforts of the communist authorities to restrict its practical role within society it has remained free from government control and able to function as the guardian of moral and spiritual values. The importance of the Church in shaping the events of the last three years took the world by surprise; and it will doubtless continue to play a central role in guiding further social and political development in Poland.

Yugoslavia and Albania are distinctive in that neither country is a Soviet satellite, and this has meant that the policy each country has pursued towards religion has been quite autonomous. In both countries the population is a mixture of Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims. In Yugoslavia, religious practice is tolerated within very widely defined limits, while Albania is the only State in the world where religion is illegal, and all public expressions of faith are savagely punished.

Christian-Marxist Cooperation

A certain amount of genuine Christian-Marxist dialogue took place in Eastern Europe during the 1960s. From the Marxist side, it was the revisionists who took the initiative in trying to establish dialogue, and the aim was, ideally, to move towards a synthesis of at least some elements in Marxism and Christianity. The symbolic end to this dialogue came with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.³ There is now no Eastern European country where dialogue is expected to produce a growing together of the two systems of belief. In fact, there has been a general reassertion of the doctrine that Marxism-Leninism must reign supreme: in Czechoslovakia after 1968, in Moscow in 1969, in Romania and Yugoslavia in 1971, in Hungary in 1972, and in changes to the Polish constitution in 1976.

Dialogue of the more pragmatic kind has however been possible in some of the countries, and in Yugoslavia and East Germany, and for some periods in Poland, the churches have achieved a definite role in society with the power to gain concessions from the authorities to widen the sphere of their own activities and sometimes even to encourage what is best in the political systems under which they live and to curb excesses.⁴

The situation of the Protestant Church in East Germany improved substantially after 1969 when the Church, which had formed part of a single

body with the Protestant Church in West Germany, separated from it and formed an independent Federation of Protestant Churches. This was recognised formally by the East German government in 1971. In 1976 permission was granted for the building of 40 new churches. State and church leaders met for high-level talks in March 1978 and concessions were granted, including greater access to the media and an end to discrimination against Christians in education and at work.⁵ The Church engages in social work on a relatively large scale — there are many church-run hospitals and homes in the GDR — and it is now able to enter into real discussions with the government about aspects of the latter's policy in a spirit of "critical solidarity".⁶ There is, however, no ideological rapprochement between Christianity and the state ideology: Christian-Marxist cooperation in East Germany is not dialogue but a practical *modus vivendi*. It is over ideological matters that Church and State still tend to come into conflict. For example, as in other communist countries, the State insists that the Church speak out positively in support of official East German and Soviet policies to promote world peace. Recently Christians have shown signs of wanting to take independent initiatives in this sphere. In 1978 it was announced that pre-military education would be a compulsory school subject for 15- and 16-year-olds. The Churches opposed this move. In 1981 they called for an alternative type of "social peace service" as a substitute for military service. Meanwhile, an unofficial peace movement within the Church adopted the wearing of the "swords into ploughshares" badge and began campaigning for disarmament in both East and West. This was unacceptable to the secular authorities and the matter is causing continuing tension between Church and State.⁷

In most countries of Eastern Europe, any concessions won by the churches as institutions have been at the price of complete endorsement of the social and political strategies of the secular authorities. In the Soviet Union, the churches are allowed a hierarchy and an organisational framework on condition that they speak out consistently in support of the social and political initiatives of the régime, notably the cause of world peace. In 1982 the Russian Orthodox Church hosted an international conference on this theme in Moscow. In Czechoslovakia, the churches are firmly under the control of the secular authorities. The hierarchs of the churches are used systematically as spokesmen for government policies. Close control of the clergy is exercised through such bodies as the priests' organisation *Pacem in Terris* which have an obvious political role. Pastors and priests are licensed by the State and can be sacked or have their pay cut for too zealous pursuit of their calling and for failing to endorse aspects of the regime's policy. During the 1970s about 500 clergy were banned from exercising their ministry. Since 1971 it has been made explicit that monastic orders have no legal foundation for their existence, and they have been subjected to chronic pressure and persecution. The price paid by the churches in Czechoslovakia for their survival is one of the highest in Eastern Europe.

In countries like the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, the preservation and championing of the rights of believers to follow the dictates of their own consciences in all areas of daily life has fallen to groups of activists and dissidents who have been consistently punished for their activities.

Human Rights

One of the most obvious areas in which religious believers have been active during the 1970s has been the realm of human rights. The secular human rights movement began in the relatively liberal 1960s when there was widespread belief that the Soviet and East European regimes could be pressurised into correcting abuses in their own systems. The movement was boosted by the negotiations leading to the drafting of the Helsinki Agreements, and by the fact that this document was endorsed in 1975 by all Eastern European countries except Albania. Human rights campaigners in communist countries began to send documents and petitions not only to their own authorities but to the West as well in the hope of effecting real changes in their societies. The flow of *samizdat* (unofficial, uncensored, usually typewritten documents) from the Soviet Union and many Eastern European countries has increased from a trickle to a flood.

The contribution of religious believers to the human rights movement has been a specific and important one. Christians have not only campaigned for the rights of religious believers but for civil rights in general, and in the climate of growing disillusionment with Marxism during the 1970s, it is the moral authority of Christianity which in many countries has come to provide the enduring framework for the conducting of this wider human rights campaign.

Religious rights are specifically mentioned in the Helsinki Agreements, and believers have campaigned for the freedom to practise their faith in accordance with their consciences. In the Soviet Union, the only religious activity which is specifically allowed is to meet for worship in a registered building. The legal position for believers is somewhat better in most of the other countries, but in general many religious activities which we would regard as normal in the West are either illegal or actively discouraged: evangelising, educating children in religion, producing and circulating religious literature, doing social work. The churches are also generally woefully short of basic requirements: Bibles and even the most elementary religious literature, theological academies and seminaries, even in many cases registered buildings for worship.

By the early 1970s a movement had begun among certain priests and laymen of the Russian Orthodox Church aiming to put pressure on the hierarchs to be more vigorous in demanding full realisation of the rights of the Church and of the freedom of individuals to practise a faith, as laid down in the Constitution. In 1975 the signing of the Helsinki Agreements and the

publication of revisions to the law on religion, clarifying many ambiguous matters,⁸ gave a more definite context for the human rights campaign and an impetus to believers to petition for greater freedom at home and for the right to leave the country. The emigration movement among Soviet Pentecostals began in 1976, and had grown to 20,000 applicants by May 1978.⁹ *Samizdat* increased in quantity, and a good deal of that emanating from Baptists and Adventists was actually printed on clandestine presses.¹⁰ By the mid-1970s almost 50 per cent of all *samizdat* in the USSR was written by religious believers.¹¹

The priest Gleb Yakunin and the Orthodox layman Lev Regelson sent a report on the infringement of the rights of religious believers in the USSR to the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi in November 1975. Their initiative sparked off the first debate ever held on this topic by the WCC.¹² Encouraged by this response, Fr Gleb went on in December 1976 to found the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights in the USSR, which began sending regular and plentiful supplies of documents to the West detailing the difficulties facing religious believers.¹³

A parallel Catholic Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights was founded in November 1978 and has since been very active in the Soviet republic of Lithuania, a nation which is predominantly Roman Catholic and which presents special and apparently insoluble problems to the Soviet government.¹⁴ There is growing cooperation in Lithuania amongst ordinary believers, priests and bishops, and a 12-year campaign in the unofficial *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* to have Bishops Sladkevičius and Steponavičius released from internal exile was crowned with partial success in 1982 with the release and installation of Sladkevičius. (For details see pp. 88-90—Ed.)

The human rights manifesto *Charter 77* was issued in Czechoslovakia in 1977 and after 18 months had 1,000 signatures. Catholics became the largest single group in the *Charter 77* movement and the Catholic philosopher Václav Benda was appointed one of its three official spokesmen in 1978.¹⁵ At the same time, a flow of documents from Christian sources in Czechoslovakia began to reach the West.¹⁶

In Romania, the responsibility for promoting human rights since 1975 has fallen more and more on religious believers, particularly since the 27th Congress of Baptist Churches in Bucharest in 1977. Prominent in the movement has been the Baptist pastor Josif Ton, now exiled, and the Orthodox priest Gheorghe Calciu, now in prison. In April 1978 Romanian Baptists founded the Christian Committee for the Defence of Religious Freedom and Freedom of Conscience (ALRC), partly on the model of Fr Gleb Yakunin's Committee in the USSR.¹⁷

The Catholic Church in Poland, as already noted, has always been the guardian of national and religious values, and since the communist takeover

it has continued to exist as an autonomous institution and a potential alternative for the people's loyalty. In 1970, the Polish authorities shot at striking workers. This action brought home to the Polish people the width of the gulf between rulers and subjects and demonstrated the bankruptcy of the official ideology. In 1976 there were further serious strikes, and the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) was founded to defend victimised workers. The growing dissident movement began searching for a moral basis for its protest, and has increasingly found it in the Catholic faith.¹⁸ At the same time, the Church has been more and more closely involved in supporting the human rights movement. Cosmetic concessions were made to the Church by the authorities, but then in 1978 an event took place which entirely altered the balance of power between Church and State: the election of a Polish Pope. Since then the Church has been able to take the moral initiative in society. It has been intimately involved in the growth of Solidarity and the Catholic faith has provided the moral framework for the movement,¹⁹ including its overtly pacifist character.

Arrests of members of the secular Helsinki Monitoring groups in the USSR began in 1977. Fr Gleb Yakunin was arrested in 1979 and sentenced to ten years' detention for "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda". Repression of human rights activists has been severe in Czechoslovakia, and in Romania ALRC has been dismantled. Solidarity has been suppressed since the imposition of martial law in Poland. The only human rights movement in Eastern Europe to have survived into the 1980s is the one in Lithuania, where an ominous development since 1980 has been a growing number of assaults on priests and nuns, and the murder of at least two priests, including Fr Laurinavičius, a member of the Helsinki Monitoring Group.²⁰

The Religious Renaissance

The authorities in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have now clamped down decisively on activists for religious and human rights. It is evident that believers have been placing less hope in recent years on systematic support from the West in their struggle to improve their conditions; nor are they any longer expecting significant concessions from their governments or any rapid alteration in their external circumstances.

Throughout the 1970s there has however been a parallel and ever-growing interest in Christianity, particularly but not exclusively amongst the educated, and most markedly amongst young people. Born and brought up under a moribund ideology, significant numbers of young people are now seeking the spiritual sustenance and moral authority which Marxism cannot give them and which the official churches are largely prevented from providing. Common themes are the search for *truth*, inspired by the growing realisation that the ruling ideology is based on hypocrisy and fear, and the search for *true community* in societies where the policies of the authorities are

aimed at isolating individuals from one another except in officially sponsored mass activities. The teachings of Pope John Paul II, himself intimately acquainted with the spiritual needs of those in Eastern Europe, have recently provided a further powerful stimulus to the general religious revival.

In the Soviet Union, there have been all kinds of Christian *samizdat* writings discussing the place of the believer in Soviet society. Between 1971 and 1974 Vladimir Osipov edited the unofficial Orthodox journal *Veche* as a forum for "loyal opposition" within the Soviet system.²¹ The Christian Seminar on Problems of the Religious Renaissance, in existence from 1974 to 1979, was a group of young Orthodox who met for informal discussions about their new-found faith.²² Osipov and the leaders of the Seminar have all been sent to labour camps for "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda".

The religious renaissance in Poland is of course of major importance for the future of that country in particular and for Eastern Europe as a whole. Specific mention should however be made here of the "Light-Life" movement of religious renewal, which since 1972 has organised summer camps for children and students despite strong opposition from the local authorities.^{*23} In the last four years this movement has given rise to a similar one inside Slovakia, the traditionally Catholic area of Czechoslovakia. This latter movement apparently has as many as 200 secretly ordained priests.²⁴

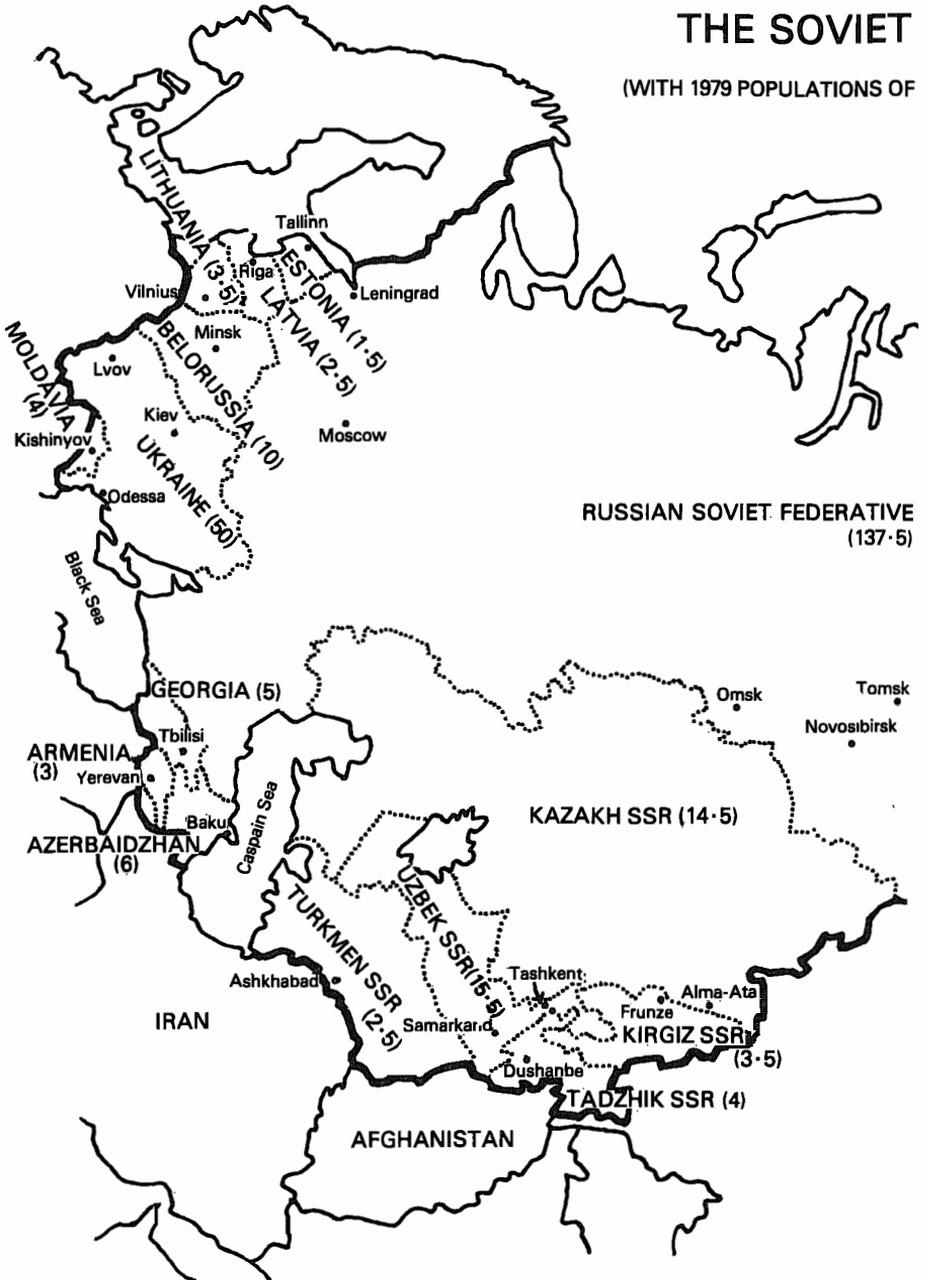
Pressure and constraints on the churches in Czechoslovakia have produced over the last five years a burgeoning of *samizdat* comparable only to that in the Soviet Union and Poland. Seven priests were amongst the 241 signatories of *Charter 77*, but since then, while the supply of secular human rights *samizdat* has faltered, religious *samizdat* has flourished. Between 1977 and 1979, for example, a group of Catholics in the province of Moravia produced 55 *samizdat* titles in a total of 8,000 copies.²⁵ A number of priests have been arrested as a result of their work in disseminating unofficial literature, two of the most prominent being Fr Josef Zvěřina and Fr František Lízna, both arrested in 1979.

The compromise between the officially-recognised Catholic church and the regime worked out by Cardinal Lékai in Hungary has come under criticism in the last decade from the so-called "basis communities" — independent groups comprising altogether several thousand Catholics who meet to pray, study the Bible and celebrate mass in private homes. About a hundred groups over the last two years have embraced the pacifism of Fr György Bulányi, who preaches a Christianity based on a communal life of poverty and non-violence.²⁶ In March 1982 his theology was condemned by the Hungarian Bishops' Conference. The Vatican has not yet endorsed this judgement, and it seems that under Pope John Paul II it is unhappy in general about Cardinal Lékai's arrangement with the government which compromises the Church and is leading to a decline in the quality of religious

*See article on pp. 49-66—Ed.

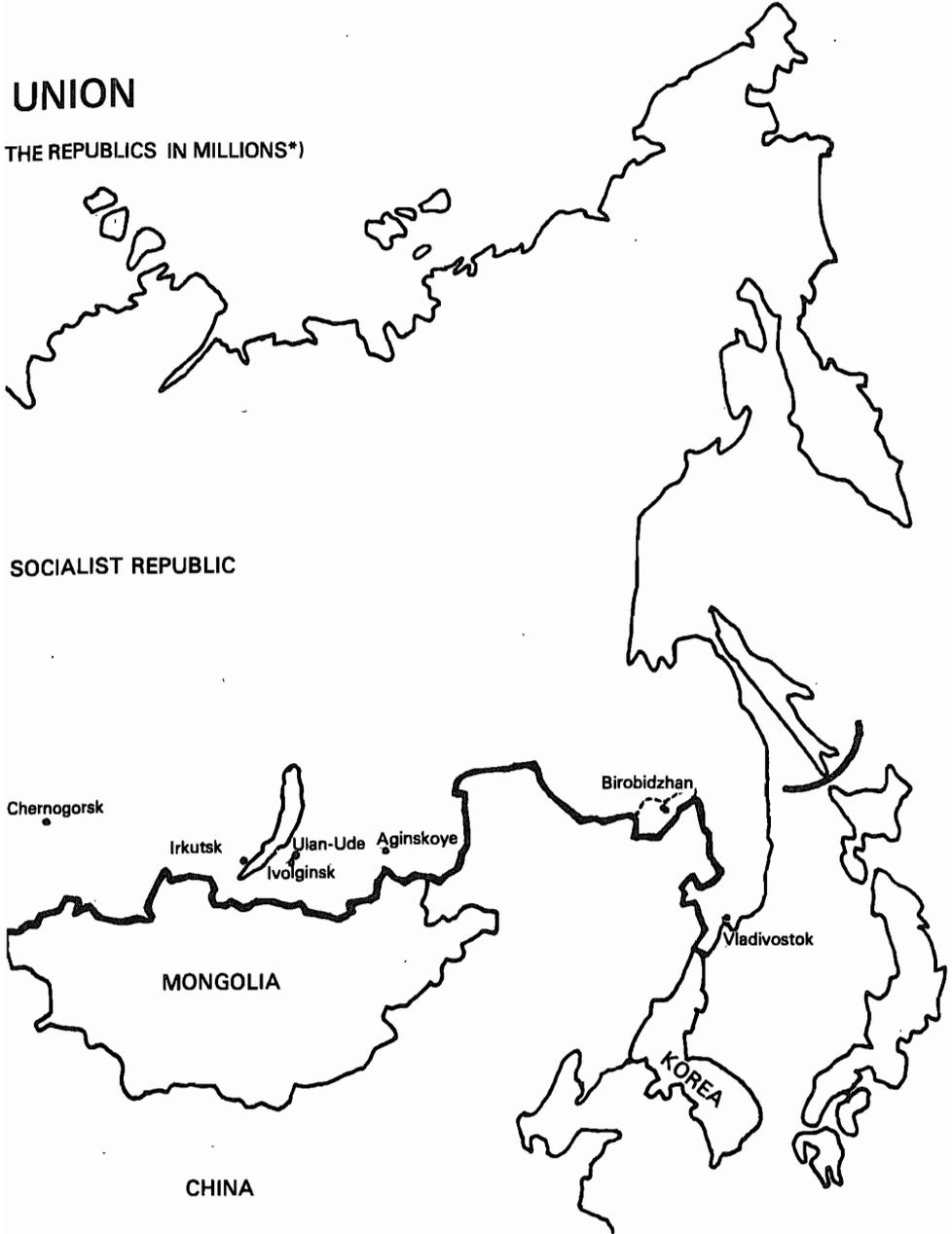
THE SOVIET

(WITH 1979 POPULATIONS OF



UNION

THE REPUBLICS IN MILLIONS*)



Map drawn by Philip Walters.

* By the beginning of 1983, the population of the Soviet Union had risen from the 1979 census level of 263 million to an estimated 270 million.

life.²⁷ A new Hungarian *samizdat* publication, *Beszelo*, has listed "independent religious groups" as one of the subjects it will deal with.²⁸

Even in East Germany, where the churches enjoy a good deal of freedom, there have been signs of unofficial religiously inspired activity: as already noted, young Christians have recently been involved in an unofficial peace movement calling for disarmament in both East and West.²⁹

One widespread result of cooperation amongst Christians in Eastern Europe over the last decade has been an increase in ecumenical consciousness at an informal level amongst the various denominations. In 1976 the first unofficially-inspired ecumenical appeal in Soviet (and Russian) history was sent by 28 Christians of six denominations to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.³⁰ *The Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* has expressed support for Christians of other denominations, including the Russian Orthodox priests Dimitri Dudko and Gleb Yakunin.³¹ An ecumenical openness characterised the Christian Seminar in the USSR and the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights publicised violations of the rights of Christians of all denominations. A similar ecumenical spirit is at work amongst the unofficial groups of Catholics in Czechoslovakia, who feel themselves united with Protestants and have shown a great interest in the Taizé community.³² Ecumenical contacts with other Christians not only in Eastern Europe but also in the West have eagerly been sought by unofficial groups of young Christians, notably from Czechoslovakia and the USSR. The Christian Seminar was very anxious to establish permanent contact particularly with young Catholics in Italy.³³

The Influence of John Paul II

Mention has already been made of the significance of the election of a Polish Pope in 1978 for the subsequent developments in Poland specifically and of the importance of his teachings and activities in awakening more generally amongst Christians in Eastern Europe a sense of their dignity, responsibilities and potential strength. The important visit he paid in 1979 to his native country awakened the Poles to a sense of their own Christian identity and his sermons on that occasion and since then have carefully set the context for a new Christian consciousness not only amongst Catholics but amongst Christians in general.³⁴ He has dwelt at length on the basic Christian theme of the dignity and inviolability of the individual, and his message to Christians in Eastern Europe is that they should never give in to illegitimate social or political pressures,³⁵ a message which is perceived by those Christians as being particularly relevant to their situation.

The Pope has also stressed that East and West share common Christian roots,³⁶ and has made it clear that the Vatican is deeply concerned with the fate of the churches in Eastern Europe. There has been a subtle shift in the

Ostpolitik of the Vatican under John Paul II. It is no longer sufficient that the institutional structures of the Catholic Church in Eastern Europe should be safeguarded: the price paid for this must also be examined, and pressure exerted at psychological moments and at sensitive points. In March 1982, for example, the Vatican issued a decree prohibiting priests from participating in political organisations, and this was correctly construed by the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia as directed particularly at the government controlled priests' organisation *Pacem in Terris*. The Czech hierarchy is now faced with a choice between continuing to belong to a banned organisation or speaking out against illegitimate government interference in the affairs of the Church.³⁷ Cardinal Tomášek, the Archbishop of Prague, has recently felt able to speak out in defence of the trampled rights of the Church now that he has the specific backing of the Vatican.

Nationalism and Religion

All the elements in the religious picture surveyed so far have principally concerned the individual: his rights and his dignity and his search for his true place in a real community. One other factor of major importance during the 1970s, the sense of national identity amongst the people of Eastern Europe, has at times provided a climate in which these concerns can flourish, but at other times has produced the reverse effect.

Albania was declared the first atheist State in the world in 1967. Since then all manifestations of religious belief have been illegal and severely punished. Albania has historically been a country of three faiths — Islam, Orthodoxy and Catholicism — and religious divisions have been exploited for political ends by occupying powers. The need for unity to some extent explains if it does not excuse the total suppression of religion there.³⁸

In Yugoslavia, where religion and nationality are closely identified, religious fervour is usually interpreted as a cloak for unacceptable nationalist aspirations. The various republics which constitute the Yugoslav federation have their own particular traditional religious makeup: Croatia and Slovenia are predominantly Catholic, Serbia and Macedonia Orthodox, Kosovo Muslim, and in Bosnia and Hercegovina all three religions live side by side.³⁹ In 1971 President Tito inaugurated a campaign against anti-socialist forces, including "liberalism" and "nationalism", directed initially at Croatia, where an outburst of nationalism had united all sections of society, including the Party and the Catholic Church. This anti-pluralist attitude has of course affected the churches; but there has not been a consistent offensive against religion since the 1950s, and one reason for this has been the fear that an anti-religious drive would simply turn the churches into rallying-points for liberal or nationalist opposition.⁴⁰ The most that has happened is that what constitutes religious activity has been more strictly defined. Religious publishing has actually increased and there are now about 200 religious papers

and journals produced by the Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims.⁴¹ The areas which have come under pressure have been education — the right of teachers to be practising believers — and the social activities of the clergy.⁴² It is still in practice impossible as well for religious believers to occupy senior posts in the government, the armed forces and the economy. Some of these restrictions have now been embodied in new republican laws governing relations between the State and the religious communities, circulated for discussion in the various republics in 1975-76 and all enacted by 1980. The social activities of the Church have been banned. Training facilities for priests and the religious education of children are however guaranteed.⁴³

Recent harsher responses by the authorities in cases of outbreaks of local religious zeal or outspoken sermons by priests must mostly be ascribed to increasing nervousness about the future of Yugoslavia in a climate of growing economic difficulty and at a time when Tito is no longer present to act as a unifying factor in a historically fragmented and strife-ridden part of Europe.⁴⁴ There is no doubt that the authorities are still anxious to allow as much religious freedom as they feel able to do while inevitably, as anti-pluralists both ideologically and in the cause of national unity, keeping the churches out of the mainstream of social and political life.⁴⁵

Religious division within Yugoslavia has historically been a factor which has weakened the churches and prevented them from presenting a united stand in the face of communism. Traditional lack of cooperation between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches was exacerbated by the grim events of the last war when Catholic Croatia became a Fascist puppet state and anti-Serbian and anti-Orthodox atrocities took place.

The fostering of nationalism in Romania under Ceausescu has led to greater freedoms for the Romanian Orthodox Church which is identified with the historical national aspirations of the Romanian people. The State supervises the Church through the Department of Cults and pays part of the salaries of priests and theological professors.⁴⁶ Under Patriarch Justinian until 1977⁴⁷ and then under his successor Justin the Church as an institution has found little difficulty in accommodating itself to the aims of a socialist society. In return, it has gained some real concessions in facilities for theological education and publication.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the religious believer is severely disadvantaged as far as educational and career prospects are concerned, and the range of activities open to churchgoers is very narrow. The "Lord's Army", a wing of the Orthodox Church which engages in evangelistic and worship activities outside church premises, is illegal and has been under severe pressure,⁴⁹ and its leader, Traian Dors, has spent years in prison and was sentenced to a further term of two years in June 1982.* There are signs that not all priests are happy with the spiritual consequences for the Churches of cooperation with the State. In April 1981 five Orthodox

*Dors was released from prison under the amnesty announced by the Romanian government on 29 December 1982—Ed.

priests addressed a "Testimony of Faith" to the Patriarch, criticising the "prostitution of the Church" and its sterility, materialism and hypocrisy, and calling for the right to instruct children in religion, freedom to organise pilgrimages, access to the media, the release of Fr Calciu and the legalisation of the Lord's Army. The five priests were subjected to varying degrees of persecution, and two were unfrocked.

Bulgaria is the East European country ideologically closest to the Soviet Union. Bulgarians in general have an affection for the Russians, not shared by other Eastern Europeans, as their liberators from the Turkish yoke. The Orthodox Church under Patriarch Maksim is recognised by the State and there is a good deal of mutual respect here as well — the Church kept Bulgarian national identity and culture alive through 500 years of Turkish rule. In 1981 Bulgaria celebrated 1,300 years of its existence as a nation and the Orthodox Church was prominently involved. As in Romania and the USSR, the Orthodox Church actively endorses the policies of the State. In 1978, for example, it organised a rally, with the participation of Protestant denominations, to demonstrate against the neutron bomb. There are priests and believers who are unhappy about the degree of compromise reached between Church and State and it appears that several underground groups of Orthodox Christians have been formed, but no details are known.

The situation in Romania and Bulgaria should be contrasted with that in Lithuania, where during the 1970s the national faith has become intimately involved with the national struggle for freedom. This combination has given rise to the most successful and persistent human rights movement in the USSR, perhaps in the whole of Eastern Europe; and of course similar but much more far-reaching developments have taken place in Poland under the inspiration of the self-identification of the nation with the Catholic faith. From the point of view of religious freedom, the growth of national self-awareness is a very complex factor and ambiguous in its implications.

Concluding remarks

All the countries of Eastern Europe except Albania possess: central church organisational structures and hierarchies of officially-recognised clergy who are expected actively to endorse the social and political line pursued by the State (only in Poland has this expectation been unfulfilled); relatively small groups of active dissenters who reject most if not all state control of religion and restrictions on religious activity and who often criticise the morality of the ruling ideology and even the legitimacy of the regime; and between the two a graduated spectrum of churchgoers who are more or less satisfied with the opportunity for limited religious expression at the price of remaining second-class citizens. In the countries with harsher regimes, the latter group tends to comprise mostly old people. In some instances all three types of

believer will unite in a coherent movement to pursue religious liberty, but for this to happen special conditions are needed. During the late 1970s these conditions have been achieved in Poland and Lithuania where the nation as a whole has been identified with one particular faith, in this case Catholicism, and where a strong external authority, the Vatican under the Polish Pope, has been available as a consistent support and point of reference.

Efforts have been made during the 1970s by religious activists in Eastern Europe to stimulate analogous consistent support from Western governments and public opinion, and specifically from the World Council of Churches, for the cause of religious rights. These efforts began before 1975, received endorsement in that year by the ratification of the Helsinki Agreements, but eventually failed. There are signs that believers are now aware that the most tangible results of this kind of open campaigning are simply going to be further repression and imprisonments. The emphasis among Christian activists seems to be shifting towards discreetly-coordinated religious self-education at the level of the private group or family in a more long-term effort to build an alternative moral basis for society. The emphasis is on love, integrity, honesty and the life of true community — all theoretical ideas of Marxism which are negated every day in practice.

The restrictions laid by the communist authorities on religious communities and individual believers have varied considerably in intensity both from country to country and over the years, depending on a variety of considerations: foreign policy, internal politics, economic conditions within the country, ideological preoccupations, nationalist pressures. In all the countries we are considering except East Germany the situation for religious believers has however not improved substantially during the 1970s — has indeed on balance deteriorated. Concessions by the authorities to religious communities have normally been cosmetic — for example, an increase in the provision of religious literature (both imported and printed within the various countries) to a level still however far from adequate — while real restrictions remain or have been reimposed on believers hoping for responsible jobs, on churches wishing to engage in charitable, social or welfare activity, and on the political involvement of believers.

The fact that external circumstances for the churches have not improved has not however meant a decline in the number of active believers. In most countries, except again in industrialised and relatively prosperous East Germany and in Yugoslavia, both countries where secularisation of the type familiar in the West is prevalent, most if not all religious denominations have seen a substantial increase in membership and some have experienced charismatic renewal movements. External pressures are stimulating not only a quantitative but, more importantly, a qualitative growth in the churches of Eastern Europe.

It is obvious that religion is here to stay as a factor in communist societies. As the only legalised form for alternative ideological commitment, the

churches and other religious bodies equally obviously are in a unique and potentially powerful position. Until recently, however, their importance has been almost completely neglected by political and sociological analysts in the West. *Religion in Communist Lands* is still the only journal in English dealing systematically with the subject. Now, at last, perceptions seem to be changing. The events in Poland have been the main catalyst for creating a new frame of reference for a systematic assessment of the crucial role which religion now has to play in the development of the societies of Eastern Europe.

¹ *RCL* Vol. 9, Nos. 1-2, pp. 18-27.

² *RCL* Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 4-22; Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 28-38.

³ *RCL* Vol. 1, No. 6, p. 4.

⁴ For comments on dialogue in Yugoslavia, see *RCL* Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 20-1; and on the harder conditions for this dialogue after 1971, see Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 6-8. On the absence of dialogue in Romania, see Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 6-7.

⁵ For a story illustrating progress towards the latter goal, see *Keston News Service (KNS)* No. 61, pp. 1-2.

⁶ *RCL* Vol. 9, Nos. 1-2, pp. 6-17.

⁷ *RCL* Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 275-82; *KNS* No. 151, p. 5; No. 154, pp. 4-5.

⁸ *RCL* Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 4-10. See also Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 24-34.

⁹ *RCL* Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 6; Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 170-9.

¹⁰ *RCL* Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 34; Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 205-6.

¹¹ *RCL* Vol. 9, Nos. 3-4, p. 106.

¹² *RCL* Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 4-17; Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 4-15.

¹³ *RCL* Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 279-98.

¹⁴ *RCL* Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 76-96.

¹⁵ *RCL* Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 32-4.

¹⁶ *RCL* Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 162-78.

¹⁷ *RCL* Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 166-77.

¹⁸ *RCL* Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 23-8.

¹⁹ *RCL* Vol. 9, Nos. 1-2, pp. 33-9.

²⁰ See list on pp. 83-8 (Ed.)

²¹ *RCL* Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 229-34.

²² *RCL* Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 92-112; Vol. 9, Nos. 3-4, pp. 111-26.

²³ *RCL* Vol. 9, Nos. 1-2, p. 35.

²⁴ *RCL* Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 37-8.

²⁵ *RCL* Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 34.

²⁶ See documents on pp. 95-108 (Ed.)

²⁷ *KNS* No. 149, pp. 4-5.

²⁸ *KNS* No. 150, p. 5.

²⁹ *RCL* Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 202-4.

³⁰ *KNS* No. 27, pp. 1-4.

³¹ *RCL* Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 83.

³² *RCL* Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 36.

³³ *RCL* Vol. 9, Nos. 3-4, pp. 124-6.

³⁴ *RCL* Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 160-5.

³⁵ *RCL* Vol. 9, Nos. 3-4, pp. 38-9.

³⁶ Notably in his homily at Gniezno on 3 June 1979.

³⁷ *RCL* Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 275-82.

³⁸ *RCL* Vol. 3, Nos. 1-3, pp. 4-7; Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 148-52; Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 242-55.

³⁹ *RCL* Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 215-7.

⁴⁰ *RCL* Vol. 2, No. 6, pp. 8-12.

⁴¹ *KNS* No. 78, pp. 4-5.

⁴² *RCL* Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 18-27.

⁴³ *RCL* Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 119-24.

⁴⁴*RCL* Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 7; Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 18-27; Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 4-9; *ibid.*, pp. 87-8; *KNS* No. 134, p. 9; No. 135, pp. 4-5; No. 144, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁵*RCL* Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 256-74.

⁴⁶*RCL* Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 4.

⁴⁷*RCL* Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 164-9.

⁴⁸*KNS* No. 4, p. 7.

⁴⁹*RCL* Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 314-7.

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