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Fifty Years of Communism in Russia, 1967.

Fifty Years of Communism in Russia - Thoughts on a Jubilee Daniel Jeremy Silver November 5, 1967

It was an ordinary work day in Memphis and Themes and Babylon and perhaps hardly unnoticed, but in the far reaches of the Sinai wilderness Moses and the children of Israel were binding for themselves to the Torah covenant. The businessman and the workman of Jerusalem and of Rome went about their business quite unaware and unaffected by the execution of Jesus and of a few common criminals.

One hundred years ago this year Londoners went about their business quite unaware of the fact that Carl Marx had on one particular day pushed back his chair from his desk at the British Museum, having written the last sentence of his new scripture, Das Capital. The great religions of the world were all born in silence and in anonymity. Once they grabbed hold of the hearts of men and shaped the entire body politic and despite its official anti-religious doctrine, Communism is the most spectacularly successful of all new religions. One-third of all the people of the world live in states in which Communism is the official religion. One-third of all the children of the world recite daily in their schools the catechism of this new faith. There are Communist parties in every nation on the face of the earth, either legal and visible, or illicit, hunted. One hundred years, Communism has moved from a vision, an economic vision in the eyes of a London dreamer, to the living faith of a good proportion of mankind.

Now, it is one of the commonplaces of religion that they are born in silence and in distant places. They flourish in public and in the centers of the world, the power centers of the world. Judaism was born in the Sinai Peninsula that flourished in Judea. Christianity was born in Judea, a Judea broken under Roman rule, but it flourished in Rome. Communism was born, if you will, in western Europe and Marx confidently expected the Communist revolutions in the more advanced states of western Europe, but it has flourished in the Soviet Union where 50 years ago this week the Bolsheviks brought off their successful November revolution and it is to this day in

Moscow that the authority and the ceremonial of the Communist faith is centered. Communism is a faith, and this I insist. It has a scripture, Das Capital. It has a gospel, the Communist Manifesto. It has its patriarchs, Marx and Engels. It has its lawgiver, Lenin. It has its priesthood, the commissars. It has its truth, Pravda; and its heresy, deviationism. It has a messianic complex. It has an active missionary apparatus which exists in every part of our globe. Like all the great religions of mankind, Communism has its doctrine of man. Man is more a product of nurture than of nature. Man is a product of the conditions of the economic system in which he is found. In a system of class antagonisms, man is necessarily suspicious and defensive and aggressive, but come the classless society man will mature into his own fullness and he will be peaceful and fulfilled, untroubled, unconflicted, happy. And like all the great religions of mankind, Communism has its philosophy of history. History, according to the Communist Doctrine, is a product pure and simply of economic forces. With the coming of the Industrial Revolution more and more power was concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer people. They control the capital which, in turn, controlled the means of production. The workers were increasingly subordinated to the privileged, but they increasingly recognized that without their labor the privileged could not survive, that capital could not be increased. Dimly sensing their power, the workers of the world would turn to those who could give them strong guidance and discipline the elite of the Communist Party. There would be a revolution. There would be a forced march period of economic growth and consolidation, all under the tyranny, the dictatorship, of the elite, but then, in time, after the economic revolution had been won that dictatorship would wither away for, according to Marx, a State exists only to maintain the privileges of the privileged and to maintain those who are underprivileged in their want and once all people have all that they can expect and hope of the society, there is no reason for a State, to use Lenin's phrase, "it will wither away. " The Communist worker then will have not only economic advantage,

but political freedom.

I am often reminded as I listen to or read the Communist publications of the messianic statement of our own people: "I believe in the coming of the messiah and even though he is delayed I await him confidently." Even though the withering away of the bureaucracy and tyranny is momentarily delayed, the Communists say, I await its withering, its disestablishment, when, in addition to social welfare, I will enjoy political freedom.

Communism is a faith, and like all faiths it has zealots and its doctrine, its catechism, its dogma, its priesthood, its messianic concept. It has had in its history all of the classic problems which have affected the classic religions of mankind. Delegates from one hundred or more nations of the world are assembling in Moscow to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution and, interestingly, they themselves will be confused by exactly what it is that they are celebrating, the growth, the tremendous economic political growth of the Soviet Union, or the triumph of the internationale, the triumph of the Communist Party for increasingly it is evident that the two are not synonymous. There are already Protestant groups within the Communist faith system, not only Peking, but Albania and Jugoslavia and Cuba and many of the Communist parties outside the Iron Curtain in the so-called free nations of the world. I believe the fiftieth anniversary celebration going on this week is far more a triumph to the renaissance of the Russiah State than it is a statement of the success of the Communist faith, for although the giant picture of Marx will dominate Red Square, it will be paralleled by an equally giant picture of Lenin and it will be Russia that is on display rather than the world-wide revolution which the Marxists so confidently expected. It will be the Russian Army which will march into Red Square with its 3-1/2 million troops, its sleek, sophisticated, modern weapons dragging along with it its rockets and missiles, the space ships which have shot the Cosmonots to Venus and beyond. It will be the visible

and the no less real and tangible achievements of the Soviet Union which will be paraded about. Let none of us forget that these are many and they are great.

In 1917, before the Bolshevik Revolution, three in four Russians were illiterate. Four million Russians only were in school. Less than 125,000 Russians were in the university. Today 95 percent of the Russians are literate. Fifty million Russian children are in school and four million Russian young adults are in universities or in technicons in advanced education. In 1917 the Soviet Union produced two billion kilowatt hours of electricity. In 1967 she will produce 584 billion kilowatt hours. In 1917 the Soviet Union produced four million tons of steel. In 1967 the Soviet Union will produce 104 million tons, 80 percent of American production. This year the Soviet Union will produce 8. I billion meters of textiles; 4.7 million television sets; 4 million refrigerators and an almost equal number of washing machines. In 1917 the Soviet Union was the fifth largest industrial producer in the world. In 1967 she is second only to the United States and it must be remembered that she has had this tremendous growth despite the jolts to the economy unlike any which we suffered in the intervening period. She has suffered tyranny, its viciousness and its foolishness. In 1936 and '37 and '38 alone some seven million Russians were put to death under Stalin. She suffered five years of violent and cruel invasion by Germany during the second World War. Russia lost 20 million citizens, men, women and children, in that war. And despite tyranny and despite invasion, 50 short years she has moved by forced step in the upper position until now she is the second great power in our world

Now this achievement has not been done without great cost, of course,

The standard of living of the Russian people has constantly been sacrificed to production
and industrial development and armaments. It is estimated that the standard of living
of the average Russian is one-fourth of the standard of living of the average American.

Just this year, in honor of the 50th anniversary of the revolution, the Russian worker will finally be granted a five-day week, but despite the sacrifices which the Russian people have had to make, despite the human cost which has been imposed upon them by their tyranny, they have come a long way quickly and they seem to be pleased and prideful of their achievement. For the Bolshevik Revolution was not only an economic revolution and not only a Communist tyranny, but it opened up, it ripped apart the seams of Russian society and permitted those on the bottom to stream up into position and opportunity. In 1917 Russia was a highly-stratified society. You died as you were born, a peasant, a serf, a Jew, whatever you were. There was no movement into the narrow upper classes of the church or of the state. All this disappeared in 1917 and with education as their ladder, young Russians from all over Russia climbed into the areas of opportunity in education, in politics, in agriculture, in industry which fast opened up to them. The last fifty years has seen the emancipation of women in the Soviet Union. In 1917 women belonged in the house. Today 75 percent of all the doctors in Russia are women; seventy percent of all the teachers; 40 percent of all the lawyers; and 30 percent of all the certified mechanical engineers. To the Russian it has been a land of opportunity. It is a land of upward movement. It has been a movement which has satisfied the hopes and dreams of many and so, though the average Russian, of course, has far less freedom than the average American, the average Russian has a standard of living below, way below, that of the average American, it is nevertheless true that the average Russian has more social security and more educational opportunity than the average American who lives in Hough and for the average Russian, knowing where he was fifty years ago, that is enough. Those who hope idly for some kind of populist revolution against those who now rule the Russian state, in my opinion, hope idly.

Of course, there is a darker side to this picture. There is a dictatorship

which is bloated and swollen and growing bigger by the day, which holds down efficiency. There is the inability of the Russian system to develop a democratic form of rule to break down the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is the constant uncertainty that the autocratic tyranny, the ruthlessness and violence of the Stalinist period may not at some point reassert itself. Russia has not solved the critical problem of any government, the problem of succession. If the Russian people want to raise their standard of living rather than to give more arms to Nasser, knowing that Nasser jails the Communist period which they supposedly agree with, they have no way of protesting. If they want more butter, more bread, more cars, better clothing, they are not so eager to put a man on the moon or to put a rocket beyond Venus, they have no way of protesting, no way of changing governmental policy, they have no alternative but to accept.

The Russian poets who in Russia occupy a central position in the literary world there, in a sense the folk philosophers of Russia, complain about the banality of Russian life, complain about the puritanical quality, strangely about what they call the bourgoise mentality of Russian art and Russian literature. The writers complain about censorship. If a book is disapproved of it is simply not published. No longer are men exiled to Siberia or killed. They are sent sometimes to jail for six months or a year, but the worst penalty for the author is simply to have his book relegated to his desk, remaining there unread by anyone and that penalty is still exacted by a censorship which is erotic, which opposes eroticism rather which is episodic and precludes the completely free expression of criticism. Yet, there is much criticism in the Soviet Union and, increasingly, people feel free to criticize this or that act of productive decision, this or that act of governmental decision to visitors even in their own press.

To a student of religion, the intriguing fact about Russian society today is that alongside the scripture, alongside Marx and Lenin, the holy revealed world, there

has developed an intricate system of what we in our tradition call hair-splitting, legal analysis of the great texts which allow those who are in control of the apparatus of the state to do exactly what they want regardless of what the classics maintain. Marx insisted on the collectivization of agriculture. One-half of the agricultural output of the Russian society today comes from privately owned plots. Marx insisted that the profit motive must be completely taken out of the marketplace and out of industry. Increasingly, the Communists such as Lieberman and Behrman in the Soviet Union are demanding that the profit motive be reintroduced into the factory system and they begin a very competent economic analysis with a long, involved, logical analysis of a sentence pulled out of context here, a phrase pulled out of context there from the scripture, to show that what they will prove economically was, in fact, what is insisted upon by Marx or by

The Russians have even made peace with the church despite the anathmas hurled at the church by the early Marxist leaders. The church, as you remember, was the opium of the masses. It was the propaganda means by which the privileged kept the ordinary in their place. Today the Russian society is busy gilding again the beautiful onion-shaped domes of the old Russiah Orthodox Churches. The churches are open.

The priests are free to offer the ritual. The people are free to come and many are coming, all this, of course, within a church-parish structure which is carefully controlled and run by the state itself. No Russiah orthodox priest would deliver a sermon on America such as I am delivering on Russia today.

Only vis a vis the Jew does Russia maintain its intransigent opposition to religion. As you well know, some 5-600 small and medium-sized synagogues have been closed in a decade. The one yeshiva in Moscow had been closed. Synagogue worship is actively discouraged. There have been all kinds of restrictions placed upon the Jewish

community. The could not bake matzah for some years. They could not print the religious calendar which tells them the dates of our holidays. They were not allowed to print a new edition of the prayerbook as the old books became fewer and fewer and more tattered and scattered. This active opposition to the Jewish faith in more ways reveals the nature of Russian life today than it does reflect official Marxist doctrine for in a sense it says what is throughout Russia, that Russia remains Russia, that mother Russia, Zionist Russia, in many ways is mother Russia, Communist Russia. The tremendous outpouring of anti-semitic feeling which existed in Czarist Russia continues to exist in Communist Russia. The narrowness of the Russian society which wants to isolate itself, has always wanted to isolate itself, from other influences and other impulses from without, continues to be one of the dominating sociological aspects of Communist society. And the Jew represents the alien, a humanistic tradition, a more western tradition. The Jew remains a danger and, therefore, you maintain the pressure, the anti-religious pressure, of Communist doctrine vis a vis the Jew though you do not maintain it vis a vis the Russian orthodox or the Greek orthodox or the Baptists and other Protestant groups which exist today in Russia.

Russia is today essentially Russian, the strong, renascent, reborn Russia, eager throughout the world to reestablish her markets, to reestablish her military influence, to extend her authority as far as she can. And this renaissance of Russia faces the delegates who will congregate in Moscow with their most complexed and difficult practical problem, Russia or Communism. It is the same problem which the church faced a thousand years ago. Is Rome the be-all and end-all, the focus and central aspect of Catholicism, or has the Catholic church interests which are different from and in fact may be at war with the interests of Rome? Russia has used the Communist parties throughout the world very often to effect her own interests and often those interests conflict with those of the internationale and of the coming "Communist revolution".

In the 1930's when Hitler signed his pact with Stalin, Stalin in effect gave new authority to the man who had done more than any other man in Europe to blot out, to erase the Communist party, to imprison its leaders, to throw them into concentration camps. For the sake of Russia he had sacrificed the Communist Party in Germany. When his successors today give arms and aid to Nasser, in effect arms and aid to a man who has imprisoned the small Communist Party in Egypt and who will use these arms against Israel, the one nation in the Middle East which allows a Communist party to operate openly and tacitly and within the body structure. Russia demands that the Communist Party be the forerunner of her own interests, but the interests of Communism vary at great degree from the interests of Mother Russia, and in the orthodox Protestant battle which is essentially the battle between Moscow and Peking, Peking is closer to the Communist faith than Moscow is. Peking accuses Moscow of having sold out Communism from Mother Russia, of having forgotten the world revolution because she has had her revolution and now she wants to protect what she has gained. In fact, she is afraid to venture out or to send out a crusade to convert the rest of the world.

In the history of religions there is a period of growth and of change. Religions are born in their solitariness and their ideas appeal to a few and they developed disciples and disciples preach the gospel and then in some center of the world, some constantine, some Lenin sees a way of using the gospel to arogate power on to himself and the faith is then bound inextricably with a place, a national interest. And, inevitably, the faith and the interest of that place come into conflict, and there is a period within church structure where the structure is decentralized, where there is a Protestant movement, where there is schism and where there is what the orthodox, those who control the apparatus of power, call heresy. The Soviet Union and the Communist Party face exactly that situation today. The unity of the Communist Party has been shattered

and shattered, I believe, irrevocably. Men maintain the faith, the pure faith, but is maintained neither in Moscow nor in Peking, but in little places throughout the world where men still dream of the proletarian revolution in its purity. But now, essentially, Communism has become inextricably intertwined with various nationalisms and these national interests predominate, overwhelm, and it is these which those who oppose the Communist expansion must take into account. The days of simplistic, unified Communism are over. Consequently, the days of unified, simplistic anti-Communist crusade also must be over. No longer is it a question of competing ideologies. Today the political questions of the world are questions of completing nationalisms, competing ambitions. No longer is it enough for us to proclaim we can give the worker all he needs and freedom, and for Russia to acclaim to the peoples of the world we can give you economic tools to move into power and we will in time give the worker his freedom. That is not the issue on which the battle is being fought any more. It is not being fought by priests or by diplomats. It is not being fought by missionaries. It's being fought with guns and tanks and planes.

And so it seems to me, as we take stock of this 50th anniversary of the Bolshevik-Communist Revolution in Russia, we must be clearly aware of the simple fact that what began as a faith and from the very beginning had showed all aspects of a world religion, has in fact now suffered the critical illness of any great world religion when it allows itself to become one, identical, with some narrow political interest. There are still fanatic Communists in the world, but, by and large, the Communist is simply a man with his particular economic attitude who is seeking to rule his state from a lower level of gross national product to a higher level of gross national productivity, who is seeking to move it from a lower level of power to a higher rank of authority, to greater voice in the council of nations. And if we oppose expansion by any power, im-

perialism by any nation, then it is our responsibility no longer to fight this expansion in the ideological arena purely, but to fight it in the realistic arena, to understand what is involved, to understand that the world is no longer a divided world between two great faith systems, but it is a world filled with nations, each scrambling for its own ambition, each demanding, each problem demanding a separate and quite distinct remedy.

In sum, what shall we say of fifty years of Soviet achievement? Could it have been achieved at a lesser price? I believe that it could have been. The blood bath, which was Russia in the thirties, could have been avoided. Russia could have come as far as she had come under other than a tyrannical system, but that system has produced its own antidote. It has produced economic well-being. It has produced a sense of advantage over many emerging and who are still not emerging nations of the world. A Russian is proud of what he has, desirous of maintaining it, fearful of war and of the possible ravages of war, for what he has gained with such cost. The Russian has his first taste of freedom and the more sensitive in Russia are demanding more. Russia realizes that the real battle which he faces in the next years are domestic battles, battles to raise the standard of living, battles to raise the standard of culture, battles to raise the standard of decency, the quality of things, and her battles are not so much different than ours, her needs not so different from those of the American people.

Russia in 1917 was a have-not nation. Russia in 1967 is a have nation.

The nations which have, have a responsibility, of course, to the nations which have not, and they can because they no longer need to expand and to turn their people's ire away from their own problems. They have the possibility of making those political arrangements which offer some hope in our world for peace. The Russians speak of peace.

They speak of the horrors of the 1940's. They don't want it again. We speak of peace.

We've seen the horrors of nuclear war and we don't want it for our children. Perhaps

the two great nations of the world can somehow combine and forget for a moment the religious irrelevancies or set them apart and see a human responsibility in which they have a common interest, and perhaps the areas of disarmament and trade and the areas in the reduction of world tensions we can find in the years ahead some way to forage a world which will give the possibility of peace.



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Friday Nov 5

Those who passed away this week

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RICHARD D. ZIPP
EDWARD SCHAGRIN
ROSE B. LICHTIG
DORA ELSNER
BESS MANDELKORN FULDAUER
LOUIS E. GRUBER
HENRY H.WEISKOPF
IDA MILLER