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The Role of the Church in Defeating Communism and Rebuilding a Capitalist Economy in Eastern Europe

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Capitalist economies have been challenged on many occasions by authoritarian doctrines which call for the state to replace a competitive market. One of these totalitarian doctrines, fascism, was defeated in World War II, but communist totalitarianism was not. Communist tyranny stemmed from the abolition of private property and the replacement of economic relations between people with communist party authority. State-centered communist systems founded on Marxist doctrine have been the most serious threat to free economies, in large part because communist leaders not only tried to alter all economic institutions, but intended to reverse people's mentality as well.

Communism was a total or, even more appropriately, a "totalitarian" assault on Christian tradition. Communist doctrine was not an ordinary adversary of religion and the church, such as the ethical relativism of liberal thinkers or methodological rationalism. As Leszek Kolakowski noted, communism was particularly dangerous since it was an "imitation" of religion, or rather its parody (Tischner, 1991, p.3). It was a deceitful doctrine which appealed to many themes raised by religion and was therefore more difficult to combat.

The communist system was first introduced in the Soviet Union in 1917 and then brutally imposed on six nations of Eastern Europe after World War II. The imposition of the system required destroying the preexisting moral fabric on which these societies thrived -- namely religion and family (see Hayek, 1988, p.137). By destroying religion and family, rather than creating a complete alternative to a capitalist society, the communist system actually destroyed itself, "leaving no other

trace in the history of mankind than exhausted peoples, economic and social chaos, political vacuum and a spiritual tabula rasa" (Arendt, 1951, p.430).

As I shall demonstrate, in the totalitarian era of communism, churches nurtured "civil society" when other institutions did not and their role in giving society moral value and integrity remains crucial today. Churches of Eastern Europe provided an outlet for both resisting the totalization of society and preserving its cultural identity. The resulting mass drive for freedom of religion had political implications since, after regaining their faith, people turned their attention to other freedoms. In a way, the religious revival eventually became indistinguishable from political liberalization and the restoration of private enterprise.

1. Marxian Utopia Versus Christian Tradition: Fundamental Conflict

To talk about the collapse of communism requires a discussion of what Marxist parties wished to accomplish in Eastern Europe. One of their key objectives was to create a society without religion. The communist assault on religion in Eastern Europe was a calculated political move informed by a fundamental conflict of social philosophies. Marxian political doctrine was extremely hostile to Christianity, in fact to any religion, even if employed for the sake of a revolutionary change. Marx attacked religion for its specific perspectives on principal philosophical issues and also for the "negative" role it supposedly played in human history. Marx, in brief, blamed religion for producing a false view of the world and, as he phrased it, serving the economic interests of the dominant, oppressive class.

1.1 Marxian and Christian Views of Man

The Marxian and Christian views of human beings and the concept of truth are two extreme opposites. At one level, Marx rejected Christianity's claim to eternal truth on the methodological grounds that it does not stand up to scientific scrutiny, meaning that it is not verifiable in an empirical way. Marx argued that reality can be sensed and properly examined by people without any reference to spirituality. All mysteries of man and nature are supposedly decipherable through empirical scrutiny (see Tischner, 1991, p.1). Also, according to Marx, questions that cannot be dealt with in an empirical fashion are falsely formulated.

Marxian thought departed from Christian philosophy by assuming a materialistic vision, or belief in the primacy of the material over the ideal. Marx was convinced that the only true world is that of material reality and that any ideal world, or world of ideas, is merely a reflection or derivative of material reality. So defined, the materialism of Marx was incompatible with genuine religious beliefs, which include a concept of revelation and supreme divinity, and presume a subordinate role of the material (for more on the subject, see McKown, 1975).

In an effort to explain social reality, including religion and the church, Marx and his numerous followers gave absolute priority to economic conditions. Marxism is an example of extreme economic determinism, in which it is assumed that the material conditions of production -- organization and technology -- shape every other element of social reality. According to Marx, when the economy develops, the rest of the social structure changes as well. Since religion and the church generally obstruct

economic progress and are lacking independent life, both are thus dispensable.

The attack on religion by Marx went beyond the purely philosophical discourse on truth. It was also included in his doctrine of history. Unlike the large group of utopian socialists who were his contemporaries, Marx arrived at the conclusion that building a "new" society was not a dream, but the inevitable outcome of the historical process. History follows a certain logic, or some "iron" laws, as he put it, which bring about communism or ultimate social harmony -- without private property and without religion.

Marx expected religion to vanish, believing that all progress in history is geared to the ultimate liberation of human beings from any sort of "oppression," including religious beliefs and the churches that preach them. History did not represent to Marx the self-realization of the spirit of God since, to him, God was only an idealized image of man, a product of human self-estrangement or alienation. According to Marx, the essence of historical process was thus the self-realization of human beings through the rejection of religion and the parallel termination of man's alienation from himself (see Tucker, 1978, pp.xxii-xxiv).

Translating this "prophecy" (for more on the prophetical qualities of Marxist thought, see Schumpeter, 1942) into the language of economic processes: In Marx's view, the whole development of humankind gradually leads to the removal of the physical barriers which prevent the material needs of people from being met. The ever-expanding human potential to economize on resources will eventually free man from a scarcity of resources. With the final liberalization from economic pressures, a

concept reflecting Marx's utopian thinking, both religion and the church will lose their rationale (Novak, 1991).

1.2 Persecution of Religion and the Church

Following the social philosophy of Marx, the communist leaders of Eastern Europe installed after World War II, like the Soviet party a few decades earlier, labelled the church an "enemy of the people." Other "enemies" included rich peasants and private entrepreneurs. Physical elimination of members of these groups or police intimidation was presented at that time as a historical necessity, while helping the communist party to weed out the moral tradition of the past and instill its own atheistic morality (Orlandis, 1982).

Initially, the communists legislated a separation of church and state, which did not seem different from policies adopted in modern capitalist states. It quickly became apparent, however, that the ideological conflict between the communist party and the church was too deep for the former to tolerate any religion. Religious life was eventually considered anti-state activity since the communists decided that, as a revolutionary vanguard of workers, the party should not allow the church to take any part in educating people (Kolakowski, 1978, p.59).

The communist attack on the church was particularly brutal in Russia where, unlike in Eastern Europe, capitalism was destroyed through a bloody revolution. In the 1920s, scores of Orthodox priests were murdered or sent to concentration camps (set up since 1918 on the authorization of Lenin and Trotsky) and the survivors were

placed in complete submission. The number of priests dramatically diminished during the initial years of the communist rule in Eastern Europe, as in Hungary where there were 6900 priests in 1945 and only 4500 in 1964 (Osa, 1989, p.275).

Church property was confiscated, as in Poland, where all large land holdings were taken over by the communist state. In Hungary, the number of churches and other religious institutions -- such as hospitals or old-age homes -- declined from 9984 in 1945 to 400 in 1964 (Osa, 1989, p.275). Construction of churches was very difficult or impossible since communist governments refused to issue building permits, meaning that many industrial centers created after the war were left without any places to worship.

Religion was totally removed from the public schools; parochial schools were closed down, and many seminaries were shut down as well. Children were subjected to aggressive atheistic propaganda through state-controlled education. Families became economically dependent on the state as the only employer, and disobedience -- such as churchgoing -- could cost parents a promotion or even their job (all the principal positions in factories and offices were reserved for party loyalists, members of the so-called "nomenklatura").

As a consequence, the number of churchgoers declined very sharply in most of Eastern Europe. In Poland, the decline was rather minor, but in East Germany and Hungary the reduction was dramatic (Hutten, 1967). For instance, in East Germany, membership in the Lutheran Church slipped from 15 million to 7.7 million between 1946 and 1983. Particularly rapid erosion of churchgoing took place among young

people and the urban population, which was mostly recruited from peasants who left their villages to seek industrial jobs (this trend reflected more than just the effort by the party to take away worshipers to its own "church").

The situation in Poland was exceptional because here the Catholic Church proved capable of resisting a total marginalization. The resistance by the church toward the expansion of communism in Poland peaked in 1949 when the Vatican issued a decree excommunicating party members and their supporters. Catholic priests were connected to the anti-communist underground that battled the secret police for a number of years. The church also openly supported peasants in their opposition to the collectivization program initiated by the communists in 1946. Due to these actions, unlike in other East European countries, farming remained mostly in private hands.

Poland's communist government, led by pro-Soviet and Soviet-trained president Bierut, was forced to temporarily compromise with the church. As early as 1950, the regime of Bierut signed a "Mutual Understanding" with the episcopate, the final product of year-long negotiations by a "Joint Commission" representing both parties in this political conflict. The reason for the party's readiness to reach a very limited compromise was that the communist leader Bierut sought the Vatican's recognition of new Poland's western borders which were drawn after World War II.

2. Moral Decay of the Communist System

The communist idea to build a "new world" could have worked only if the "proletarian morality" was fully internalized by the people. To thrive, the communist

can be simply interpreted as a statement that by adopting a "new proletarian morality," the party undermined the economy -- and with a weak economy, the whole structure had to go under. In this interpretation, the decline of communism was a moral collapse because by destroying social tradition, accumulated during centuries, the communist system demotivated people, specifically reduced their interest in productive work and destroyed respect for property (Tokes and Porter, 1991).

By undermining religion and family, the communist system literally "de-moralized" society. Neither truth, justice nor competence mattered as long as people were obedient to the party. Among the worst implications was the destruction of the work ethic. Not only were people demoralized, but the entire "human factor" was allowed to deteriorate. No one knows precisely what damage was caused by the half-century rule of the communist party. It is not physical capital, meaning machinery, but people with their skills and imagination, that drive any economy.

Deterioration of "human capital" is a multifaceted phenomenon. Populations of Eastern Europe have suffered a long-term decline in life expectancy at birth. For example, an average indicator of life expectancy for males in Poland and Hungary in 1989 was about 65 years. This was two years less than the period reported a few years earlier by official communist sources. This is an unprecedented development for any industrial society during peacetime; the trend in most such societies has been for life expectancy to expand considerably.

The negative demographic tendency has a lot to do with the underdeveloped medical system left in Eastern Europe by the communists. This is a replica of the

original Soviet health care system established after 1917 to take care of the population at a very low level of economic development and basically designed to control communicable diseases. The sharp rise in male mortality is attributed particularly to cardiovascular diseases typical of industrial societies. Reportedly, about thirty percent of all patients with heart attacks are currently dying before an ambulance arrives.

Another cause of health deterioration is the ecological catastrophe of unknown proportions. Apparently, one-third of Poles live in areas where air quality is below any acceptable environmental standards. Water in most of the Polish rivers, and also in Czechoslovakia and former East Germany, is not usable, even for industrial purposes, without prior purification (Poznanska, 1992). Certain major cities in Poland are not livable, for example the coal-town of Bytom in Silesia and the textile-mill center of Lodz (and many surrounding towns as well). Former East Germany's main industrial centers have also been transformed into zones of danger to the people.

2.2 Freedom and Ethics

Communism not only crashed because its negation of human tradition weakened the motivation to work, but also because its alternative, rationalistic morality failed to attract people and left the party without needed political legitimacy. Even a totalitarian system such as communism required legitimization since there are limits to founding a society on state violence only.

The communist moral alternative was not without any appeal when it was first imposed after World War II, because it was not yet tested and because of its deceitful

nature. People, however, quickly began questioning that ethical code as inconsistent with their natural dispositions or spirit. According to communist ethics, violence was justifiable if directed against those who "enslave" people -- exploitative classes -- while individual feeling was that human life was not dispensable under any circumstances. Communists placed the interest of the collective, or rather of the state, ahead of the individual, while people properly felt that their interests were primary (Novak, 1990b).

The true challenge for the communist morality came, however, less from the ethical discourse itself and more from the struggle for freedom. Freedom is a necessary condition for any ethic, since only in a situation of individual choice can norms become meaningful. Catholic theologian Jozef Tischner (1991, p.2) posited that, "The human being becomes a subject of ethics only when he realizes that he is free." For the traditional ethics to acquire enough strength to undermine the idea of a "new" communist man, people would not only have to realize the critical value of freedom, but also to experience freedom themselves.

Tischner (1991, p.1) stated emphatically that "...the disintegration of communism was determined by a moral catastrophe. Communism is wasting away because its ethical hopes and promises have not been realized." Clearly, communism deprived people both of human freedom and accountability to God -- thus running directly counter to the Christian understanding of humankind's nature and destiny. From a Christian perspective, voluntary choice, which is the essence of human freedom, is important to God. He created human beings with free will and allowed

them to choose. Thus, the proper function of any state is to secure God-given rights.

As Vaclav Havel (1987), elected president of post-communist Czechoslovakia phrased it, the complete degradation of the individual "...was presented as his or her ultimate liberation." However, the reality was that of enslavement and alienation. Paradoxically, by denying freedom to people, the communist system also undercut any ethic, including its own inhuman code. Placing all people in the situation of obedience -- with the party trying to become the only depository of mind -- the system petrified consciousness and made individuals insensitive to moral choices.

3. Political Struggles of the Church

From the very beginning, in spite of persecution, the church resisted any possible compromise between Christianity and Marxism. Church actions were motivated by more than the mortal struggle between human rights and collectivism, or eternal values and atheism. Churches also resisted communism in their role as the repositories of national consciousness, as in Poland and Slovakia. In addition, churches engaged in that struggle to ensure their survival as institutions (see Osa, 1989). The country where this struggle was both the most dramatic and the most effective is Poland. This is the country that I will focus this part of the discussion on.

3.1 From Resistance to "Power Sharing"

A long tradition of foreign domination and the belated process of nation-building throughout Eastern Europe, including the Ukraine, has greatly shaped the churches in

the region. Specifically, the churches became strongly involved in struggles for independence. This has been evidenced in the crucial role of churches in preserving national cultures and in their direct involvement in periodic uprisings. Soviet domination was perceived as a threat to national survival and the churches responded accordingly.

From its earliest days, the communist party had to face opposition from the churches, particularly in Poland. By the late 1950s, the Polish church, for example, had already returned to the political arena to openly confront the ruling communists. This was related to an important turn in the communist movement. In 1956, the Soviet party leader Krushchev revealed Stalin's crimes. Without Soviet approval, Poland's communists named a new party secretary, Gomulka. Gomulka was a "native" communist, living under house arrest during most of the Stalinist period.

Gomulka's first political move was to reduce Soviet control of Poland, though without rejecting the communist doctrine. His request to remove Soviet military advisers was among the most symbolic steps in this direction. Gomulka needed solid domestic support to resist Soviet intervention, and an alliance with the church offered such help. The church extended such assistance, for it also was interested in loosening the Soviet grip. "National communism," championed by Gomulka, was more acceptable than the alien, Soviet version of communism.

Among the major gains by the church in 1956 was the release of Cardinal Wyszynski, a head of the Polish church, from a three-year house arrest. In the same year, the government of Gomulka permitted bishops from the so-called "Western

Territories," regained from Germany after World War II, to finally assume positions of apostolic administrators. In addition, the regime allowed the church to begin mass pilgrimages to the Black Madonna shrine in the country.

The church acquired considerable political influence as well. The government allowed for the establishment of Clubs of Catholic Intelligentsia in five major cities. Equally important was the decision to offer five seats in the parliament to Catholic deputies (from the caucus "Znak"). Both these moves were absolutely unprecedented for Eastern Europe, and in many of these countries such political concessions were not made until the end of the communist power monopoly.

The improvement in church-state relations turned out to be only temporary, however. Gomulka, after solidifying his domestic position, returned to many of the authoritarian practices of his predecessors. In the mid-1960s, tensions between the church and Gomulka's regime reached a new height. The direct reason for the deterioration was a joint appeal by the Polish and West German churches for a quick reconciliation between the two nations. The party became upset by this initiative, since it went against the strategic interest of both East Germany and the Soviet Union.

With the departure of Gomulka, swept away by mass food riots, the church gained considerable strength. In the aftermath, for the first time in the post-war period, the church became a well-recognized political and moral power. Similar to Gomulka, his successor, Gierek, needed the church to stabilize the domestic scene. The party's authority was not enough to persuade workers to return to their factories. Gierek had to "borrow" some legitimacy from the church, in exchange for a series of

key concessions. Gierek was less reluctant to do it than Gomulka since his party was not passionately committed to communist ideas anymore.

3.2 "Conservative Revolution" in Eastern Europe

The real turning point was the visit of Pope John Paul II, on Gierek's invitation, in 1979. Rather reluctantly, the party agreed to that visit, which the majority of Poles looked forward to. It is estimated that approximately six million people participated in masses. The Pope's mission in Poland was ecumenical, but the language of his sermons -- appealing to Christian values, praising the work ethic and talking about human dignity -- was received by most as an indirect attack on the communist reality. The party watched it happen rather calmly. There were no police incidents or anti-pope propaganda.

The visit energized the population in opposition to the communist party to the point that, in mid-1980, thousands went to the streets asking for independent union representation. It was not yet a call for dismantling the system, for only a few expected the Soviet Union to allow for such a solution. The popular demand was to make the party more accountable and free trade unions were seen as the right solution. In the same year, Gierek legalized the unions, led by Walesa. It turned out that this reform was also too much for the Soviets to accept -- expectedly, Gierek was forced out of office.

The inability of the party to find a working political arrangement which would accommodate independent unions resulted in the escalation of labor tensions. The

church provided clear support to the workers, while trying to temper political emotions. When Jaruzelski, successor to Gierek, decided to suppress the unions by internal security forces rather than face Soviet invasion and a threat to national sovereignty, the church showed necessary restraint. The martial law imposed by Jaruzelski destroyed much of the union's base but at a minimal cost in terms of lost lives.

The Soviet Union, under Brezhnev, was ready to attack Poland, not only out of ideological concerns, but also out of a fear that political ferment could spread to Soviet lands. Among his concerns was that the demand for religious freedom might spread to the 1.1 million strong Polish minority, and that it could reach other Catholic groups, such as Lithuanians and Latvians (three million and .4 million respectively). Soviets were also afraid that the Ukraine, particularly its western part, once under Vatican jurisdiction, would be affected as well.

With the imposition of "martial law," the church entered into yet another stage, one of building an alternative, or second, society within the society at large. Unlike in the past, when the church simply challenged the party through the gospel, this time it began to gradually recapture important institutions. For example, the church was allowed to expand the number of Catholic schools, to sponsor exhibitions and provide funds for academic work. Catholic schools also expanded their curriculum and began offering classes in such subjects as history.

In addition, the church rapidly increased its economic functions. A vast network of charity to help the poor as well as persecuted opposition activists was

created (e.g. many union activists fired from their jobs were offered regular paychecks). Jobs were provided through an expanding system of church-related, small-scale industrial enterprises. The church helped underground activities by words of hope, but also by distributing printing equipment and offering shelter to dissidents. Moreover, it set up a fund to finance -- on credit -- private rural projects, particularly water and sewer constructions (Morawska, 1984).

The remarkable progress by the church was reflected in the quickly expanding number of its religious institutions. Between 1945 and 1968, the total number of church buildings increased from 6.3 thousand to 13.3 thousand (Osa, 1989, p.276). This was most unusual by East European standards, but even more unusual was the expansion in the following years, when the number of places of worship almost doubled.

With the assistance of the church, the opposition movement in Poland survived the period of worst repression and, in 1988, was ready to challenge the party again (Nielsen, 1991). Following waves of mass strikes, the party agreed to hold "roundtable" negotiations with the opposition, resulting in a timetable for power sharing. In the mid-1989 election, the party lost control over government and, by 1990, disintegrated, leaving behind only two confused, relatively small offsprings. Similar changes took place in the other countries of Eastern Europe as well. The example of Poland, and the strong signals coming from the reform-minded Soviet leadership of Gorbachev, were critical in the process -- but domestic sources of change were present too.

Even in the countries where communism resulted in a widespread atheisation of people, local churches took an active role in rejecting communist structures. In Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and the former East Germany, communist efforts to weed out religion had the most success. For example, according to a rare 1990 study of East German religious affiliations, more than 70 percent of those surveyed described themselves as atheist. Still, the role of the Lutheran Church in undermining the communist regime of East Germany was substantial.

These were all unprecedented developments and, not surprisingly, the majority of scholars agreed to correctly call them "revolutions" (Dahrendorf, 1990b). Unlike the Russian Revolution of 1917, the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe renewed ties with the past. In contrast with the bloody French Revolution of 1789 and the Russian Revolution, these revolutions in Eastern Europe were not aimed against religion and the church. To the contrary, they were largely driven by a popular desire to restore both -- and rebuilding faith has been their primary achievement.

The events of 1989 can be called revolutions since they were all undertaken in the name of liberty, including religious liberty. However, what is missing in these recent revolutions is the element of novelty, or an orientation toward the future. The revolutions of 1989 could be called "conservative revolutions," since their true intention has been to bring back the past or "return to history." From this perspective, the whole communist period appears as an unfortunate detour.

The collapse of the communist party has resulted in a total overhaul of the status of the church. In most cases, churches regained their pre-communist legal

position. In Poland, the church has been allowed to regain lost property and rebuild its once extensive system of religious schools. Religious instruction and daily prayer have been reintroduced to public schools. Soldiers in Poland, as well as in Hungary, have been allowed to practice religion during their service in the army. The Catholic press has multiplied its circulation of journals and books.

4. The Church in the Post-Communist Phase

The Catholic Church emerged from the communist period as a formidable institution, but its mission has not finished yet. Defeating communist rule was one challenge for Eastern Europe. Now it faces another challenge. Its people must build a new society -- with the aid of the church. This is an extraordinary challenge since the communist regimes did not prepare these countries for the task. To the contrary, they left behind enormous devastation in terms of damage to the human factor, including motivation and skills, both discussed earlier. Also, communism caused enormous damage to material factors, such as physical capital.

4.1 Toward Private Ownership

The overriding principle of a traditional communist economy is collective, specifically state, ownership of capital resources (more than central control over application of resources). Marx viewed private ownership as a source of alienation, since it implied, as he argued, the control of one man, dispossessed of capital, by another, the owner of capital means. Accordingly, the communist party, shortly after capturing political

whether their wealth is a product of manual labor or a use of someone's capital assets (Psalm 49:16-17).

Thus far, privatization has been rather slow and far slower than expected by the newly elected governments. Even in the most reform-oriented Hungary and Poland, about 80 percent of industrial production continues to come from the state sector -- three years after privatization began. It is very likely that three or four years from now the state sector will still account for half of the total capital stock in East European industry, though in other sectors such as retail trade or transportation this share will be much less, judging by the pace of change there.

This process has been expected to bring about a "healthy" capitalist economy, but what might easily emerge first is an aggressive, ruthless and primitive form of capitalism and there are some signs of that happening. Extreme income disparity is emerging, with a few taking advantage of speculative profits and many falling below the poverty line. There is evidence of widespread corruption, largely fed by chaotic sales of public property and legal fluidity.

4.2 From Indoctrination to Dialogue

Besides re-making their economic institutions, East European countries have to solidify their democratic achievements. To prosper, these countries need political pluralism, in which various interest groups engage in an open dialogue. After years of communist indoctrination, which made many people apathetic or cynical, the task is to prepare all individuals to be responsible citizens, willing to engage in politics and to

exhibit tolerance for others. The key role of the church in this transformation of internal politics cannot be overstated.

The importance of Christian social teaching in rebuilding East European politics was already evident in the 1989-90 free elections. The dominant parties that emerged in post-communist Hungary, Poland and former East Germany were affiliated with the church. Hungary returned to its pre-war political structure, i.e. a central role for the Christian Democratic Party. Church support was crucial for the formation of Poland's first non-communist government of Mazowiecki and, later on, in 1992, for the emergence of the predominantly Christian Democratic government of Olszewski.

This has not been a universal pattern, however, as the recent experience of Czechoslovakia indicates. Here, the power base shifted from the communists to the Civic Forum, which opened the door to another, less radical form of anti-clericalism. It is interesting that in this case as well the internal politics has shown a tendency to revive the pre-war situation. The main social basis for the Civic Forum consists of urban intelligentsia, the group that dominated pre-communist politics and used to display deep reservations about the church.

There is a growing frustration with political liberalization since so far it has produced mostly dysfunctional semi-democracies. Except for Hungary, the recent democratization resulted in highly unstable political systems. Quick turnover in government is one evidence of this instability (e.g. in Poland, there has already been three governments). So is the widespread fragmentation of the political scenes into ethnic blocs (e.g. in the former Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia). This

instability provides fertile grounds for radical political movements, some of them openly calling for an authoritarian rule.

According to Tischner (1991, p.5), in the area of individual behavior, "...post-totalitarian sicknesses continue to hold sway, such as suspicion, ambiguity, revanchism and a 'dialectical' system of thought injected by the school and the mass media." These are the sources of new disputes and new misunderstandings. The memory of the original revolt of conscience is lost. One might even get the impression that society entered into a state of disintegration. Moral norms have been further weakened due to the great amount of change and growing sense of economic deprivation.

Distinguished political scientist Ralph Dahrendorf warned against "democratic deception," since democracy is a system of government which does not provide ground for firm economic policies. He claimed that while "Removal of tyranny will by itself release energies of freedom...it does not guarantee a constructive process of economic reform" (1990, p.3). To the contrary, the practice of political freedoms by societies with limited experience in democratic "discourse" may create powerful forces opposed to necessary economic change (comment by Kornai, 1990).

Under the circumstances, the newly gained political freedom should not allow individuals to do anything they want, since anarchy is a threat to freedom. Each individual should be free to choose as long as their choices do not interfere with the ability of others to do likewise. The role of the church is to de-escalate the destructive tensions emerging in connection with the transition. However, in doing this, the

church risks that it will even further become a political institution, which obviously goes against its true mission.

5. The Concept of "Responsible Capitalism"

The challenge faced by the church in Eastern Europe is enormous, since it not only has to confront the negative legacy of communism but it also has to ensure that these societies develop "responsible" capitalism. Contemporary capitalism is not without serious problems, but people recently liberated from the communist propaganda tend to idealize the social reality of capitalism. Undoing the false promises of communism has thus to be combined with the thorough demythologization of its alternative -- capitalism.

5.1 Pains of Transition

Countries of Eastern Europe began their transition to democratic capitalism with great euphoria. They were all confident that their state-controlled economies could be turned into free-market economies almost overnight and that a strong economic prosperity would follow quickly thereafter. Economic successes were also expected to lead to a moral revival as people learned to respect commercial contracts and private property rights. In reality, establishing democratic capitalism has proved very complicated. The scope of the problems ahead for East European societies is becoming increasingly evident.

In 1989, all the countries of Eastern Europe unexpectedly entered into a deep

recession, combined with severe cuts in capital expenditures (Kolodko et. al., 1992). The net material of the six countries of Eastern Europe fell by .7 percent in 1989, 9.9 percent in 1990 and another 12-15 percent in 1992. The decline in industrial output has been even more pronounced. Gross investment registered a 1.5 percent decline in 1989, a 13.3 percent decline in 1990 and a 20-25 percent decline in 1991 (ECE, 1991, p.25).

Scores of workers have already lost their jobs (e.g. the rate of unemployment at the end of 1991 was 10 percent in Poland and 15 percent in Yugoslavia (EEC, 1992, p.2)) and inflation rages through these economies as well (e.g. in 1991, 360 percent in the Soviet Union, 400 percent in Yugoslavia and 66 percent in Poland (op. cit.)). Real wages have sharply declined and a "safety net" is not yet developed, leaving many unemployed without any state help.

The process of democratic revival in post-communist Eastern Europe is greatly complicated. This is due in large part to growing frustration among people with the lack of visible economic improvement. It is becoming clear that transforming state-run economies into market economies will take a great amount of time. It also has become apparent that the key feature of economic transition to capitalism is that it requires an extended period of deferred gratification. Many people are not ready to wait for improvements any longer, which is a sure prescription for political trouble.

5.2 Demythologization of Capitalism

The role of the church is crucial in re-establishing capitalism in Eastern Europe, but

capitalism cannot be amoral. In other words, the production and consumption of goods cannot become the center of social life and society's only value (Novak, 1982, 1990b). Since a privatized economy cannot develop the virtuous society by itself, that is the task of religion and morality. All this makes the role of the church more critical in the transition to capitalism: the church must help define the future "responsible" capitalism.

This dilemma has been raised by John Paul II in the encyclical on economics, "Centesimus Annus," issued in 1991. The Pope wrote, "Can it perhaps be said that, after the failure of communism, capitalism is the victorious system, and that capitalism should be the goal of the countries not making efforts to rebuild their economy and society?" He concluded that the answer is affirmative if a "new capitalism" advances the prospect of creation of a society based on free work and full participation.

In the introduction to the encyclical, we find the following words, "...we need to repeat that there can be no genuine solution of the 'social question' apart from the Gospel, and that the 'new things' can find in the Gospel the context for their correct understanding and the proper moral perspective for judgment on them" ("Centesimus Annus," 1991, p.13). It is a call to approach social challenges -- like the transition away from Stalin's communism to capitalism -- from an evangelical perspective.

"Centesimus Annus" stressed that the fundamental error of communism was anthropological in nature, since it rejected the notion of the person as the autonomous subject of moral decisions, and this is why it had to fail (op. cit., p.27). However,

any other attempt which excludes spiritual values has to fail in producing social harmony. This applies to the model of an "affluent society" of consumer-oriented populations that "...seek to defeat Marxism on the level of pure materialism by showing how a free-market society can achieve greater satisfaction of human needs than communism" without paying attention to human spirituality.

In the words of John Paul II, "The Church respects the legitimate autonomy of the democratic order and is not entitled to express preferences for this or that institutional or constitutional solution" (op. cit., p.92). The role of the church is to head the moral backbone of modern societies, while other aspects -- economy and politics -- should be left to others. In particular, it is up to the state to guarantee "...individual freedom and private property, as well as a stable currency and efficient public services" (op. cit., pp.92-93) (see comments by Hoksbergen, 1992).

6. Conclusions

A genuine capitalist economy represents a complex system of voluntary relations in which individuals are involved in market exchanges within the framework of legal rules which prohibit acts of violence, fraud and seizure of private property. If a free economy is now to evolve in post-communist Eastern Europe, people will have to learn that a sound economy and effective moral code must come together. Democratic capitalism, so badly desired by East Europeans, will not meet their expectations unless it springs from the human spirit.

The communist idea to build a new world without God, even against God,

proved to be illusory. Communism predicted the atrophy of Christian religion and made enormous efforts toward that end. It is a true irony of history that the communist project not only did not thrive on forces that were expected to fuel it, but was mortally undermined by forces that were predicted to vanish. To be correct, communism was defeated by religion as part of moral outrage, and not by religion alone.

While posing a mortal danger to religion, communism forced Christians to examine themselves. In a way, the communist assault contributed to the revival of religion in Eastern Europe. In the face of the communist threat, the church in Poland transformed itself from a traditional "state church" to an "activist church," whose main contacts are with ordinary people. Because of the constant imminent danger of personal persecution, only those most humbly passionate joined the priesthood in Eastern Europe.

Some may question the role of the church as a political force, even if applied in the name of undermining the communist "horror" or for the sake of changing the contaminated post-communist world. However, it seems that the Christian role in defeating communism has been irreplaceable, and the church must be responsible for instilling Christian values within the society. The church had no choice but to take part in public life in order to prevent further depersonalization and the massive destruction of society.

The collapse of the communist system proves that there is no alternative to run an economy, and that a private enterprise-based economic system is the most

successful. The communist economic system has fallen on its face, and this coincides with efforts in the capitalist world to trim overgrown state sectors and dismantle various state monopolies. However, market economy and free society are not necessarily the moral choices unless such values as modesty, honesty, respect for others and strong family ties are imprinted into society. In Eastern Europe, the Christian church has proved to be a great defender of people's dignity and their right to life and freedom.

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