Religion and Anti-Religion in Eastern Europe*

A Personal Impression of a Recent Visit to Russia, Poland and East Germany

by

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Source: *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Summer, 1974).

www.studiesincomparativereligion.com

Traces of the Old Russia

It can truly be said that, with the violent overthrow of Tsarist Russia in 1917, Holy Russia, with its long tradition of Orthodox spirituality, was brought to an end. Thereafter all that remained was a communist wasteland. Nevertheless there persist in Russia today a number of things which directly recall the Christian past: the most visible is the physical presence everywhere of beautiful (but closed and unused) Orthodox churches; the most spiritual are the icons, which one may view in abundance in certain churches (conserved as museums) and galleries; the most important is the continuing existence (in pitifully truncated and harassed form) of the Orthodox church itself; and the most touching is the continued adherence of many Russians (including a proportion of younger people) to the Orthodox religion.

During my two-and-a-half-week visit I encountered evidence of all of these things. One cannot miss the striking multi-colored domes of St. Basil's Cathedral in Red Square (*Krasnáya Ploshchad*). This square, incidentally, bore the same name before the revolution: the adjective *krásny* means both "red" and "beautiful". St. Basil's Cathedral seemed to be permanently closed, and not even used as a museum. Inside the precincts of the Kremlin, in the main square, are three more cathedrals: of the Annunciation (*Blagoveshchénsky*), of the Assumption (*Uspénsky*) and of the Archangel (*Arkhangélsky*). The two high gold-covered domes of the free-standing bell-tower of Ivan the Great (*Iván Veliky*) can be seen from all over Moscow. Finally there is the Church of the Twelve Apostles (*Tsérkov Dvyenádtsati Apóstolov*) near the archiepiscopal palace, with its five gilded, towers. All of these churches are of the 15th and 16th centuries. Several of them are open as museums. Throughout Moscow many splendid churches, large and small, can be seen.

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* Editor's note: This article first was published in the Summer 1974 issue of *Studies* under the nom de plume of "Peregrinus." The author, William Stoddart, has updated the article (in 2013), and it is this version of the article that we are happy to present here, in the form that the author prefers.

There is no sign that any of them are open for worship, though a few may be.

In the Kremlin also is the Armory Museum, with many relics of the Tsars. The Kremlin is surrounded by a high wall, with five gates, the most commonly used of which are the *Spassky* ("Savior") Gate and the *Troitse* ("Trinity") Gate.

The greatest glory of Moscow, and of all Russia, are the icons. The blossom time of Russian icon-painting was the 15th and 16th centuries. Like almost all traditional art they virtually all anonymous, but the greatest known painter of this period was St. Andrew Rublyóv (c. 1360-1440), who was canonized by the Orthodox Church. Many icons are to be seen in the cathedrals of the Kremlin, in the Trétyakov Gallery, and in the Rublyóv Museum in the Andrónikov Monastery. I also had the opportunity to see many icons in the Trinity Cathedral of the Troitse-Sergiyeva-Lavra at Zagorsk, the location of the headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Church, about two hours by bus to the north of Moscow.

One of the most renowned icons in the world is now located in the Trétyakov Gallery: this is the icon of Our Lady of Vladimir (*Bogomater Vladimirskaya*, "the Vladimir Mother of God"). Tradition has it that this icon, like the Black Virgin of Czenstochowa and certain others, was painted by St. Luke. It was brought to Moscow from Constantinople in the Middle Ages, having previously come from Jerusalem. The icon of Our Lady of Vladimir is one amongst many in the two great halls of icons in the Gallery, and is not given any pre-eminence; nevertheless, the presence (even in a museum) of this "miracle-working" icon inevitably imparts a blessing and a protection on all believers in Moscow and throughout Russia. Also in the Trétyakov Gallery is Rublyóv's famous "Trinity" (*Troitse*) and a wonderful "Holy Face" (*Mandilion*) of the Novgorod school of the 15th century.

I possess so many reproductions of icons, that I could scarcely believe my eyes when, time and time again (especially in the Trétyakov Gallery), I saw the original of an icon with which I was already familiar. It was a breathtaking experience to be in the presence of so many beautiful and sacred things. By means of a rigorous, and yet subtle and sensitive portrayal of innumerable episodes from the Christian story, the dogmatic truths of Christianity are transmitted to whoever, consciously or unconsciously, seeks to assimilate them. Visitors whom I saw from several Western countries were obviously deeply moved.

Our Lady of Vladimir

As regards the continued existence of the Orthodox Church, I paid a visit to the Troitse Sergiyeva Lavra (the Sergiev Trinity Monastery) at Zagorsk, some fifty miles north of Moscow, where its headquarters are to this day. The monastery precincts enclose four or five churches, notably the Trinity Cathedral, the Church of the Holy Spirit (*Dukhovskaya Tsérkov*), which were both of the 15th century and the Assumption Cathedral of the 17th century. I visited this monastery on a week-day, and there were religious services going on in two of the churches, with many people (largely women, with a sprinkling of children) taking part. On a Sunday, there would no doubt be even larger congregations, including more men and young people. I remained for some time in the Trinity Cathedral, listening to the priest and congregation singing the liturgy. In one of the smaller churches a priest was also reciting the office, and people were taking away holy water in receptacles from a well. In the monastery grounds one saw a few priests, including some younger men, coming and going. With long beards, tall black hats, and long black vestments, these dignified figures represent something infinitely precious in the desert of communist Russia. At school the young are taught to regard Christianity, and all its outward manifestations, as something "historical", that is, belonging to a period that is now past. The mere *existence* of these priests gives the lie to this propaganda, as does the continued celebration of the liturgy in certain churches.[1] Besides falsifying the issue, the state also has the effrontery to try to steal some reflected glory from the Orthodox Church. Thus, church buildings (mostly closed) are hailed as "glorious *artistic* achievements of the Russian nation", belonging (always) to a certain period of "Russian *history*". I myself never saw a priest in Moscow. As I shall mention later on, some churches are open in Moscow, though I did not personally see any.

I would have liked also to visit such places as Vladimir, Suzdal, and Yaroslavl —all once important monastic centers, with many fine churches — which lie some hundred miles to the East and North of Moscow, but I did not have sufficient time. Incidentally, one is obliged to visit these places by arrangement with the state tourist organization (Intourist). A friend of mine who, a few years ago, visited Zagorsk independently, had a visit in his hotel three or four days later from the police, who questioned him about his motives, and reminded him that his visa covered only Moscow.

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1. Notwithstanding all this, the prelates of the Orthodox Church are, alas, to a considerable extent, under the thumb of the communist régime, and occasionally make—or are constrained to make—statements in support of government policies.

The New Russia

For its inhabitants, the new Russia is first and foremost life without meaning. As I shall mention later on, this is due to the depriving of the people of religion. At the immediate practical level, the new Russia is, for the ordinary citizen, austerity, frustration and drabness. Why should these loom so large in Soviet life? It is certainly not because of any resemblance to the situation in much of the Orient, where there may be widespread poverty. In European Russia at least, there are modern resources and "know-how" in plenty. The simple fact of the matter is that consumer satisfaction is low on the list of Soviet priorities. The austerity is government-ordained.

Higher on the Soviet list of priorities are such things as the armed forces, external espionage and infiltration, internal communist indoctrination, space research, grandiose public building, and industrialization. Well behind all that comes the individual consumer. Not for him the constant rise in the "standard of living" so imperiously demanded in the West. The individual's role in the Soviet state is simply to accept his lowly station.

A further factor contributing to the frustration of the individual is poor service—in shops, restaurants, etc. There is absolutely no incentive for a shop assistant, waiter, etc. to give him or herself the least bother to please a customer. Such people in themselves are not necessarily unpleasant. It is just that, within the system, attentive or thoughtful service has no premium put on it, and it is simply not forthcoming.

A third factor in the life of the inhabitants of the USSR is the drabness that comes from nationalization and centralization. Centralization entails a massive bureaucratic maze, and consequently everything is slow and complicated. Nationalization—virtually total—involves a universal uniformity that would be hard to exaggerate. In every district of Moscow one sees the same food and clothes shops—*Produkti*, *Gastronom*, *Phrukti*, etc. These are dismal places, scarcely resembling shops as known in the West, and there are long queues for everything. As for restaurants, there are not enough to go round, and the first hurdle is to get in at all. Commissionaires in Russia are not there to entice people in, but to keep consumers out. Their colleagues inside are not looking for work. If one succeeds in forcing oneself inside, one might have to wait forty minutes before the menu is brought. If one is so foolish as to ask for a menu in a Western language ("an international menu"), this might take another half hour. The whole visit might last three and a half hours. The food is indifferent—neither good nor bad; but in any case,

most of the items on the menu are “not available”. If one wants a sandwich or a coffee at lunch-time, one has to queue. If one wants stamps, one has to queue. And so on.

I must say the man and woman in the street seem resigned to all this. As well they may be, for they have no alternative. Nor do they know (though they may half suspect) that conditions are less austere, less frustrating, less drab elsewhere. They are brought up to believe that Russia is foremost in everything and, pitifully, they will often make this point to you in conversation.

Moscow is disfigured by the fruits of Stalin’s massive building program. Landmarks of this are the University, the Ukraine Hotel, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc. In some guide-books the style in question is referred to as “Stalin-gothic”, but this term is a complete misnomer, as it in no wise derives from Gothic or any other traditional style. This is no doubt why it is so oppressive. It is not that it is in the least “contemporary”. It is symmetrical and conventional. The fussiness of its decoration is positively Victorian. I would suggest three reasons for its disagreeable appearance: (1) it shows no sign of good taste, being clearly the product of a shallow mind; (2) it is entirely lacking in “soul” or “spirit”; and (3) it is usually erected in the names of Marx and Lenin, whose names or countenances are to be observed in some position of prominence. Incidentally, the building in London which, in its general lines, most closely resembles “Stalin-gothic” is the University’s Senate House! Given that all Western cities are now riddled with “contemporary” architecture—of glass, steel and ferro-concrete—it is difficult to say that Moscow is worse than they are. Yet the effect is oppressive, apart from the relatively few older buildings. As elsewhere in Europe, the very newest buildings in Moscow are “contemporary” in style.

All over Moscow one sees communistic slogans: “praise be to the USSR”; “praise be to progressive youth”; and the commonest: “praise be to the communist party of the Soviet Union” (*slava KPSS*); this one sees everywhere. It is clear from all this that in the past the Russian people praised God for everything (*slava Bogu*), and that the Marxist-Leninists tried to deflect their pious utterances in the direction of communism. One sees the slogans everywhere, but one never hears them uttered by the people.

It is ironic that all this self-awarded praise to communism and the Soviet state can immediately be checked against the surrounding realities of Soviet life. But the people who actually live there, though they are the ones who suffer, have no standard of comparison. Westerners do have, including Western communist visitors, though they, of course, are in bad

faith, and mendaciously retail rosy reports of life in the Soviet Union. Every day that I was in Moscow I thought of the planned starvation of the Kulaks, the murder of the Polish officers at Katyn, and the murder by Khrushchyov of the Hungarian leader Imre Nagy, after he had been given a safe conduct. I shall refer later on to the central evil—the suppression of religion.

"Soviet scientific achievements" ("space research" and the like) are, like those of other nations, so banal and so boring, that even foreign sympathizers cannot convincingly pretend to find them interesting.

During my two and a half weeks in Moscow I was in four buses or taxis which broke down (on two occasions seriously). "Why invest money in new vehicles for the unimportant individual consumer?" is obviously the official viewpoint. The buses are old and ramshackle and to get a taxi, with queues even more hopeless than in London at the rush hour, is itself an achievement.

Moscow is presented as a center of culture. There are three main items: traditional singing and dancing (of the different territories within the USSR), ballet (classical and modern), and the circus. The first item is the most rewarding, but occasionally there is some *kitsch*, aimed at both natives and tourists. I was fortunate, however, to see and hear much of the genuine article, from quite a number of different territories. I also heard in an erstwhile church near the Rublyóv Museum (in the Andrónikov Monastery), an excellent choir which sang Russian songs of the 15th to 19th centuries. Ballet and the circus are the same as in the West.

It is impossible to attend any performance casually or on one's own initiative. Tickets must be obtained through Intourist at least one day in advance and, having made one's request, it is necessary to call back the next day for the actual tickets. No choice is possible regarding seating and price.

It was infinitely sad to see the many people from all parts of the USSR on holiday in Moscow. They went in hordes to such places as Lenin's tomb, the "Park of Economic Achievements" (with its "space pavilion"), etc., etc. How much energy and seriousness devoted to so much banality and evil! To be fair, the crowds of holiday makers also visit the Kremlin cathedrals and the various museums, but of course the Soviet interpretation of these "*artistic* achievements" from "Russian *history*" is probably hard to avoid. Incidentally, I heard it said that travel is not free in the USSR and that, for example, to travel from Kiev to Moscow, one had to give a reason, and receive permission. Foreign diplomats, of course, are seriously restricted in regard to where they may live,

where they may travel, and so on.

Differences between Russians and Eastern Europeans

There is a big difference between the populations of the Eastern European countries and the population of Russia. In the former, most of the people still have memories of pre-communist life, and they also have access to news from Western sources. In the USSR, however, the people receive virtually no news from Western sources and already two generations have been brought up with a Soviet "education". Consequently they live in an artificial dream-world (or nightmare world) of slogans and fictions. It is as if their contact with objective reality had been entirely cut off. Not only were many Russians ill-informed, they also seemed no longer to know how to think. The educated people were the worst; the simple people were less mentally deformed, and, in spite of linguistic difficulties, one could have more normal exchanges with them.

Perhaps the main element in the difference between the Eastern European countries and the USSR is that, in the former, religion, though not given any absolute rights, is not decisively hampered in practice, whereas in the USSR, as I will mention presently, it is.

In keeping with the essential definition of communism, which is a systematic and unremitting atheism applied with force to politics and administration, it was clearly the absence of the religious element in people's lives and minds that constituted the biggest single factor in their alienation from reality. Over and above the required submissiveness to arbitrary government, the people seemed to be largely deprived of any meaning for life and any basis for (and any understanding of) normal moral conduct. I got the impression that lying was considered legitimate,[2] and I had reason to believe that pilfering was not uncommon. Among some young educated married men, systematic marital infidelity seemed to be taken for granted, and was not concealed, as it still tends to be in the West. Russians of this sort tended to be on the defensive whenever the conversation turned to things Russian. Russia was always good, nearly always best.

Nevertheless I must say that I frequently had pleasant contacts with Russians. Perhaps they were the less well educated ones, or perhaps I was simply drawing on the basic fund of human goodness (even if unformed by religious education) which, precisely, communism will never manage completely to suppress. Every visitor to Moscow knows that one encounters much

2. Communism itself, being the practical expression of Marxist dogma, is nothing more nor less than a lie.

"cussedness" and "bolshiness"—as well as sheer indifference and inefficiency deriving from a total lack of incentive to be otherwise. Nevertheless I was repeatedly surprised to find as much humanity and normality as in fact I did, amongst a people who have been deprived of religion for two generations. But of course, despite insults and cruel injuries, it is not given to governments to succeed completely in extirpating religion from the minds and hearts of men. This is why (should a reason be needed) there is no occasion for being hostile to the Russian people as such. The Russians are the first victims of the Soviet regime and it is sympathy rather than hostility, that is called for. In some people, of course (and it would be surprising were it otherwise), there is a partial, voluntary espousal of communist ideas. Here, alas, there is culpability, since no one is obliged, in his heart, to accept communism.

It is clear to me that the Russian people were happier under the Tsars than under communism (even though I personally have seen only the latter). The imperfection *in fact* of the Tsarist regime is as nothing compared with the imperfection *in principle* of the communist one. It is a cruel lack of sympathy for the Russians and their predicament when Westerners (and not only "leftists", alas) express a preference for the latter over the former. What can be unkinder to a people, than friendship towards their oppressors?

Religion in Russia

I was told that about thirty churches are open for worship in Moscow. When one guesses that, in a Western city of comparable size, the number must be in the hundreds, one gets an idea of the extent of the restriction involved. A secretary from the British Embassy told me that, at Christmas and Easter, the authorities very often arbitrarily close one or two of the few open churches (e.g. "because the priest is ill"), and worshipers turning up are thus frustrated in their intention. Also, he said, members of the young communists' league would often jostle and intimidate worshipers, with the collusion of the police. Christmas, of course, is a working day. He expressed the view, however, that religion was still quite strong in Russia, particularly throughout the countryside. He also said that, in Central Asia, the Islamic religion was a force to be reckoned with, and he had heard that there had recently been severe repression of Muslims there.

The Embassy secretary recalled that the official communist belief was that with education and scientific advance, religion ("superstition") would simply fall away and disappear. Because it does not disappear, however, (except amongst the successfully educated) the authorities are repeatedly

constrained to "help" it disappear by all manner of restrictions and harassments. Another Englishman who was present approvingly and complacently expressed the view that, in the West too, religion would in any case fall away (was indeed already falling away) because of "modern culture" as we now know it. Obviously there is much that could be said on this point, but I was nevertheless staggered by the superficiality of this remark.

Some people seem to think that communist persecution and Western decadence are two of a kind, as far as religion is concerned. This is both a half truth and a serious error. Decadence (the collective suggestiveness that religion is *passée*) only seduces those whose religion in any case is weak or non-existent. Above all, Western decadence still leaves the way open for those who, against the current, wish to believe and practice. Communist persecution, on the other hand, positively sets out to exterminate religion and, as far as it can, to render its observance impossible. It denies the possibility of faith to many who would otherwise have it. For a number of reasons it can never entirely succeed, but the difference between active persecution by communism and contempt and indifference on the part of Western decadence is a cardinal one.

Another view I have occasionally heard from complacent, non-religious Westerners (and the view is incompatible with the foregoing one, though it sometimes comes from the same people!) is that persecution strengthens the thing which it oppresses, and can therefore be regarded as something good. In spite of the grain of truth which this view contains, it is nevertheless a piece of hypocrisy and wrong-mindedness, as well as being a cruel and insensitive callousness into the bargain.

Communism and Western decadence are not two of a kind as far as religion is concerned, and this is an important social truth. From a political point of view, it is a forgivable exaggeration to say that religion has only one enemy: communism![3]

I gleaned no news of Buddhism during my stay in Moscow, although I had a pleasant but brief

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3. The point is that communism is politics and politics is power. Psycho-analysis and existentialism infest our Western society and sap the foundations of religion, but it is perfectly possible for individuals, and even groups, to elude them. There is all the difference in the world between an armchair leftist (a "parlor pink", as he would be called in Dublin), whose influence is harmful, but who does not leave his chair, and a political commissar with effective power, who crushes all before him. Moreover, the atheism which finds its political expression in communism implicitly contains (in a certain sense at least) the errors of psycho-analysis and existentialism.

conversation with a woman from the Far East. The principal Buddhist area is in that part of Siberia that lies to the north of Mongolia, for example, around Lake Baikal.

Interviews

I was interviewed twice while I was in Moscow: first by a journalist from an unknown newspaper and later by a reporter from the Soviet news agency TASS.

The first occasion was entirely informal: following a visit to the exquisite icons in the Rublyóv Museum and an excellent talk on them by the curator, the interpreter turned to me and said: “I have with me a newspaper reporter who would like to hear your impressions”. I was still feeling moved by the splendid exposition of the doctrinal and spiritual content of each icon given by the curator, and above all by Rublyóv’s icons themselves. I could not but speak with enthusiasm: “We have already been in this country for several days,” I said, “but I feel that it is only today, in the presence of these icons, that we have finally arrived in the real Russia!” The reporter smiled, and the curator was obviously pleased to hear my appreciation of his lecture-demonstration.

On the second occasion, a reporter from Tass asked me for my impression of his country. I answered that I had been very happy to see the beautiful cathedrals and icons in Moscow and elsewhere. Without thinking, I added: “I love the old Russia!” He immediately said: “And the new Russia, what about the new Russia?” Regretting my inadvertence, I pondered a moment, and answered: “In the West and in the East, I prefer the old to the new!” Despite my rather lame attempt to dilute what I had said, my meaning remained only too clear! At this point my interpreter intervened to say: “You are a conservative!” The man from Tass then went on: “Moscow was once built with wood, but this burned down and was replaced with stone. This is surely progress”. It took me some moments to gather my thoughts and to comment: “Brass is more lasting than stone, but poetry (and, I could have added, religion!) is ‘more lasting than brass’!” The conversation ended here. The journalist presumably wanted copy that was publishable, and not un-marxist philosophizing!

I should add that, in making these comments, I was not attempting any bravado, nor seeking to be foolhardy. It would have been unwise for a Russian to make them, but a foreigner is almost expected to be ideologically unsound. In any case, since a conversation in English with one or two

safe officials is unlikely to subvert the Soviet state, it can be passed over without fuss. The worst that could happen to an indiscrete foreigner (provided he has not actually broken the law) is expulsion and (at least as far as I was aware!) I was never near the risk of that.

There is no room for complacency, however, as the bureaucratic nature of the regime means that the authorities could quite easily "frame" anyone they wished, even a visitor. This might be unlikely in a period of *détente*, but could be used if the Russians wanted an "exchange" for, say, an imprisoned Russian spy in the West.

The Lighter Side

The malfunctioning, in the USSR, of things relating to service to the public is not always to the latter's disadvantage, as the following episode shows: in the Moscow buses, one pays one's fare by means of a contraption which I can only describe as a kind of "fruit-machine" (but it is not meant to be such). This is supposed to deliver a ticket on being fed with a small coin. However, the first time I took a bus and used this apparatus, I unintendedly won a free ride and received a prize of two kopeks into the bargain! The man next to me was even luckier. As soon as he put his money in the slot, there was a tremendous clanking, and it was clear that he had won the jack-pot! It is obvious that, in the field of municipal transport, socialization—and mechanization—can and do offer tangible benefits to Moscow's citizens!

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It was strange being without world news during my two and a half weeks in Moscow. The only "British" newspaper available was the communiust *Morning Star*, which is not famous for its objective coverage of events. As regards the two Russian newspapers, *Pravda* ("Truth") and *Izvestia* ("News"), a Polish lady said the last word: "There is no *pravda* in *Izvestia* and there is no *izvestia* in *Pravda!*" The joke is fifty years old, but it gets better every day!

Breakfasts in the hotel were reasonably good—often with fruit juices and excellent Balkan-style yogurt. In addition, there was a "main dish", such as fried eggs one day, omelette the next, and cold meat the next. But there was no possibility of switching from one main dish to another on any given day. We got the impression that it was decided the day before in the Kremlin that, on the following morning, everyone in Moscow should have, say, fried eggs for breakfast!

The Remedy . . .

All Russia's miseries could be ended by two simple measures: blowing up Lenin's tomb, and installing the icon of Our Lady of Vladimir, as Patroness of Russia, in its proper place of honor in (a re-opened and re-dedicated) St. Basil's Cathedral. All other necessary rectifications would follow automatically.

Linguistic Desiderata

A familiarity with the Cyrillic alphabet is essential for the foreign visitor to Moscow who wishes to be able to move around the city on his own. It makes possible, for example, the use of public transport. The Cyrillic alphabet, related to the Greek alphabet, takes its name from St. Cyril who, with his companion St. Methodius had, in the 9th ninth century, the mission to Christianize the Slavs.

It is most desirable to acquire a minimum number of words in Russian, even if these do not extend far beyond *pozháluista* ("please"), *spasibo* ("thank you"), *khoroshó* ("very well"; "all right"), *sozhaléyo* ("sorry"), *nichevó* ("nothing"; "it doesn't matter"), *zdrávstvuitye* ("greetings") and *do svidánya* ("au revoir"). I found that with a vocabulary of between twenty and thirty words, miracles could be performed!

It is extremely useful to know French and/or German, in addition to English. I repeatedly encountered guides, receptionists, and the like who spoke only one of these three languages, but who usually spoke their particular foreign language very well. Presumably it was a requirement for their jobs.

European and Oriental Territories

Whenever I have used the word "Russia", I have generally intended this in the strict—that is, in the narrow sense. In addition to Russia, the USSR holds down many vast territories, European, Central Asian and Far Eastern. Amongst the European non-Russian territories are Belarus or White Russia (*capital* Minsk), the Ukraine or Little Russia (Kiev), Georgia (Tbilisi), and Armenia (Yerevan). At the end of World War II vast areas of Eastern Europe, including whole countries were swallowed up by the USSR and are now regarded as part of its territories. These include the erstwhile independent Baltic states of Estonia (*capital* Tallinn), Latvia (Riga) and Lithuania (Vilnius), as well as the Romanian province of Bessarabia, now called Moldova (Kishinev). Likewise, a part of

Eastern Poland, namely, Ruthenia, and a part of Eastern Slovakia (the region of the Carpathians) were added to the Ukraine. Georgia is known as Grusia, and has a language and a script of its own. A Georgian told me: “There are many hundreds of languages in the world and about a dozen scripts; one of these scripts is Georgian.” Apparently Georgian (like Basque and Albanian) is unrelated to any other known language.

In the lands held by the USSR there are two important civilizations other than the Christian: these are the Muslim and the Buddhist civilizations. There are two main Muslim areas: West of the Caspian Sea (bordering on Turkey and Persia) and East of the Caspian Sea (bordering on Persia and Afghanistan). The former is the Caucasus and comprises Azerbaijan (*capital* Baku) and the Russian regions of Daghestan, Chechnya, and Astrakhan. The latter is Central Asia and comprises five countries, namely, Uzbekistan (*capital* Tashkent, and also containing the cities of Samarkand and Bokhara), Turkmenistan (Ashkhabad), Tajikistan (Dushanbe), Kazakhstan (Alma-Ata) and Kyrgyzsten (Bishek). These territories were seized and colonized by the Tsars. Under the communists, massive Russian immigration has continued and draconian measures have been taken to extirpate the Muslim religion. Elsewhere in the world, such territories would by now have managed to wrest independence from their foreign overlords.

I saw many Muslims from Central Asia and occasionally chatted with some of them. The women wore traditional dress, with trousers and a tunic, and their hair in long plaits. The men wore little caps. I saw several excellent performances of Central Asian dancing, with exquisite Persian-style music from flutes and drums.

The main Buddhist area is in Siberia—around Lake Baikal, North of Mongolia. The people here are the Buryats. Amongst the Buryats, and their neighbors the Samoyeds, one also encounters (or encountered) another important traditional current, namely Siberian shamanism. This is a direct branch of Hyperborean shamanism to which Taoism, Shinto, Bön (the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet) and the religion of the North American Indians are also affiliated. Siberia has also been heavily settled by Russians since the time of the Tsars.

There is another, smaller, Buddhist community, namely the European Russian region of Kalmykia. The Kalmuks are a nomadic Mongolian people who centuries ago migrated West of the Caspian to the area of Astrakhan at the mouth of the Volga, where they mingle with the more numerous Muslims. The Kalmuks possess the distinction of being the only naturally-occurring

Buddhist community in Europe.

I saw numerous people of Far Eastern countenance in Moscow, but had occasion to talk only with one woman, and (for linguistic reasons) only superficially. I paid a visit to the Museum of Oriental Culture. This contains many fine carpets from Central Asia, and a few *objets d'art* from Near-Eastern countries and India. No Far-Eastern sections (if there are any) were open when I was there. The Museum, to say the least, is very modest, and not to be compared with the great Oriental museums in such places as London, Leyden and Berlin.

POLAND

Warsaw

To travel to Warsaw from Moscow is like going to another planet. In Warsaw there seems to be, proportionately, more churches than in Rome! All are open and much in use. Also, whereas the architecture of Moscow is disagreeable (I am naturally not thinking of that of earlier centuries), much of Warsaw is picturesque and full of charm. One can scarcely believe that eighty per cent of Warsaw was destroyed in World War II, the city has been so wonderfully re-built in the old style. One thinks above all of *Rynek Starego Miasta* (the Old Market Place), *Rynek Novego Miasta* (the New Market Place), and surrounding streets, such as Ulica Piwna. The arches, narrow lanes, natural brickwork and wrought iron are beautiful at any time of the day or night, and motor traffic is restricted in much of this area. Here there are cafés which, for charm and good taste, I have not seen surpassed anywhere. They equal, and may exceed, the standard of the best Spanish paradors. These small establishments are run by private enterprise. The larger restaurants, like all concerns employing over ten people, are nationalized. It is said that service is better in the former, but even in the latter service is not as in Moscow. The universal dish in Warsaw, incidentally, is roast duck. In polite conversation I said to several Poles how different I found Warsaw from Moscow. They all took this as a compliment! There is only one piece of "Stalin-gothic" in Warsaw. This is the "Palace of Culture and Science" whose name speaks for itself. It was allegedly a gift from the Russians (the Poles having allegedly chosen this instead of new housing!), but I was told that it was Polish money and goods that paid for it. Apart from the beautiful old town, Warsaw has, like every other city in the world, numerous "contemporary" style buildings.

It would be easy to say that one "liked" Warsaw and "disliked" Moscow—but this would be

too simplistic. The time of the great religious suppressions and persecutions that hit Russia in 1917 and the years following had passed over by the time communism was imposed on Poland after World War II. Russia has been severely disabled; Poland much less severely so. In all commonsense and logic, therefore, the greater sympathy must go to where there was the greater catastrophe. In any case, Poland herself is far from being free. It only seems so, when one arrives from Russia.

On the Sunday morning that I was in Warsaw, I did what many natives and visitors, do and visited the Łazienki Park where, reclining on the grass under the trees, one may listen to the music of Chopin, played by a young woman pianist. Very pleasant; but I preferred the Central Asian music in the horrible Park of Economic Achievements in Moscow! (Nevertheless, I was glad to be in the Łazienki Park, and not the other one!)

Germans and Russians

The sufferings of the Poles at the hands of the Germans and the Russians are well known. The Poles are not free to give vent to their feelings on the deeds of the latter, so comments tend to be deflected (as is the wish of the state) towards the former. Having suffered under neither the Germans nor the Russians, it would clearly have been inappropriate for me to contend with those who had. However, one-sided criticism of the Germans led me to venture the following remarks to my Polish companion. My main point was simply that the Germans destroyed Warsaw physically (and killed many thousands[4] of people during a campaign of resistance that was never completely suppressed during the whole of the war), whereas the Russians, having in mind the inescapable fact of Poland's post-war fate, have morally and physically enslaved the whole of society. In particular I cited three enormous atrocities: (l) The murder of the Polish officers corp at Katyn. (All Poles were fully *au fait* with this, my companion told me). (2) The premature calling of the Warsaw uprising in 1944, with the result that the Germans suppressed it entirely, killing many people, while the Russian army paused on the outskirts of the city. (My companion had himself been in the resistance). (3) The imposition by force of a communist regime in Poland, when this was by no means a foregone conclusion. The post-war prime minister Mikolajczyk headed a

4. I do not think the German people were implicated in the Nazi cruelties towards the Jews, culminating in the terrible extermination camps in Poland. Further-more, I do not wish to attempt a discussion of anti-semitism and its various historical forms.

non-communist government, but the Russians had something else in view, and Mikolajczyk fled the country the day before they planned to arrest him. (He is now a farmer in America). In hesitantly touching on these tragedies I found that, as far as my companion was concerned, I was preaching to the converted. He shared all of the views I expressed. I may say that the Poles seem to have little bitterness towards the Germans, and there are many German tourists in Warsaw—mainly to be found, like all tourists of good sense, in the Rynek Starego Miasta.

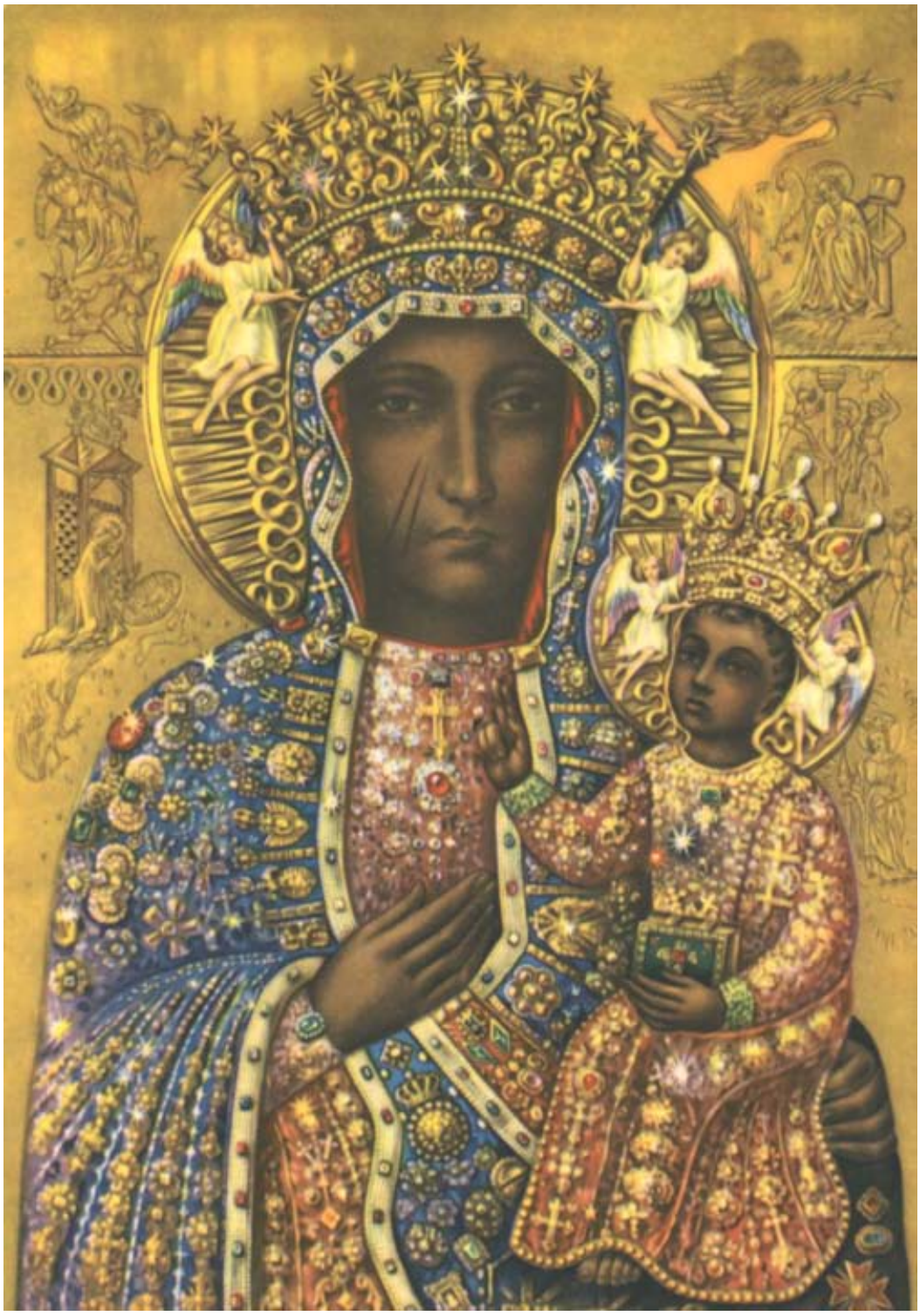
In Western Europe so many people are semi-marxist, and readily manifest sympathy for the USSR. To encounter anti-communism and hostility to the USSR on a really broad basis, it is necessary to go to Eastern Europe, where the people have reason to know what they are talking about. Apart from the individual misfortune of living under a repressive regime, with its mixture of crudeness and drabness, one aspect of people's resentment is their countries' loss of national sovereignty, in that they are compelled by force to be satellites of the USSR.

Czenstochowa

Czenstochowa is the well-known Polish national place of pilgrimage. The object of the pilgrims' piety is the famous icon known as the "Black Virgin of Czenstochowa", which is located in a chapel in the monastery at Jasna Gora ("Clear Mount") just outside the town. Like "Our Lady of Vladímir" in Moscow and "Our Lady of Perpetual Succor" in Rome, the "Black Virgin of Czenstochowa" is one of the most venerable icons in Christendom. It is of the *Hodigitria* type ("She who points the Way"), whereas that of Vladimir is of the *Eleusa* type ("Mercy") and that of Rome of the *Stratsnaia* type ("Passion").

As luck would have it, I went to Czenstochowa (about three hours' journey by train south of Warsaw) the day before the national pilgrimage, and the crowds were already gathering. Pilgrims come from all over Poland; many of them had come on foot, taking a week for the journey. I had to fight my way to the altar of the chapel where the icon is exposed, fight to maintain my position in front of the icon, and fight to make my way back. It was a happy occasion, and one might have been in the Orient! People unceasingly sang devotional hymns and the words *Ave Maria* rang out over and over again.

Czenstochowa and its icon—as becomes especially evident when one experiences it on the occasion of the national pilgrimage—is unquestionably one of the most important Christian pilgrimage centers in Europe.



Black Virgin of Czestochowa

EAST GERMANY

From Warsaw to Berlin

I had thought that I had long left the USSR behind but, on the train between Warsaw and Berlin, I passed through several USSR sleeping coaches on the way from my compartment to the dining car. I had noticed at the station in Warsaw that, on the outside of these coaches, in the form of a crest, was a well-known communist slogan in many languages. Inside in the corridor, there was a receptacle for literature. Thinking this must contain tourist leaflets, I dipped my hand in, but what I pulled out was not brochures on the Kremlin, the Black Sea, or Central Asia, but extracts from Lenin in several languages! My fingers released their catch, but after a few days in Poland, I could not help being amused at this pathetic parting shot from the USSR!

East Germany

This so-called country is a non-country: it is simply the Soviet occupation zone of Germany given a grotesque title (the "German Democratic Republic") and a even more grotesque regime. Its so-called government is a non-government: its members are simply a clique of de-Germanized quislings doing the work of the foreign communist power. The inhabitants of the Soviet zone showed in then rebellion of 17th June 1953 what they thought of the forcible establishment of a communist mini-state in that zone... And the Soviet zone authorities showed how much appeal their regime had for the people by having to build a wall to keep them in. One's attitude to East Germany, therefore, is quite different from one's attitude to, say, Poland, Czechoslovakia or Hungary. The latter are countries in their own right whatever be the regime they are at present laboring under. The former, on the contrary, is no more than part of a country detached from the whole (and enslaved) only by the *de facto* power of the USSR.

The communist grip on Eastern Europe can be likened to a frost, emanating from Moscow. The frost is most powerful, most effective, in the USSR itself. In the case of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, etc. whole countries, bordering on the USSR, have been "frozen" —though the "ice" is not entirely impenetrable, and there is much warmth underneath. In the case of East Germany, however, it is as if the frost had bitten only one member of the body; but, though the disease in this case, affects only part of the whole, it is in some ways more repellent, no doubt because of the additional lie that the East German artificial state constitutes a country in its own right.

Also relevant is the fact that East Germany is the only Protestant communist "state". For this and other reasons I have often thought that, should Britain ever be seized by the communists (which God forbid!), it is East Germany that it would most resemble. It is a nightmarish thought!

The young officials of East Germany were always courteous and friendly. But this makes no difference to the icy reality of the regime. In any case, they are only there to obey orders. Time and time again the East German border guards have shot and killed their own people escaping to the West. The week-end I arrived in Berlin, seven people (miraculously and successfully) escaped to West Germany. The flow is never-ending.

Leaving aside the definition of communism in principle, one immediately experiences in East Germany the customary practical effects of communism. These may be described as repressiveness, drabness, frustration and deliberately planned consumer austerity. Whatever else the regime's priorities may be, it is certainly not the good pleasure of the consumer that occupies first place! The luxurious and materialist West is so disgusting, one only wishes that this "monastic" attitude were directed towards the good. But, alas, the regime barks up the tree of unreality!

As one walks along Unter den Linden, Wilhelmstrasse and Friedrichstrasse, one is aware of being in Germany: the neatness, the tidiness, the features and demeanor of the people all tell one so: but "something is rotten in the state of Denmark" and one is heart sorry for these people arbitrarily caught behind the wall of communism and afflicted by a blight which they deserve no more and no less than those who are still in the free world.

The authorities of East Berlin erected, a year or so ago, a television tower which has, near the top, a large globe made of a reflective material. This globe is remarkable in that, whichever way the sun's rays fall upon it (and from whichever position one views it), a pronounced and distinct cross appears. This can scarcely have been the intention of the proud planners and builders! (Postcard photographs are carefully re-touched, so that the cross does not show). But there it is, for all in East (and West) Berlin to see. The Berliners, who have a word for everything, call it "The Pope's Revenge"!

(Original editorial inclusions that followed the essay:)

The spirit of meditation is the combating of self-willed thinking – it is a combat against the weight of one's feelings. It is a combat against dark and deep sleepiness. It is a combat against the ideas of right and wrong; of activity and quiet; disorder and regularity – in fact it is a combat against all the forms of the objective world of the senses – the condition which dulls the mind. By carrying on the combat with enthusiam in the correct spirit one may go on till there is an entirely unexpected attainment of enlightenment.

Hakuin.