

knowledge and experience. The United Nations is a seminal example of the pooling of knowledge and expertise in an international organization. An example that comes to mind here are the activities of the WHO (World Health Organization) in understanding and combatting AIDS. By increasing our consciousness, knowledge and experiences concerning Canadian and U.S. social policies, we can take the first steps toward collaboration. Collaboration is really not possible (at least in an effective way) without first increasing consciousness, knowledge and experience.

### CONCLUSION

Canada and the U.S. share the North American continent together. They are similar nations in some respects, and dissimilar in others. Both countries face sizeable social problems in the years ahead. A growing aged population in both countries will mean increased

demands for health and other services. AIDS is a growing problem, one that will demand increased attention. Substance abuse will continue to be a significant problem. Poverty is a problem that is not going away anytime soon, and is prevalent in a special way among minorities, women and children (the "feminization of poverty"). This litany of shared social problems is longer than time or space permits here. The point is that Canada and the U.S. do have so much to learn from each other. Many Americans, disheartened by the lack of a national health program, look to Canada's national health program with admiration. However, it is not without its problems, and indeed all social policies of whatever kind have problems of one kind or another. We can mutually learn together from each other's experiences, and in so doing we can benefit therefrom. Indeed, one can almost say that the history of civilization itself is the history of one culture learning from the experiences of another.



## WHAT CAN REPLACE COMMUNISM?

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For better or for worse, it does seem to be the case that communism in Europe is dead. With noncommunist governments installed in place of virtually every formerly communist regime, and even in the Soviet Union the Party having given up its previously exclusive role in politics and society, it seems extremely unlikely that things can ever return to their former state. And although the question of the Baltic states and other areas annexed to the Soviet Union still remains, nevertheless the changes do seem to be fundamental and permanent. The communist era is over. China is now intellectually discredited and ideologically isolated from almost all the world. And as a result of all this there seems to be general satisfaction with how things are progressing. If there are any misgivings on our part, they are that perhaps the rigidly controlled economies of the East will prove unable to be decentralized or that entrenched Party bosses will somehow manage to sabotage the reforms. But there are few if any voices in the West asking the question of where the East is going anyway and why. Granted that communism is a cruel system based on lies, are we to rejoice that it might be replaced merely by the secular political regimes and free market

economics of the contemporary west? Are we so happy with what we have that we wish to share it with our brothers on the other side of what was once the Iron Curtain? It seems to me that an examination of the kind of political and economic system we have today in the West might give us pause in so wholeheartedly trying to extend it to the whole world.

I think that the main reason we tend to rejoice unthinkingly over the demise of communism has to do with the unreflective sort of anticommunism that has existed here in the U.S. From the end of World War II to the mid-seventies and beyond, anticommunism has been a major part of the consciousness of most Americans. What were the reasons, though, that we were urged to oppose communism? They were chiefly the following, I think: communism limited freedom and communism was not as economically productive as capitalism. The United States was good because we were free and because we were prosperous. But it seems to me that no Christian could ever regard freedom and prosperity as unqualified goods. Even though a certain degree of freedom is obviously needed in a society, I do not see why that freedom is something to be celebrated. Order is also needed in a society, and yet I cannot think of any American patriotic songs and orations in praise of it. As for prosperity, again we obviously need a certain amount of material goods, but I would think we

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could be mature enough to recognize that they are merely means to allow us to concentrate on what is really important. I suggest, then, that though there were and still are excellent reasons for being anticommunist, they are not the reasons that have been common in the United States. The popes, after all, have always been opposed to communism chiefly because of its denial of God. But this has never been a widespread view in our culture, which is not surprising in view of the marginal place God holds in modern Western civilization.

In fact, when we turn to the same papal sources which denounce communist atheism and atrocities, we do not find there much in the way of praise for our own economic and social systems. On the contrary, beginning with the first of the modern social encyclicals, *Rerum Novarum* (1891), the popes have bestowed considerable criticism on the modern West. This from *Rerum Novarum* is typical:

The ancient workmen's guilds were destroyed in the last century, and no other organization took their place. Public institutions and the laws have repudiated the ancient religion. Hence by degrees it has come to pass that working men have been given over, isolated and defenseless, to the callousness of employers and the greed of unrestrained competition. The evil has been increased by rapacious usury, which, although more than once condemned by the Church, is nevertheless, under a different form but with the same guilt, still practiced by avaricious and grasping men. And to this must be added the custom of working by contract, and the concentration of so many branches of trade in the hands of a few individuals, so that a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the masses of the poor a yoke little better than slavery itself (section 2).

Lest anyone think that these papal criticisms are to be applied only to the societies of the West of one hundred years ago, consider the following from Pope Paul VI's letter *Octogesima Adveniens* of May 14, 1971.

Since the nineteenth century, western societies and, as a result, many others have put their hopes in ceaselessly renewed and indefinite progress. They saw this progress as man's effort to free himself in face of the demands of nature and of social constraints; progress was the condition for and the yardstick of human freedom. Progress, spread by the modern media of information and by the demand for wider knowledge and greater consumption, has become an omnipresent ideology. Yet a doubt arises today regarding both its value and its result. What is the meaning of this never-ending, breathless pursuit of a progress that always eludes one just when one believes one has conquered it sufficiently in order to enjoy it in peace? If it is not attained, it leaves one dissatisfied. Without doubt, there has been just condemnation of the limits and even the misdeeds of a merely quantitative economic growth; there is a desire to attain objectives of a qualitative order also. The quality and the truth of human relations, the degree of participation and of responsibility, are no less significant and important for

the future of society than the quantity and variety of the goods produced and consumed (section 41).

Probably many of us would be surprised to learn that our social and economic policies have always merited papal strictures. This is doubtless because, knowing that East bloc governments have often been cruel to their own citizens, hostile to religion and believers, and aggressive toward their neighbors, we assumed that our arrangements must meet with approval. Most of us are generally convinced of the excellence of our own system more because we see the evil of the Soviet system than because we have compared ourselves with any ideal standard. We think of our almost complete freedom to criticize the government, of our democratic political arrangements, of our freedom of worship and the freedom of action of the various religious bodies, of our prosperity and of the pacific aims which our country professes in regard to its foreign policy. And all of this tends to make us think we are not just better, we are good. But, without prejudice to the largely unproductive, and now for the most part moot, issue of whether the East and the West are or were somehow morally equivalent, I think that if we were to look at our own civilization with an open mind and in the light of the Gospels, we would find much lacking, so much in fact that we would not rejoice — at least not with so much fervor — that this culture seems to be rapidly spreading throughout the world.

Anyone who has followed Western journalistic commentary on the ongoing transformation of the communist world will notice much discussion and celebration of the freedom and prosperity of the noncommunist world. In fact, I think it can be correctly said, that there is a consensus that if the nations of central and eastern Europe hope to achieve a prosperity comparable to ours, they will have to attain a freedom comparable to ours. And there is little discussion of whether the level of material prosperity that we enjoy is desirable or not, or whether the high degree of freedom we possess helps us to attain the ends for which society exists.

The reason we so complacently accept our own freedom and prosperity lies in our notion of the purpose of society. And the thing to be noted is that we seem to believe that the purpose of society is merely the sum of the multitude of *private* purposes which exist among men. For example, people usually want various bodily pleasures and people want to be rich. Obviously freedom and prosperity are what will conduce to producing pleasures and riches. We cannot conceive that there could be any other reason for men living together in civil society except to achieve wealth and pleasure, and so communism is condemned because it did not promote either.

Although during the sixties it was fashionable to condemn the pursuit of money while praising the pursuit of pleasure, men have now returned to a more reasonable view and realize that money is very helpful in the

attainment of all kinds of pleasures. So in the U.S. and the modern West in general, the making of money and the exercise of the kind of power that goes with moneymaking, is dominant. Now moneymaking requires some things and does not require others. Though it remakes life and culture just as relentlessly as does a totalitarian creed, it does so after its own manner. Concentration camps and torture chambers are usually irrelevant to its needs. It is also able to tolerate a high degree of verbal discussion and criticism, so long as there is little chance of action resulting. In fact, it thrives on such verbal activity, because it needs a citizenry open to many different points of view and not passionately committed to any particular one, so that after toying with various opinions or theories, in the end it acts the way the culture considers practical and sensible. Its ideal is a populace always able to see the other guy's point of view, not merely in the sense of seeing why he holds the position he does, but in the sense of hesitating between all available positions, or better still, of languidly and superficially surveying the various opinions from the standpoint of a shallow curiosity. And after doing thus, it would turn to something undeniably real, pursuing money and pursuing pleasure. For if a man wearies of finding the intellectual good, he will assuredly run after goods that cannot be disputed.

Our commercial civilization likewise can afford to permit other nations their political freedom, as long as it can effectively penetrate them economically. Thus Puerto Rico can easily be allowed its independence, because Puerto Rico is an economic colony of the U.S. What does its political status matter? Economic ties are the real ones here. The U.S. can forgo torture and terrorism because we do not need them. To attempt to dominate the world politically would be a useless waste of energy and money. Thus the Soviets have been foolish; they could have accomplished their dreams of domination so much more easily and cheaply if they had given up trying to control everything politically and concentrated on commercial mastery. For via commercial means one can attain an effective degree of control indirectly, although a different kind of control to be sure. Of course, if some country did attempt to resist American commercial exploitation, then perhaps military action would be necessary. But why bother if it is not necessary?

One should also note that this indirect method of dominating other countries, while it generally eschews the cruder military and police tactics used by the East, is not necessarily more respectful of human life or human rights. One need only consider the attitude of many Western business firms toward marketing infant formula in the Third World to see that. Although it was clearly demonstrated that such marketing and sales caused deaths, many defended the practice in the name of free enterprise. But one death resulting from formula feeding is the equal of one death from starvation and torture in the Gulag; but somehow we escape recogniz-

ing that equivalence. Modern Western society has also readily adapted to unlimited murder of the unborn, and who can doubt that abortion fits in very well with our modern pursuit of both pleasure and money?

Moreover, if anyone doubts that Western economic activity transforms and effectively controls its sphere of the world just as well as Soviet military efforts have done, consider what would happen to a traditional village in a Catholic culture were it transformed by American capitalism and tourism. Surely the reshaping of life involved is at least as profound as that brought about by communism. For the rhythm of life is no longer set by the Church year, the seasons with their varied agricultural tasks, the family with its births, marriages and deaths, even the daily rising and setting of the sun. From now on all of life will be rationalized by the sole standard of economic efficiency, and all customs and institutions that conflict with this new standard will be abandoned or changed. If farming practices that supported a village culture for centuries prove to be unable to justify themselves in a competitive economy, then they will be replaced. If it is no longer economically efficient for grandparents to live with their children and grandchildren, then this will be changed. And if it turns out that it will be more conducive to a larger Gross National Product for mothers to work at paying jobs outside the home with their children placed in institutions by day — well, then, this also is necessary if we are to meet our rational standard of life. And these displacements will inevitably involve alteration of people's lives and habits and eventually of their thoughts. And although religion and the Church are allowed to remain, they are cleverly neutered, for they are pushed to the periphery and at best permitted to shape personal piety. They must no longer stray outside their closed circle nor have any real social or cultural force. Even within the area of personal piety and morality let them beware of trampling on the rights of moneymaking. One can wonder, for example, if a really effective campaign against prostitution in a Third World nation would be permitted to succeed if it interfered with the pleasures and patronage of tourists, foreign businessmen or American sailors?

Now it is patent that the kind of control the West has exercised over other nations, and indeed over the people of the Western nations themselves, is very different from that which the Soviets have exercised at home and abroad.<sup>1</sup> The point is, though, that in the long run both peoples dominated by communism and those dominated by Western economic power obey the logic of the ideology, one indeed because of force, the other willingly, charmed by the false freedom, the material goods, the dream of unlimited gains. Ludwig von Mises, of all people, is said to have compared it to the difference between being raped and being seduced. There is no question which is more pleasant, but rape involves no moral compromise on the part of the victim, while in seduction both parties share in the guilt.

In the modern Western world society has become nothing other than a compact for the pursuit of pleasure and wealth. This should not surprise us, though, since John Locke, one of the patron saints of the modern West, stated this long ago, perhaps nowhere better than in his first *Letter Concerning Toleration*:

The commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing their own civil interests. Civil interests I call life, liberty, health, and indolency of body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like.

Now such a society has in a sense very limited and modest goals. It is not out to secure the passionate and explicit loyalty of each and every one of its denizens, but merely to compromise them in the life of consumerism, TV watching, and general hedonism. It is also quite willing to share its blessings with the rest of the world, since by so doing it can secure a healthy profit for itself. But of course the rest of the world, in order to secure these blessings for itself and its posterity, must sell its cultural and spiritual birthright. But what matter, since these things are not as important as "indolency of body . . . money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like." Not to mention VCRs and PCs. Such a conception of the purposes of a commonwealth is opposed to the Gospel, for as St. Thomas Aquinas states, the purpose of human laws, and thus of the commonwealth, is to lead men to virtue, not simply allow them to perfect their bodies and increase their property.<sup>2</sup> So the West of today sins by proposing simply "health, . . . indolency of body; and the possession of outward things" as the end of life in the human community. And this goal is more than compatible with considerable personal freedom, because most people will be rendered willing cooperators with these aims. As for the rest, those who take religion seriously — well, most of them — can be duped into denouncing only those pleasures associated with the body, while pronouncing a benediction on the acquisition of "money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like," while the few who realize that God requires both chastity and justice — well, they are only a few. They can have their journals, since they are of small circulation.

The point at which I have arrived, then, is this: The group of countries presided over by the U.S. subscribes to the notion that the purpose of human life is bodily and material pleasure. This kind of life demands considerable personal freedom, and this freedom can generally be readily extended to all without fear, since the majority are unwilling or unable to challenge this conception of life. In order to increase even more its profits, this bloc of nations desires to penetrate every

part of the world economically. Only if its economic interests are seriously threatened will it resort to force. Otherwise, it is happy to leave other peoples' ways of life and political independence alone, for it knows that the forces of economic rationalization will transform those nations and regions into copies of North America or Western Europe more effectively than policemen and soldiers could. Also it is cheaper to do it this way.

We who live in the West can be grateful to God that its kind of control allows us — at least for the present — to think, write and speak the truth without fear of arrest, to worship Almighty God in peace, and engage in Catholic activities without fear, though without hope of much success either. But amidst all this, we should not ever forget that this is only an accident; that our contemporary civilization is not a friend of the Gospel and that its philosophical and ideological springs are absolutely opposed to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Our society allows us our freedom for the wrong reasons. And at the same time, of course, we should deplore the evils still visited on courageous men and women in places such as China for their faithfulness to Christ or even to natural truth, without our succumbing to the delusion that only their system is founded on the Evil One. Both theirs and ours are based on evil, because both are based on error. Moreover, we should not be too secure in our judgment that the West will never employ the savage methods of the communist East, at least against some parts of the population. I have already mentioned abortion and infant formula marketing, and when one thinks of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of our birth-control experiments in Puerto Rico and elsewhere, one should not rest too easy. In the meantime, though, we can thank God that we do have the freedom to use our time well, and pray for the grace to make good use of it.

#### Notes, Storck

1. At times U.S. political goals may be frustrated, but at its deepest levels our culture is not interested in political goals per se. Though the politicians may lose out, the bankers usually cash in. One need look only at America's efforts to stop Communism politically and militarily from 1919 till now. These efforts were usually halting and weak, and they never hindered the bankers and businessmen from making a good profit by trading with our supposed enemy. (Recall the outcry over the grain embargo imposed by President Carter when the Russians invaded Afghanistan.) American political and military power, in short, in the last analysis is usually exercised in support of private commercial aims.
2. *Summa Theologiae* I-II, 96, 2, ad 2; and a. 3. An excellent contemporary restatement and application of this Christian and Thomistic ideal is found in the Irish patriot and statesman, Eamon de Valera's declaration, "The Ireland we dreamed of would be the home of a people who were satisfied with a frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit. It would, in a word, be the home of a people living the life that God desires men to live."

