

Communism, Church and State (1918)¹

"In Moscow alone the churches number forty times forty. And how many of them are to be found in all of Russia? And for whom do they all pray? For their masters." - (From the stories of A. Budishchev)

Communism is not only a social and political doctrine. Communism is first of all a unified and, in its fundamentals, completed world outlook and philosophy.

As such, communism comes into sharp collision with religious philosophy.

Communism and religion are two poles, two opposites. They are locked in eternal struggle with each other.

Every religious philosophy is based on feelings of man's domination by the elements of nature and society, on feelings of man's fear and slavish dependence on his surroundings.

Communism, scientific communism, is based on feelings of subordinating the blind and mechanical forces of nature and the environment to man.

Dominated by his surroundings, religious man dares not to try to explain what surrounds him. He only begins to speak, issues entreaties and tries to mollify the threatening and inexplicable phenomena.

Man who has freed himself from the feeling of slavish dependence, tries to explain, and then to use to his benefit, both nature and society.

Religion gives absolute, final and indubitable answers. After hearing them there is nothing left to question or investigate.

Like any science, communism gives unbounded sweep to research; like any science, it gives no exhaustive and final answers, it gives no absolute truths, but only relative ones.

The soul of religion is the miracle. Without miracles there is no religion.

The soul of communism is the appreciation of lawful development and the lawful consistency of phenomenon.

¹ "Rabochii krai", 7 December 1918.

As the accumulation of moral precepts, religion, and, Christianity in particular, preaches love for one's neighbor. But this love is abstract, devoid of flesh and blood. It is love for God, and through God. But it is love which is the same for all. And since it is distributed to all, it is indifferent to concrete people; at the summit it is always cold. Religious love is cold and indifferent to real live people. Therefore it easily finds its place in hearts which are callous to the sufferings of one's neighbor.

Communism also advocates the solidarity of people and self-sacrifice. But it wraps these feelings in flesh and blood, they are born by the earth, by the essence of life. They are concrete. They embrace both solidarity of the oppressed and hatred for the oppressors. Great love gives birth to great hatred. Whoever loves in a limited manner, being committed to a certain group, layer or class, - will hate others who are his enemies.

If such is the relationship of religion and communism in their most fundamental aspects, then all the more hostile to the new proletarian state is the church, which has ruled until recently.

The church has always been and continues to be an instrument of enslavement of the most refined and consistent kind. It has sanctified the darkest epochs of the inquisition with its bonfires; it has organized the persecution of free human thinking; it has inured man to slavish servility, it has been the opium of the people, and it has blessed and justified the foulest wars and the enslavement of man by man.

Especially here in Russia. In the West, with its war against feudalism, the revolutionary bourgeoisie was once merciless in shattering the religious tablets. The bourgeoisie produced Voltaire, Diderot, Holbach and Feuerbach. In Russia there never was a revolutionary bourgeoisie which was ruthless and bold in its struggle against religious fetishes. Backward, petty-bourgeois Russia, with the domination of the "rule of the land" over millions of forgotten and down-trodden people, with the domination of the primeval forces of nature over people, - always served as fertile soil for the church.

That is why no consistent and sincere socialist is able to or has the right to avoid the most energetic struggle against the domination of the church.

The battle against religious prejudices, against the church with its higher orders and its "shepherds," is a primary obligation of every revolutionary socialist.

But this battle must be waged skillfully and carefully. The religious world outlook has been created over centuries and

millennia. As long as there is social injustice, ignorance, and the dependence of man on the elements of nature and society, religion will exist in one form or another. The struggle must be ideological and in no instance should transgress these bounds. We communists would be philistines if we said that communism is not hostile to religion. We will never say this, for we have never been and will never be philistines and political mercenaries. But we would be committing a mass of the crudest errors if we stepped beyond the bounds of ideological battles and conflicts.

People will object: and what about the separation of church and state?

The separation of church and state delivers a cruel and irreparable blow to the church which ruled under tsarism. But in essence this is merely an act of social justice. We cannot show preference to Orthodoxy over Buddhism, Catholicism, or a whole number of other religions. The separation of church and state reduces the church to a free religious society which lives at its own discretion and on the means of its voluntary members. And only that. This measure signifies nothing else. It deprives the clergy of the economic might which it illegally enjoyed under tsarism, but this measure does not affect the freedom to choose a religious system. Our enemies often confuse this intention with others and present the separation of church and state as an attack on the freedom of religious expression. On the contrary, this measure, which removes one set of privileges, returns genuine freedom in the choice of religion. We fight against priests because of their counter-revolutionary activity, and not because they believe in God. We will conduct this struggle as long as the epoch of dictatorship continues. It is not our fault if the clergy ended up on the side of the "powerful of this world."

In returning genuine freedom of religious expression, we will and should wage our struggle for the triumph of our views and our world outlook, within the framework of ideological forms.

That is our position.

A. Voronsky