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The Church's Renewed Evangelizing Mission

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Abstract

A Soul for the New Europe: What would Don Francesco Ricci Propose?

Religion is back in Central Eastern Europe after a long experiment in Godlessness. The fall of communism was followed by a radically changed religious situation in the former Central East European block countries. Certainly, the post communist years were perturbed for most of the countries of Eastern Europe, especially for filling the spiritual desert that the fall of communism left behind. For Pope Benedict XVI, the real depredation that the communist regimes left behind was not economic. Instead, it consisted of the destruction of souls, and the eradication of a moral consciousness. The late Patriarch Aleksy II of Moscow and all of Russia complied. What worried the patriarch the most was saving Russians' defaced souls and restoring traditions of social service, than building defaced churches. In 1991 essay entitled *La Chiesa della Compassione* Don Francesco Ricci reflected brilliantly on the compassionate mission of the Church in post-communist Central Eastern Europe. The chapter's foci will be on the triple role of religion or the Christian Church in the post-communist, post-Christian or what Don Francesco Ricci called neo-pagan societies. This triple role includes regenerative, unitive, and formative dimensions of religion. This specific mission of religion or of the Church in post-communist societies is going be applied on a national and international level.

Keywords

religion in post-communist societies, religious persecution, religious freedom, united Europe, Christian roots of Europe, de-secularization of Europe

1 Introduction

In his 1991 essay entitled *La Chiesa della Compassione* Don Francesco Ricci reflected brilliantly on the special calling of the Church in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe and on how the example of this martyred Church testified to Church's universal mission. The churches in the free West could learn a great deal from the painful experience of violation of the most fundamental human rights which included freedom of conscience. Coincidentally, Don Ricci was analyzing the same issues Pope John Paul II was addressing in the 1990 *Assamblea Speciale per l'Europa del Sinodo dei Vescovi* in Rome.¹ For Don Ricci the Church was called to serve, to give all to all, especially to the people of Central and Eastern Europe who were emerging from the catacombs of the Communist persecution. East European countries and the secularized West needed the compassionate and salvific mission of the Church. The Church, according to Don Ricci, is the "segno umano di Dio" who is "ricco di misericordia,"² and who has and gives all to all. Consequently, the Church is not man-made. Instead, God has established the Church on earth to save humankind. *Ecclesia* is Christ's Body on earth, or what Peter Kreeft called an extension of the Incarnation.³ Fr. Dumitru Staniloae, a distinguished Orthodox theologian, who experienced first hand the Communist persecution in his native Romania, explained that the very act of bringing the Church into existence through the Holy Spirit represents the full goodness which God bears towards his creation now put at our disposal in Christ.⁴ Thus, it is Christ through his bride-the Church- which gives all to all. Indeed, the Church has an independent purpose for its existence, a focus which is distinct from that of the state: the sanctification and the eternal salvation of humankind. Communism curtailed or obliterated to various degrees, depending on the country, the teaching, the pastoral, and the sacerdotal power of the Church, which are the necessary means for sanctification and salvation of all.⁵ But this did not mean that the Church

¹ Discorso di Giovanni Paolo II ai Partecipanti alla Riunione di Consultazione dell'Assemblea Speciale per l'Europa del Sinodo dei Vescovi, Martedì, 5 giugno 1990, <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1990/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19900605_sinodo_it.html>, accessed February 21, 2009.

² Ricci, Francesco, *Da un Paese Vicino.*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna, 2003, p. 143.

³ Kreeft, Peter, J., *Catholic Christianity*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2001, p. 105.

⁴ Staniloae, Dumitru, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology. The Experience of God*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Massachusetts, p. 57.

⁵ Ott, Ludwig, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, Tan Books and Publishers, Illinois, 1974, p. 276.

was not available for the people who were living behind the iron curtain and denied religious and other human freedoms. In fact, the *chiesa della compassione* was prompt to respond to people's spiritual needs.

The Church is back in Central Eastern Europe after a long experiment in Godlessness or government dictated atheism. The fall of Communism was followed by a radically changed religious situation in the former Central and East European block countries, of which some, like the classic case of Albania, had remained hermetically sealed off the rest of the Western world for decades. The post-communist years were perturbed for most of the countries of Eastern Europe, especially for filling the spiritual desert that the fall of Communism left behind. For Pope Benedict XVI, the real depredation that the Communist regimes left behind was not economic or material poverty. Instead, it consisted of the destruction of souls, and the eradication of people's moral consciousness.⁶ The late Patriarch Aleksy II of Moscow and all of Russia complied with spiritual desert issue the churches had to face. What worried the patriarch was saving Russians' defaced souls and restoring traditions of social services. Aleksy described his years as head of the Russian Orthodox Church as "very hard." Under his leadership, he admitted, there were victories, but also disappointments. Although fifty to sixty per cent of Russians describe themselves as Orthodox Christians in polls and censuses, only a tiny proportion, between one and five per cent, attend church regularly. Consequently, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of nationalism in its former republics led to painful schisms, particularly in Ukraine, where the Russian Orthodox Church was first established in 988.⁷ Building what Communism destroyed, restoring souls; this is exactly the mission of the Church in post-communist societies.

Employing an historical-analytical approach, this chapter will focus on the threefold mission of the Church before, during, and after the fall of Communism, which includes the compassionate, spiritual-regenerative, and the unitive mission, topics that were very dear to Don Francesco Ricci and explored in a number of essays written by him before his death. It will analyze the special vocation of the Church in Eastern Europe during the harsh years of Communist persecution, the role of the Church in a post-Communist milieu or what Don Francesco Ricci called in a neo-pagan society, as well as the unitive role of the Church and Christianity in particular in a

⁶ Ratzinger, Joseph, Pera, Marcello, *Without Roots: the West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, Basic Books, New York, 2006, p. 73.

⁷ SEIA Newsletter on the Eastern Churches and Ecumenism, No. 159, December 31, 2008, p. 1.

contemporary ecclesiastically divided Europe.

2 The Communist Persecution and the Return to the Pre-Constantinian Church

Emperor Diocletian (245-313), known as an autocratic ruler, persecuted the Christian Church. For Diocletian the vibrant Christian Church presented a political and social threat to his empire at a time when it needed unity and cohesiveness.⁸ Diocletian decided to resolve the Christian question, induced by co-emperor Galerius, returning to persecutor. The Council of Nicomedia (302) of the chief military and civil officers resolved to suppress Christianity throughout the empire. A year later, in 303, the splendid cathedral of Nicomedia, opposite the imperial palace, was demolished by the imperial guards. An edict was issued "to tear down the churches to the foundations and to destroy the Sacred Scriptures by fire; and commanding also that those who were in honorable stations should be degraded if they persevered in their adherence to Christianity"⁹. Three further edicts (303-304) marked successive stages in the severity of the persecution: the first ordering that the bishops, presbyters, and deacons should be imprisoned; the second that they should be tortured and compelled by every means to sacrifice; the third including the laity as well as the clergy. The persecution of Christians was so harsh - which made the victorious Constantine comment through the pen of Eusebius - that "I held the previous Emperors as exceedingly harsh because of their savage ways."¹⁰ Indeed, the Diocletian and Galerius persecution as well as the endurance and martyrdom of the victims had left an indelible memory on young Constantine, who as Eusebius wrote in Book III of the *Life of Constantine*, "did all the things opposite to those

⁸ McGonigle, Thomas D., and Quigley, James F., *A History of the Christian Tradition from its Jewish Origins to the Reformation*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, 1988, p. 94.

⁹ The Catholic Encyclopedia, an International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church, The Encyclopedia Press, New York, 1913, Vol. 5, p. 7; Chadwick, Henry, *The Early Church. The Story of Emergent Christianity from the Apostolic Age to the Dividing of the Ways between the Greek East and the Latin West*, Penguin Books, 1993, p. 121; Grant, Robert McQueen, *Augustus to Constantine: The Rise and Triumph of Christianity in the Roman World*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2004, pp. 229-230; Danielou, Jean, Marrou, Henri, *The First Six Hundred Years*, Vol. 1, Paulist Press, 1983, pp. 232-238.

¹⁰ Cameron, Averil, and Hall, Stuart, G., *Eusebius, Life of Constantine*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 112.

crimes committed shortly before by the savagery of the tyrants.”¹¹ Emperor Constantine ended the organized state persecution of the Christian Church and aligned himself with the Catholic Church. Constantine became the Church’s advocate: he heaped upon it power and responsibility within the civic realm. He gifted the Church with properties; he built new churches; he exempted the Church and the clergy from taxes, thus giving them civic status.¹² The golden age for the Church had really dawned.¹³

Communism as a totalitarian ideology produced subordination of culture to politics and compulsory imposition of an exclusive party ideology on East European societies.¹⁴ The spirit of violence and the use of force as a means to acquire and maintain power, the subordination of the legal rights and moral values of the human person to the interests of the state, the loss, whether gradual or violent, of liberty, was exactly what happened in the Bolshevik Russian and East European societies.¹⁵ The communists treated religion, in both theory and practice, as a reactionary ideology. Religion was backward-looking. It provided erroneous views of the world, divided society by unnecessary internal barriers, drew young people into unproductive work¹⁶ and served as an opiate of the minds and spirits of the revolutionary proletariat. In fact Vladimir Ilic Lenin, said, "religion is the opium of the people. Religion is a kind of spiritual intoxicant, in which the slaves of capital drown their humanity and their desires for some sort of decent human existence."¹⁷ Thus, religion was part of the old order; it was part of the previous regime which needed serious revisions. Furthermore, the state as Don Ricci explained chose to be neither lay nor neutral towards religion. Instead the state was atheistic or a militantly atheistic.¹⁸ Thus, the Constantinian rap-

¹¹ Cameron, Averil, and Hall, Stuart, G., *Eusebius, Life of Constantine*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 120.

¹² Grant, Robert McQueen, *Early Christianity and Society: Seven Studies*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1977, pp. 44-65, 151-154.

¹³ Grant, Robert McQueen, *Augustus to Constantine: The Rise and Triumph of Christianity in the Roman World*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2004, p. 248.

¹⁴ Russello, Gerard, ed., *Christianity and European Culture. Selections from the Work of Christopher Dawson*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 1998, p. 112.

¹⁵ Sturzo, Luigi, "Has Fascism Ended with Mussolini?" *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 3, July 1945, p. 315.

¹⁶ Chadwick, Owen, *The Christian Church in the Cold War*, Penguin Books, 1993, p. 19.

¹⁷ Lenin, V. I., *Introduction to Religion*, quoted page 153, *The Communist Conspiracy*, Part I, Section A, U. S. Government Printing Office, p. 157.

¹⁸ Ricci, Francesco, *Da un Paese Vicino.*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna, 2003, p. 140.

port between Church and state was eliminated and the return to Diocletian persecution was completed. Scholars such as Matthew Spinka agreed that since the Diocletian persecution, there has never been such a concerted, determined, and ruthless attempt to sweep religion,¹⁹ as it happened during communism.

In general, the methods that the communist governments employed to fight, and to later exterminate, religion can be characterized by: infringement (interference in religious affairs, which was the case during the first period of religious persecution); internal and external conflict (causing conflict and disunity among religious communities and discrediting the clergy in face of the faithful); and annihilation (this would eventually bring condemnation of the clergy). After this three-step plan was applied, the faithful were expected to abandon their Churches and places of worship.

Why was Communism against religion, when Communism ended up being an organized religion based on the worship of man? Communism was a worship of collective human power on a world-wide scale, and in this respect it was a modern counterpart of the worship of the goddess Rome and god Caesar.²⁰ Sociologist Herbert Miller asserted in his 1935 *Chicago Tribune* article that "Russia has resolved the conflicts of human relationships by substituting Communism for religion and equality for nationality."²¹ Moreover, according to the official communist propaganda, Christianity emerged as part of a class struggle in the middle of second century AD.²² Consequently, the communist revolution in Russia led to an active persecution of all of the country's religions including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. The same happened in East European countries after World War II. However, the degree of religious persecution differed by country.²³ In the People's Republic of China the first phase of religious persecution or what Sabrina Ramet called the phase of system destruction began towards the

¹⁹ Spinka, Matthew, *Christianity Confront Communism*, The Religious Book Club, London, 1936, p. 121.

²⁰ Toynbee, Arnold, *Christianity Among the Religions of the World*, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 79.

²¹ *Chicago Tribune*, "Communism Viewed As World 'Religion' by Bryn Mawr Man," August 28, 1935, <http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/ChiTribune/CT_1935_06_28.html>, assessed March 22, 2009.

²² Green, Michael, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, p. 15.

²³ Schultz, Jeffrey D., West, John G., and MacLean, Iain S., *Encyclopedia of Religion in American Politics*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999, p. 186.

end of World War II and lasted until 1953.²⁴ Catholicism and Protestantism used these religions as tools to invade China. The 1950 newspaper article, which was published all over China, entitled “The Knowledge People Should have on Catholicism and Protestantism,” called on the faithful to cut ties with the imperialists and make the Church a Chinese one.²⁵

In the first years after the war, 1945-1948, the Communist governments in Eastern Europe imposed several administrative and economic restrictions against religions which varied in different countries. Expropriation of Church properties by the state left religious communities without property and paralyzed their education and other cultural and charity activities. Catholic and Protestant missionaries in China were imprisoned and beaten. In the Romanian People’s Republic during the Stalin period, persecutions were bloody and unusually brutal. Although the Orthodox Church, the majority of Romania’s religious organizations, was less persecuted, it nevertheless suffered, while the Catholic Church of both rites, Latin and Greek-Catholic, suffered the most severe persecution.²⁶

When the communists seized power in Bulgaria they immediately staged mock trials of the clergy and confined about 200 priests to forced labor camps. The Metropolitan of Nevrokop and Bishop Boris were killed, and others, including the administrator of Rila Monastery, Egumenos Kalistrat, were sentenced to long imprisonment.²⁷ The same was happening in Poland. The direct assault of the state against the Church began in 1947. Two years later the regime promulgated a “religious freedom” decree in order to assert state control over the Church. This was followed by massive arrests of clergy. All ecclesiastical properties, with the exception of Church buildings, were expropriated. The Church press was banned and Catholic-run schools were declared illegal.²⁸

Albania represents a unique case of religious persecution given the country was self-proclaimed atheistic in 1967. The government of the dictator Enver Hoxha was striving to control every aspect of Church organizations as well other religious organizations in Albania. Under the motto “Re-

²⁴ Ramet, Sabrina P., *Nihil Obstat. Religion, Politics, and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia*, Duke University Press, North Carolina, 1998, pp.14-15.

²⁵ Kejia, Yan, *Catholic Church in China*, Intercontinental Press, China, 2004, pp. 106-107.

²⁶ *The Church and State under Communism*, Vol. 2, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1965, p. 11.

²⁷ *The Church and State under Communism*, Vol. 2, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1965, p. 28.

²⁸ Weigel, George, *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism*, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 106.

ligion is Reactionary,” the Albanian Political Bureau decided not to allow anyone to leave the country for theological studies abroad. This was the first measure taken by the state to create the National Albanian Catholic Church. State officials allowed the seminaries to function only under strict government supervision, which was also the case in Romania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia. The party would choose the right candidates for the seminary, especially those individuals who had shown their loyalty to the communist regime. In the seminary curriculum, the government demanded special courses that would educate seminarians “on the party’s policy.” Centralization of power in the hands of the communist states, limited, and, later, paralyzed the activity of religious communities to various degrees all over Eastern Europe. The clergy arrests and killings, the closure of religious-run schools, Churches, and mosques were clear signals of the magnitude of the religious persecution that was going to be executed in Albania.

Following the 1949 social orientation programs, numerous priests considered retrograde were arrested in Romania. This was followed by another wave of arrests which took place between 1958 and 1964, when monastic seminaries and monasteries were closed down and some 4000 monks and nuns were jailed or forced to go back to secular life.²⁹ The Church and religion in general in Eastern Europe was expected to die a slow death which would lead to what Don Ricci called to the Church’s “totale liquidazione.”³⁰

Although the Church was given a death sentence by the atheistic states, it managed to survive. The Church was not annihilated. After almost forty years of persecution, and in some countries like Albania for more than forty years, the Church was alive and, as Don Ricci observed, was able to recuperate its rights and liberties that were for a long time denied. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, while noting that the states made more than one attempt to exterminate the Church and return to the pre-Constantinian time, with regret admitted that “the spirit of Christianity has won over everything. The sacred cult has always remained, or again become independent of the sovereign, and without a necessary bond with the body of the State.”³¹ *Ecclesia Mater* was available to the people of Eastern Europe and she did not stop exhorting them to a higher life.³² The Church was in action against “the principal-

²⁹ Stan, Lavinia, Turcescu, Lucian, “The Romanian Church and Democratization,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 8, December 2000, p. 1468.

³⁰ Ricci, Francesco, *Da un Paese Vicino*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna, 2003, p. 140.

³¹ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, Masters, Roger, D., *On the Social Contract, with Geneva Manuscript and Political Economy*, St. Martin's Press, 1978, p. 126.

³² De Lubac, Henri, *The Splendor of the Church*, Ignatius, San Francisco, 1999, p. 172.

ties, against the powers, against the world's rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places,"³³ while each and every individual had constantly to be winning his or her own inner freedom in conflict with hostile powers.³⁴ The Church was in contact with the people and the communities, Christian and non-Christian, who were suffering under Communist oppression, from the very beginning of the Communist takeover. She had experienced enough to know how very rapidly the fashion of this world passes away, as G.K. Chesterton wrote in his essay "Twelve Modern Apostles and Their Creeds." The *chiesa della compassione* found the strength to rise from the Diocletian-Communist persecution. The terrain was cleared once again for the Church to accomplish her mission, to give all to all and to continue her mission as the Church of compassion.

3 The New Found Freedom

When Monk Sofronio Preņçe, from the Abbey of Grottaferrata, visited his native Albania in 1990, after 42 years of absence due to the Communist takeover of the country, he reported to the Congregation for Oriental Churches and the abbot the paradox that: "il comunismo in Albania sta provocando, suo malgrado, un esplosione di valori spirituali e morali dell'uomo."³⁵ Monk Sofronio announced that the Church in his native Albania had won the spiritual warfare she was called for using the whole armor of God, "if God is for us, who can be against us?"³⁶ Indeed, what George Weigel called the final revolution, or the revolution of the spirit, won over the fears which had kept the society in the grip of power.³⁷ In 1991, when Fr. Pietro Maione, who a year later became the rector of the Pontifical Seminary of Scutari, visited Albania as part of a Vatican delegation, he noticed a great deal of material and spiritual devastation that he thought the history of the Church in Albania was beginning from scratch.³⁸ The Church in Ro-

³³ *The Holy Bible*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1994, p. 178.

³⁴ De Lubac, Henri, *The Splendor of the Church*, Ignatius, San Francisco, 1999, p. 186.

³⁵ Preņçe, Sofronio, "Relazione sul'Albania fatta da P. Sofronio Preņçe in seguito al suo viaggio 13 giugno-21 luglio 1990," Archivio Archimandritale di Grottaferrata, *Sangue nell'Albania Rossa, Documenti d'Attualita*, p. 4.

³⁶ *The Holy Bible*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1994, p. 144.

³⁷ Weigel, George, *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism*, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 131.

mania won and emerged as an uncontested source of moral strength after the fall of communism, making it the most popular institution in post-communist Romania.³⁹

Moreover, Monk Sofronio believed that the sacrifices and trials endured had forged and matured the morality of the martyred people of Albania. It seemed to Sofronio that “Dio stesso abbia voluto il comunismo per fargli suscitare (all'uomo, al popolo) per reazione, energie sociali, umane, spirituali. Non è il contrario nelle democrazie occidentali dove tutto sembra dovuto?”⁴⁰ Don Ricci concurred; the Marxist-Leninist ideology did not constitute a particularly cumbersome obstacle. Religious spirit, even in Albania where religious persecution was extreme, survived.

However, Don Ricci expressed concern, as the late Patriarch Alexy of Russia, regarding what he called the general moral degradation, which did not exclude the clergy. The transition was accompanied not only by a collapse of the old economic systems but also by the collapse of the belief in the old communist “commandments.” The dictatorship of the proletariat or better, the dictatorship of the communists over the proletariat and the collapse of the communist state that had become a kind of church, left a vast spiritual vacuum. Scholars reported a general deterioration of values and a moral wasteland in post-communist countries, as the main cause of corruption.⁴¹ Consequently, the Church was called to contribute to the religious and moral renewal, asserting its voice in public space.

The demolition of historical memory or the peoples' histories or the erasing of the past to serve, what Don Ricci called, the communist utopia, or the present, had left its mark on the peoples' conscience. History books published in the East conformed to the various versions of communist Orthodoxy. What these texts had in common was the Marxist-Leninist interpretations of historical events. Furthermore, old national mythology was recycled and re-invented to quench the thirst for communist-national identity. In Romania, for example, historical figures like Decebal, the king of

³⁸ “Historia Domus del Seminario di Scutari,” *Archive of the Venetian Province*, Gallarate, Varese, p. 2.

³⁹ Stan, Lavinia, Turcescu, Lucian, “The Romanian Church and Democratization,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 8, December 2000, p. 1471.

⁴⁰ Preņe, Sofronio, “Relazione sull'Albania fatta da P. Sofronio Preņe in seguito al suo viaggio 13 giugno-21 luglio 1990,” *Archivio Archimandritale di Grottaferrata, Sangue nell'Albania Rossa, Documenti d'Attualità*, p. 5.

⁴¹ Miller, William, L., Koshechikina, Tatyana, Y., Grodeland, Ase, B., eds., *A Culture of Corruption? Coping with Government in Post-communist Europe*, Central European University Press, 2001, p. 46.

Dacians and a powerful enemy of the Roman Empire, medieval kings and princes including Stephen the Great, Michael the Brave, Vlad the Impaler-known as Dracula, were presented and re-invented as precursors of Nicolae Ceausescu.⁴²

However, communism had failed to destroy the human spirit, because it did not adapt or respond to the multifarious needs of human nature. The system did not invest enough in the human capital and civic shared virtues. For Carlos Alberto Montaner, the Cuban born columnist and critic of socialism and authoritarian regimes, the communist state model contradicted human nature and exercised a negative effect on society. The substitution of individual ego with the spirit of collectivism; the disappearance of material rewards; the false collective solidarity; the breakdown of family ties; and above all the need for human freedom, were some aspects that contradicted human nature which communist states failed to address. Furthermore, people thought the totalitarian governments deceived the people as they were initially promised freedom of religion. If Leonard Swidler's and Paul Mojzes' four C-s definition of religion- as creed, code, cult, and community-structure,⁴³ is applied to the religion of communism, it did not fulfill the human need to find answers regarding the transcendent, or provide an explanation on what went beyond the material and visible world, the everyday and the ordinary.

G. K. Chesterton saw an intimate connection between human race and religion. In fact according to Chesterton, religion would survive as long as the human race survived, because it is human to need religion. People could not find those answers about life, which according to faith is very like a serial story in a magazine: life ends with a promise or menace "to be continued in our next."⁴⁴ Furthermore, Christianity satisfied suddenly and perfectly man's ancestral instinct for being the right way up; satisfies it supremely in this; that by its creed joy becomes something gigantic and sad-ness something special and small.⁴⁵

Therefore, the religious sentiment did not die among the people behind the iron curtain. It was not extinguished in spite of the fiercest persecution as was the case in Albania. Monk Sofronio reported in 1990 that "il senti-

⁴² Pavel, Dan, "The Textbooks Scandal and Rewriting History in Romania. Letter from Bucharest," *Eastern European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 15, 2000, p. 185.

⁴³ Swidler, Leonard, Mojzes, Paul, *The Study of Religion in an Age of Global Dialogue*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2000, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁴ Chesterton, G. K., *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, Ignatius, San Francisco, 1986, p. 341.

⁴⁵ Chesterton, G. K., *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, Ignatius, San Francisco, 1986, p. 365.

mento religioso nel popolo Albanese e buono. Il popolo, cristiano e musulmano, crede in Dio, molti osservano I digiuni e le quaresime della propria religione. ...ho sentito alcuni che mi dicevano: 'ci hanno traditi, ci hanno ingannati! Ci avevano promesso la liberta di professare la nostra religione, e invece rischiamo la vita!'"⁴⁶ How did the people of Eastern Europe manage to keep their aspirations and spirits animated for restored freedom and statehood? For virtually all of them the direction was the same. The very place where that aspiration was anchored and cherished was the Church. So the Church was the people and the people were the Church, as Paul Mojzes explained. Religion and ethnicity in some East European and especially Balkan countries have become so enmeshed that they can neither be separated nor studied apart. In Eastern Europe, the binomial Church and nation became even more undividable.⁴⁷

What is then the mission of the Christian Church in post-communist or in what Don Ricci referred to as neo-pagan societies? Don Ricci compared the new-found freedom of the Church in post-communist Eastern Europe to the Church after the 313 Edict of Milan. Furthermore, the Church is linked to evangelization in her most intimate being. The very existence of the Church testified to a successful evangelization. Or as Pope Paul VI put it: "she is the normal, desired, most immediate and most visible fruit of this activity."⁴⁸ Thus, the Church remains in the world as a representative of Jesus who departed in glory to the Father. So she is called upon to continue Jesus' message on earth by being evangelized herself as she is the People of God immersed in the world.⁴⁹ So she is evangelized and is ready to evangelize.

St. Adalbert, a missionary in Hungary and later in Poland, evangelized both countries almost a thousand years ago. For the late Pope John Paul II, St. Adalbert and his mission among Poles was at the origin, of the Church's second beginning in the lands of the Piast. In fact, it was due to St. Adal-

⁴⁶ Preņce, Sofronio, "Relazione sull'Albania fatta da P. Sofronio Preņce in seguito al suo viaggio 13 giugno-21 luglio 1990," Archivio Archimandritale di Grottaferrata, *Sangue nell'Albania Rossa, Documenti d'Attualita*, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Mojzes, Paul, *Yugoslavian Inferno. Ethnoreligious Warfare in the Balkans*, Continuum, New York 1995, pp. 125-126.

⁴⁸ Evangelii Nuntiandi. Apostolic Exhortation of his Holiness Pope Paul VI to the Episcopate, to the Clergy and to all the Faithful of the Entire World. December 8, 1975. <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html>, accessed March 8, 2009.

⁴⁹ Evangelii Nuntiandi. Apostolic Exhortation of his Holiness Pope Paul VI to the Episcopate, to the Clergy and to all the Faithful of the Entire World. December 8, 1975. <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html>, accessed March 8, 2009.

bert's mission that Poland became part of the family of European countries.⁵⁰ Furthermore, St. Adalbert introduced the Benedictine form of monastic life to Hungary and later to Poland, which would be a common and unitive movement shared by both the Eastern and Western Church. His monastic foundation at Brzevnov near Prague became the fountainhead of monastic influence for the neighboring countries as well. It was the motherhouse of Meseritz, the first Benedictine foundation in Poland established by St. Adalbert himself.⁵¹

Consequently, Don Ricci expressed hope in new the evangelization of the then liberated Europe. What favored re-evangelization of Eastern Central Europe for Don Ricci was the fact that the totalitarian regimes were never successful in seducing peoples' souls⁵² and soothing their legitimate need for the divine. He was confident that the Church was well equipped to adapt to the new circumstances and accomplish its mission in the united Europe. In fact, the Church has the potential to become a bond of unity in the European Unity. Pedro Maione concurred in regard to the potential for re-evangelization. However, he noticed that in the case of Albania people had only what he called a Catholic heart or spirit, while they lacked the most rudimentary knowledge of their Catholic faith, which was due to the political circumstances.⁵³

4 A United Europe?

In the past, Europe exhibited alliance of its Eastern and Western halves. The Empires of Justinian and Diocletian before him. Historian Dermot Quinn commented that Europe demonstrated especially a unity of culture, which simply meant being at home with herself and with her traditions. But unity is also about continuity and collective memory, the shared and conscious

⁵⁰ Apostolic Journey of His Holiness John Paul II to Poland (May 31-June 10, 1997) 1000 Year Anniversary of the Death of St. Adalbert. Homily of John Paul II. <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/travels/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_03061997_en.html>, accessed March 7, 2009.

⁵¹ Dawson, Christopher, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture. The Classic Study of Medieval Civilization*, Image Books Doubleday, 1991, pp. 115-116.

⁵² Ricci, Francesco, *Da un Paese Vicino.*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna, 2003, p. 146.

⁵³ Maione, Pedro, Interview with the Albanian Program of the Vatican Radio, April 26, 1993, pp. 4-5.

history of spiritual oneness.⁵⁴ But continuity has to do with a continuous memory of the classical culture, and an awareness of common Christian faith in its Eastern and Western expressions. Christopher Dawson who is considered to be the greatest English-speaking historian of the twentieth century⁵⁵ turned his attention to the medieval conception of Europe as a distinct society, consisting of a diversity of peoples and states, bound together by a network of mutual rights and obligations and founded on a common spiritual citizenship and a common moral and intellectual culture.⁵⁶ Certainly, the bonds of Europe are rooted in the common history and civilization of its peoples. Indeed, Europe is not a continent that can be comprehended neatly in geographical terms; rather, it is a cultural and historical concept.⁵⁷ Currently, with the EU member countries and the potential members, it is obvious that Europe needs not only the unity of economy and prosperity but also a cultural and a spiritual unity or a return to that common culture that made Europe, Europe. Don Ricci considered the Church the only European reality which was consistently present from the origins to the present day Europe and believed that she can offer the hermeneutics for a fair interpretation of what can be defined as the very essence of Europe.⁵⁸

What had really happened with the other part of Europe or the free Western Europe while the East was suffering under totalitarian regimes and forced atheism? Don Ricci found Western Europe in a double denial: in denial of God and in denial of its Christian roots. “Se Dio c’è, non serve,” was one of the mantras, and people had lost interest in religion and the Church. Don Ricci was critical of Europe, its deep self-denial, and self-hate, which extends to hate of God and hate of self. What Don Ricci had specifically in mind was the massive secularization of the West, in which religion has taken a back seat. For other scholars like Arnold Toynbee, secularization meant that the West had traded religion for the cult of technology, nationalism, and militarism. In fact, Toynbee gave the following definition to the process of secularization:

⁵⁴ Quinn, Dermot, “Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History,” Caldecott S., and Morrill J., *Eternity in Time: Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1997, p. 79.

⁵⁵ Callahan, Daniel, “Christopher Dawson,” *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 66, 1973, p. 167.

⁵⁶ Dawson, Christopher, *Understanding Europe*, Sheed and Ward, New York 1952, pp. 61-62.

⁵⁷ Ratzinger, Cardinal Joseph, *Europe Today and Tomorrow. Addressing the Fundamental Issues*, Ignatius Press, 2007, p. 11.

⁵⁸ Ricci, Francesco, *Da un Paese Vicino.*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna, 2003, p. 147.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century to A.D. 1956, the leaven of secularization and the zest for Technology had spread progressively from one stratum of the Western Society to another till they had permeated the whole mass. The apotheosis of Technology was not an inevitable consequence of the discrediting of the West's Christian heritage.⁵⁹

Furthermore, Don Ricci criticized the change of the original European ethos, or the peculiarity that made Europe – Europe. What had happened to the Christian roots of the once united Europe? Why is this neurotic search for glory has led Europe to self-hate? Psychologists agree that self-hatred may take the form of self-contempt, which might be expressed as belittling, disparaging, doubting, discrediting, and ridiculing oneself.⁶⁰ Moreover, self-denial and self-deception supposedly make life easier and safer than confrontation and accountability and the courage they demand. Another pattern or reaction to identity denial is distancing oneself from that threatening identity,⁶¹ which in the case of Europe is its Christian roots.

Scholars like J.H.H. Weiler, professor of law, agreed that Europe is living in a state of denial, which in psychiatric terminology is called “alienation from self.”⁶² “Se mentre si sta svolgendo un dibattito sulla sua identità proprio le parole “cristiano” o “Cristianesimo” sono diventate tabu.”⁶³ For Weiler, as for psychologists, this denial of roots and identity is problematic and is reflective in the general public ethos. There is an expressed tendency to avoid the difficult subjects including religion, and especially Christianity, Christian roots and the like, in favor of a superficial rhetoric, under the label of political correctness.

Furthermore, Pope Benedict raises the issue of reciprocal respect or reciprocity in inter-religious relations. The pope demanded respect and sensitivity for all religious traditions, which is in itself a very ecumenical principle. The father of dialogue “Prof. Leonard Swidler” called the eighth ground rule of his dialogue Decalogue: treat your partner as an equal, for dialogue can take place only between equals.⁶⁴ The pope observed that in contem-

⁵⁹ Toynbee, Arnold, *An Historian's Approach to Religion*, Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 180.

⁶⁰ Feist, Jess, and Feist, Gregory J., *Theories of Personality*, McGraw Hill, 1998, p. 168.

⁶¹ Cheryan, Sapna, and Monin, Benoit, “Where are You Really from?: Asian Americans and Identity Denial,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 89, No. 5, 2005, p. 725.

⁶² Horney, Karen, *Neurosis and Human Growth. The Struggle Toward Self-Realization*, W.W. Norton & Company, 1991, p. 155.

⁶³ Weiler, H.H. J., p. *Un'Europa Cristiana. Un Saggio Esplorativo*, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, Milano, 2003, p. 32.

⁶⁴ Beversluis, Diederik Joel, *Sourcebook of the World's Religions. An Interfaith Guide to Re-*

porary society anyone who dishonors the faith of Israel must pay a fine. The same holds true especially for everyone who dishonors the Koran and Islamic tenets. Obviously, the pope supports and is in favor of equal treatment and equal respect for religious traditions. However, he did not see the same respect reciprocated to Christianity and to what Christianity holds sacred,⁶⁵ which for the pope is simply a denial of freedom of speech.

Other scholars including Richard Rubenstein argue on another level of reciprocity. For Rubenstein, the Muslims are free to practice and propagate their religion in the West. He noticed a little reciprocity between religious freedom Muslims enjoy in the West, and the severe constraints of such freedom imposed on Christians in Muslim lands.⁶⁶ The late Oriana Fallaci, a prominent Italian journalist and political analyst, herself a convinced atheist, warned Europe of the lack of reciprocity regarding the Islamic countries, as well as the myopia and the stupidity of the politically correct. "You don't realize or don't want to realize that a war of religion is being carried out."⁶⁷

Pope Benedict XIV observed that while Europe denies her roots, including the religious and moral foundations of its identity, Asia and Asian great religious traditions, especially the more mystical traditions, are experiencing a revival in the West.⁶⁸ Probably it would be beneficial if Europe had the same revival of interest in re-exploring her roots and accepting herself or a return to what psychologists call self-love. Rediscovering her Christian roots and identity would greatly help to unify what Don Ricci called "le due Europe," Western and Eastern Europe. For Wolfhart Pannenberg, a contemporary highly acclaimed Protestant theologian, a uniting Europe will and must include the nations of the Christian East, which until recently were persecuted behind the iron curtain.⁶⁹

Don Ricci thought that Western secularized Europe was in need of re-evangelization as much as the Eastern-bloc-countries, and the Church, as in the past, is called to unify and re-evangelize both Eastern and Western

ligion and Spirituality, New World Library, 2000, p. 140.

⁶⁵ Ratzinger, Joseph, Pera, Marcello, *Without Roots: the West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, Basic Books, New York, 2006, p. 78.

⁶⁶ Rubensatin, Richard L., "Jihad and the Roots of Europe's Religious Identity," <http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm/frm/29722/sec_id/29722>, accessed on January 30, 2009.

⁶⁷ Fallaci, Oriana, *The Rage and Pride*, Rizzoli, New York, 2002, p. 84.

⁶⁸ Ratzinger, Joseph, Pera, Marcello, *Without Roots: the West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, Basic Books, New York, 2006, p. 65.

⁶⁹ Davie, Grace, Gill, Robin, and Platten, Stephen, eds., *Christian Values in Europe*, Westcott House, Cambridge 1993, p. 42.

Europe. The West needs the Church to affirm the lost identity and return to self-love, while the East, as the Patriarch Daniel of Romania asserted, needs the Church to help fight the deficit of transcendence in the life of individual human beings. The Patriarch hoped for an increase in the spiritual mission of the Church in society beyond the places of worship.⁷⁰ The common focus of re-evangelizing Europe will also have an ecumenical impact in the relations between the Eastern and Western Churches. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow foresees that both Churches will grow together and their relationship would further develop in an atmosphere of mutual trust and cooperation, primarily in asserting the traditional Christian values in Europe and in the world as a whole.⁷¹

In conclusion, Don Francesco Ricci suggested several options for European civilization and its postmodern experiment. However, he held strong hope that Europe may reaffirm its Christian inheritance and recuperate a lost patrimony. After all, Western Europe looks like an island of secularism in a sea of global religion. The de-secularizing of the world, which is accepted by the very originators of secularization theory,⁷² is an aspect of globalization generally neglected in current discourse including academic, and which needs immediate re-assessment.

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⁷⁰ SEIA Newsletter on the Eastern Churches and Ecumenism, No. 144, September 30, 2007, p. 3.

⁷¹ SEIA Newsletter on the Eastern Churches and Ecumenism, No. 161, February 28, 2009, p. 8.

⁷² Berger, Peter L., .ed., *The Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan, 2005.

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