

THE SECULAR SPIRITUALITY OF FORMER EASTERN BLOC DISSIDENTS

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Joseph Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili Stalin, "the great friend of progressive humanity," "the great liberator of the Hungarian people," died on March 5, 1953. The news of his death was released by the Kremlin the next day.

The Budapest in which I was living at the time with my parents as a four year old was draped in black flags; the slow, melancholy sound of funeral marches was all that could be heard on the radio (there was no T.V. at that time). One of our neighbors, either unbelievably but authentically ignorant or an "agent provocateur," asked why all the signs of national mourning? Another neighbor responded (I am translating literally from the Hungarian), "Haven't you heard? Stalin has farted himself out of the ranks of the living." For this gross indiscretion, our loose tongued neighbor disappeared that night. He returned a year later.

He was not the only one to disappear around that time (we had had an ample number of neighbors disappear in the previous few months; nobody needed an explanation of what had transpired!). On the very day our "great liberator" Comrade Stalin died, my father was arrested. Two weeks after his arrest, my mother lost what would have been my sister. For six months, my mother and I did not know if my father was alive. After six months, we found out that indeed he was alive; my mother received visiting privileges. She found out the charges against my father: libeling the name of Joseph Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili Stalin!

Although the new Prime Minister, Imre Nagy, had granted an amnesty to all political prisoners, the AVO, the Hungarian state security police and the staunchest supporters of Mátyás Rákosi, Hungary's Stalinist leader, proud holder of the titles of "Stalin's best disciple" and "father of the Hungarian people," still secretary general of the party and until June, 1953 Prime Minister as well, did everything in their power to prevent the actual release of political prisoners. My father was one of countless others caught in the wedge of the power struggle.

My mother persisted. She went daily to the offices of the Ministry of Interior under whose jurisdiction the AVO supposedly operated. She finally contacted an attorney of Jewish origin whom she and my father had saved during the war. Although not a Communist, he had connections in the hierarchy of the party. My father came home in December, 1953. His 5'2" frame had shrunk from his chunky 160 lbs. to 70 lbs; his left ear drum was broken, most of his teeth were missing, his hair had turned white. I did not recognize him.

During his imprisonment, my mother and I were shunned by our neighbors and friends. Painful as this was, lonely and isolated as we felt, exactly what the authorities wanted the families of political prisoners to feel, we understood. Guilt by association with the family of a known "enemy of the people" could easily lead to one's arrest. And people had been hanged for less!

There was one family that was an exception to this shunning: an orthodox Jewish family, who lived down the street, most of the members of which had perished at Auschwitz, befriended us. They brought over food, and provided companionship and support. My mother cautioned

them about the danger of associating with us. Éva Grosz, wife, the tiny mother of two, replied that they were not going to allow anyone to experience the kind of abandonment her and her husband's family had experienced during the war. She and my mother became best friends; I became best friends with her son Robi, who was a year older. I have never forgotten their kindness.

In the Hungary of the time, less than a decade after the end of the brutal reign of terror on the part of the Arrow Cross, the Hungarian fascist party whose members were still obsessed with shooting Jews into the Danube as the Red Army was laying siege to Budapest, there were strong undercurrents of anti-Semitism. I remember a song, popular on the streets, rendered as though the singer was a Jewish concentration camp survivor, about how wonderful the conditions had been and how old Mrs. Weiss, who had died of old age, was the only one not to return from Auschwitz. Moreover, in the top of the leadership of the Communist Party, not only Rákosi but the three other most influential leaders, Ernő Gerő, Minister of Industry, József Révai, Minister of Culture, and Mihály Farkas, Minister of Defense, were all Jewish. It was also well known that the investigators of the AVO had been recruited by Rákosi from the ranks of young, orphaned survivors of the Nazi death camps bent on vengeance. Some Hungarians felt that the terrible Stalinist reign of terror in Hungary 1949-1953 was nothing more than the perpetration of Jewish vengeance far out of proportion to the horrors inflicted on the Jewish population during the period of Nazi domination!

In this regard, George Schöpflin, referring to the more immediate post-war period but no less applicable to the era of Rákosi's reign of terror, has written:

There had been a connection between the left and Jews from the early years of the century and the popular identification with Jews--well exploited by the interwar regime--had created the stereotype figure of the Judaeo-Boshevik in the eyes of many people. From this it was an easy step to regard communism as a Jewish device, especially in the aftermath of the Holocaust for which the responsibility of non-Jewish Hungarians had not been clarified then or later. This confusion of attitudes was exacerbated by the communists' no less deliberate reliance on cadres of Jewish background to undertake the anti-fascist purification of Hungarian life.

He explains further:

"From the communists' point of view, Jews were absolutely reliable in this role because by no stretch of the imagination could they have been tainted with Nazism. From the non-Jewish and non-communist majority standpoint, the prosecution of war criminals by Jews could and did assume the appearance of a Jewish revenge, because their other qualifications for this role seems less salient. The entire question of reciprocal attitudes, Jewish and non-Jewish, communist and non-communist, remained as a kind of semi-visible undercurrent throughout the post-war period of Hungarian history and surfaced only occasionally."

However, the whole set of relations, between Jew and non-Jew, Communist and non-

Communist, was even more complicated. For one thing, Rákosi was keenly aware of Stalin's purges of Jews in the late '40s, early '50s in the entire Soviet bloc (the trial of the Jewish doctors involved in the famous "doctors' plot" to assassinate Stalin, which probably would have unleashed a fresh round of purges whose targets would be Jews throughout the Eastern bloc, was forestalled only by the Soviet leader's death). He was always afraid of the anti-Semitism of the Soviet leader and other members of "the inner circle," particularly Lavrenti Beria. This was one of the most important factors motivating his obsession with showing that he was "Stalin's best disciple."

Secondly, in a move difficult to top in its utter Stalinist cynicism, if Rákosi recruited the investigators of the AVO from the ranks of embittered death camp survivors, he had the AVO's torturers and executioners recruited from the fascist Arrow Cross' most fanatical and cruel members. No less ironic was turning the dreaded former headquarters of the Arrow Cross at 60 Andrassy Ave (renamed Stalin Ave; nobody in my neighborhood called it by that name!) into the dreaded headquarters of the AVO!

The two groups, investigators of Jewish origin and torturers/jailers with a compromised Arrow Cross past, as well as a third of group of draftees from the rural areas who served primarily as border guards, were kept isolated from each other, the respective background of its members a tightly guarded secret. But just in case, Rákosi was always ready to play these groups off against each other.

Beyond this, the "father of the Hungarian people," in spite of his Jewish origins, was not beyond using anti-Semitic rhetoric for political gain. As anti-Semitism was on the rise in 1951-52, there was at least one anti-Semitic Rákosi speech given to factory workers and broadcast on national radio (preserved in historical archives).

Within three months of the death of Stalin, Imre Nagy replaced Rákosi as Prime Minister although the latter was allowed to retain his position as General Secretary of the Party. Popular among the Hungarian population, Nagy brought a number of political and personal skills to his new job. To the Soviet leadership, not the least of his skills and qualifications was the fact that among the old "Muscovites" he was the only gentile!

An epic power struggle, in part reflecting, in part deviating from the power struggles in the Kremlin, ensued between Nagy the reformer and Rákosi the hardliner, who still controlled the party apparatus. Rákosi eventually won, obtaining the backing of the Soviet leadership (after Malenkov's fall from power), and gathering sufficient strength to have Nagy expelled first from the leadership, then the Party itself in 1955.

What amounted to an inter party opposition consisting of writers, journalists, young intellectuals, some of them populists, a disproportionate number of them of Jewish origin, gathered around Nagy (who always rejected the term inter party opposition). The fact that Rákosi and his clique as well as most of the upper echelon of the AVO on the one side and disproportionate numbers of "the Imre Nagy circle" were of Jewish origin made perfectly logical sense to xenophobic anti-Semites then and now: it was all part of one big Jewish conspiracy to control the world! Hitler could not have put it better!

Paradoxically, as the Soviet Union was de-Stalinizing, Hungary was re-Stalinizing!

Following the XXth Party Congress at which Khrushchev denounced "the crimes of Stalin," things began to unravel in Hungary (and Poland): the Petofi Circle, a group of young intellectuals much of the leadership of which came from "Nagy circle" and, once again, a disproportionate number of whom were Jewish, held their much heralded debates on topics previously taboo in the Communist world (freedom of the press); Rákosi was finally relieved of the leadership in July, 1956 and replaced by Gerö, who was, without the trappings of "the cult of personality," no less a Stalinist than his predecessor; and László Rajk and his fellow victims of the anti-Titoist purges were ceremoniously reburied. Attended by a crowd of 200,000, the funeral turned into a mass protest. Sitting on my father's desk, I listened to every drum roll, every word of every eulogy and every speech on the radio.

Seventeen days later, on October 23, 1956, the Hungarian Revolution erupted; the giant statue of Stalin, on the pedestal of which was inscribed "To our Great Liberator, from the Hungarian people," was toppled; Gerö was removed from power and Imre Nagy became the Prime Minister. By October 28, Nagy announced the withdrawal of Soviet troops. My father and I watched them to do so -- from nearly the same spot, among others, in front of the Yugoslav Embassy from which Nagy and his entourage would be abducted on November 22! Within three days, the new Prime Minister had formed a truly multi-party cabinet, withdrew Hungary from the Warsaw Pact, and declared the country's neutrality.

I still have an occasional nightmares about the rudest awakening of my life in the early hours of the morning November 4: the earth, the house were shaking to the sound of cannon fire and tanks rumbling down the street; the voice of Imre Nagy came on the radio announcing that the Soviet Union had invaded Hungary.

The Kádár government, which for all of its well deserved later reputation for reform, came to Budapest in a Soviet tank, would later claim, especially at the trial of Imre Nagy, that there were numerous instances of Jewish persecution and that, had not Soviet troops intervened, a massive, well organized pogrom would have occurred. There is no evidence for either of these claims. What we do know is that there were disproportionate number of Jews among the ranks of the freedom fighters just as there were among the intellectuals who, with the Workers' Councils, spearheaded the passive resistance to the Soviet occupation and the new government. The last person executed during the post-'56 reprisals, László Nickelsburg, had served a three year prison sentence, was retried, and sentenced to death. He was accused of leading a group of dedicated former fascists who were seeking to bring about an Arrow Cross restoration. Nickelsburg was Jewish; nearly all of his allegedly ex-fascist "band" were between the ages of 13 and 18, making the oldest seven years old in the waning days of Arrow Cross rule.

Shortly after November 4, Éva, Robi and the rest of the Grosz family fled to Austria. We obtained permission to move into their apartment in December (the family encouraged us to do so, prior to their escape). We received several letters from them, then lost contact. Their letters could not have reached us; my father, mother, and I crossed into Yugoslavia on January 21, 1957 at about the same time that the successors of the AVO were ringing the doorbell at the Grosz apartment into which we had moved.

These personal and historical recollections and reflections provide the context and the existential motivation for the topic of this paper, "The Secular Spirituality of Former Eastern Bloc Dissidents," within the parameters of the theme of this session, "Post-Holocaust, Post-

Gulag Religious Experience." I have always had a fascination for what I consider to be one of the most admirable features of the lives of former Eastern Bloc dissidents, namely their unremitting commitment and courage regardless of any potential danger to their persons. Most of the former of the dissidents were former Marxists whose commitment to the utopian ideals of communism and the discipline of the party, and later to the cause of human rights and oppositional activity had a religious, spiritual, ascetic quality. A disproportionate number of them were Jews for whom, if they were old enough, their actual experiences during the Holocaust, and if they were of the post-war generation, the retrieval of the historic memory of that monstrous evil coupled with experiencing the Gulag in the broadest sense of the term shaped their unequivocal commitments. My illustration's will focus largely on the former Democratic Opposition in Hungary, including its efforts to retrieve and reinterpret the Revolution of 1956 by means of which it questioned the legitimacy of the communist regime. More briefly, I shall draw parallels to the key figures of Adam Michnik in Poland and Václav Havel in the former Czechoslovakia. In addition to analyzing the religious and spiritual quality of the former dissidents' commitment and dedication, I shall highlight the challenges such a secular spirituality poses for the development of a post-Holocaust, post-Gulag theology.

I.

In her Pulitzer Prize winning *The Haunted Land: Facing Europe's Ghosts After Communism*, Tina Rosenberg has perceptively written that much more than a rewriting of the past is occurring in Central and Eastern Europe:

"This is more than a debate over the past. The struggle to define the past is one of the most important ways eastern Europeans compete for control of the present."

Alluding to George Orwell's statement to the effect that "whoever controls the past controls the future," she firmly asserts that "the memory of the past is a prize worth struggling for." She writes:

"Nations, like individuals, need to face up to and understand traumatic past events before they can put them aside and move on to normal life. This is important for the victims, who can truly heal and resume their contributions to society only when their dignity and suffering have been officially acknowledged. But it is just as important for the collaborators. Preventing dictatorship's return requires a full understanding of the mechanisms of dictatorship. How did communism win the complicity of ordinary, well-intentioned, even idealistic people to horrible crimes?"

61.5 To be sure, Rosenberg is acutely aware that the reinterpretation of the past involves winners and losers, one foreign occupation replacing another and/or a nation gaining its independence and sovereignty, and the ups and downs different elements and interests in the course of upheaval. But more importantly, there are fundamental values and differences in fundamental values at stake in the reinterpretation of the past (something that is not new in the histories of the peoples of Central/Eastern Europe and Russia and the other successor states!). And what precisely is at stake in the reinterpretation of the past in the postcommunist period is

rather basic:

"A nation's decisions about how to face its past are central to the challenge of building real democracy... How they treat the past is becoming the first important measure of whether they will put these ideals into practice, the first extended test of the new governments' system of justice, level of political tolerance, guarantees of rights, and rule of law."

In Hungary, one of the focal points of the activities of the Democratic Opposition that was formed in the late '70s and gained strength throughout the '80s concerned the official interpretation and assessment of the Revolution of 1956. János Kádár, Party Secretary who was in power from 1956 to 1988, had attained a considerable degree of popular support as a result of economic reforms ("goulash Communism") that from 1968 through most of the '70s made Hungary the most prosperous country in the Eastern bloc. Moreover, in spite of sometimes tortuous shifts in cultural policy, Hungary (along with Poland, except during martial law) was the most politically open and pluralistic of these countries, "the happiest barrack in the block." By 1985, Parliamentary elections featured not only several Communist candidates running for the same seat (and debating such issues as how to balance the budget!) but non-Communist as well!

But there was a very high price for all of this. The presence of Soviet troops on Hungarian soil was an unquestionable given. Hungarian foreign policy was in effect a mouthpiece for the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. In what is more than an ironic twist of history, Hungarian troops participated in the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August, 1968!

No less important (and inseparable from the issue of the presence of Soviet troops) was the official assessment of the events of 1956. Within a few weeks of the suppression of the uprising and the formation of the Kádár government, Kádár proclaimed the insurrection a "counterrevolution;" as mentioned previously, later propaganda would claim that the Soviet interference and a new government were necessary because of, among other reasons, planned systematic anti-Jewish pogroms and persecution of innocent Communists. The reprisals that followed were the worst in Hungarian history. There are 452 documented cases of court imposed executions being carried out, with at least another 1500 summary executions during the course of the revolution and in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet invasion. Tens of thousands were imprisoned, their employment often tenuous after their release, and later frequently deprived of their old age pensions on account of their "criminal" past. For all of Kádár's popularity and attempts at reform, it was difficult to ignore the fact that he started his long "reign" as "the Butcher of Budapest;" his legitimacy was established by the tank and the gallows. Of course, this was not something that could be talked about -- except as a "counterrevolution" whose participants were "bandits and murderers!"

Like dissidents throughout the Eastern bloc, members of Hungary's Democratic Opposition attempted to "live in truth" -- a concept I shall explore at greater length below -- and by so doing exposing "the lie" which was the ideological basis of "post- totalitarian" regimes. For them, one of the focal points of "living in truth" concerned the truth regarding the events of 1956. This was for the sake of the truth itself and living in it. But by so doing, they realized they

were undermining the guiding premises and the very legitimacy of the regime.

Given the theme of this session, the focus of my discussion will be the figure of the executed freedom fighter István Angyal, and the manner in which his memory was (and is) kept alive and used as part of their attempt to live in truth (then and now).

Angyal was born in Magyarbánhegyes on October 14, 1928. His father made shoelaces, his mother was a homemaker. Being Jews, Angyal, his mother, and two sisters were deported to Auschwitz, where the mother perished in 1944 (I have not found any references to the manner of his father's death although, apparently, he managed to survive the war). One of his most formative experiences was being forced as a sixteen year old to watch the public hanging of one of his sisters on account of her aborted escape. Angyal, who was never secretive about his Jewish origins, rarely talked about this to his friends, nor did he mention it in his written prison confessions and his oral interrogations lest he be given preferential treatment. In light of what I have written about Jewish Hungarian involvement in the Revolution of 1956 and as victims of the ensuing reprisals, in my view this would have been more than highly unlikely.

Angyal returned from Auschwitz a dedicated communist committed to a messianic faith in the vocation of scientific socialism to create a society which would end oppression based on nationality, race, and class in all its forms. But his communism was always with a small "c"; at no time did he join the Party. In fact, although he had two years of a university education specializing in philosophy, Angyal's goal in life was to become "a good worker." And indeed, he was a skilled worker who labored with heavy iron works, construction, and automobile building in the road construction department of Budapest (during this time, he was married, had a son, was divorced). In 1952 and 1953, he was a "stahanovite," in the Stalinist propaganda of the time, "a model worker."

As profoundly shaped as he was by witnessing the gruesome execution of his sister, Angyal never exhibited any signs of rancor, vindictiveness, or desire for vengeance; he wanted a new order of the world where such things would not happen and he was convinced that communism would bring about such a world.

As his biographer and editor of his prison confessions, the poet and writer István Eörsi, a major figure in the Democratic Opposition as well as postcommunist politics, along with numerous others, has shown that it was the workers who experienced foremost the discrepancy between the conditions under which they were living and the vision of communism, let alone the proclamations concerning what had been attained on the part of Stalinist propaganda. In Angyal's case, the disillusionment that resulted from this discrepancy was exhibited by his hanging his picture of Stalin upside down next to his toilet as early as 1950! Although a gesture fraught with great danger, it was hardly one of open, vocal defiance; Angyal merely acted as though this was the most natural place the likeness of "the Great Liberator" belonged!

Angyal's behavior during the Revolution of 1956 and after right up to his execution is nothing short of remarkable. On October 23, he participated in the demonstrations that served as the catalyst for the uprising. In his prison confessions, he describes fondly how he marched arm in arm with the likes of Tibor Déry, Communist novelist close to the "Nagy circle," József Gáli, another prominent writer, Angyal's good friend Per Olaf Csongovai, Imre Sinkovits, the popular actor, and the writer István Csurka. The affectionate tone is rather ironic in the case of the latter

two individuals; in the postcommunist era they have both been notable for their ultra-nationalist, anti-Semitic sentiments; although I am not aware of either of them making anti-Semitic or otherwise derogatory remarks about the person of Angyal, they have at times been allied with former '56 freedom fighters who have thought Angyal and his freedom fighters were too far to the left to be authentic representatives of the revolution (in '95, a major controversy surrounded the building of a statue honoring the freedom fighters and whose symbol was to be Angyal. It was decided that he would not be a representative figure because of his "leftism;" Peter Mansfeld, imprisoned until he turned 18 and executed three days later, was chosen instead); and in historical usage, calling someone a "leftist" a Bolshevik, a "liberal," was synonymous with calling them a Jew.

Angyal was elected commander by the freedom fighters in Tüzoltó ("Firefighter Street"), with Csongovai as his second-in-command. They were one street over and parallel to the Killian barracks which in turn was across the Corvin passage with its famous movie theatre. The three locations were of the utmost importance: they controlled access to the downtown area, to two of the bridges across the Danube, and, in the other direction, the airport outside of Budapest.

Angyal organized strategy and delegated a variety of tasks. He spent much of his time gathering accurate information (in Budapest and the rest of the country rumors were running rampant), and making contact with other groups of freedom fighters, especially Pál Maléter, the tank commander who took charge of the Killian barracks, and Gergely Pongráz, leader of the large insurgent group at Corvin alley. He also helped in the production and distribution of flyers, and led a demonstration in Heroes' Square protesting the massacre of unarmed demonstrators in Kossuth Square in front of the Parliament Building.

Above all, Angyal wanted a peaceful resolution to the conflict, a feat that could be accomplished only if the government recognized the insurgency as a revolution, not a counterrevolution as it had repeatedly proclaimed on the radio, as socialist and democratic, and if Soviet troops withdrew from Hungarian soil. To this end, he went to the Parliament Building to meet with Imre Nagy, János Kádár, new General Secretary of the Party, and Ferenc Münnich, the Interior Minister. He participated in the meeting and negotiations at which Nagy met with the leaders of the various groups of freedom fighters. Angyal also participated in the meeting during which the National Guard, which sought to integrate those elements of the armed forces and police that were loyal to the revolution with the freedom fighters, was formed.

As a commander, Angyal tried to make sure that captured AVO officers were not harmed or suffered any reprisals; he had them kept as prisoners with the hope that under a new government it would be the courts, strictly adhering to due process of law, that would determine their guilt or innocence. He also tried to insure that, as economic life ground to a halt, stores would not be looted.

Most moving of all of Angyal's activities was the distribution of food and medicine, donated by bakers, store managers, and pharmacists, to people in the neighborhood -- including the family of an AVO agent who infiltrated the group, was discovered, and subsequently released on Angyal's orders! And no less striking, especially for the leader of a group of freedom fighters, he is described as weaponless on several instances by witnesses.

If all of this sounds like hagiography, it is more than striking that Angyal's

contemporaries and fellow freedom fighters, including Pongráz and Jeno Fonay, with whom Angyal shared a cell in the "death house," now associated with members of freedom fighter organizations who, then and now, objected to the Tüzoltó utca commander's "communism" and "leftism," grounds, in their view, for disqualifying him as a representative figure of the Revolution, unequivocally testify to the veracity of the descriptions of his extraordinary courage, sense of fairness, and compassion.

It is interesting to note that Angyal, in varying degrees, shared the opinion of some of these people about some of the luminaries of the Revolution: he did not trust Maléter because he, like Pongráz to this day, believed that Maléter had ordered his troops to fire on the freedom fighters. This is a matter of considerable controversy in Hungary, especially among the so-called "56-ers," intensified by Maléter's status as a hero and martyr of the Revolution. Some of Maléter's former associates, especially Peter Gosztonyi who after escaping to the West in '56 became a renowned historian in Switzerland, and such biographers as Miklós Horvath have attempted to show rather convincingly that Maléter never gave such an order, although admittedly in the beginning there was fighting between the two groups.

In similar fashion, Angyal, like his detractors then and now, was distrustful of Nagy because of the Prime Minister's repeated radio requests for the freedom fighters to lay down their arms. In the case of the commander of the Tüzoltó utca freedom fighters, there was another, equally strong reason for the distrust: as Nagy was creating a multi-party cabinet, the politicians of the old political parties were already jockeying for position and prestige, a phenomenon Angyal deemed to be an affront to the freedom fighters who were shedding their blood and who, in his estimation, needed the nation's solidarity and sense of unity rather the diffusion created by the proliferation of political parties. The leaders of these political parties were already acting like would be "feudal lords" of old, and Nagy was enabling them to do so, catering to their whims.

A few days after the Soviet invasion of November 4, Angyal, like the mothers of young freedom fighters, felt that, given the odds, continuing the armed resistance was futile, yet it was a cowardly, conceding of the legitimacy of the invasion, to surrender directly to the Soviets. Consequently, like most freedom fighters, he and his group stopped fighting, discarding weapons in a variety of assorted places. Angyal, perhaps naively but still with a gesture of eloquent dignity, distributed flyers written in Russian that quoted Marx's statement about how "a people that subjugates another cannot itself be truly free" and Lenin's statements affirming the right to national self-determination. On November 7, the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution and the greatest holiday throughout the Eastern bloc, he waved two flags at Soviet tanks, one the symbol of the Revolution, the traditional Hungarian tricolor of red, white, and green, bordered by black in memory of freedom fighters who had died in the fighting, with a hole in the middle where the Stalinist emblem had been, and the traditional communist red flag with star and hammer and sickle in gold. Some of the people in the neighborhood were extremely upset at the two flags being waved together, feeling that the communist flag sullied everything the Revolution stood for. But for Angyal, his actions embodied some of his basic beliefs: Stalinism and even post-Stalinist Communist rule in the entire Soviet bloc was a fundamental betrayal of communism; the Hungarian Revolution, while to be a sure a national rebellion against foreign domination, was equally fundamentally a socialist and democratic revolt against this betrayal; consequently, flying the flag of the Revolution and the communist flag symbolized the continuity between the Russian and Hungarian Revolutions, that the Hungarian freedom fighters of '56

were the authentic heirs of the Bolshevik Revolution!

The leader of the Tüzoltó utca freedom fighters also participated in the passive resistance that followed the suppression of the uprising and that was spearheaded by the Workers' Councils. Operating secretly out of the hospital on Sándor Peterffy utca, he and such writers as István Eörsi produced and distributed flyers and newspapers in "samizdat" form. During this time, dating back to the first days of the Revolution, Angyal was quite sick: he was diagnosed with pneumonia but "escaped" from the hospital! He managed to keep going with the help of caffeine pills.

István Angyal was arrested at the aforementioned hospital on November 16, 1956. Once the incriminating flyers were found, he tried to distribute them to his captors. In fact, he had packed a suitcase full of them as he had been preparing for the inevitable.

Upon being arrested on unspecified charges and being taken to jail, he immediately requested a hearing. In fact, all of the prisoners on his floor took up a chant in unison to give István Angyal a hearing. In his first written statement, alluding to his activities during the Revolution, he stated "in 1956 I became an excellent worker."

Angyal's prison confessions have to be considered among the most remarkable documents written in prison. First of all, it is a memorable, passionate yet self-effacing account of one person's recollection of his participation in the events of '56. Second, it is a powerful and moving indictment of János Kádár and his regime.

In his description of his role in the Revolution, Angyal describes how, in contrast to his distrust of Imre Nagy, his greatest confidence was in János Kádár, head of the party even during the revolution, of working class background himself, and who related well and easily to workers. The freedom fighter met with Kádár twice in the Parliament Building during the Revolution. On one of those occasions, they talked for three hours, Angyal (and Csongovai) urging the party boss to lead the Party into the forefront of the Revolution rather than fighting it, and inviting him to visit the group in Tüzoltó utca. Kádár promised to do so. He never did.

It was very difficult for Angyal to accept the fact the party leader he trusted and respected, who was so clearly on the side of the Revolution, betrayed it, and became the chief symbol of its suppression. In this regard, Eörsi claims that Angyal's conduct during his imprisonment and trial, including his prison confessions, follows the pattern of a Greek tragedy. The commander of Tüzoltó utca knew that the only chance for his life to be spared would have to be clemency from Kádár himself. However, for Kádár to do that, he would have to acknowledge that the uprising was a legitimate revolution and not the counterrevolution of his consolidationist propaganda. Since the Party Secretary was obviously unwilling to do so, and Angyal unrepentant and unrelenting, Eörsi thinks there was a fated logic to the course of events; Angyal knew too much about Kádár's actual behavior during the revolution not to be eliminated.

The most striking feature of Angyal's prison confessions, in my view, is its remarkable if uneven quality as a political treatise. Thoughtful, erudite, with an amplitude of quotes from Marx, Lenin, and numerous greats of Hungarian history (i.e., Petöfi) without the benefit of the availability of books, it is a remarkable statement of grassroots, participatory socialism, "communism," characterized by workers' self-governance and national self-determination.

Angyal's vision combines elements of anarchism, "libertarian socialism," especially of the Hungarian variety, and Trotskyism in a way that is deeply rooted in Hungary's historical and cultural context. And if that sounds contradictory, one can hardly expect the consistency of an academic paper given at the American Academy of Religion from a prison confession, especially given the harsh and cruel conditions of Angyal's incarceration!

If the political language of Angyal's treatise sounds anachronistic in the postcommunist era, it was certainly current and creative in 1956. Not only was his use of Marxist categories and of "communism" within the parameters of official political discourse, he used it creatively to show not only how short the regime had fallen short of but contradicted in cynical fashion its own professed ideals, anticipating the later intellectual critique of future dissidents. Most importantly, the unitive thread of Angyal's political ruminations is the problem of freedom developed in light of the freedom fighter's fundamental experiences of the denial of freedom under fascism, Stalinism, and post-Stalinist Communism, and the quest for a new and different world of freedom. In addition to personal memories, it is this focus on freedom, based on the experience of the lack of it, that provides the basic link between Angyal and members of the later Democratic Opposition, such as Eörsi, long after the latter abandoned his Marxism in favor of liberalism.

At this point, given the theme of this session, it is worth reiterating that although Angyal never mentioned his experiences during the Holocaust either in his written or oral confessions, nevertheless these experiences left an indelible mark on him, and were certainly among the prime factors motivating him to seek a different world. The depth and intensity of the impact of witnessing his sister's hanging is evident in the prison doctor's medical report: Angyal was unable to eat for a long (unspecified) period of time, and his capacity for social contact was severely limited. It is a jarring experience to read this part of the report. The prison doctor also wrote that in the normal course of life Angyal had resolved the psychological trauma of his teenage years, that there was nothing to prevent his being held accountable for his actions, no psychological condition to prevent his execution.

István Angyal was tried in two cases. Sentenced to death on April 7, 1958 in the first, he seemed to waver during his "right to the last word" in his confidence in the revolution, admitting to a discrepancy between his intentions and the unintended consequences of his actions, and that there may have been "imperialist elements" involved in the uprising. Tried again and sentenced to death again on November 20, 1958, there was no wavering this time in his "right to the last word;" admitting no wrongdoing, he said that according to the norms of the Kádár regime, in effect no different from the Arrow Cross or Rakosi regimes, he deserved death. Summarizing his most formative experiences and fundamental love and focus on freedom, he said:

"I did not know within myself any desire for power. I did not want to lead men, I merely wanted to be a citizen. I always considered myself first and foremost a citizen, the laws until 1945 meant death for me, in many instances they meant this after 1945 as well. In between the two legalities I sought justice (author's note: the Hungarian word "igazság" can be translated as both truth and justice). I did not find it. I wanted to be a free man, I cannot live in prison. I ask the court to let its judgment stand because it proved such facts to weigh on me that deserve death." (Translation is my own.)

István Angyal was hanged on December 1, 1958.

II.

Upon being released from prison on August 19, 1960, István Eörsi stared for a long time at the large building; his friend István Angyal, then the rest of those who had been murdered behind the walls came to mind. He remembered those he left behind and recalls feeling like an escapee: he pledged loyalty to the dead.

There were many (and just how many would be clear only after June 16, 1989!) who like Eörsi, kept the memory of 1956 and its martyrs alive. This was especially the case with those who lost friends and family in the fighting and/or the reprisals. But during the more than thirty two years the uprising was labeled a counterrevolution or ignored, the price paid for the prosperity and relative freedom of the Kádár era was a "collective amnesia" concerning 1956 -- a collective amnesia that seemed to afflict even those who kept secretly the memory. Disturbing this collective amnesia and awakening collective historical memory were among the primary objectives of the later Democratic Opposition.

Before discussing the pertinent dynamics concerning the make-up, worldviews, and political activities of the Democratic Opposition, I need to point out that martyrs of the Revolution like Angyal were both precursors, forerunners and role models for the dissidents. As mentioned previously, the use of Marxist categories to expose the hypocritical discrepancy between the professed ideals and claimed achievements of the regime anticipated the later critiques of the future dissidents. The overarching experience of the lack of freedom and the struggle for a different world of freedom, even with the transformation of political philosophies and orientations, provides the most powerful bond, the strongest point of linkage across the decades, between freedom fighters like Angyal and the Democratic Opposition. And their respective commitments to the cause of freedom, to "living in truth" was unswerving, unequivocal, exhibiting a virtual dare devil attitude that ignored any adverse consequences to one's safety and well being.

Like Angyal, most of the dissidents acting in the Democratic Opposition were of Jewish origin. The older members, such as Miklós Vásárhelyi, were already adults during World War II and had adult memories of the Holocaust. Others, like the writer György Konrád who in such autobiographical novels as *A Feast in the Garden* describes his experiences through the use of gripping flashbacks, were teenagers (like Angyal) for whom the Holocaust was, needless to say, decisively formative of their identity and life orientation.

For the generation born during and after World War II, this entire dynamic was far more complex. It was not at all unusual, for example, for parents to conceal from their children their Jewish origins. A vivid instance of this is the case of Miklós Haraszti, the last person tried for a political crime in Hungary (1973), a major figure in the Democratic Opposition and in the postcommunist period, one of the parliamentary leaders of the Alliance of Free Democrats until his "retirement" from politics in 1994 (while still in his mid-40s); he did not even know what a Jew was until he asked his parents the meaning of the derogatory names his classmates in elementary school had been calling him!

Hiding one's Jewishness, a historic "defense mechanism" on the part of some Jews in

Hungary, has become a widespread phenomenon since World War II. The practical impact on dissidents of Jewish origin born after World War II has been that, in addition to dealing with the "shock" of finding out the meaning of derogatory images and stereotypes associated with a people in whom they have at least biological roots, they have had to retrieve quite intentionally and self-consciously the historic memory of the Holocaust (as well as the rest of complex history of the interrelationship between Jews and non-Jews in Hungary, especially since the early 19th century).

For dissidents, at least in their own estimation, the retrieval of the historic memory of the Holocaust did not establish and enhance their self-consciousness as Jews. Rather, it became part of an overarching panorama of oppression, domination, the lack of freedom as they became aware of and retrieved no less self-consciously the historic memory of the experiences of the Gulag in the broadest sense of the term.

Like Angyal, the members of the Democratic Opposition who were of Jewish origin were totally assimilated Jews. They were typical of the 85% of Hungary's 100,000 Jews who do not observe their religion or identify in any ostensible way with those ethnic roots (religion and ethnicity being two of the standard characteristics for being considered Jewish).

At the risk of digressing too much, I do feel the need to observe that such total assimilation has been the most typical pattern of the relationship between Jewish Hungarians and the wider culture at large. Indeed, the Jews of Hungary have long had the reputation of being the world's most assimilated. For in spite of my numerous references throughout this paper to the long and complex history of anti-Semitism in Hungary, as István Deák has written, "perhaps nowhere else in Europe were Jews more enthusiastically encouraged, at least in certain periods, to become members of the national group, and probably nowhere else were Jews more willing to become patriotic citizens.

I have made this digression for two reasons. The first has to do with the viciously anti-Semitic claim that one cannot be a Jew and a loyal citizen of the country of one's residence at the same time; that is to say, one cannot be a Jew and a loyal Hungarian -- or Pole, German, Russian, or American for that matter. As pernicious as this contention is, it is nevertheless one that was part of the propaganda of the countries that had fascist governments and were allied with Nazi Germany during part of the interwar period and World War II, and one that is still heard all too often in the contemporary world -- including in the United States.

The second reason has to do with the fact that their being *assimilated* Jewish Hungarians shaped their outlook on freedom, human rights, and, especially in the postcommunist period, the all important issue of the rights of "Magyar" (the Hungarian word for Hungarian) minorities "across the borders," in the adjacent nation-states. What I am driving at is that, unlike an Elie Wiesel, no less a spokesperson for universal human rights, who retrieved not only memory of monstrous evil but the *particularity* of that evil in its attempt to eliminate the Jewish people from the face of the earth and in the process recovering the *particularity* of his Eastern European Jewish roots, the younger Jewish Hungarians of the Democratic Opposition, who never thought of themselves as anything other than Magyars, while retrieving particularity of the experience of Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust, did so without the recovery of their Jewish roots, and with an ensuing emphasis on *universal human* rights rather than the *particular* rights of *distinct* ethnic, national, and religious groups.

Just as they retrieved the historic memory of the Holocaust, so the younger dissidents of Jewish origin retrieved the historic memory of the experience of the Gulag in the broadest sense of the term, especially that of the Rákosi era. Of course, for some of them both Rákosi's reign of terror and the post '56 reprisals were childhood memories. But whether an actual childhood and/or reconstructed historic memory, the dissidents uncovered the truth and developed, to use Henry Nelson Wieman's terminology, an ultimate commitment to "living in truth." And the development of this ultimate commitment needs to be seen in terms of a "whole" of the retrieval of the historic memory of the Holocaust and the Gulag, some personal memory of the experience of the Gulag in the broadest sense of the term, and the experience of the discrepancy between the professed ideals and even real achievements of the "soft dictatorship" that created "the happiest barrack in the camp" and its actual political practices, which, no matter how surprisingly liberal in terms of the norms of the Eastern bloc of that era, nevertheless drew carefully the parameters of what was permissible.

One of the focal points of this "whole," as I have emphasized previously, was retrieval of the truth about '56. For some of the younger dissidents, it was yet another major shock to discover that their parents participated actively in the reprisals or that, at best, their behavior at the time was ambiguous. Nevertheless, regardless of generation or what they uncovered, including about their parents, they persisted in retrieving and telling the truth about '56.

For example, János Kis, a philosopher who was one of the founders and editor of *Beszélő*, the oldest (established in 1981) and longest running illegal "samizdat" publication, leader of the Alliance of Free Democrats (1989-91), wrote such seminal essays as "The End and the Beginning," "Can 1956 Be Forgotten?," "The Restoration of 1956-57 in a Thirty Year Perspective," and "The Present Crisis and its Origins" attempt *both* to retrieve the truth about the Revolution and its suppression *and* link that truth to the system's crisis in the '80s. In "The End and the Beginning," Kis writes:

"Today we must remember the restoration not just in order to regain moral integrity, but in order to understand that present political crisis of the regime. We have to revive the tradition of resistance in order to overcome the political decay of our society. We have to analyze former (failed) proposals of conciliation in order to find a more effective compromise to our present and future (perhaps less hopeless) situation. The events of 1956-57 developed from a moral issue into a political one."

As early as 1982, *Beszélő* devoted an entire issue to the historic memory of '56, containing memorable interviews such as the one with Sándor Rácz, President of the Greater Budapest Workers' Councils in 1956. In addition, the dissidents attempted annually to hold a public observance of the anniversary of the Revolution on October 23; as late as 1988, they would be dispersed and/or arrested by truncheon wielding police.

A continuing thread in Kis and other dissident writers of *Beszélő* was that the Revolution of 1956 was unfinished. Of course, they were acutely aware of the fact that the '80s (or for that matter 1996) were not 1956. Nevertheless, they saw a thread of continuity in the need to struggle ceaselessly for freedom, a struggle that, unlike the one in '56, was to be carried out by non-violent means for both moral and political ("realpolitik") reasons.

Part of the thread of continuity between the two eras in the quest for freedom and the search for ways of embodying that freedom was the concern to create institutional frameworks that had the capacity to prevent the undue concentrations of power that were such a fundamental feature of the dissidents' lived experiences. While there was no uniformity in their formulations of such institutional patterns, they were in general agreement that it meant the adaptation of Western style liberal democratic political institutions: separation of powers and a system of checks and balances between the various branches of government; truly free elections with universal suffrage; and most importantly, legal protection and safeguarding of universal human rights and civil liberties. Indeed, "constitutionalism," authentic legality, the creation of a genuine "rechtstaat" became one of the distinguishing hallmarks of the Democratic Opposition.

The members of the Democratic Opposition were no less critical of the undue concentration of power in economic life and the complex way in which economic and political power were intertwined in the communist system. They were equally aware of the complex interrelationship between economic and political power in capitalist systems. During much of the eighties, most of them favored some variation of democratic socialism. Retrieving the aspirations and traditions of '56, with no small degree of nostalgia, most of them advocated economic democracy, workers' ownership and control of the enterprises and factories where they work.

A few were attracted by the late '70, early '80s to a Hayekian classical liberalism, more closely resembling libertarianism. By the late '80s, most of the members of the Democratic Opposition, which eventually became the political party named the Alliance of Free Democrats, espoused some form of liberalism, which in the Central/Eastern Europe refers to an emphasis on freedom of thought, constitutional limits on the power of the state, and the free market. Amidst their diversity, most of them advocated free market mechanisms with a basic and stable social safety net and had considerable sympathy for worker owned and managed enterprises. That is to say, they retained their egalitarian sensibilities, "social democratic" sympathies, not in the sense of retaining any confidence in socialism or the historic Social Democratic Parties that were forced to fuse with the Communists, but in the sense of defending the need for a minimum, fair, and stable social safety net in a free market economy that sought to maximize participation in decision making, just as the institutions of liberal democracy sought to protect and embody freedom as well as empower the participation of its citizens.

The publication of "The New Social Contract," written by János Kis, Otilia Solt, and Ferenc Köszeg and published in *Beszélő* in 1987 was a truly epochal event in the Hungarian dissident movement. In a deliberately Lockean fashion, it advocates the sovereignty of the people, and the establishment of a constitutional system of checks and balances and separation of powers. With regard to the economy, it vaguely called for the creation of workers' councils to realize the democratic dreams of '56. In fact, the document begins with the premise that the time is ripe to attempt to realize the dreams of '56, in a new age and in a new way.

In the postcommunist period, the Alliance of Free Democrats which had emerged out of the Democratic Opposition became the second largest political party and the main opposition party to the right-center of coalition that ruled the country between 1990 and 1994. When István Csurka, who had marched with István Angyal on October 23, 1956, vice-president of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the major partner in the then ruling coalition, until his expulsion from the party in 1993, engaged in anti-Semitic tirades, it was the Alliance of Free Democrats that led the way in the public repudiation of anti-Semitism in Hungary's political life.

And as the government drifted to the right and made authoritarian sounds, as 10,000 people participated in an extreme right wing demonstration in September, '92, as the Csurbists gained control of the electronic media in '93-'94 and seemingly displayed no great respect for democracy, György Konrád, in no sense an acting in any official capacity for the Alliance of Free Democrats but closely identified with it, organized with a number of others the Democratic Charter, a grassroots, umbrella organization for a wide variety of groups that sought to defend civil liberties; in response to the aforementioned rightwing demonstration, 100,000 demonstrators gathered under its aegis in defense of a "democracy without fear."

As in 1990, SZDSZ came in second during the elections of 1994. In spite of the fact that the Socialists, one of the successor parties to the Communists (one that, in my view, bears little resemblance to its predecessor, with its plurality of factions, open bickering, and implementation of Thatcherite austerity measures) won an absolute parliamentary majority, they formed a coalition with the Alliance of Free Democrats many of whose members were the Communists' old nemesis. Some of the former members of Democratic Opposition -- most notably János Kis, Miklós Haraszti, and Otilia Solt -- chose not to run for reelection. Some were uneasy with the past of their coalition partners but recognized that '94 was not 1988 and 1956, that the reality of the political situation for the SZDSZ, the Socialists, and the Hungarian nation made the formation of the coalition not only a smart move politically but wise as well with respect to the common good. Civil libertarians, pushing for more rapid privatization, austerity to stabilize the inflation rate and to manage the huge international debt, most of the old Democratic Oppositionists identified themselves as "social liberals," distrustful of all concentrations of power, devoted to free thought, civil liberties, and a social egalitarianism that, in spite of the austerity they proposed, was sensitive to the sufferings resulting from the massive economic dislocations of the post-communist order, and grappled with the provision of a minimum safety net in such order.

The journey of the former dissidents has been a long one, especially in the case of the post-war generation whose parents were stalwart, loyal, obedient party members. If the journey all three generations seems tortuous, their ideas contradictory in various phases of their development, it is important to remember that the centrality of freedom, conceived in different ways at different times, their preoccupation with undue concentrations of power, their fundamental egalitarianism, and quest for political and economic participation, with due acknowledgment of differences, have a thread of continuity with the traditions of the Revolution of 1956. And both the traditions of the later dissidents and the freedom fighters of '56 have much in common with what János Bák has called "libertarian socialism." And above all what the members of the two groups in very different eras have in common is an unremitting devotion to the cause of freedom for which they were willing to pay any price, including their lives.

III.

In this section, I shall briefly consider two former dissidents from two other former Eastern bloc countries, Adam Michnik of Poland and Václav Havel of what was then Czechoslovakia. Michnik's life and thought closely parallels those of the younger generation of Hungary's former Democratic Opposition while Havel, a gentile profoundly shaped by the historic memory of the Holocaust, provides the quintessential exemplification of the secular

spirituality of former Eastern bloc dissidents.

Born in 1946, Michnik came from a family of Jewish origin. Both of his parents were devoted Communists. Although Michnik could look forward to a life of privilege, his father's avowed respect for the varied and critical traditions of the pre-war Polish Left and disdain for the post-war institutionalization of Communist power was a profound influence on him. Other formative influences, at least intellectually were Leszek Kolakowski, who was of "the generation of October '56" that was instrumental in bringing the "national," reform Communist Wladyslaw Gomulka to power (the Hungarian Revolution of '56 started on October 23 with demonstrations that were intended as gestures of solidarity with the Polish people) and who at that stage of development was a reform minded critical Marxist bent on expanding the reforms toward political pluralism, human rights, and social justice; and Jacek Kuron, who with Karol Modezelewski in their "An Open Letter to the Party" in 1964 (by which time Kolakowski was openly siding with these dissident Marxist students) critiqued the oppression and exploitation of workers under the Eastern bloc's "managerial socialism" and advocated workers' ownership (genuine social ownership) of the means of production much in the manner of István Angyal and the Workers' Councils of the Hungarian Revolution of '56.

But for Michnik, who had first been arrested in 1965, the most decisive events were the student demonstrations of 1968, which, needless to say, were severely repressed. Intellectuals like Kolakowski were not only expelled from the party but exiled. The government engaged in a vicious anti-Semitic campaign that led to the flight of most of what was left of Poland's post-Holocaust Jewish population; less than 5,000 Jews live in postcommunist Poland.

Michnik stayed, was arrested, and received a three year prison term. In 1976, in the wake of arrests of workers following the Radom riots, he and Kuron among others, founded the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR). He was always a mediating figure, and advocated the collaboration of the left with the Roman Catholic Church in defending human rights and the creation of some modicum of space for civil society.

In the days of Solidarity (1980-81), Michnik, along with Kuron, became one of the advisors Lech Walesa. Following the imposition of martial law, he spent three years in prison. By the late '70s he had traversed the road from Marxism to a libertarian type of democratic socialism or, perhaps more aptly, "liberal communitarianism." During the Roundtable Negotiations that led to Poland's first postcommunist elections in 1989, Michnik was one of the key negotiators. As the new postcommunist age was about to dawn, with all due respect and appreciation for the person and achievements of Walesa, the political alliance between the two men came to an end. Michnik since then has been the editor of a "liberal" newspaper (in the Central/Eastern European sense). He is one of the few defenders (and, in fact, now a friend) of General Jaruzelki, Michnik's one time jailer now on trial for treason.

During the Communist period (1968 and after), Michnik was the subject of direct government sponsored anti-Semitic attacks, personal attacks that would be continued by his detractors during the postcommunist period. It was in this context and in the very country where Auschwitz is located that the retrieval of the historical memory of the Holocaust came alive for him --probably even more vividly than for his Hungarian counterparts. Like the Hungarian dissidents of Jewish origin, Michnik is totally assimilated and does not think of himself as anything other than a Pole. And as is the case with these Hungarians, the Polish dissident's

persistent defense of human rights has always been in terms of *universal* human rights and not the *particularity* of these rights.

The following quotes from Michnik illustrate his ultimate commitment to freedom in a manner reminiscent of the Hungarian dissidents we have considered previously:

"... the value of your participation cannot be gauged in terms of your chance of victory but rather the value of your idea. In other words you score a victory not when you win power but when you remain faithful to yourself."

"... By refusing to talk to the informer, and by choosing to be a political prisoner you are defending hope. Not just hope within yourself and for yourself but also in others and for others. You're casting your declaration of hope out of your prison cell into the world, like a sealed bottle into the ocean. If even one single person finds it, you will have scored a victory."

"... it is not courage that makes me choose prison instead of banishment. If anything, I am making this choice out of fear. Out of the fear that by saving my neck I may lose my honor."

Referring to the importance of the retrieval of historic memory to "living in truth," he writes:

"The history of your nation is fixed in your memory. You know that in its history a loyalty declaration signed in jail has always been a disgrace, loyalty to oneself and to the national tradition of virtue. You can remember those who were tortured and jailed for long years but who signed no declarations. And you know that you, too, will not sign them, because you are unable and unwilling to renounce the memory of the others..."

And summarizing the central focus on freedom, "libertarian socialism," and "living in truth," he maintains:

"In searching for truth, or, to quote Leszek Kolakowski, 'by living in dignity,' opposition intellectuals are striving not so much for a better tomorrow as for a better today. Every act of defiance helps us build the framework of socialism, which should not be merely or primarily a legal institutional structure but a real, day-to-day community of free people."

Since he is the quintessential Central/Eastern European dissident and since his life story is so familiar, I shall not rehearse the details of the biography of Václav Havel. I shall, however, use what is probably his most famous essay, "The Power of the Powerless," to highlight and summarize the most salient features that characterized Central/Eastern European dissident movements.

In this essay, Havel makes his point with the well known allegory of "the green grocer." In Havel's account, he imagines the green grocer placing in his window the slogan, "Workers of the World, Unite!" This he does not out of conviction but because he is afraid; by hanging the sign, he is communicating to his superiors and would be informers that he is obedient and as such should be left in peace. But since he is a human being with a sense of his own dignity, he would be ashamed and embarrassed to admit it. Hence, "... the sign helps the green grocer to

conceal from himself the low foundations of his obedience, at the same concealing the low foundations of power," hiding them behind the facade of something high, which is how the former dissident describes "ideology." Havel describes this phenomenon in the following manner:

"The primary excusatory function of ideology, therefore, is to provide people, both as victims and pillars of the post-totalitarian system, with the illusion that the system is in harmony with the human order and the order of the universe."

However, in the view of the Czech President, there is a yawning abyss between the aims of life and aims of post-totalitarian systems. Life, in its essence, aims toward independent self-constitution and self-organization, toward diversity and plurality, that is to say the fulfillment of its freedom. Post-totalitarian systems on the other hand, demand uniformity and conformity, serving "... people only to the extent necessary to ensure that people will serve it." Moreover, the radius of its influence is ever widening. Any overstepping of predetermined roles is considered as an attack by the system on itself for every transgression is a denial of the system.

Havel maintains that "ideology, in creating a bridge of excuses between the system and the individual, spans the abyss between the aims of the system and the aims of life," pretending that the requirements are derivative from the requirements of life, a world of appearances attempting to pass for reality.

While the post-totalitarian system permeates every facet of life, since it does so with ideological gloves, life in the system is saturated with hypocrisy and lies. And "because the regime is captive to its own lies, it must falsify everything." Havel writes:

"Individuals need not believe all these mystifications, but they must behave as though they did, or they must at least tolerate them in silence, or get along well with those who work with them. For this reason, however, they must **live within a lie**. They need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it and in it. For by this very fact, individuals confirm the system, fulfill the system, make the system, **are** the system."

The example of the green grocer hanging the slogan illustrates the workings of the principle of social *auto-totality*. The former dissident asserts that "part of the essence of the post-totalitarian system is that it draws everyone into its sphere of power, not so they realize themselves as human beings, but so they may surrender their human identity in favor of the identity of the system, that is, so they may become agents of the system's general automatism and servants of its self-determined goals, so that they may participate in the common responsibility for it, so they may be may be into and enslaved by it, like Faust with Mephistopheles." But even more than this, through people's involvement a general norm is created which pressures their fellow citizens. And the system draws everyone into its sphere of power in order that they may learn to be comfortable with their involvement, to identify with it to the point where it becomes as though it were natural and inevitable, with any non-involvement treated as an abnormality, as an attack on themselves. Havel observes that "by pulling everyone into its power structure, the post-totalitarian system makes everyone instruments of a mutual totality, the auto-totality of society." In a way that is reminiscent of Reinhold Niebuhr's distinction between the equality of guilt and the inequality of responsibility, the Czech President

claims that in such systems "position in the power hierarchy determines the degree of responsibility, but it gives no one unlimited responsibility and guilt, nor does it completely absolve anyone."

Havel's piercing analysis demonstrates that although humans can be compelled to live within a lie, this can be done only because of human beings are capable of living in this manner. He states:

"The essential aims of life are present in every person. In everyone there is some longing for humanity's rightful dignity, for moral integrity, for free expression of being and a sense of transcendence over the world of existences."

He continues:

"Yet, at the same time, each person is capable, to a greater or lesser degree, of coming to terms with living within the lie. Each person somehow succumbs to a profane trivialization of his or her inherent humanity, and utilitarianism. In everyone there is some willingness to merge with the anonymous crowd and to flow comfortably along with it down the river of pseudo-life. This is much more than a simple conflict between two identities. It is something far worse; it is a challenge to the very notion of identity itself."

Havel no less eloquently returns to his assertion that the capacity to surrender one's freedom, the willingness to live within the lie resides in the very grounds of human dignity. Maintaining that "individuals can be alienated from themselves only because there is *something* to alienate," he asserts that "the terrain of this violation is their authentic existence." He states that "living the truth is thus woven directly into the texture of living a lie," for "it is the repressed alternative, the authentic aim to which living a lie is an inauthentic response." Havel writes that:

"Only against this background does living a lie make any sense: it exists *because* of that background. In its excusatory, chimerical rootedness in the human order, it is a response to nothing other than the human predisposition to truth. Under the orderly surface of the life of lies, therefore, there slumbers the hidden sphere of life in its real aims, of its openness to truth."

This exposition sets the stage for the former dissident turning back to the example of the green grocer, supposing that the grocer refuses to put up the slogan, to vote in farcical election, to live within the lie. To be sure, the green grocer will pay a very high price for such "refusenik" behavior. But, despite the seeming failure of his actions, he will have accomplished something extremely important: he will have exposed the system for what it is, living within a lie; he will have exposed the fact that the emperor is naked. And in the process, he discovers his long suppressed identity and dignity.

The confrontation between the power of the post-totalitarian system and opposition forces, comprised of people like the green grocer turned dissident, occurs initially not at the level of quantifiable power but at the existential level. However, each act of living in truth, however small, loosens the grip of the system and enlarges the sphere of freedom, however little, because "if the suppression of the aims of life is a complex process, and if it is based on the multifaceted manipulation of all expressions of life then, by the same token, every free expression of life

indirectly threatens the post-totalitarian system politically, including forms of expression to which, in other social systems, no one would attribute any potential political significance, not to mention explosive power."

Havel's contention at this point sounds unrealistic, idealistic to the point being removed from the reality of power relations of post-totalitarian systems of the former Eastern bloc. Yet, as Havel so ably demonstrated during the Velvet Revolution and as President first of Czechoslovakia, then the Czech Republic, he has a keen sense of "realpolitik" and is quite adept at using the levers of power, as well as practicing the art of compromise. Although varying in degrees of success in wielding of power, the same could be said of most members of the Democratic Opposition in Hungary and Solidarity activists like Adam Michnik in Poland who were keenly aware of the self-limiting nature of their activities as long as Soviet troops were present in the two countries, and who though unequivocal oppositionists, maintained informal and mostly secret contact with reform Communist technocrats and intellectuals (who by the end of the Communist period, it would be fair to say, were Communists in name only, and at certain points were willing to compromise to avoid bloodshed -- one of the lessons of '56!). And yet it must be added that, coupled with numerous other factors (economic, geopolitical, military, and most especially Gorbachev's announcement that the Soviet Union would not intervene in the internal affairs of its Warsaw Pact allies, that is to say the Brezhnev Doctrine was revoked and replaced by the "Sinatra doctrine"), the activities of the Democratic Opposition in Hungary, Solidarity activists like Michnik in Poland, and Havel and his fellow signers of Charter 77 in the former Czechoslovakia, embodying the meaning of living in truth, played an indispensable part in the demise of post-totalitarian systems and the Great Transformation of 1989-90.

IV.

The thread of continuity between István Angyal and the later dissidents of the Democratic Opposition in Hungary, of Solidarity activists like Michnik in Poland, and Charter 77 signers like Havel in the former Czechoslovakia is their unremitant commitment to the cause of freedom, to "living in truth," to the cause of human rights, and to oppositional activity. This commitment had (and has) a religious, spiritual, ascetic quality. It is this that I call "the secular spirituality of former Eastern bloc dissidents."

By "spirituality" I do not mean anything ephemeral, ethereal, otherworldly. Neither do I identify it exclusively with the particularity of its institutional expressions in various religious traditions, although admittedly the variety of traditions of spirituality are embodied in and transmitted through their institutional manifestations. Rather, in the broadest and most general sense, what I mean by "spirituality" is a life orientation, a way of being-in-the-world. It entails an "ultimate commitment" that integrates and transforms all of our other commitments (Wiemann), an "ultimate concern" that ties together and gives meaning to all of "preliminary concerns." In this broad, general, inclusive sense, "spirituality" is a dimension of *all* religious traditions, theistic and non-theistic. Considered in this fashion, we can affirm that historically spirituality has found *both* supernaturalistic and naturalistic expressions in Western religious traditions. In addition, when defined in this manner, spirituality can be considered to have not only ostensibly religious but secular expressions as well.

By "secular," I am thinking in part of the Latin word, "saeculum" meaning "this world," "this age." In addition, the manner in which I use the word "secular" also chiefly has the modern

connotation of a way of being-in-the world without identifying with particular religious institutions and traditions, and without any reference to the sacred -- except in a sociological, functional sense. I shall not engage in the typical Western distinction of the '60s between "secularist," positivist, positions that *preclude* any plausibility of the existence of the sacred and "secularity," fully modern, oriented to this world, accepting modern science yet open to the possibility of the existence of the sacred; both positions, as well as genuine agnosticism, existed side by side in "the secular spirituality" of former Eastern bloc dissidents.

I have already alluded to the "ultimate commitment," "the ultimate concern" of these dissidents that integrated and unified their other commitments and "preliminary" concerns, exhibiting what could appropriately be called a radical faith, a radical trust. To be sure, "the object" of this trust cannot be understood in any conventional theistic sense. What can be considered the object of this radical trust or its functional equivalent is what I have called "the cause of freedom," "to live in truth." While this sounds nebulous and imprecise, in my view it is that very imprecision that captures the ethos of the dissidents. Precision, to be sure, is indispensable to rigorous, critical thinking. However, attempts at too neat and facile systemization all too easily lead to totalization -- something the former dissidents experienced all their lives! Moreover, although I am not aware of any former members of Hungary's Democratic Opposition using the term, the cause of freedom to which they were (and are) committed in an ultimate sense is unmanageable and uncontrollable, reminiscent of the notion of "World Freedom" ("Világ Szabadság"), which, almost in a Hegelian sense, is the moving force of history. And what amounts to the equivalent of this "World Freedom" finds concrete expression for the dissidents as both *freedom from* and *freedom for*, freedom from manifested in the advocacy of the institutions of political democracy and the safeguarding of human rights and civil liberties, freedom for manifested in the demand for participation, the means for self-realization in community with others, in part through political, in part through economic democracy, workers' ownership and management.

We have seen that in their unremitting devotion the former Eastern bloc dissidents paid no heed to any adverse consequences to their own persons. Clearly, such a commitment entailed considerable self-discipline and self-denial. In passing, it would not be exaggerating to mention a loose parallel between the devotion of the dissidents and the tradition of the martyrs in Christianity and Islam -- "martyrs" without any connotation of the more bizarre aspects of martyrdom but in the best sense of the term, a "witness" to the point of being willing to die for the integrity of one's faith.

The most fascinating aspect of "the secular spirituality" of former Eastern bloc dissidents is in my view their remarkable courage; I find it reminiscent of Tillich's "courage to be," the affirmation of one's being "in spite of" the threat of non-being, whether in the form of fate and death or emptiness and meaninglessness (which are the most pertinent for this discussion) or guilt and condemnation, by taking the anxiety of the threat of non-being into oneself.

However, as I make this observation, I am keenly aware of my predilection to view the ethos of the former dissidents from the perspective of my understanding of the Christian faith. That is to say, I am inclined to see in the dissidents the "anonymous Christians" of Karl Rahner, "the latent church" of Paul Tillich, and respondents to the fundamental intuition that what we do matters because it matters everlastingly because it matters to the One who is everlasting, the process perspective of Schubert Ogden.

However, the self-understanding of the former dissidents, as well as such precursors as István Angyal, the integrity of their "secular spirituality" in its own terms needs to be affirmed. That means accepting and affirming that, according to the dissidents' own self-understanding, what they did was for its sake, for the sake of their own dignity and authentic existence. And that is its own self-justification.

Of course, in the writings and activities of the former dissidents, there is an element of what Schubert Ogden has called "contributionism." That is to say, (instead of Ogden's Hartshornean process perspective) how historical memory would treat them is not an unimportant motivating factor in the courage they manifested. And this anticipation of historic memory is profoundly linked to a sense of continuity with courageous heroes of the nation's past -- a phenomenon we have seen particularly in the writings of Adam Michnik but no less present among the members of Hungary's Democratic Opposition and Czechoslovakia's Charter 77 activists. Nevertheless, this seems far less important than the fact that since "living within the lie" had become unbearable, "living in truth" was for its own sake and was its own self-justification regardless of whether or not or how they would be remembered.

An integral part of "the secular spirituality" of former Eastern bloc dissidents, as well as precursors like Angyal, both during the communist and the postcommunist periods, was their dual emphasis on responsibility and reconciliation. As we have seen, for example, members of the Democratic Opposition took responsibility for retrieving and telling the truth about '56; doing so was indispensable to "living in truth." This was done not to point the finger or seek reprisals but out of the deep seated conviction that only by taking responsibility and holding people accountable for their actions could there be authentic reconciliation. Members of the former Democratic Opposition, as for instance János Kis and Árpád Göncz, President of the Republic of Hungary since 1990, certainly did not advocate putting on trial men, now in their 80s, who in '56 gave orders to shoot or participated in the shooting of unarmed demonstrators. But they did advocate a full, unequivocal uncovering of the truth to the point of naming the decision makers and perpetrators of atrocities. Only by honestly facing the truth about the past can people be conciled to themselves, only then can disparate groups within the population be reconciled to each other.

In Poland, Solidarity activists like Adam Michnik put no less a dual emphasis on responsibility and reconciliation. Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of this is his friendship with his one time jailer, General Jaruzelski, as the latter was put on trial for treason for his imposition of martial law (he was recently acquitted). Similarly, although Havel eventually signed the Czech Republic's lustration laws knowing that the Parliament would override his opposition, he did lend his moral authority to opposition to the legislation.

One of the most significant aspects of what I have just described, which was no less true during the communist period, is the lack of a "dualistic" attitude toward their opponents or those who did not share their views and support their activities on the part of the former dissidents. That is to say, in a way reminiscent of the lack of rancor they exhibited in the retrieval of the historic memory of the Holocaust, there is no hint of a "we-they" mentality dividing people into "the righteous" dissidents and the "unrighteous" communists, "the pure" oppositionistic and "impure" silent majority that shared complicity in supporting the system. Rather, perhaps expressed most eloquently by Havel, it is typical of the ethos of the former dissidents to contend that there were no "righteous," that all, including themselves, shared, with varying degrees of

responsibility, in the complicity of supporting the post-totalitarian system. Recognition and acceptance of this is a precondition for national reconciliation in their estimation.

The theme of reconciliation provides a point of transition for highlighting some of the challenges such a secular spirituality poses for the development of a post-Holocaust, post-Gulag theology. Not the least of these challenges concerns the very practical theological task of post-communist reconciliation in the context of recently established democracies.

Since elsewhere I have written at greater length about the problem, I shall mention the first of these challenges briefly. It concerns the complex relationship between the churches and the former dissidents. As religious communities, all of which were persecuted in various ways at different times during the communist period in the entire Eastern bloc, have been attempting to establish their postcommunist identities, although one can increasingly find evidence of countertrends and as unsafe as generalizations can be, one can claim that much of new leadership of the churches of the region have tended to identify with the broad spectrum of populist nationalism in which religious, cultural, and national symbols are linked. There is a tendency on the part of populist nationalists, in spite of the presence of "liberals" in their ranks, to see free thinking "liberals," inside the church and outside, with their concomitant advocacy of the limitations of undue concentrations of power, as a threat to the integrity of faith, the unity of the church, and the very survival of the nation. And at one extreme of populist nationalism, the use of "liberal," "liberal-Bolshevik" as a derogatory euphemism for "Jew" is not far away (Michnik recently bore the brunt of anti-Semitic attack by a Roman Catholic priest during a sermon).

Adherents of religious communities, especially the churches, in Central/Eastern as well as Russia and the successor states, need to acknowledge that they can disagree with others without considering them "opponents" and "enemies of religion and the nation," without impugning the integrity of their motivations, and slurring religio-ethnic origins, that is to say with the kind of civility that is a prerequisite for democracy. The range of complex issues free thinking liberalism opens up -- the nature of truth claims, whether the criteria for adjudicating truth claims should be confessional or subject to public criteria, whether the boundaries of these communities and their truth claims are fixed or fluid, if fluid to what extent, and finally the relationship between "Christ and culture" -- needs be discussed honestly and openly, affirming the right to disagree, voicing one's perspective vociferously yet with civility without demonizing those on the other side and seeing them as threats to one's existence.

One of the most urgent challenges for the development of a post-Holocaust, post-Gulag theology, in my view, is the delineation of such a theology in a *democratic* way and that is simultaneously in contact with yet critical and hopefully transformative of intellectual currents that foster the exploration of the meaning(s) of democracy and nurture their development. An example of this might be the development of a "democratic faith" in a "democratic God." Of course, the question of the appropriateness of engaging in such a task once again open up the range of issues mentioned above.

A prerequisite for the kind of openness I have been advocating (and have attempted to model in this paper) is the affirmation of the commitment and ensuing activities of the former dissidents, both during the communist and postcommunist periods, in their own right, their own integrity, and see them as self-justifying and self-authenticating.

Finally, there is the urgent challenge of anti-Semitism, especially given its resurgence during the postcommunist period. It goes without saying that for any kind of authentic historical and national reconciliation to take place the churches of Central/Eastern Europe and Russia and the successor states, especially because of their histories, need to confess and repent their complicity in the Holocaust and to liberate themselves for the anti-Judaic tradition in Christianity that has been a breeding ground for anti-Semitism.

The churches of the region have varied in their responses. For example, in Slovakia, a semi-official rehabilitation of Josef Tiso has been underway; Cardinal Corec participated in the dedication of a plaque in his memory; local clergy did the same in Tiso's birthplace. Little attempt has been made to come to terms with the past. I have already alluded to anti-Semitic verbal attacks on Adam Michnik during a sermon by a Roman Catholic priest in Poland. Archbishop Josef Glemp has both condemned anti-Semitism and been maladroit in handling it. On the other hand, various ecclesiastical commissions and institutions have been very much in the forefront in dealing with the issue. In Hungary, the Conference of Bishops issued a pastoral letter confessing and repenting the churches' complicity in the Holocaust -- one of the most far reaching documents to be issued by a representatives of a church body in the region. For all such important work, it is clear they are but the beginning of the process of historic and national reconciliation.

This raises the problem of the historical fusion of religious, national, and cultural symbols. To come to grips with the past, the ambiguous history of this fusion needs to be looked at carefully, accurately, and inclusively. The whole issue of the relationship between "Christ and culture" in a postcommunist democracy, in the distinctive particularity of each nation and the equally fundamental interrelatedness to its neighbors, needs to be examined.

An integral part of my final point is the need to affirm and appreciate the distinctiveness of an assimilated Jewish culture within the particularity of each nation, a point that I suspect the former dissidents of Jewish origin would not accept. István Deák mentions that although in Hungary assimilated Jews, as we have seen, thought of themselves as nothing else than Magyars, they have made unique contributions to Hungarian culture precisely because of their distinctiveness as assimilated Jews.

As a non-Jewish Magyar, I have always felt embarrassed and ashamed that there were Jewish Hungarians who felt the need to hide their Jewish background. I could certainly understand why they would want to do so. But what is wrong with affirming one's Hungarianness and simultaneously affirming one's Jewish roots, no matter how much one is assimilated? And what is wrong with gentile Hungarians affirming the genuine Hungarianness of Jewish Hungarians *and* affirming equally their Jewish roots? This suggests a degree of openness that affirms and accepts both *distinctiveness* and *identity* without seeing either distinctiveness or identity as *absolute*. And such a degree of openness may provide an appropriate model for an authentic postcommunist reconciliation.

I have spoken with considerable trepidation about the challenges to theology in a Central/Eastern European context; after all, I have lived in the U.S. for 37 years. Nevertheless, having a foot inside *and* outside both worlds, I have taken the risk of highlighting and making some judgments about theological issues facing the region as I see them.

However, these issues are no less real for religious communities in the United States, especially the development of a post-Holocaust, post-Gulag theology delineated in a *democratic* way. What this involves, among other things, is a challenge to explore honestly and consider pragmatically whether our theological formulations enhance or obstruct democratic development. And, of course, given the imprecision and confusion surrounding the use of the word "democracy," we are challenged, both in the U.S. and Central/Eastern Europe, to explore the possible meaning(s) of democracy.

But the biggest challenge "the secular spirituality" of former Eastern bloc dissidents presents to religious communities in the U.S. is to Western triumphalism, something that few of them share. Does the end of the Cold War mean that life in one system has been meaningful for forty-five years, meaningless in the other? Such a contention would be dismissive of and trivialize the lives of the peoples of the former Eastern bloc over the circumstances of which they had little choice.

To be sure, there is much to celebrate. But there are many tragedies, past and present, to be faced. Dissident turned President Árpád Göncz has expressed a fairly typical perspective among former dissidents, especially in Hungary, in claiming that in the Cold War there were only losers. And the present, the moment of "the melancholy of rebirth," is too important to be consumed by the pseudo-euphoria of triumphalism.

Perhaps the most important challenge the "secular spirituality of former Eastern bloc dissidents" presents for all of us, regardless of what "bloc" which we resided in geographically, to live in freedom and in truth as authentic human beings.

V.

I set the context for this paper by means of some personal recollections and historical reflections. I proceeded by using the figure of the executed freedom fighter István Angyal as paradigmatic of the attempts of the Democratic Opposition in Hungary to retrieve and reinterpret the Revolution of 1956, a fundamental part of their attempt "to live in truth," by means of which it questioned the legitimacy of the communist regime. In addition, as a survivor of Auschwitz, Angyal was equally paradigmatic and served as a role model for those members of Hungary's Democratic Opposition who either remembered or tried to retrieve the historic memory of the Holocaust which, coupled with the experience of the Gulag in the broadest sense of the word, shaped their unequivocal commitments. I then explored further some of the ideas and activities of the former Democratic Opposition in Hungary. More briefly, I drew parallels to the key figures of Adam Michnik in Poland and Vaclav Havel in the former Czechoslovakia. The religious and spiritual quality of the former dissidents' commitment and dedication I analyzed and highlighted the challenges such a secular spirituality for the development of a post-Holocaust, post-Gulag theology.

The following words by Erazim Kohak provide an eloquent summary of "the secular spirituality of former Eastern bloc dissidents:"

"... the immensely brave men and women of the civil initiative, killed, jailed, exiled, are unlikely to bring down the impersonal edifice of Soviet rule. Their great achievement is that, before all eternity, they have spoken the word of truth in time... Their

success, whatever the 'results,' is in having been at all, in having spoken the word of eternal truth amid the complexity of time."