

Preface 20

Ecclesiastes 12:12

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Lloyd Billingsley's

THE GENERATION THAT KNEW NOT JOSEF

by David Chilton

Communist governments rule by terror. The Party nobility sits above the populace in the character of an occupying force of a conquered nation. As one Soviet leader—before his own downfall—wisecracked, the Soviets believe in a two-party system: one in office, the other in jail.

Communist political theory, such as exists, is summarized in the phrase “dictatorship of the proletariat”; and it was V. I. Lenin himself who provided the best definition: “Dictatorship means unlimited power based on force, and not on law. . . . The scientific term ‘dictatorship’ means nothing more nor less than authority untrammelled by any laws, unrestricted by any rules whatever, and based directly on violence. The term ‘dictatorship’ has no other meaning than this” (quoted in Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* [3 vols: Oxford, 1978, 1981], Vol. 2, p. 498).

Communism is thus, at a most basic level, a theory of gangsterism, an ideology of brute power. Marxism-Leninism, as more than one astute observer has argued, is not so much a corpus of ideas as it is an organizational theory, designed to enhance the power of an elite. Lenin himself was a monster, the evil social engineer who formulated, set in motion, and presided over the early years of the Soviet terror. Within the first three years of organization, Lenin's secret police numbered 250,000 full-time agents (by contrast, the Tsar's secret police, at its height, had numbered a mere 15,000—up to that time the largest such organization in the world). But Lenin was small fry next to his successor, the former seminary student Josef Djugashvili, better known as Josef Stalin. Stalin deported millions of peasants to Siberia and other desolate regions; the inhabitants of entire villages were wiped out; concentration camps overflowed with prisoners; moreover, Kolakowski points out, “The destruction of the Soviet peasantry, who formed three-quarters of the population, was not only an economic but a moral disaster for the entire country. Tens of millions were driven into semi-servitude, and millions more were employed as executors of the process. The whole party became an organization of torturers and oppressors: no one was innocent, and all Communists were accomplices in the coercion of society. Thus the party acquired a new species of moral unity, and embarked upon a course from which there was no turning back” (*Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 3, p. 43). Eventually, according to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the purely political murders that took place under Stalin reached sixty million.

Why is it that Communist theocracies, which often begin with pleas for brotherhood and peace, have such a horrifying record of atrocity and mass murder? It is because socialism is at root a power theory. It is most fundamentally a dictatorship, an unrestricted, lawless authority, accountable to

no one, founded on violence. Such power is seductive, addicting; as Dostoevsky observed, “Whoever has experienced the power, the unrestrained ability to humiliate another human being . . . automatically loses power over his own sensations. Tyranny is a habit, it has its own organic life, it develops finally into a disease. The habit can kill and coarsen the very best man to the level of a beast.”

Apologists for Tyranny

It seems natural, therefore, that Christians, in exercising the prophetic ministry entrusted to them, should oppose tyranny wherever it appears. But such has not always been the case. In the 1930s, at the very time that Stalin was pursuing what Kolakowski calls “the most massive warlike operation ever conducted by a state against its citizens,” many of the most prominent Western intellectuals and churchmen became—in the face of all the evidence—ardent admirers and passionate defenders of the Soviet system. Writing of this phenomenon, historian Paul Johnson says: “If the decline of Christianity created the modern political zealot—and his crimes—so the evaporation of religious faith among the educated left a vacuum in the minds of Western intellectuals easily filled by secular superstition. There is no other explanation for the credulity with which scientists, accustomed to evaluating evidence, and writers, whose whole function was to study and criticize society, accepted the crudest Stalinist propaganda at its face value. They needed to believe; they wanted to be duped” (*Modern Times: The World from the Twenties to the Eighties* [Harper & Row, 1983], p. 275). The list reads like a *Who's Who* for the decade: Lincoln Steffens (who returned from the USSR with the observation that he had “seen the future, and it works”), Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, John Dos Passos, Walter Duranty, J. Robert Oppenheimer, George Bernard Shaw, Andre Gide, Jean-Paul Sartre, and many more. This group was, in the expression of Lloyd Billingsley, “the generation that knew Josef,” the intellectual vanguard who, seduced by the siren of “scientific socialism,” attempted to bring Stalin's Soviet millennium to the West. (Billingsley quotes an understandably anonymous young Eastern bloc athlete: “If Marx was a scientist, why didn't he first try communism on rats?”)

The author begins this fine little volume (the whole book is as witty as the title, chock-full of things I wish I'd said) with a close examination of some of the outstanding personalities of the back-to-slavery movement. Foremost among these apologists for tyranny were two whose roots were planted in the Christian faith: Anna Louise Strong and the Very Reverend Hewlett Johnson.

Anna Louise Strong (1885-1970) was the daughter of a Congregationalist minister noted for his defense of Darwinism. Like her parents, she attended Oberlin College,

founded by the radical feminist, perfectionist, and all-round Pelagian heretic Charles G. Finney. After receiving a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago (the youngest person, and the first woman, ever to do so), she went on to work in the real world, which came as a terrible shock. Forced to lay off a young man, she became acutely distressed and unhinged by the experience. She realized that what was needed was a world in which no one would have to be fired: "I knew enough to know that such a society was called socialism, and that I must be a socialist" (p. 49).

Miss Strong's search for the perfect society led her in the 1920s to the Workers' Paradise itself, the Soviet Union. Working as a correspondent/propagandist for Stalin's regime, she was most careful to follow every slight nuance in the party line, becoming, in Billingsley's words, a motor-minded groupie on cruise control (p. 53). Where George Bernard Shaw had rhapsodized that the Soviet prison system was so wonderful that prisoners had to be forced to leave ("As far as I could make out," he purred, "they could stay as long as they liked"), Anna Louise went him one better, claiming that criminals actually applied to the prisons for admission! (She also stated that it amused her to see how much she could deceive her gullible Western readers.)

After two decades of defending Soviet genocide and telling lies on behalf of the commissars, Anna Louise was suddenly thrown into prison by the guardians of public safety, without even applying for admission. Eventually released, she made her way to Communist China, where she applied her skills as a dedicated groupie to Mao's regime, which made a valiant attempt to out-Stalin Stalin; Mao murdered as many as 30 million countrymen in a single year. Miss Strong remained in the People's Republic for the rest of her life. Unlike the victims of Utopia, Anna Louise died of natural causes, at an advanced age. She had found the perfect society, one in which workers had no fear of being fired. The fear of being shot took care of that. Starvation helped, too.

Billingsley's apt summary of her career concludes: "Intrepid souls who care to investigate Anna's most interesting life will discover that the human potential for falsification is bottomless, however many letters follow the name and whether or not the graduation was, like Anna's, magna cum laude. Though Strong bore no children, her spiritual descendants are many. What is worse, many of the myths she perpetrated are alive and well. She is forgotten, but not gone" (pp. 53f.).

As Billingsley points out in his discussion of Hewlett Johnson (1874-1966), "Protototalitarian clergymen are a decidedly modern phenomenon. The early Christians, with all their glaring faults, never produced anyone capable of seeing in Alaric, the Visigoth king who sacked Rome, the coming saviour of the world" (p. 55). Like Anna Louise Strong, this Anglican Dean of Canterbury was a staunch defender of even the grossest excesses of Stalin's blood-soaked rule. He threw his support behind what the commissars called the Soviet "incorporation" (gobbling up) of other nations, gushed that Stalin—whom he admiringly always referred to as "The Generalissimo"—was "the embodiment of good-humored common sense," compared Lenin to Jesus Christ, and shrugged off the slaughter of millions with the explanation that there is, after all, no objective ethical standard: "The rightness or wrongness of any act must be judged by its whole context and consequences. In the light of its context it would not be wrong."

Again, Billingsley's summary is to the point: "In the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, the entry for the Very Reverend Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury, is longer than the one for Jesus Christ. Verily I say unto you, he had his reward" (p. 62).

The Dissenters

Although many of the Western elite's leading lights fawned blindly over "Uncle Josef," delighted at what unrestrained social engineering could accomplish, there were some who

woke up and courageously opposed the totalitarian trend of their age. One of the greatest of these—and the man who, clearly, has had the greatest personal effect upon Billingsley's thought—is Malcolm Muggeridge, who set off for the Soviet Union in the summer of 1932 to find everlasting peace and happiness. What he found was quite different, although his job as correspondent for a British newspaper was "easy enough; after all, there was only one source of information" (p. 73). He discovered that outright deception was the norm, not only for the government agencies which provided the "facts" and censored all reporting, but also for his fellow journalists, whose adulation for the Soviets was such that they deliberately falsified their accounts.

What was also surprising to Muggeridge, as Billingsley writes, was that "many of the early sympathizers with the USSR were pacifists. Refusing to serve in the armies of their own countries and opposing any military action by their respective governments, they changed their stance where class warfare was concerned. Perhaps they were only, like Hewlett Johnson, 90 percent pacifist, though in his case, through that other 10 percent, entire Soviet military parades could goose step with complete safety. Muggeridge reports that pacifists and representatives from the peace churches fairly swooned when the tanks rattled by and the planes roared overhead. *When it was international war they pleaded their conscience; when it was class war, they fixed their bayonets*" (pp. 74f., italics added).

Life in the Workers' Paradise became bitterly disillusioning to Muggeridge. But it was the horrifying Ukraine famine, which Muggeridge saw firsthand, that fully shocked him into reality; his realization that it was a planned, deliberate, government-created famine caused him to see how truly evil the system was. Then he spoke out, told the world what was really happening, and suffered a further body blow from Real Life: the discovery that to attack the Soviets automatically meant being pegged as a Nazi (who but a Fascist would oppose Communism?).

There are other reasons, as Billingsley explains: "In the West, particularly the Reformation countries, a long diet of sermons has caused wisdom to be associated with solemnity. Here Muggeridge has broken the rules. His writing has been satirical, iconoclastic, and barbed. Worst of all, he has dared to *laugh* at the fellow-traveling elite who must, at least until utopia dawns, take themselves with deadly seriousness. He has compared the World Council of Churches to a convention of drunkards holding on to each other lest, alone, they fall into the gutter. Interviewing trendy clergymen on television, he would ask, 'Bishop, is there an afterlife?' instead of inquiring about the Christian ethics of Third World communist guerrillas. He has continued to insist that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, that carnal pursuits are vain and lead to misery, that abortion is *wrong*. These are among the most unpopular words it is possible to utter. From the point of view of the liberal-left media, it is blasphemy" (p. 80).

Muggeridge can be happy about one thing, at least: He has never been accused of either cowardice or equivocation. On the question of why some Christian churchmen favor totalitarianism, he once said: "The answer, I believe, is terribly simple. A ghastly, fearful answer. You are indulgent towards the dictatorship of the proletariat because, in a sort of way, you are, or would like to be, a dictatorship of the proletariat yourselves. You are frustrated revolutionaries, and the spectacle of a revolutionary government in actual existence so intoxicates you that you fall on your knees, senses swooning, in awed worship. Like plain and reluctantly virtuous women fawning on brazen promiscuity you fawn on the dictatorship of the proletariat. When you hear of comrade so and so being taken for a ride you unconsciously lick your lips over the prospect of taking councillor so and so,

who opposes your scheme for giving free milk to elementary school children, for a ride. The dictatorship of the proletariat is all-powerful and mouths your aspirations; and you, who have for so long had to be content with spinning your ideas into words, see in it the possibility for translating them into deeds. Seeing this, you adore; and adoring, you easily become propaganda-fodder" (p. 81).

There were others who realized the truth in time, and who sought to make others aware. Responding to Picasso's statement that he "went to Communism as one goes to a spring of fresh water," Arthur Koestler wrote: "I went to Communism as one goes to a spring of fresh water, and I left Communism as one clammers out of a poisoned river strewn with the wreckage of flooded cities and the corpses of the drowned" (p. 85). Koestler too, who had the satisfaction of seeing his works burned by both Hitler and Stalin, was able to ridicule the absurdities of Sovietism:

Question: What does it mean when there is food in the town but no food in the country?

Answer: A Left, Trotskyite deviation.

Question: What does it mean when there is food in the country but no food in the town?

Answer: A Right, Bukharinite deviation.

Question: What does it mean when there is no food in the country and no food in the town?

Answer: The correct application of the general line.

Question: What does it mean when there is food both in the country and in the town?

Answer: The horrors of Capitalism.

Another famous dissenter from Communist orthodoxy is Milovan Djilas, who rose to the position of Vice President of Yugoslavia before breaking with the Party in 1954. In his books *The New Class* (Praeger, 1957), *Conversations with Stalin* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963), and *The Unperfect Society: Beyond the New Class* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), Djilas showed how and why Communism's internal contradictions inevitably result in a slave state. In *The New Class* Djilas wrote that "Communist regimes are a form of latent civil war between the government and the people." Billingsley comments: "As Lenin so succinctly put it—who whom? That is the question; who does what to whom. It is inescapable; in a planned society, there are the planners and the planned. . . . When one considers the man-made famines, the forced labor, the fraudulent trials, it becomes clear that this constant civil war is more than latent. It is a permanent *jihad*" (p. 105).

Although Djilas came to consider Stalin "the greatest criminal in history," he emphasized also that "Stalin did not invent the systems"; far from being an exception to the rule, Josef Stalin was the veritable personification of what Communism inescapably produces. As long as Communism exists, there will be the oppressive Soviet aristocracy, the "New Class," as detailed in Michael Voslensky's recent book, *Nomenklatura: The Soviet Ruling Class* (Doubleday, 1984), for which Djilas wrote the preface. Under Marxism there will always be a GULAG, and there will always be a New Class to run it. Stalin is a shining example of what Communism creates, not when it lapses or deviates or becomes excessive, but when it holds unflinchingly to its true course, when it is most faithful to its inner core of meaning.

Billingsley also has a chapter on George Orwell, whose classics *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have accomplished more than didactic essays ever could in capturing the essence of totalitarian societies. (*The Orwell Reader*, a good collection of his writings, is published in paperback [456 pp.] by Harcourt, Brace and Co. for \$6.95.) One of

Orwell's great passions was his struggle for an honest use of language, his lifelong opposition to the doublespeak used by the "bootlickers and whores" who worked as apologists for tyranny. Writing in "Politics and the English Language," Orwell said: "In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible. . . . Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenseless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets; this is called *pacification*. . . . Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them. Consider for instance some comfortable English professor defending Russian totalitarianism. He cannot say outright, 'I believe in killing off your opponents when you can get good results by doing so.' Probably, therefore, he will say something like this:

While freely conceding that the Soviet regime exhibits certain features which the humanitarian may be inclined to deplore, we must, I think, agree that a certain curtailment of the right to political opposition is an unavoidable concomitant of transitional periods, and that the rigors which the Russian people have been called upon to undergo have been amply justified in the sphere of concrete achievement.

"The inflated style is itself a kind of euphemism. A mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outlines and covering up all the details. The great enemy of clear language is insincerity" (*The Orwell Reader*, p. 363). As Orwell pointed out elsewhere, it is difficult to write clearly and well while one is trying to defend injustice.

First Church of Christ Socialist

So much for "the generation that knew Josef" and the evils he and his comrades produced. But Billingsley's reason for writing this "political" book—not his usual literary genre—is that there has arisen, in our day, a generation that is ignorant (willfully or otherwise) of Stalin and his petty imitators around the world. Where Muggeridge, Orwell, and several others learned their lessons, these modern bootlickers have not learned. Billingsley especially is concerned about the members of what he names the "First Church of Christ Socialist," the New Christian Left (represented by Ronald Sider, *Sojourners* magazine, and others), who seem to have undergone some sort of "objectivity bypass surgery" and are duplicating "the earlier record of servile apology toward Marxist dictatorships, coupled with an antagonism toward the West" (p. 137). While the modern evangelical leftists are generally traditional in their approach, resolutely making the same mistakes as their spiritual forbears, there is one striking difference: New Christian Leftists stay in the USA. Cuba and Nicaragua may be nice places to write about, but one shouldn't have to live there. Muggeridge was right: These are frustrated revolutionaries getting vicarious kicks.

Thus, while they tend not to follow up their prescriptions with active participation in Millennium-building, New Christian Leftists do see plenty of action on the intellectual front. "Increasingly, the evangelical community takes the *Sojourners* mentality seriously, to the point that it is widely thought that the majority of professors of social ethics in seminaries adhere to a leftist line. One reason for the popularity of radical Christianity among academics and students is that journals like *Sojourners* imply that to be on the left is to be intelligent and to be otherwise is reactionary and unintelligent. Malcolm Muggeridge once wrote that for the most part, the reverse is true" (p. 143).

Billingsley cites several examples of the New Christian

Left's ideological blindness, such as *Sojourners* editor Jim Wallis's explanation for the Soviets' murder of the 269 passengers on KAL 007 in August 1983: Sure, the Soviets were sort of guilty, but so are all of us, because of "the pervasive climate of fear, distrust, and hostility" among the nations, caused of course by the fact that the USA is a threat to world peace. There is also Wallis on the North Vietnamese government's cruel and sadistic treatment of those who try to leave its socialist Shangri-La: "In this respect," Wallis expansively concedes, "the revolution has become the regime and has begun to behave like governments everywhere." An incredulous Billingsley asks: "Really? Do governments everywhere do this kind of thing to potential emigrants? Does Iceland? Sweden? Belgium? Uruguay? As it happens, only socialist, revolutionary governments such as that of Vietnam have made crossing borders a tricky procedure, particularly on the way out" (p. 175).

We are treated to a bit more of the wit and wisdom of Wallis, this time on the subject of the "boat people" themselves, whom he castigates as "inoculated with a taste for Western lifestyle" and "fleeing to support their consumer habit in other lands." Congratulations are in order for Billingsley, who refrains from lapsing into profanity at this point but simply observes that "the conclusion is inescapable: many of the refugees to some degree *deserve* what they are getting" (p. 175).

Finally, there is Wallis on the Iranian hostage crisis, on which he wrote an article headlined: "We Could Just Ask Them to Forgive Us." At which point / lapse into profanity.

The Candle Sputters

The New Christian Left always apologizes for the USSR's atrocities, never criticizes socialism in principle, and always, always, ends up laying the blame for all the world's ills (and a good many ills that don't really exist in any universe) on the evil, rich, capitalistic USA. But a budding Paradise such as Nicaragua, now—*there* "the reign of God has arrived" with the blessed Advent of the holy Sandinistas, the heirs of St. Francis. Dr. Wayne Bragg, of Wheaton College, tells us that he actually discovered there "a government of the people, by the people and for the people." As for those minor matters of mass murder, genocide, forced migrations, and so on: Well, as one *Sojourners* writer put it, "Nicaragua is trying to be a light. Like any candle, it sputters sometimes" (p. 158). They may be butchers, but they're cute little fellas, aren't they?

New Christian Leftists are also very, very big on what they call "compassion," which in Doublespeak stands for as much government control of society as we can get away with at this benighted stage of History, and the confiscation of other people's money. One of the greatest of these hearts

overflowing with compassion is, of course, Dr. Ronald J. Sider, with whom many of us are already familiar. Sider can always be counted on to provide interesting comment, such as in his appalling book *Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope*, in which he advocates total disarmament, followed by greeting the incoming Soviet warplanes and ships with peace banners and bilingual pamphlets; Billingsley calls this "the world's longest suicide note" (p. 188). Never mind; anyone who disagrees with the New Christian Left's position on nuclear issues is, Sider claims, "sick" from "the wasting disease of normalcy" (p. 187). Somehow, I always had a hunch that whatever Sider's problem is, it isn't "normalcy."

The standard fare in New Christian Left publications is a no-frills Spartan diet: a style utterly devoid of humor and variety, an ineffably dull, boring, and wearying cant, expressed in morose and depressing imagery, combined with vague ethical standards, guilt-manipulation, pretentious sanctimoniousness about their own "deep" spiritual lives, and a shrill, strident demand for conformity. Unwilling to allow Christians to live a quiet life and attend to their own business, as St. Paul commands (1 Thess. 4:11), the New Christian Left demands that all men follow its own shabby shadow-image of reality. "Flannery O'Connor observed that a difference between Protestants and Catholics was that over-zealous Catholics often disappeared into a monastic order and were never heard from again, whereas Protestants were free to run around wreaking havoc" (p. 197).

All of this is leading, of course, straight to the socialist theocracy, the apocalyptic vision in which a thousand generations will get to know Josef and his many ideological siblings rather more intimately than anyone in his right mind would ever wish. Billingsley quotes C. S. Lewis's observations on the religious aspect of totalitarianism: "If we must have a tyrant a robber baron is far better than an inquisitor. The baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity at some point be sated; and since he dimly knows he is going wrong he may possibly repent. But the inquisitor who mistakes his own cruelty and lust of power and fear for the voice of heaven will torment us infinitely because he torments us with the approval of his own conscience and his better impulses appear to him as temptations" (p. 25). It is sobering to remember, as Billingsley reminds us several times throughout the book, that no Marxist government has yet become "liberal" or been overthrown.

The Generation that Knew Not Josef is an excellent introduction to its subject, a clear, forcefully written book that can be mastered in an evening. It will do a great deal of good. It is, moreover, enjoyable reading. And, while Billingsley uses his satirical gifts effectively, his humor is always gentle. Anyone who is offended by this work is probably either a Communist or a vegetarian.

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