

Utopian Dream or Dystopian Nightmare?

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By Lenny Cacchio

LEE’S SUMMIT, Mo.—In 1983, during the midst of the Cold War, I had the chance to take a trip behind the Iron Curtain into a country then known as Czechoslovakia (now divided into two countries, the Czech Republic and Slovakia). This was not exactly a mission trip, but it was close.

I was meeting up with a church group representing various countries that had received permission to hold our annual fall festival known as the Feast of Tabernacles in the Czech city of Brno.

This event was not to proselytize but to serve church brethren from East Germany who were allowed to make the trip to the neighboring Communist country without much trouble.

It was a trip that changed my life and perspective.

Under a watchful eye

We were told before we crossed from Austria to Czechoslovakia that we could talk to our East German brothers and sisters all we wanted while in the meeting hall, but once outside the hall we needed to be careful. Everything was being watched.

We were told that they were unable to receive religious literature, but, to get around that restriction, brethren in West Germany would write out in long-hand—in the form of a letter—articles from various sources and mail it to them.

The people from East Germany did not have enough money to buy meals, so they would take dinner rolls and so forth from the luncheon table and save them for their next meal.

Contrast of atmosphere

I remember the contrast in countries and atmosphere when crossing the barbed wire and fortifications between Austria and Czechoslovakia, and then back across to West Germany the following week.

One side was colorful, green and prosperous. The other was drab, gray and coldly inefficient. Public housing looked like public housing, and everyone lived in public housing.

The border was a maze of fortifications and barbed wire, and, unlike most places, the buses were searched by dogs and guards more thoroughly when leaving country than when trying to enter it.

The workers' paradise had rivers full of industrial waste. Protecting the environment was not a priority when there was not enough capital to both control pollution and support a barely above-poverty standard of living. If we had talked about carbon dioxide as being a pollutant, they would have either pitied us or laughed at us.

Through lens of Cold War

If ever there was a laboratory experiment to compare socialism and capitalism, of central control vs. freedom, it was the world as seen during the Cold War.

There could be no doubt which system delivered a better life for its people because Western Europe and Eastern Europe could not have been a starker contrast.

Central to that freedom was the contrast between those nations that allowed for religious liberty vs. those that actively discouraged it.

Why do oppressive regimes fear when their citizens are allowed to think for themselves on matters of faith?

I could go on about the citizens of Brno whom we talked to briefly on the streets and their furtive looks as we did so. I could talk about their concern about being trailed by informers and the lack of even basic goods.

Instead I will simply say that, when I landed at Kansas City International, I really did want to kiss the ground. My view of my blessings and my country were changed forever by a visit to a land where there was a famine of the Word.

Form of religion without power

So today, when I see what appears to be an intentional and planned disparagement of Christianity and the Bible in my own country, I think back to my weeklong foray into a time and place where faith was successfully marginalized to a few old churches visited mostly by museumgoers.

So, when prominent politicians begin using the term "freedom of worship" rather than "freedom of religion," my antenna goes up.

I thought of that nearly empty church and where the conventional wisdom of that worldview leads: You can follow whatever liturgy you want in specially designated places of worship, but be careful what you teach, make sure it's politically correct, and otherwise leave it in the building. You may have a form of religion, but you must deny the power of it.

Soothing music, dangerous words

I'll end this piece with a video [on my website]. You'll recognize the music and the artist ("Imagine" by John Lennon). The music is wonderful and soothing. That's part of the propaganda effect.

But listen to the words. Listen for the utopian dream of a world without God, without borders, without property.

Yet history teaches us that every time mankind tries to implement a utopian dream it becomes a dystopian nightmare. I saw it in 1983, and there are places in the world where it is happening today. We can't let them bring it here.