

**«The ideal of socialism is to emancipate the working people not only from the social and economic yoke, but also from the spiritual slavery of alien ideologies. Socialism is the only order which creates all the conditions for this allround emancipation of man, and which is able to realize it.»**

**ENVER HOXHA**

# **FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE**

by **HULUSI HAKO**

**What the bourgeoisie really means by «freedom of conscience». Its historic development. «Freedom of conscience» as an effective means used by the bourgeoisie to deceive and subjugate the masses. Sound Marxist-Leninist concepts and revisionist attempts to corrupt this concept**

**AS THE NEW BOURGEOISIE GREW AND DEVELOPED, AND ROSE IN THE PAST CENTURIES IN STRUGGLE AGAINST FEUDALISM, THE ABSOLUTE DOMINATION OF THE CHURCH, AND RELIGION, IT LAUNCHED THE SLOGAN OF «FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE» AS A POLITICAL DEMAND OF ITS OWN AND AS A POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL WEAPON. THE ESSENCE OF THIS DEMAND WAS THE RENUNCIATION OF THE USE OF VIOLENCE, OF STATE COERCION, TO**

*HULUSI HAKO – Professor, specialist in problems of Marxist philosophy.*

mould the feelings and thoughts of men. In particular, it stressed leaving people free to decide on their stand towards religion, for themselves, to be free to believe or not to believe in any kind of religion, and to renounce it freely, without any legal, moral or other imposition or sanction.

The feudal states maintained religion as an official, state, political institution. They did not allow the least violation of this ideology and they savagely persecuted any spark of science, any free expression of thought or human conscience, independent of religious dog-

ma; this persecution culminated in the barbarous acts of the inquisition, the most terrible weapon of feudal absolutism. The tortures and crimes of the inquisition in Europe and other countries show the savagery and cunning of the religious obscurantists.

Engels wrote, «The Middle Ages, had attached to theology all the other forms of ideology – philosophy, politics, jurisprudence, and made them sub-divisions of theology».

Religion was not just the privileged and favourite ideology, but also the only dominating ideology, almost absolute. It

sive world culture, who made a scientific criticism of the absurdity and harmfulness of the religious dogmas; they stigmatized the Vatican, the church and the whole of clerical activity as «perhaps the most terrible combination that has ever been set up against freedom, reason and the happiness of mankind» (Anatole France), or «at once the shame, terror and misery of catholic Europe» (Voltaire). Indeed they indignantly sent out the call: «Crush this outrage!» («Ecrasez l'infame!»), etc.

This ideological struggle seriously worried the entire clerical apparatus, and set it in motion, particularly the Vatican, the organized international centre of reaction and obscurantism. These dark clerical forces started a deceptive and demagogic campaign to present religion as an «essential freedom of man», a «sacred right», «the foundation of morality and education», «the essence of culture and art», a «factor of progress», etc. etc. Indeed the present pope has gone so as to assert, quite shamelessly that scientific studies confirm «divine truths», that there is no conflict between religion and science, and that the arguments between them have stemmed from the «weakness of human judgements».

But what has worried clericalism most, and continues to preoccupy it, is the question of establishing beneficial relations with the dominant policy; the clergy has been extremely active in this direction, and has made great efforts to suit religion to the spirit and requirements of the most reactionary policy of every epoch.

After having seized power and established its rule, the bourgeoisie clearly saw that religion could and must serve it with the same reactionary essence and social functions as those with which it had served feudalism.

Of course, the maintenance and support of religion by the previous orders has not come about purely because of political considerations. The deepest social roots of religion lie, as Lenin stressed, «in the domination of capital in all its forms». Marx said, «Religion is the conscience of man who has not yet found or has again lost himself; an inverted society gave birth to religion, to an inverted world outlook, for it is an inverted world. Religion is the

cry of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of a soulless system. Religion is opium for the people».

Thus obviously, the dominant policy could not go beyond or rise above the economic order. That is why the slogan of «freedom of conscience» remained merely a democratic illusion, to which the bourgeoisie did not remain loyal; it was unable to guarantee or respect it, although it likes to proclaim and advertise it formally in constitutions and laws. At best, the bourgeoisie rose against the feudal concept of god but not against god in general.

Under earlier feudal-bourgeois exploiting regimes, it was a very difficult and serious matter, fraught with danger, not to believe in religion or openly to oppose it. This occurred because religion was imposed by the social climate and opinion, where the tone is set by the state of the ruling class. Not to believe, or to oppose, religion, meant bearing moral, political and juridical responsibility. Backward social opinion would condemn you morally. Political consequences, too, such as persecution, and legal punishments, were not lacking. «He who departed from religion, ceased to be a citizen, and for this alone he was considered to be an enemy, whereas he who gave his life for religion was considered to have fallen for the fatherland» (Spinoza). «He who does not love and adore the king, has no religion either»; «Whoever is opposed to authority is opposed to God», «The state and religion are twins», «Whoever is opposed to God is opposed to the government» these ideas were current in religious writing; they were preached and maintained as entirely usual and natural under earlier orders.

Foreign invaders spread religious beliefs in our country by force, and used them for their reactionary interests, to divide and rule. The clergy of all religions were the most zealous servants of the foreign invaders and the reactionary ruling classes, without distinction.

The connection of the Church with the state, the clergy with the exploiting classes, and religion with reactionary politics, in the capitalist countries, is today a fact, and a vital necessity for both sides. For

was the ideological bulwark and the weapon of domination used by feudalism. Some ideologists of the early bourgeoisie have stigmatized the feudal monarchy and the church as identical enemies of freedom and human reason. «The main secret of monarchic government, and its greatest interest», wrote Spinoza, 300 years ago, «consists in keeping men hoodwinked, and the fear by which they curb them is concealed with the loud name of religion».

In its revolutionary struggle against feudalism and its ideological bases, the bourgeoisie gave rise to outstanding atheistic thinkers, representatives of progres-

instance, the U.S. Congress has proclaimed the expression «In God we trust» as a national motto, and the oath says that the nation is under the power of God. It has become a custom for the American House of Representatives to begin sittings with prayers by the clergy. «The grandeur of America, its strength and its genius – one president said, «is based above all on the religious spirit of its people. The recognition of the Supreme Being is the first and most important expression of Americanism. Without belief in God there can exist neither the American form of government nor American way of life». The American state emblem mentions God, while the British national anthem is «God save the king». While the pope prays to God to maintain the capitalist world in peace and tranquillity, Nixon thanks God in church for the ceasefire in Vietnam. These are very sophisticated methods of justification and exculpation, so as to shift on to «the will of God» any aggression or international banditry.

The Italian constitution grants the citizens only the right to carry out religious activity. In Greece orthodoxy has been proclaimed the dominant religion, and proselytism is forbidden. In Catholic Spain Protestantism is persecuted even today, while in Portugal criticism of the Roman Catholic church is forbidden. The Vatican has its own special gendarmerie. In many countries those conducting propaganda against religion are sentenced to fines and imprisonment. Workers who do not go to church are fined. In many plants, a mass is broadcast over the radio before work starts. In hotel rooms clients find a bible by the bed. In the armies of the capitalist countries, religion is organized and extensively preached. The soldier is not allowed to be an unbeliever; he must without fail be a believer, ready to endure sacrifices and be killed, thereby carrying out «the will of God». Any misbehaviour during church services is punishable by a military court.

Religious toleration, that is coexistence of different beliefs, and the avoidance of divisions and conflicts on a religious basis, constitutes an indispensable premise and an initial step towards guaranteeing freedom of conscience. But history shows that this initial step has not been taken

by the orders with exploiting classes. Religions themselves, with their intolerant character and essence, do not tolerate one another. Every religion, always and everywhere, has said that men are, either with God or against him, and woe to him who dares to come out openly against. Every religion knows only either followers, blind believers, or opponents and enemies, destined for the severest punishment. Every religion remains tendentious and intolerant towards science, progress and atheism, and towards other religions and all sorts of heresy. Religion cannot tolerate or allow questioning or violation of the authority and force of God.

Mankind has paid dearly for religious dogmas, and victims are still being caused. As we can see from the criminal deeds committed by the clergy and the fanatics, God outdoes even that «... disgusting pagan idol which would drink nectar only out of the skulls of those sacrificed (Marx).

The history of many countries bears witness to the hideous deeds and events, persecutions, clashes and bloody massacres which have been nourished and instigated on a large scale by religious fanaticism. The victims continue to this day. This religious fanaticism is manipulated according to the policy and interests of the ruling classes, or occupationist and colonialist powers.

These and many other facts show that the church and religion are part of the imperialist state apparatus, an important element of the reactionary ideological and political arsenal.

Then, in what does freedom consist in the so-called «free world?» As pointed out by the classics of Marxism-Leninism, so-called bourgeois democracy represents nothing but freedom to preach whatever is to the benefit of the bourgeoisie, that is, to preach the most reactionary ideas of religious obscurantism, in order to protect the exploiters. Bourgeois freedom of conscience is only a toleration of all kinds of religious conscience.

In the past social consciousness had been seized to a considerable extent by religious ideology. Thus, the entire problem of freedom of conscience has been reduced to and, concentrated on the question

of religion, this favourite child of the ruling classes. Articles of constitutions, laws, agreements and concordats have been drafted; pressure is exerted and demands made by the clerical forces; their feverish, multifarious demands, their insatiable ambitions and absurd and reactionary claims, have not been fulfilled yet. Things have gone so far that the imperialist bourgeoisie and, in its spirit and under its influence, the modern revisionists too have put on a par and almost identify «freedom of conscience» with «freedom of religion». In these conditions, if a critical stand is adopted or religion is violated in the least, the reactionary forces shout that «the laws are being trampled under foot», «freedom of conscience and the natural rights of man are being violated», «an attempt is being made to destroy freedom and civilization», and so on.

The exploiting class imposes itself on society with its own ideology, and with its religion. Definite social strata and groups are compelled to accept the «sweetened», «sugared» deception of this religious opiate. The working class, led by the party and its Marxist-Leninist ideology, takes up the banner of the struggle for democratic rights, and freedom of conscience.

In the conditions of the capitalist society, where the conscience of the working masses is violated by the ruling class and clericalism, the working class party sets forth as a programmatic requirement the struggle for the freedom of conscience, for the democratic right that everyone must be able to decide whether he wants to believe or be an atheist, without it being necessary for police to poke their nose into the matter; the state must treat religion as a purely «private question».

The working class party does not remain neutral towards religion; it does not flirt with it and is not tolerant towards efforts to «renovate religion», or unite it with socialism, as the parties of the II International did and as the revisionist parties are doing today. «Religion is opium for the people». This expression of Marx, as Lenin points out, constitutes the corner stone of the entire world outlook of Marxism in the matter of religion. All the present-day religions and churches, all sorts of religious commu-

nities and organisations, are always considered by Marxism to be organs of bourgeois reaction, which defend exploitation and befuddle the working class».

But how does the Marxist-Leninist party of the working class realize, and put in to practice, its programme? Certainly, not through ideological bargainings and empty words, as in so-called «dialogues» between the Catholics and modern revisionists, which have become the fashion in many capitalist countries. The party does not indulge in preliminary academic discussions and never brings the question to the fore, nor does it proceed from religious divisions instead of class political divisions. It clearly realizes that the yoke of religion on the masses is a product and reflection of the social, economic yoke, and that the deepest social roots of religion lie in the «rule of capital in all forms»; that is why it unites all the working people, irrespective of their religious belief, in the concrete struggle against the exploiters, and launches political slogans so as not to impair class unity in this struggle.

In both the capitalist society and the socialist order, the existence, exercise and domination of religious ideology constitutes the greatest violation of the human conscience, a grave offence and a humiliation to human reason and dignity, paralyzing the inexhaustible energies of the creative forces of man. The reasonings of the Khrushchevite revisionists, who claim to have guaranteed the «freedom of atheism» and the «freedom of religion», are a flagrant violation not only of the principles of Marxism-Leninism but also of the most elementary democratic rights; this is an entirely demagogic deception. To judge and act in this way is tantamount to releasing lambs to graze in the meadow where several hungry and insatiable wolves are roaming. The freedom of the lambs is quite limited; they graze in order to become a little fatter for the wolves.

The word «atheism» is needed by the Khrushchevite revisionists to camouflage their betrayal of Marxism-Leninism, to disorientate social opinion and to give the clerical forces an opportunity to spread religious obscurantism. As Lenin pointed out, the existence and exercise of religion does not show freedom of conscience and

thought, but «lack of conscience, ignorance, and obscurantism».

Freedom of conscience» does not have «two aspects» but one sole aspect and direction; through socialist socio-economic transformations, educational and cultural uplift, and atheistic and scientific work, to direct and speed up as much as possible the process of the continuous weakening of the force and influence of religious ideology in the life of society. We see the complete triumph of the democratic principle of freedom of conscience in our socialist society only through the progress made in freeing the conscience of the labouring masses from religious rubbish and remnants. The classics of Marxism-Leninism and our Party have written very clearly about this. This is one of the objectives of our society on the road of socialism. New Albania emerged from revolution and develops through revolution. «The freedom secured by revolution is the greatest freedom ever seen on this planet, for this is freedom for the millions».

Our socialist state, our laws, guaranteeing the freedom of conscience, can by no means defend religious obscurantism. In our country no action, by law or state decree, was taken against the religious institutions or the clergy, as the Vatican and the other reactionaries like to claim. In its development, our society created and is creating objective conditions for men to throw off the spiritual chains of religion, it lays concrete, sound foundations and opens boundless horizons of knowledge, science, socialist art and culture, for the elevation and allround education of every individual.

In no country and under no social order is there absolute, boundless freedom. The society imposes itself on man, on every individual, in economic relations, the system of education, political ideas and juridical laws, the norms of morality, and even in the simplest customs and habits. The individual grows up and is formed in society and through it. The question is what the society offers the individual, what it feeds his conscience on, and how it does this. Does it impose on him religious fog, mysticism and idealism, pessimism and uncertainty, or does it help him towards harmonious development with scientific knowledge and revolutionary cul-

ture? The first road is characteristic of the exploiting orders. Present-day idealist philosophers, lackeys of the imperialist bourgeoisie, assert for example that the philosophic stimulus must be developed not through inquiry but through revelation.

The second road is characteristic of our socialist order. The Marxist-Leninist concept of «freedom of conscience» extends to the complete emancipation of the human conscience from the chains of religious ideology and other bourgeois-revisionist ideologies. Of course, in our society, too, a correct relation is preserved between the freedom of the individual and the requirements of the social order. The upsetting of this relationship, in one direction or another, would lead us to degenerating bourgeois liberalism or to bureaucratic centralism, which would both equally undermine our socialist achievements.