

Understanding the Culture and Background of the Peoples and Assembly Work in Central and Eastern Europe

By Roger Brind

Introduction

This paper is an attempt at an analysis of events in the recent history of Central and Eastern Europe that have had affect on its peoples and their attitudes. It is based on two things – 35 years of experience travelling there and my professional interest in history. The history of Central Europe was a major component of my studies.

“Friend, do what you came for” (Matthew 27:50). These words in Hungarian had been cut out and hand stitched onto a large black banner. The banner was suspended over the main entrance of a Christian Camp in Hungary one summer in the 1970s. The camp was run with the grudging permission of the communist authorities. We were taken there by Laszlo Timar to see things first hand and to speak with the leaders. I was asked to speak to all present and thinking that this was the motto for the camp asked brother Timar what the words meant. He told me to look them up in my bible, which I did. When I looked at the verse and the context in which they were set I thought, “funny people” how could they use such an obscure verse as the basis of the bible teaching in their camp. I decided I would not follow the camp motto but would give a message on discipleship.

On the way back to Budapest, I asked brother Timar why they had used this text. He told me to think of the context. I did. It was the betrayal of the Lord by a friend. “Roger” , said brother Timar, “the people who are running that camp know there will be more than one Judas present! More than one who will be prepared to sell their friends for 30 pieces of silver. They know that all of them will look up the verse and they hope and pray that the Word of God will prick their consciences and bring them to an understanding of what they are doing.”

That was my introduction to the practicalities of the world of deceit, disinformation and corruption that ruled in the communist world.

Not long after that I drove a lorry from Berlin to Poland during the Martial Law period (1980-82). Peter Harris, from the Llandaff North Assembly in Cardiff, accompanied me. In our cargo we had a tonne of bibles, which we officially declared on the manifest. The customs officer who checked the cargo could not read German and actually sat on the box of bibles as he made us open up all the boxes of food and clothing. This satisfied him and he happily stamped our manifest. When we got into Poland and handed over the stamped import permission the believers were beside themselves with joy over the permission to import bibles. One said, “This is wonderful. We have 20,000 illegally imported bibles now we can use them without fear as we have one import permission. The situation in which the believers were living meant they had to use every opportunity to get the materials they needed for the work God had given them. They argued, biblically, that they had to “obey God rather than men”.¹ However the secrecy culture that grew up led to a small minority of believers taking personal benefit from the situation. It could be argued that the world of deceit, disinformation and corruption that ruled in the communist world had an influence within the assemblies and the lives of some individual believers too. This statement is fully substantiated as the papers of the “Stasi” (East German secret police) reveal that a number of believers were informers and collaborators. Tragically some were revealed to be members of the organisation. Drawing the line as to what was and wasn’t legitimate before God was not always easy.

Some years later I was preaching in Tirnaveni in Romania. The text on the platform was in three languages, Hungarian, German and Romanian. I asked why? I knew that all the assembly were Hungarian speakers. The believers explained that until recently Tirnaveni was a predominantly German village and that German-speaking believers were the largest group in the assembly. After the fall of the communist regime all ethnic Germans were given permission to return to Germany and almost all the German-speaking believers left to live in the Black Forest area of Germany. The Hungarian believers then took over the building and continue the work of the Gospel there. This opened my eyes to the changes that the believers in Central and Eastern Europe have had to go through and led me to think through how all the pressures of the political, religious and economic change have influenced their lives and witness.

¹ Acts 5:29

In the same year, at one of our camps, Janos Harmatta was speaking on the issues that believers are facing in the post communist world. He told how he had visited a building that once an assembly meeting hall in Slovakia. Now the local undertaker uses it as a mortuary. He said that among the shrouds he noticed a faded text in Hungarian that was written in the era when all of what is now Slovakia was in the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On another wall the same text appeared written in German in Gothic script. This dated from the Nazi era when the Germans gave Slovakia national identity for the first time as a German Protectorate. On the third wall the text appeared in Slovak. Sadly, political turmoil had succeeded in damaging the testimony so much that what had been a vibrant place of witness was now nothing more than a storage place for dead bodies. Janos' words were really challenging not only as they brought home the problems caused by political turmoil but he also asked, "Are our assemblies any more than storage rooms for dead bodies?"

"To be a Pole is to be a Catholic" is a Polish saying that Andzrej Turkanik used in an article that I helped him write for the Missions Magazine of CMML. I have learnt that it sums up the attitude of the man in the Polish street to his "Polishness". This attitude has grown out of centuries of interference and domination from the Germans to the West and the Russians to the East and now possibly even English Language Imperialism much of it of the American variety. In the view of the vast majority in Poland it is the Catholic Church that has protected the Polish language, culture and way of life from outside attack. Thus today Poland needs no other monarchy than that which it has in "Mary the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven". The fact that this Mary belongs to mythology not the scriptures does not worry the average Pole. Add to this a Polish Pope who ruled longer than any other Pontiff in modern times and there is much for this medium size nation of 40 million to be proud of.

These experiences, and many others, have led me to understand how important it is to understand the background and culture of those we seek to work with in Central and Eastern Europe. We need to face that those of us who live in Western Europe or further a field have had very different, political, historical, religious and cultural experiences that have shaped us and made us the people we are. I remember after my first visit to Czechoslovakia in 1969 that as we returned home we all agreed that our experiences of assembly life during our short stay demanded that we examine the scriptures to see if we could continue with this work. Some did and were happy to return the others didn't and never went back.

Today Central and Eastern Europe is made up of a number of medium and small sized nations that are all fiercely proud of their identity. It is not without significance that where as other nations are coming together to form larger power and trading blocs in Central and Eastern Europe the reverse has happened. The emergence of new states like a phoenix out of the ashes of Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia has increased the European family of nations from thirty-two to forty-one. The fact that many are now either members of the European Union or would like to be has more to do, in my judgement, with the protection that they see small states get from the EU rather than any commitment to a large political entity.

The experiences of people living in Central and Eastern Europe has been totally different from those of us who live in the United Kingdom and very different from those living in Western Europe. Their life experiences have been dominated by political instability, war and its aftermath without the support of the Marshal Plan, external domination, crises in identity, border changes etc.

I am going to particularly cover aspects of the culture and backgrounds of the people and assemblies in the countries I have visited for thirty-five years.

Poland
Czech Republic
Slovakia
Hungary
Romania.

I am sure that similar factors are an influence in all the countries that were once under both the domination of the "Three Black Eagle Empires"² of Central and Eastern Europe and later under Communist rule. As they have been influenced by many of the factors that will be explored in this paper.

² Prussia, Russia and Austro-Hungary all had eagles on their coat of arms.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire

Until 1918, the dominant force in Central Europe was the dualistic state of Austro-Hungary founded 1867 and I am going to focus the influences that have moulded the lives of people since then. However it needs to be pointed out that earlier events are also important. For example the work of Jan Huss in Bohemia and Moravia predate the Luther and later the Calvin led Reformation by more than a hundred years. The Counter-Reformation in Poland was almost 100% "successful" and remains so to this day. (If success is the right word to describe it?) Areas that are dominated by the Orthodox Church were not exposed to the Reformation in the same way as those that were dominated by the rule of the Bishop of Rome. The work of Count Nikolas Zinzendorf had a major effect in Moravia and Saxony and influenced the work of the Wesley's in Britain and later the New World rather than the other way around.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire as it was in 1910

Austro-Hungary was established as the result of compromise. This compromise involved the Hungarian nobility and the Hapsburg Dynasty seeking to maintain what had been the Austrian Empire to their mutual advantage. The Hapsburg's had dominated much of Europe since the days of the Holy Roman Empire. Most historians would agree that this came into being during the reign of Charlemagne who was born in 742 AD.

It was a multinational empire, made up of eleven principal national groups, who in an era of national awaking were in regular conflict with each other as well as the dominant Slav force, Russia to the east and the dominant Germanic force, the newly united Germany, to the west.

The Austrian Area of the Empire was dominated by the German-speaking minority (36%). The Czechs, Poles and Ukrainians to the north and east and the Slovenes, Croats and Italians to the south all wanted a greater say in Cisleithan affairs. Thus from the beginning of the new empire there were tensions that affected the life of all the people.

The Hungarian-speaking minority (48%) dominated the Hungarian Area of the Empire. The Romanian majority in Transylvania and eastern Banat, Slovaks in what today is Slovakia and Croats and Serbs, contested this dominance. The Hungarian Government's refusal to share power with the subject minority groups within the empire led to the Romanians and Serbs, in particular, looking for union with the newly founded kingdoms of Romania and Serbia.

The Ethnic Map of Europe in pre 1914 Boundaries

The Austro-Hungarian Empire entered the First World War on the side of the Central Powers. The national minorities remained loyal to the Hapsburgs for most of the war. However the collapse of the German will to continue with the fight and serious supply shortages in the summer of 1918 caused many to reconsider their positions and to demand their "freedom".

Before considering the post World War 1 situation it is helpful to examine the position of Poland the majority of which was outside of the direct control of the Austro- Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire.

Poland

Poland has a long and chequered history as a nation state. "Most Scholars agree that the original Slav homeland lay within the boundaries of modern Poland in the Odra (Oder) and Wisla (Vistula) basins. The Slavs subsequently expanded into territories to the east, south and west and became increasingly differentiated until, by AD 800, three main geographical and linguistic divisions had arisen; the East Slavs inhabiting a large part of European Russia, the South Slavs who settled in the Balkan Peninsula, and the West Slavs who settled in what is now Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and what was the German Democratic Republic (DDR).

The West Slavs suffered different fates; the Lusatians and Veleti were absorbed by German expansion, the Czechs and Moravians merged to form the nucleus of the Czech Kingdom, whilst the Slovaks became part of the kingdom of Hungary. The remaining tribes, including the Polanie, Wislanie, Pomorzanie and the Mazovians, joined together (in time) to form the Polish State.

In 1333-1370 Casimir the Great (Kazimierz Wielki) built Poland into a major Central-European power, increasing her territory by 2.5 times. There is a saying that "he found Poland built of wood, and left her in stone," so great was his activity as founder and planner of towns.

Under Casimir, in 1346, the first Polish Legal Code was made, and in 1364 the foundations of Krakow University (the second oldest in central Europe) were formed. Trade also became important due to Poland's position on the commercial routes leading from East to West and from South to North.

Casimir was the last King of a purely Polish state. Hence forward, dynastic problems provoked a series of unions with neighbouring states: Hungary (1370-84; 1434-44; 1576-86); Lithuania (1386-1795); Sweden (1587-1600); and Saxony (1697-1764). Only the Lithuanian union succeeded, creating a state, which dominated east-central Europe until the seventeenth century (the Polish Commonwealth).” 3

By 1795 Poland was wiped off the map as a result of a series of wars, treaties and the intrigues that dominated Central and Eastern Europe. This was a gradual process that grew out of the disastrous rule of the Electors of Saxony (1697-1763), the Alliance of the Three Black Eagles (Russia, Prussia and Austria – so named because they all had a black eagle on their coat of arms) who had entered into a secret alliance to maintain a paralysis of law and order in Poland in 1732 and the fact that the last King of Poland Stanislaw August Poniatowski 1764 – 1795 was “totally controlled by Catherine the Great Empress of Russia.”

“The King was forced to abdicate and taken to St. Petersburg (where he died in 1798). Many captured Poles were sent to Siberia but thousands more escaped to Italy where, in 1797, they formed a Polish Legion, led by General Henryk Dabrowski, fighting for Napoleon Bonaparte against Austria. The Poles hoped that by fighting on the French side against the Powers that had partitioned Poland they could free their country.”4

The Ottoman Empire

The rise and fall of the Ottoman Empire is another significant factor in the culture and history of Central and Eastern Europe. “This greatest of the Muslim states in terms of duration was founded in the late 13th century by the Ottoman Turks. It lasted until its dissolution after World War I in 1918. Its early phase challenged the Byzantine Empire, Bulgaria, and Serbia. In 1389, much of the Balkan Peninsula came under Ottoman rule. The Ottomans conquered Constantinople in 1453, bringing to an end the 1100-year-rule of the Byzantine Empire. Next the Ottomans gained control of Mamluk Egypt in 1517, followed by Algiers and most of present-day Hungary by 1529, all of Persia in 1638, and most of the region between the Black and Caspian Seas by the 1650s. These so-called Ottoman wars of conquest fixed in the imagination of the Europeans the image of the Muslim Turks as ferocious and religiously inspired warriors. Beginning in the 1780s, the Ottoman Empire began to weaken, as European powers gained strength and began to vie with each other for access to resources and markets in the Middle East. Most of the northern coast of the Black Sea had slipped away by 1812. The Ottoman Empire lost Greece, Egypt, and Serbia to European-inspired independence movements over the next 60 years. By 1900, Turkey was known as the “Sick Man of Europe,” and by 1912; it had lost nearly all of its European territories. Siding with Germany and the losing Central Powers in World War I doomed the Empire. With the signing of the armistice ending World War I, the Ottoman Empire was dismantled by the Allied Powers, paving the way for the creation of new individual states in the modern Middle East”.5

World War 1 and its Consequences

The Peace that followed the end of World War 1 was of enormous significance in Central and Eastern Europe. The old order of empire was completely dismantled politically and new nation states were born. However a new and menacing Soviet empire was being established in the East and the foundations of Nazism to the West were already in place.

Czechoslovakia

The Czechs were the first to proclaim their independence on October 28th 1919. Czechoslovakia was twice as big as the present Czech Republic with the regions of Slovakia and Ruthenia as the eastern provinces of the country. Hungary followed shortly afterwards, although Transylvania's Romanian majority joined Romania. The southern Slavs formed the state of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. However within a very short period further amalgamations took place, which eventually led to the formation of a Slav dominated, Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

³ Mieczyslaw Kasprzyk 2004

⁴ Mieczyslaw Kasprzyk 2004

⁵ www.theislamproject.org/.../Ottoman_Empire.html

In 1919, the Czechoslovak state contained an estimated 6,800,000 Czechs; 3,124,000 Germans; 1,967,000 Slovaks; 745,000 Hungarians; 462,000 Ruthenes (Rusyns), Ukrainians and Russians; 345,000 Jews; and 76,000 Poles. The Czechs formed the largest ethnic group, constituting 51% of the total population.

The Slovaks and Rusyns were officially "constituent" nationalities in the state together with the Czechs, but they were ruled by the latter, who created a centralized government and a national Czech ideology. T.G. Masaryk, the first president, generally regarded as a benign and benevolent leader, viewed the Slovaks and Rusyns as backward little brothers, while Edward Benes, his successor, steadfastly refused to admit any ethnic difference between Czechs and Slovaks, insisting they were one nation. This point of view was reflected in official statistics, which always lumped the Czechs and Slovaks together. The Germans who outnumbered the Slovaks, constituting 32.6 % of the whole population, were legally the equals of the Czechs, considered themselves with some justification to be second-class citizens.

The Slovaks proved to be the most vocally dissatisfied constituent nationality. The Slovak People's Party, led by a Catholic priest, Andrzej Hlinka until his death in 1938, constantly agitated for real autonomy. A treason trial of one, Vojtech Tuka, who claimed in 1928 that the Slovaks had been promised autonomy, was a symptom of the Czech-Slovak tensions through out the inter war period. It was only after the Munich crisis of September 1938 and Benes's resignation, that the next Czechoslovak government signed the Zilina Accord with the Slovaks creating a two nation state with two parliaments and two administrations. At the same time, Carpathian Rus was granted autonomy. These reforms lasted less than a year before Nazi domination became a reality by March 1939.

This domination affected every aspect of life – even the side of the road on which people drove. Until the events of 1938/9 Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia drove on the left. Hitler enforced Napoleon Bonaparte's rule "Keep right".

The Czechoslovak constitution and liberal language laws were generous to the minorities, but sometimes they were subverted, as with the Polish minority of western Silesia (Zaolzie). Here the Czech administration exercised constant pressure on the Polish Silesians to send their children to Czech, not Polish schools, and in general made life difficult for them. Such a policy was, however, the rule in all contested borderland districts in interwar Central and Eastern Europe.

In sum, the multinational Czechoslovak state was, like Yugoslavia, an oddity among national states. It might have had a chance to survive, given a great deal of time and long periods of prosperity, but it had neither. Switzerland, which has a similar ethnic mix, had both time and prosperity to develop as a multinational state, as well as a ring of mountains around it to deter invaders

Hungary

Following the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, at Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, most politicians and military commanders of the Monarchy favoured war against Serbia. Count István Tisza, the Hungarian Prime Minister, was opposed to the idea of declaring war but was persuaded by the Austrians, who in turn were influenced by Kaiser Wilhelm who believed that the Central Powers would be in Paris "by the time "the leaves fall from the trees".

The fighting gradually developed into trench warfare with heavy loss of life on both sides. In the first three years, Austro-Hungary lost three million men, and a million of these were Hungarian. The country was short of food, inflation was on the rise, and wages lagged far behind the rapidly changing prices, while those dealing in paper-soled boots and inedible rations reaped handsome profits.

Dissatisfaction was everywhere. From 1915, Count Mihály Károlyi, the leader of the political opposition, had been demanding a break with the Germans and a separate peace. Following the death of Francis Joseph, the new king, Charles IV (1916-1918), attempted to conclude that separate peace. He proposed a series of liberal reforms and concessions to the national minorities, but his attempts failed in 1917.

The 1917 February revolution in Russia had a great impact in Hungary; a wave of antiwar strikes swept over the country and Social Democratic Party fell under the communist's influence. The revolutionary socialist group of university students, the Galilei Circle, started organizing anti-militarist resistance in alliance with the trade union workers. Tension mounted rapidly in the country, which the government was unable to do anything about. Strikes and demonstrations engulfed the nation, and the revolutionary movement spread to the fronts.

By the summer of 1918, a National Council came into existence. It demanded a separate peace, Hungarian independence from Austro-Hungary, the recognition of the right of self-determination for the national minorities, land reform, and universal suffrage. On October 31, 1918, the masses, wearing asters on their caps, marched through the streets of Budapest and occupied the strategic points in the capital. On November 16, 1918, Hungary was proclaimed a republic.

Károlyi, the Prime Minister was a liberal politician. He was opposed to the war and sympathetic to the Entente Powers.⁶ He tried to alleviate the plight of the peasants and divided up his huge estates among them. Despite this, he was soon overwhelmed by the territorial demands and armed invasion of the Entente. On March 21, a communist regime took over under Béla Kun. The hastily conceived measures of the communists - nationalisation of all the lands and taking most of the economy into state control - met with resistance. Meanwhile the Red Army collapsed and the Romanian forces marched into Budapest. On August 1, 1919, the short-lived first communist regime of Hungary was overthrown.

After the fall of the communist regime and the departure of the Romanian troops from the country, a National Army created under the command of Admiral Miklós Horthy, the one-time aide-de-camp of Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary advanced on Budapest. Elections were held and on March 1, 1921, and the National Assembly appointed Miklós Horthy regent of Hungary.

After the election of the National Assembly, the Treaty of Trianon was signed. The provisions of this peace treaty were extremely severe. Hungary's territory was reduced to a third of its previous size, and the country was forced to pay a large indemnity. What's more, the territorial provisions of the treaty resulted in three million Hungarians being placed under the jurisdiction of neighbouring countries. The Treaty of Trianon shocked Hungary not only by severing millions of Hungarians from the mother country but also by wrecking Central Europe's historical economic region.

Between the two world wars Hungary achieved a measure of economic development, though suffering heavy losses during the universal economic crisis of the thirties. Hoping for the recovery of the territories that had been lost as a result of the Treaty of Trianon, Hungary in her foreign policy got more and more under the influence of the Axis Powers. As a result of the Vienna Verdicts agreed upon in 1938 and in 1940, Hungary in fact recovered some of the territories annexed to Slovakia and Romania.

The map below shows the changes brought about by the Treaty Of Trianon and the massive land area lost by Hungary. The greatest anomaly for the Hungarians was the fact that they lost what is now Burgenland to the Austrians who were defeated in 1918 too.

The Hungarian View is encapsulated by Hungarian historian who wrote, "They were harsh in the extreme: the area of Hungary was **reduced to 28 per cent** (yes: twenty-eight per cent) of what it had been, setting the arbitrary borders the country still has. And along with 72 per cent of its territory Hungary lost 60 per cent of its population to Romania, Serbia (which renamed itself *Yugoslavia* in 1929) and the newly created Czechoslovakia; for obscure reasons even Austria received a chunk (today's *Burgenland*)."⁷

His anger about this action is evident by his comments, "The Allies, although purporting to act under the banner of self-determination, refused Hungarian requests to hold plebiscites in the regions to be transferred to the so-called Successor State and with 'good' reason: at least one third of those now suddenly no longer in Hungary were pure 'ethnic' Hungarians. And, since the Trianon Borders were reconfirmed after the Second World War, there are still millions of Hungarians living just across the present borders of Hungary.

Poland

Poland regained its independence on November 11, 1918, the day World War I ended. Much of the credit goes to Jozef Pilsudski who persuaded the Germans to disarm and leave Poland without further bloodshed. Pilsudski's "war for the frontiers" against the Ukrainian militia in the southeast also ended peacefully. His attempt to pull Eastern Ukraine from the new Bolshevik state, however, was a serious miscalculation that almost cost Poland its newly acquired independence. The Bolshevik armies advanced within striking distance of Warsaw and it was only through skillful military intervention that Pilsudski managed to drive them back in August of 1920. This campaign, known as the "Miracle on the Vistula," saved the fledgling Polish

⁶ France, Britain and the USA

⁷ István Pálffy in sp.insyc@zetnet.co.uk

state and brought to the foreground the future Commander in Chief of the Polish Army, General Wladyslaw Sikorski.

The frontiers of the Second Republic (sometimes called the Versailles Poland), were formed along historical and cultural lines. There were, however, two major exceptions: Upper Silesia, whose population was still predominantly Polish was left outside the country's borders while Gdansk was transformed into the so called Free City of Danzig (Gdansk), within which Poland exercised only restricted authority.

The reborn Poland faced enormous difficulties. Four years of war had created massive devastation and more than a hundred years under Partitions had woven striking regional differences into the fabric of Polish society. The new country also lacked basic mechanisms a unified currency, an army and organized administrative services necessary to run an independent government. In addition the Polish authorities faces continual problems from both East and West. In the East the significant Ukrainian and Byelorussian minorities pressed for their rights and to the West the Germans continually demanded more and more freedom of movement in the Danzig corridor. Undaunted, the Poles tackled the challenges of reunification and Poland thrived in spite of the worldwide depression of the 1930's. By 1939, Poland enjoyed a steady population growth, expanding industrial sector and blossoming academic and cultural life. Unfortunately, the Polish military doctrine, following the guidelines established by Marshall Pilsudski, did not keep up with the threat of a modern total war. The country's military, although numerous and well trained, lacked the adequate equipment necessary to defend itself in view of the emerging threats. Attempts at developing modern armoured combat vehicles and military aircraft came to late to be of significance before the outbreak of World War II.

Romania

Romania entered into two agreements following World War 1, the Treaty of Saint-Germain with Austria and the Treaty of Trianon with Hungary these more than double its size, by adding the territories of Transylvania, Dobruja, Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, and part of the Banat to the Old Kingdom of Romania. The treaties fulfilled the centuries long Romanian dream of uniting all Romanians into a single country. Although the newly acquired regions brought added wealth and doubled the country's population to 16 million, they also introduced foreign nationalities, cultures, and social and political institutions that proved difficult to integrate. These differences aroused chauvinism, exacerbated anti-Semitism, and fuelled discrimination against Hungarians and other minorities. In the foreign arena, Romania faced Hungarian, Soviet, and Bulgarian demands for lost territories.

The King, Ferdinand feared revolution and fulfilled his wartime promises of land reform that provided for the expropriation and distribution of large estates in the Old Kingdom and new territories. The reform radically altered the country's land-distribution profile as the government redistributed arable land belonging to the crown, boyars, church institutions, and foreign and domestic absentee landlords. When the reform measures were completed, the government had distributed 5.8 million hectares to about 1.4 million peasants; and peasants with ten hectares or less controlled 60 percent of Romania's tilled land. Former owners of the expropriated lands received reimbursement in long-term bonds; peasants were to repay the government 65 percent of the expropriation costs over twenty years. The land reforms suffered from corruption and protracted lawsuits and did not give rise to a modern, productive agricultural sector. Rather, ignorance, overpopulation, lack of farm implements and draft animals, too few rural credit institutions, and excessive division of land kept many of the rural areas mired in poverty. Expropriation of Hungarian-owned property in Transylvania and the Banat created social tensions and further embittered relations with Hungary.

In October 1922, Ferdinand became king of Greater Romania, and in 1923 Romania adopted a new constitution providing for a highly centralised state. A chamber of deputies and a senate made up the national legislature, and the king held the power to appoint prime ministers. The constitution granted male suffrage and equal political rights, eliminated the Romanian Orthodox Church's legal supremacy, gave Jews citizenship rights, prohibited foreigners from owning rural land, and provided for expropriation of rural property and nationalisation of the country's oil and mineral wealth. The constitution's liberal civil rights guarantees carried dubious force, however, and election laws allowed political bosses to manipulate vote tallies easily. The constitution enabled Bucharest to dominate Transylvania's affairs, which further fuelled resentment in the region.

Scandals in the royal family in the mid-1920s involving Crown Prince Carol who married a Greek princess but continued a long-term liaison with a stenographer added to the instability of the country. Rather than

obey King Ferdinand's command to break off his love affair, in 1927 Carol abdicated his right to the throne in favour of his six-year-old son Michael and went to Paris in exile. Ferdinand died within several months, and a regency ruled for Michael. This resulted in political instability. Eventually in an effort to revive the country's fortunes and stability the leader of the National Peasant Party who came to power in the election of 1927 invited Prince Carol to return to his homeland. In 1930 Carol returned, and Romania's parliament proclaimed him king. He proved an ambitious leader, but he surrounded himself with corrupt favourites and continued his extramarital affair. This situation led to more and more instability and turmoil in both country and government.

Such instability assisted the rise the Iron Guard, a macabre political cult consisting of malcontents, unemployed university graduates, thugs, and anti-Semites that began attracting followers with calls for war against Jews and communists. Peasants flocked to their ranks, seeking scapegoats for their misery during the agrarian crisis, and the Iron Guard soon became the Balkans' largest fascist party. Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, their leader who once used his bare hands to kill Iasi's police chief, dubbed himself Capitanul, a title analogous to Adolf Hitler's Der Fuehrer and Benito Mussolini's Il Duce. His henchmen marched through Romania's streets in boots and green shirts with small bags of Romanian soil dangling from their necks. He goaded the Iron Guards to kill his political opponents, and during "purification" ceremonies Guard members drew lots to choose assassins.

After an Iron Guard assassinated Premier Ion Duca of the National Liberal Party in 1933, Romania's governments changed in rapid succession, fuelling the general discontent. Iron Guards battled their opponents in the streets, and railroad workers went on strike. The government violently suppressed the strikers and imprisoned Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and other Communists who would later rise to the country's most powerful offices.

In December 1937, when the National Liberals were voted out of office, King Carol handed the government to a far-right coalition that soon barred Jews from the civil service and army and forbade them to buy property and practice certain professions. Continuing turmoil and foreign condemnation of the government's virulent anti-Semitism drove Carol in April 1938 to suspend the 1923 constitution, proclaim a royal dictatorship, and impose rigid censorship and tight police surveillance. Carol's tolerance for the Iron Guard's violence wore thin, and on April 19 the police arrested and imprisoned Codreanu and other Iron Guard leaders and cracked down on the rank and file. In November police gunned down Codreanu and thirteen Iron Guards, alleging that they were attempting to escape custody.

In February 1934, Romania joined Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Greece to form the Balkan Entente; a mutual-defence arrangement intended to contain Bulgaria's territorial ambitions. By the mid-1930s, however, support for Romania's traditional pro-French policy waned, and right-wing forces clamoured for closer relations with Nazi Germany; at the same time League of Nations-imposed trade sanctions against Italy were costing the Balkan countries dearly. Germany seized the opportunity to strengthen its economic influence in the region; it paid a premium for agricultural products and soon accounted for about half of Romania's total imports and exports. The Little Entente weakened in 1937, when Yugoslavia signed a bilateral pact with Bulgaria, and Hitler gutted it altogether in September 1938, when he duped Britain and France into signing the Munich Agreement, which allowed Germany to annex Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland. After Munich, Romania and Yugoslavia had no choice but appease Hitler. On March 23, 1939, Romania and Germany signed a ten-year scheme for Romanian economic development that allowed Germany to exploit the country's natural resources.

The Holocaust

Present Day Europe with Holocaust Sites Marked

One of the greatest scars on human history was perpetrated in Central Europe and has played an important part in shaping the history, culture and attitudes of the peoples in these lands. Hitler and the Nazi Party gained power in Germany in 1933 and lost power in 1945 a period of only 12 years. And yet, by the end of the Hitler regime, the world had been plunged into a global world war, Europe was in a shambles and nearly 30 million had died. Among the dead were over 6 million Jews, men, women and children, who were systematically and efficiently slaughtered for no other reason than that they were Jews.

Additionally, an estimated 5.5 million non-Jews, including hundreds of thousands of gypsies, Polish nationals, evangelical believers, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, political criminals and others, were

systematically murdered. While some of these might, perhaps, be classified as executions of criminals and enemies of the state on political or military grounds, this was clearly not the case for the vast majority who were classified by the Nazi regime as inferior and, therefore, as "life unworthy of life."

The motivations for the Holocaust were twofold, racial as far as the Jew and the gypsy and socio-political for the remainder. There was little, if any, economic gain; in fact, it could be argued that the Holocaust brought economic loss to Germany. The victims presented no threat to the German nation, or to the Nazi regime. The Holocaust did not serve national security and territorial expansion. Its methodology, which included its efficiency, calculability, predictability and control are unparalleled in human history. It was ferociously intense and produced the systematic slaughter of millions human beings between late 1938 and early 1945. The extermination centres were based almost exclusively in Germany and Central Europe, although there were two centres in Belarus and Ukraine. The largest was in Oswiecim (Auschwitz/Birkenau) in Poland where more than 2 million died.

The effects of this era in history remain to this day. There are many who are still scared by them and many post war policies, ideologies and cultural attitudes have grown out of the perceived need to ensure that nothing like this ever happens again. Blame has been apportioned and reapportioned. The German nation, in a very honest appraisal of its history has accepted its role and responsibility and the annual "Repentance Day" held in November is evidence of this. However, what happened, has led to anti-German feeling among many in Central and Eastern Europe which many believe was encouraged by the Allies actions in the immediate aftermath of the war.

Believers have not been immune from the situation either. There is a dwindling group of both Jewish believers and Gentile believers from these countries who experienced the camps at first hand. During our early years of service it was common to meet believers who had been traumatised by the camps and were working that trauma out in the lives they led before God. Many of them were able to distinguish between the actions of the Third Reich and those of the German nation but the scarring was there.

During the communist era the sites of the Death Camps were used, as an education experience for all children and it was not hard to detect that the horrors of the holocaust were being used as an anti West German propaganda tool, with hidden attacks on the Allies too. This led to conflicts of interpretation and belief.

World War Two and the Rise of Communism

Central and Eastern Europe was the main theatre of war in Europe from 1939 until the Allied Landings in June 1944. The whole area was subject to the horror of modern warfare, wartime restrictions and then at the end of the war boundaries were redrawn. The result was millions were killed, millions were displaced and had to resettle and new power blocs came into place.

The war resulted in the death of 56,125,262 people. Nearly 40% were the 21,300,000 Russians, 12% were the 7,060,000 Germans and another 12% were 6,850,000 Poles. In percentage terms the Poles lost more than anyone else in that the almost 7 million who died were nearly 20% of the population.

Under the Yalta agreement in 1945 Poland and Germany experienced the greatest changes. Poland lost its territories in the east to the Soviet Union and gained large sections of what had been Germany up to the Oder- Nisa Line. Hungary also lost all the territory it had been given by the Axis powers in the early 1940s. In other countries there were minor boundary changes. These political decisions led to massive shifts of population. This affected every area of life, including the testimony of believers.

Large and effective assemblies were closed overnight as their members were displaced and forced to move, usually westwards. There are numerous examples of this but one will suffice. The famous spa city of Jesenik, now in the Czech Republic was the German City of Freiwaldau, before the war. It had a large Czech as well as German population. There was a thriving German speaking assembly there, which was attended by Czech believers too. The Yalta agreement moved the border and gave the city to Czechoslovakia. The Germans had to leave and with it the testimony they had set up disappeared. Today the building they had had has gone and a tiny Czech assembly meets in a building owned by the Hussite Church. In more recent times the large migration of the German minority from Romania since the fall of Ceausescu has had a similar effect in Transylvania.

Millions died in the European Theatre of the war and the aftermath of that war and among the millions were thousands of believers on both sides of the conflict. Young men with real spiritual gifts were caught up in the war and their lives changed and in some cases extinguished. For example, many young German believers from states like Saxony and Hessen, where there still are many assemblies, were sent to the Russian front. Some died there or were traumatised by the things they saw and were forced to engage in and this caused them problems for the rest of their lives. This resulted in a leadership, teaching or evangelistic gaps in some

assemblies. What was true for our German brothers and sisters was true for believers from all Central European States.

This effect was multiplied in the majority of these countries with the rise of communism. Those who escaped the deepest horrors of war were faced with the reigns of terror both physical and/or mental that engulfed the communist world order.

The Yalta Agreements not only brought new borders but also ensured the rise of communism in the spheres of Russian influence. The result was the fledging democracies of Central Europe were swallowed up by communist dictatorships. The whole of Central and Eastern Europe, with the exception of Austria, which was partitioned until the mid fifties, fell under communist rule. The forms of communism were different but the citizens of every country saw their human rights and their freedom to worship, as they wished, circumscribed in some way.

Communism was a centralised system, which dominated every area of life. Control and command were the key words and concepts, which determined actions. In a church context this demanded the setting up of or the controlling of nation wide committees, which had responsibility for all aspects of Christian Work. In most countries the stated goal was the eradication of religion deemed to be the "opiate of the people". The spiritual response to these dictates was to obey those who ruled in as far as that did not prevent the believers following Peter's rule in Acts 5 that we should obey God rather than man. The practical implications of this are well exemplified by advice that Professor Ferenc Kiss gave the assembly in Munkacs (Mukachevo – Ukraine), which became part of the Soviet Union after World War 2. He said, "Put the children in a room next to the assembly hall. Leave the door wide open and forbid them to listen." ⁸ This sound advice led to the law being obeyed and to many children and young people being saved. Hine commented, "It was amazing how many children got baptised on their eighteenth birthday the age they were allowed to listen to the Gospel!"

Christian work needed outside help and much of this was clandestine. This caused numerous debates both within Central and Eastern Europe and the wider world. The conflict between what was in practical terms "obeying the government and obeying God" was NOT easy to resolve. Very fine lines had to be drawn as to what was deception and what was faithfulness to God. To me the line was well drawn by a very dear friend of mine, who told the Stasi, in the former German Democratic Republic, "We will only smuggle what you will not allow to be sold openly on the street. If you make it legal for all who want bibles to have them then we won't smuggle them."

Literature support in terms of bibles, books etc was not the only type of help needed. Those in need required help too. Often that need arose through faithfulness to God, a refusal to compromise truth or simply because an individual was a believer. The support came in various ways. Many have said that the most important was individual fellowship through visits but in addition financial and material aid was much appreciated.

These are the some of the significant conditions out of which the society of Central and Eastern has grown. The freedoms of the last fifteen years have changed the countries again. Western influence, many would say, western economic imperialism has replaced the Soviet Union's Marxist empire. This has demanded a complete revolution in people's thought processes and has affected Christians too.

Conclusions with their Implications

Central and Eastern Europe has a totally different political history to Western Europe and the British Isles. This has caused the people to look elsewhere than government for protection and security of their culture and ideals. In many countries it was the state church, the language, significant writers, musicians, artists etc. who have sustained national identity. There is the danger that this can transfer into church and Christian activity as it did in England in the sixteenth century when the Church of England was formed mainly as a result of socio-political pressures rather than the doctrines of the Reformation, which it later embraced. Instability has been a key feature of life. In one life time people who have lived in the same village all the time have lived under the rule of at least three different countries and have been occupied by a least two foreign armies.

The whole of Central and Eastern Europe has been dominated twice in recent history by foreign powers and alien ideologies. This has made its people wary of anything dominated by a foreign culture. Americanisation is grudgingly accepted, as a part of the new way of life but the home, despite the intrusion of western culture in the media, is a bastion against this new way of thinking. This has long been the case, many Hungarians,

⁸ Stuart Hine in "Not You but GOD" 1982 published by the author page 56 of part 2

living in Romania have told me that during the Ceausescu regime when they got home, they moved into their mini Hungarian World and shut out all the pressures of the Romanian world that was all around them.

The dominant Church whether Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant still plays a large place in society. It is often seen as being both morally and physically the protector of the nation. It is the church that protects St Stephen's Crown in Hungary and Mary the Mother of God is Queen of Poland. One of the late Pope's biggest threats to the Communist regime in Poland was that he would prevent its leaders being buried in consecrated ground. A visit to Poland on November 1st is sufficient evidence of the size of such a threat. With the possible exception of the Czech Republic belief in God is not an issue. The issue is how that belief is exercised. Who has the truth? The Central and Eastern European world is not post Christian when comparing it with Western Europe many have belief in God.

The whole of the area has experienced at least fifty years of communism (Eastern Ukraine has 70 years). This experience was one of centralism, dependence on others, clandestine operations, ideological and propaganda warfare and of corruption. These experiences have had an affect on the people. They still influence the way people, particularly those who are over forty, think and act. However the legacy of the period has other effects. For example. Many capable people were unable to study for higher qualifications during the communist period. Now their children do have that opportunity but have few who can guide them as to the pressures of university and business life. In some places not having higher education has been spiritualised while in others it is seen as vital for spiritual development. Neither extreme is a valuable contribution to Christian life.

The Development of the work that can be loosely defined as brethren took place as the Austro-Hungarian and Czarist Empires were in decline and as the new countries of Central and Eastern Europe were developing. Such evidence that we have indicates that there was a beautiful spiritual partnership between German, British and local brethren. The tributes from Jozef Mrozek, Joseph Prower, and many others in Ransome Cooper's work on the James Lees 9 ably demonstrates this. There is little doubt that the key figures were local men such as those named above, Frantisek Kresina, Ferenc Kiss and many more. This should be a clear guide to us too. Those of us who are, under the hand of God, working outside our home cultures and language need to be true partners. As Paul encouraged Timothy we need to be loyal yokefellows. "Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life."¹⁰

⁹ James Lees – Shepherd of the Lonely Sheep published by Pickering and Inglis 1959 pages 79 - 108

¹⁰ Philippians 4:3

Understanding the Culture and Background of the Peoples and Assembly Work in Central and Eastern Europe

By Roger Brind

Introduction

This paper is an attempt at an analysis of events in the recent history of Central and Eastern Europe that have had affect on its peoples and their attitudes. It is based on two things – 35 years of experience travelling there and my professional interest in history. The history of Central Europe was a major component of my studies.

“Friend, do what you came for” (Matthew 27:50). These words in Hungarian had been cut out and hand stitched onto a large black banner. The banner was suspended over the main entrance of a Christian Camp in Hungary one summer in the 1970s. The camp was run with the grudging permission of the communist authorities. We were taken there by Laszlo Timar to see things first hand and to speak with the leaders. I was asked to speak to all present and thinking that this was the motto for the camp asked brother Timar what the words meant. He told me to look them up in my bible, which I did. When I looked at the verse and the context in which they were set I thought, “funny people” how could they use such an obscure verse as the basis of the bible teaching in their camp. I decided I would not follow the camp motto but would give a message on discipleship.

On the way back to Budapest, I asked brother Timar why they had used this text. He told me to think of the context. I did. It was the betrayal of the Lord by a friend. “Roger” , said brother Timar, “the people who are running that camp know there will be more than one Judas present! More than one who will be prepared to sell their friends for 30 pieces of silver. They know that all of them will look up the verse and they hope and pray that the Word of God will prick their consciences and bring them to an understanding of what they are doing.”

That was my introduction to the practicalities of the world of deceit, disinformation and corruption that ruled in the communist world.

Not long after that I drove a lorry from Berlin to Poland during the Martial Law period (1980-82). Peter Harris, from the Llandaff North Assembly in Cardiff, accompanied me. In our cargo we had a tonne of bibles, which we officially declared on the manifest. The customs officer who checked the cargo could not read German and actually sat on the box of bibles as he made us open up all the boxes of food and clothing. This satisfied him and he happily stamped our manifest. When we got into Poland and handed over the stamped import permission the believers were beside themselves with joy over the permission to import bibles. One said, “This is wonderful. We have 20,000 illegally imported bibles now we can use them without fear as we have one import permission. The situation in which the believers were living meant they had to use every opportunity to get the materials they needed for the work God had given them. They argued, biblically, that they had to “obey God rather than men”.¹ However the secrecy culture that grew up led to a small minority of believers taking personal benefit from the situation. It could be argued that the world of deceit, disinformation and corruption that ruled in the communist world had an influence within the assemblies and the lives of some individual believers too. This statement is fully substantiated as the papers of the “Stasi” (East German secret police) reveal that a number of believers were informers and collaborators. Tragically some were revealed to be members of the organisation. Drawing the line as to what was and wasn’t legitimate before God was not always easy.

Some years later I was preaching in Tirnaveni in Romania. The text on the platform was in three languages, Hungarian, German and Romanian. I asked why? I knew that all the assembly were Hungarian speakers. The believers explained that until recently Tirnaveni was a predominantly German village and that German-speaking believers were the largest group in the assembly. After the fall of the communist regime all ethnic Germans were given permission to return to Germany and almost all the German-speaking believers left to live in the Black Forest area of Germany. The Hungarian believers then took over the building and continue the work of the Gospel there. This opened my eyes to the changes that the believers in Central and Eastern Europe have had to go through and led me to think through how all the pressures of the political, religious and economic change have influenced their lives and witness.

¹ Acts 5:29

In the same year, at one of our camps, Janos Harmatta was speaking on the issues that believers are facing in the post communist world. He told how he had visited a building that once an assembly meeting hall in Slovakia. Now the local undertaker uses it as a mortuary. He said that among the shrouds he noticed a faded text in Hungarian that was written in the era when all of what is now Slovakia was in the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On another wall the same text appeared written in German in Gothic script. This dated from the Nazi era when the Germans gave Slovakia national identity for the first time as a German Protectorate. On the third wall the text appeared in Slovak. Sadly, political turmoil had succeeded in damaging the testimony so much that what had been a vibrant place of witness was now nothing more than a storage place for dead bodies. Janos' words were really challenging not only as they brought home the problems caused by political turmoil but he also asked, "Are our assemblies any more than storage rooms for dead bodies?"

"To be a Pole is to be a Catholic" is a Polish saying that Andzrej Turkanik used in an article that I helped him write for the Missions Magazine of CMML. I have learnt that it sums up the attitude of the man in the Polish street to his "Polishness". This attitude has grown out of centuries of interference and domination from the Germans to the West and the Russians to the East and now possibly even English Language Imperialism much of it of the American variety. In the view of the vast majority in Poland it is the Catholic Church that has protected the Polish language, culture and way of life from outside attack. Thus today Poland needs no other monarchy than that which it has in "Mary the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven". The fact that this Mary belongs to mythology not the scriptures does not worry the average Pole. Add to this a Polish Pope who ruled longer than any other Pontiff in modern times and there is much for this medium size nation of 40 million to be proud of.

These experiences, and many others, have led me to understand how important it is to understand the background and culture of those we seek to work with in Central and Eastern Europe. We need to face that those of us who live in Western Europe or further a field have had very different, political, historical, religious and cultural experiences that have shaped us and made us the people we are. I remember after my first visit to Czechoslovakia in 1969 that as we returned home we all agreed that our experiences of assembly life during our short stay demanded that we examine the scriptures to see if we could continue with this work. Some did and were happy to return the others didn't and never went back.

Today Central and Eastern Europe is made up of a number of medium and small sized nations that are all fiercely proud of their identity. It is not without significance that where as other nations are coming together to form larger power and trading blocs in Central and Eastern Europe the reverse has happened. The emergence of new states like a phoenix out of the ashes of Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia has increased the European family of nations from thirty-two to forty-one. The fact that many are now either members of the European Union or would like to be has more to do, in my judgement, with the protection that they see small states get from the EU rather than any commitment to a large political entity.

The experiences of people living in Central and Eastern Europe has been totally different from those of us who live in the United Kingdom and very different from those living in Western Europe. Their life experiences have been dominated by political instability, war and its aftermath without the support of the Marshal Plan, external domination, crises in identity, border changes etc.

I am going to particularly cover aspects of the culture and backgrounds of the people and assemblies in the countries I have visited for thirty-five years.

Poland
Czech Republic
Slovakia
Hungary
Romania.

I am sure that similar factors are an influence in all the countries that were once under both the domination of the "Three Black Eagle Empires"² of Central and Eastern Europe and later under Communist rule. As they have been influenced by many of the factors that will be explored in this paper.

² Prussia, Russia and Austro-Hungary all had eagles on their coat of arms.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire

Until 1918, the dominant force in Central Europe was the dualistic state of Austro-Hungary founded 1867 and I am going to focus the influences that have moulded the lives of people since then. However it needs to be pointed out that earlier events are also important. For example the work of Jan Huss in Bohemia and Moravia predate the Luther and later the Calvin led Reformation by more than a hundred years. The Counter-Reformation in Poland was almost 100% "successful" and remains so to this day. (If success is the right word to describe it?) Areas that are dominated by the Orthodox Church were not exposed to the Reformation in the same way as those that were dominated by the rule of the Bishop of Rome. The work of Count Nikolas Zinzendorf had a major effect in Moravia and Saxony and influenced the work of the Wesley's in Britain and later the New World rather than the other way around.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire as it was in 1910

Austro-Hungary was established as the result of compromise. This compromise involved the Hungarian nobility and the Hapsburg Dynasty seeking to maintain what had been the Austrian Empire to their mutual advantage. The Hapsburg's had dominated much of Europe since the days of the Holy Roman Empire. Most historians would agree that this came into being during the reign of Charlemagne who was born in 742 AD.

It was a multinational empire, made up of eleven principal national groups, who in an era of national awaking were in regular conflict with each other as well as the dominant Slav force, Russia to the east and the dominant Germanic force, the newly united Germany, to the west.

The Austrian Area of the Empire was dominated by the German-speaking minority (36%). The Czechs, Poles and Ukrainians to the north and east and the Slovenes, Croats and Italians to the south all wanted a greater say in Cisleithan affairs. Thus from the beginning of the new empire there were tensions that affected the life of all the people.

The Hungarian-speaking minority (48%) dominated the Hungarian Area of the Empire. The Romanian majority in Transylvania and eastern Banat, Slovaks in what today is Slovakia and Croats and Serbs, contested this dominance. The Hungarian Government's refusal to share power with the subject minority groups within the empire led to the Romanians and Serbs, in particular, looking for union with the newly founded kingdoms of Romania and Serbia.

The Ethnic Map of Europe in pre 1914 Boundaries

The Austro-Hungarian Empire entered the First World War on the side of the Central Powers. The national minorities remained loyal to the Hapsburgs for most of the war. However the collapse of the German will to continue with the fight and serious supply shortages in the summer of 1918 caused many to reconsider their positions and to demand their "freedom".

Before considering the post World War 1 situation it is helpful to examine the position of Poland the majority of which was outside of the direct control of the Austro- Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire.

Poland

Poland has a long and chequered history as a nation state. "Most Scholars agree that the original Slav homeland lay within the boundaries of modern Poland in the Odra (Oder) and Wisla (Vistula) basins. The Slavs subsequently expanded into territories to the east, south and west and became increasingly differentiated until, by AD 800, three main geographical and linguistic divisions had arisen; the East Slavs inhabiting a large part of European Russia, the South Slavs who settled in the Balkan Peninsula, and the West Slavs who settled in what is now Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and what was the German Democratic Republic (DDR).

The West Slavs suffered different fates; the Lusatians and Veleti were absorbed by German expansion, the Czechs and Moravians merged to form the nucleus of the Czech Kingdom, whilst the Slovaks became part of the kingdom of Hungary. The remaining tribes, including the Polanie, Wislanie, Pomorzanie and the Mazovians, joined together (in time) to form the Polish State.

In 1333-1370 Casimir the Great (Kazimierz Wielki) built Poland into a major Central-European power, increasing her territory by 2.5 times. There is a saying that "he found Poland built of wood, and left her in stone," so great was his activity as founder and planner of towns.

Under Casimir, in 1346, the first Polish Legal Code was made, and in 1364 the foundations of Krakow University (the second oldest in central Europe) were formed. Trade also became important due to Poland's position on the commercial routes leading from East to West and from South to North.

Casimir was the last King of a purely Polish state. Hence forward, dynastic problems provoked a series of unions with neighbouring states: Hungary (1370-84; 1434-44; 1576-86); Lithuania (1386-1795); Sweden (1587-1600); and Saxony (1697-1764). Only the Lithuanian union succeeded, creating a state, which dominated east-central Europe until the seventeenth century (the Polish Commonwealth).” 3

By 1795 Poland was wiped off the map as a result of a series of wars, treaties and the intrigues that dominated Central and Eastern Europe. This was a gradual process that grew out of the disastrous rule of the Electors of Saxony (1697-1763), the Alliance of the Three Black Eagles (Russia, Prussia and Austria – so named because they all had a black eagle on their coat of arms) who had entered into a secret alliance to maintain a paralysis of law and order in Poland in 1732 and the fact that the last King of Poland Stanislaw August Poniatowski 1764 – 1795 was “totally controlled by Catherine the Great Empress of Russia.”

“The King was forced to abdicate and taken to St. Petersburg (where he died in 1798). Many captured Poles were sent to Siberia but thousands more escaped to Italy where, in 1797, they formed a Polish Legion, led by General Henryk Dabrowski, fighting for Napoleon Bonaparte against Austria. The Poles hoped that by fighting on the French side against the Powers that had partitioned Poland they could free their country.”4

The Ottoman Empire

The rise and fall of the Ottoman Empire is another significant factor in the culture and history of Central and Eastern Europe. “This greatest of the Muslim states in terms of duration was founded in the late 13th century by the Ottoman Turks. It lasted until its dissolution after World War I in 1918. Its early phase challenged the Byzantine Empire, Bulgaria, and Serbia. In 1389, much of the Balkan Peninsula came under Ottoman rule. The Ottomans conquered Constantinople in 1453, bringing to an end the 1100-year-rule of the Byzantine Empire. Next the Ottomans gained control of Mamluk Egypt in 1517, followed by Algiers and most of present-day Hungary by 1529, all of Persia in 1638, and most of the region between the Black and Caspian Seas by the 1650s. These so-called Ottoman wars of conquest fixed in the imagination of the Europeans the image of the Muslim Turks as ferocious and religiously inspired warriors. Beginning in the 1780s, the Ottoman Empire began to weaken, as European powers gained strength and began to vie with each other for access to resources and markets in the Middle East. Most of the northern coast of the Black Sea had slipped away by 1812. The Ottoman Empire lost Greece, Egypt, and Serbia to European-inspired independence movements over the next 60 years. By 1900, Turkey was known as the “Sick Man of Europe,” and by 1912; it had lost nearly all of its European territories. Siding with Germany and the losing Central Powers in World War I doomed the Empire. With the signing of the armistice ending World War I, the Ottoman Empire was dismantled by the Allied Powers, paving the way for the creation of new individual states in the modern Middle East”.5

World War 1 and its Consequences

The Peace that followed the end of World War 1 was of enormous significance in Central and Eastern Europe. The old order of empire was completely dismantled politically and new nation states were born. However a new and menacing Soviet empire was being established in the East and the foundations of Nazism to the West were already in place.

Czechoslovakia

The Czechs were the first to proclaim their independence on October 28th 1919. Czechoslovakia was twice as big as the present Czech Republic with the regions of Slovakia and Ruthenia as the eastern provinces of the country. Hungary followed shortly afterwards, although Transylvania's Romanian majority joined Romania. The southern Slavs formed the state of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. However within a very short period further amalgamations took place, which eventually led to the formation of a Slav dominated, Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

³ Mieczyslaw Kasprzyk 2004

⁴ Mieczyslaw Kasprzyk 2004

⁵ www.theislamproject.org/.../Ottoman_Empire.html

In 1919, the Czechoslovak state contained an estimated 6,800,000 Czechs; 3,124,000 Germans; 1,967,000 Slovaks; 745,000 Hungarians; 462,000 Ruthenes (Rusyns), Ukrainians and Russians; 345,000 Jews; and 76,000 Poles. The Czechs formed the largest ethnic group, constituting 51% of the total population.

The Slovaks and Rusyns were officially "constituent" nationalities in the state together with the Czechs, but they were ruled by the latter, who created a centralized government and a national Czech ideology. T.G. Masaryk, the first president, generally regarded as a benign and benevolent leader, viewed the Slovaks and Rusyns as backward little brothers, while Edward Benes, his successor, steadfastly refused to admit any ethnic difference between Czechs and Slovaks, insisting they were one nation. This point of view was reflected in official statistics, which always lumped the Czechs and Slovaks together. The Germans who outnumbered the Slovaks, constituting 32.6 % of the whole population, were legally the equals of the Czechs, considered themselves with some justification to be second-class citizens.

The Slovaks proved to be the most vocally dissatisfied constituent nationality. The Slovak People's Party, led by a Catholic priest, Andrzej Hlinka until his death in 1938, constantly agitated for real autonomy. A treason trial of one, Vojtech Tuka, who claimed in 1928 that the Slovaks had been promised autonomy, was a symptom of the Czech-Slovak tensions through out the inter war period. It was only after the Munich crisis of September 1938 and Benes's resignation, that the next Czechoslovak government signed the Zilina Accord with the Slovaks creating a two nation state with two parliaments and two administrations. At the same time, Carpathian Rus was granted autonomy. These reforms lasted less than a year before Nazi domination became a reality by March 1939.

This domination affected every aspect of life – even the side of the road on which people drove. Until the events of 1938/9 Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia drove on the left. Hitler enforced Napoleon Bonaparte's rule "Keep right".

The Czechoslovak constitution and liberal language laws were generous to the minorities, but sometimes they were subverted, as with the Polish minority of western Silesia (Zaolzie). Here the Czech administration exercised constant pressure on the Polish Silesians to send their children to Czech, not Polish schools, and in general made life difficult for them. Such a policy was, however, the rule in all contested borderland districts in interwar Central and Eastern Europe.

In sum, the multinational Czechoslovak state was, like Yugoslavia, an oddity among national states. It might have had a chance to survive, given a great deal of time and long periods of prosperity, but it had neither. Switzerland, which has a similar ethnic mix, had both time and prosperity to develop as a multinational state, as well as a ring of mountains around it to deter invaders

Hungary

Following the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, at Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, most politicians and military commanders of the Monarchy favoured war against Serbia. Count István Tisza, the Hungarian Prime Minister, was opposed to the idea of declaring war but was persuaded by the Austrians, who in turn were influenced by Kaiser Wilhelm who believed that the Central Powers would be in Paris "by the time "the leaves fall from the trees".

The fighting gradually developed into trench warfare with heavy loss of life on both sides. In the first three years, Austro-Hungary lost three million men, and a million of these were Hungarian. The country was short of food, inflation was on the rise, and wages lagged far behind the rapidly changing prices, while those dealing in paper-soled boots and inedible rations reaped handsome profits.

Dissatisfaction was everywhere. From 1915, Count Mihály Károlyi, the leader of the political opposition, had been demanding a break with the Germans and a separate peace. Following the death of Francis Joseph, the new king, Charles IV (1916-1918), attempted to conclude that separate peace. He proposed a series of liberal reforms and concessions to the national minorities, but his attempts failed in 1917.

The 1917 February revolution in Russia had a great impact in Hungary; a wave of antiwar strikes swept over the country and Social Democratic Party fell under the communist's influence. The revolutionary socialist group of university students, the Galilei Circle, started organizing anti-militarist resistance in alliance with the trade union workers. Tension mounted rapidly in the country, which the government was unable to do anything about. Strikes and demonstrations engulfed the nation, and the revolutionary movement spread to the fronts.

By the summer of 1918, a National Council came into existence. It demanded a separate peace, Hungarian independence from Austro-Hungary, the recognition of the right of self-determination for the national minorities, land reform, and universal suffrage. On October 31, 1918, the masses, wearing asters on their caps, marched through the streets of Budapest and occupied the strategic points in the capital. On November 16, 1918, Hungary was proclaimed a republic.

Károlyi, the Prime Minister was a liberal politician. He was opposed to the war and sympathetic to the Entente Powers.⁶ He tried to alleviate the plight of the peasants and divided up his huge estates among them. Despite this, he was soon overwhelmed by the territorial demands and armed invasion of the Entente. On March 21, a communist regime took over under Béla Kun. The hastily conceived measures of the communists - nationalisation of all the lands and taking most of the economy into state control - met with resistance. Meanwhile the Red Army collapsed and the Romanian forces marched into Budapest. On August 1, 1919, the short-lived first communist regime of Hungary was overthrown.

After the fall of the communist regime and the departure of the Romanian troops from the country, a National Army created under the command of Admiral Miklós Horthy, the one-time aide-de-camp of Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary advanced on Budapest. Elections were held and on March 1, 1921, and the National Assembly appointed Miklós Horthy regent of Hungary.

After the election of the National Assembly, the Treaty of Trianon was signed. The provisions of this peace treaty were extremely severe. Hungary's territory was reduced to a third of its previous size, and the country was forced to pay a large indemnity. What's more, the territorial provisions of the treaty resulted in three million Hungarians being placed under the jurisdiction of neighbouring countries. The Treaty of Trianon shocked Hungary not only by severing millions of Hungarians from the mother country but also by wrecking Central Europe's historical economic region.

Between the two world wars Hungary achieved a measure of economic development, though suffering heavy losses during the universal economic crisis of the thirties. Hoping for the recovery of the territories that had been lost as a result of the Treaty of Trianon, Hungary in her foreign policy got more and more under the influence of the Axis Powers. As a result of the Vienna Verdicts agreed upon in 1938 and in 1940, Hungary in fact recovered some of the territories annexed to Slovakia and Romania.

The map below shows the changes brought about by the Treaty Of Trianon and the massive land area lost by Hungary. The greatest anomaly for the Hungarians was the fact that they lost what is now Burgenland to the Austrians who were defeated in 1918 too.

The Hungarian View is encapsulated by Hungarian historian who wrote, "They were harsh in the extreme: the area of Hungary was **reduced to 28 per cent** (yes: twenty-eight per cent) of what it had been, setting the arbitrary borders the country still has. And along with 72 per cent of its territory Hungary lost 60 per cent of its population to Romania, Serbia (which renamed itself *Yugoslavia* in 1929) and the newly created Czechoslovakia; for obscure reasons even Austria received a chunk (today's *Burgenland*)."⁷

His anger about this action is evident by his comments, "The Allies, although purporting to act under the banner of self-determination, refused Hungarian requests to hold plebiscites in the regions to be transferred to the so-called Successor State and with 'good' reason: at least one third of those now suddenly no longer in Hungary were pure 'ethnic' Hungarians. And, since the Trianon Borders were reconfirmed after the Second World War, there are still millions of Hungarians living just across the present borders of Hungary.

Poland

Poland regained its independence on November 11, 1918, the day World War I ended. Much of the credit goes to Jozef Pilsudski who persuaded the Germans to disarm and leave Poland without further bloodshed. Pilsudski's "war for the frontiers" against the Ukrainian militia in the southeast also ended peacefully. His attempt to pull Eastern Ukraine from the new Bolshevik state, however, was a serious miscalculation that almost cost Poland its newly acquired independence. The Bolshevik armies advanced within striking distance of Warsaw and it was only through skillful military intervention that Pilsudski managed to drive them back in August of 1920. This campaign, known as the "Miracle on the Vistula," saved the fledgling Polish

⁶ France, Britain and the USA

⁷ István Palfy in sp.insyc@zetnet.co.uk

state and brought to the foreground the future Commander in Chief of the Polish Army, General Wladyslaw Sikorski.

The frontiers of the Second Republic (sometimes called the Versailles Poland), were formed along historical and cultural lines. There were, however, two major exceptions: Upper Silesia, whose population was still predominantly Polish was left outside the country's borders while Gdansk was transformed into the so called Free City of Danzig (Gdansk), within which Poland exercised only restricted authority.

The reborn Poland faced enormous difficulties. Four years of war had created massive devastation and more than a hundred years under Partitions had woven striking regional differences into the fabric of Polish society. The new country also lacked basic mechanisms a unified currency, an army and organized administrative services necessary to run an independent government. In addition the Polish authorities faces continual problems from both East and West. In the East the significant Ukrainian and Byelorussian minorities pressed for their rights and to the West the Germans continually demanded more and more freedom of movement in the Danzig corridor. Undaunted, the Poles tackled the challenges of reunification and Poland thrived in spite of the worldwide depression of the 1930's. By 1939, Poland enjoyed a steady population growth, expanding industrial sector and blossoming academic and cultural life. Unfortunately, the Polish military doctrine, following the guidelines established by Marshall Pilsudski, did not keep up with the threat of a modern total war. The country's military, although numerous and well trained, lacked the adequate equipment necessary to defend itself in view of the emerging threats. Attempts at developing modern armoured combat vehicles and military aircraft came to late to be of significance before the outbreak of World War II.

Romania

Romania entered into two agreements following World War 1, the Treaty of Saint-Germain with Austria and the Treaty of Trianon with Hungary these more than double its size, by adding the territories of Transylvania, Dobruja, Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, and part of the Banat to the Old Kingdom of Romania. The treaties fulfilled the centuries long Romanian dream of uniting all Romanians into a single country. Although the newly acquired regions brought added wealth and doubled the country's population to 16 million, they also introduced foreign nationalities, cultures, and social and political institutions that proved difficult to integrate. These differences aroused chauvinism, exacerbated anti-Semitism, and fuelled discrimination against Hungarians and other minorities. In the foreign arena, Romania faced Hungarian, Soviet, and Bulgarian demands for lost territories.

The King, Ferdinand feared revolution and fulfilled his wartime promises of land reform that provided for the expropriation and distribution of large estates in the Old Kingdom and new territories. The reform radically altered the country's land-distribution profile as the government redistributed arable land belonging to the crown, boyars, church institutions, and foreign and domestic absentee landlords. When the reform measures were completed, the government had distributed 5.8 million hectares to about 1.4 million peasants; and peasants with ten hectares or less controlled 60 percent of Romania's tilled land. Former owners of the expropriated lands received reimbursement in long-term bonds; peasants were to repay the government 65 percent of the expropriation costs over twenty years. The land reforms suffered from corruption and protracted lawsuits and did not give rise to a modern, productive agricultural sector. Rather, ignorance, overpopulation, lack of farm implements and draft animals, too few rural credit institutions, and excessive division of land kept many of the rural areas mired in poverty. Expropriation of Hungarian-owned property in Transylvania and the Banat created social tensions and further embittered relations with Hungary.

In October 1922, Ferdinand became king of Greater Romania, and in 1923 Romania adopted a new constitution providing for a highly centralised state. A chamber of deputies and a senate made up the national legislature, and the king held the power to appoint prime ministers. The constitution granted male suffrage and equal political rights, eliminated the Romanian Orthodox Church's legal supremacy, gave Jews citizenship rights, prohibited foreigners from owning rural land, and provided for expropriation of rural property and nationalisation of the country's oil and mineral wealth. The constitution's liberal civil rights guarantees carried dubious force, however, and election laws allowed political bosses to manipulate vote tallies easily. The constitution enabled Bucharest to dominate Transylvania's affairs, which further fuelled resentment in the region.

Scandals in the royal family in the mid-1920s involving Crown Prince Carol who married a Greek princess but continued a long-term liaison with a stenographer added to the instability of the country. Rather than

obey King Ferdinand's command to break off his love affair, in 1927 Carol abdicated his right to the throne in favour of his six-year-old son Michael and went to Paris in exile. Ferdinand died within several months, and a regency ruled for Michael. This resulted in political instability. Eventually in an effort to revive the country's fortunes and stability the leader of the National Peasant Party who came to power in the election of 1927 invited Prince Carol to return to his homeland. In 1930 Carol returned, and Romania's parliament proclaimed him king. He proved an ambitious leader, but he surrounded himself with corrupt favourites and continued his extramarital affair. This situation led to more and more instability and turmoil in both country and government.

Such instability assisted the rise the Iron Guard, a macabre political cult consisting of malcontents, unemployed university graduates, thugs, and anti-Semites that began attracting followers with calls for war against Jews and communists. Peasants flocked to their ranks, seeking scapegoats for their misery during the agrarian crisis, and the Iron Guard soon became the Balkans' largest fascist party. Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, their leader who once used his bare hands to kill Iasi's police chief, dubbed himself Capitanul, a title analogous to Adolf Hitler's Der Fuehrer and Benito Mussolini's Il Duce. His henchmen marched through Romania's streets in boots and green shirts with small bags of Romanian soil dangling from their necks. He goaded the Iron Guards to kill his political opponents, and during "purification" ceremonies Guard members drew lots to choose assassins.

After an Iron Guard assassinated Premier Ion Duca of the National Liberal Party in 1933, Romania's governments changed in rapid succession, fuelling the general discontent. Iron Guards battled their opponents in the streets, and railroad workers went on strike. The government violently suppressed the strikers and imprisoned Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and other Communists who would later rise to the country's most powerful offices.

In December 1937, when the National Liberals were voted out of office, King Carol handed the government to a far-right coalition that soon barred Jews from the civil service and army and forbade them to buy property and practice certain professions. Continuing turmoil and foreign condemnation of the government's virulent anti-Semitism drove Carol in April 1938 to suspend the 1923 constitution, proclaim a royal dictatorship, and impose rigid censorship and tight police surveillance. Carol's tolerance for the Iron Guard's violence wore thin, and on April 19 the police arrested and imprisoned Codreanu and other Iron Guard leaders and cracked down on the rank and file. In November police gunned down Codreanu and thirteen Iron Guards, alleging that they were attempting to escape custody.

In February 1934, Romania joined Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Greece to form the Balkan Entente; a mutual-defence arrangement intended to contain Bulgaria's territorial ambitions. By the mid-1930s, however, support for Romania's traditional pro-French policy waned, and right-wing forces clamoured for closer relations with Nazi Germany; at the same time League of Nations-imposed trade sanctions against Italy were costing the Balkan countries dearly. Germany seized the opportunity to strengthen its economic influence in the region; it paid a premium for agricultural products and soon accounted for about half of Romania's total imports and exports. The Little Entente weakened in 1937, when Yugoslavia signed a bilateral pact with Bulgaria, and Hitler gutted it altogether in September 1938, when he duped Britain and France into signing the Munich Agreement, which allowed Germany to annex Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland. After Munich, Romania and Yugoslavia had no choice but appease Hitler. On March 23, 1939, Romania and Germany signed a ten-year scheme for Romanian economic development that allowed Germany to exploit the country's natural resources.

The Holocaust

Present Day Europe with Holocaust Sites Marked

One of the greatest scars on human history was perpetrated in Central Europe and has played an important part in shaping the history, culture and attitudes of the peoples in these lands. Hitler and the Nazi Party gained power in Germany in 1933 and lost power in 1945 a period of only 12 years. And yet, by the end of the Hitler regime, the world had been plunged into a global world war, Europe was in a shambles and nearly 30 million had died. Among the dead were over 6 million Jews, men, women and children, who were systematically and efficiently slaughtered for no other reason than that they were Jews.

Additionally, an estimated 5.5 million non-Jews, including hundreds of thousands of gypsies, Polish nationals, evangelical believers, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, political criminals and others, were

systematically murdered. While some of these might, perhaps, be classified as executions of criminals and enemies of the state on political or military grounds, this was clearly not the case for the vast majority who were classified by the Nazi regime as inferior and, therefore, as "life unworthy of life."

The motivations for the Holocaust were twofold, racial as far as the Jew and the gypsy and socio-political for the remainder. There was little, if any, economic gain; in fact, it could be argued that the Holocaust brought economic loss to Germany. The victims presented no threat to the German nation, or to the Nazi regime. The Holocaust did not serve national security and territorial expansion. Its methodology, which included its efficiency, calculability, predictability and control are unparalleled in human history. It was ferociously intense and produced the systematic slaughter of millions human beings between late 1938 and early 1945. The extermination centres were based almost exclusively in Germany and Central Europe, although there were two centres in Belarus and Ukraine. The largest was in Oswiecim (Auschwitz/Birkenau) in Poland where more than 2 million died.

The effects of this era in history remain to this day. There are many who are still scared by them and many post war policies, ideologies and cultural attitudes have grown out of the perceived need to ensure that nothing like this ever happens again. Blame has been apportioned and reapportioned. The German nation, in a very honest appraisal of its history has accepted its role and responsibility and the annual "Repentance Day" held in November is evidence of this. However, what happened, has led to anti-German feeling among many in Central and Eastern Europe which many believe was encouraged by the Allies actions in the immediate aftermath of the war.

Believers have not been immune from the situation either. There is a dwindling group of both Jewish believers and Gentile believers from these countries who experienced the camps at first hand. During our early years of service it was common to meet believers who had been traumatised by the camps and were working that trauma out in the lives they led before God. Many of them were able to distinguish between the actions of the Third Reich and those of the German nation but the scarring was there.

During the communist era the sites of the Death Camps were used, as an education experience for all children and it was not hard to detect that the horrors of the holocaust were being used as an anti West German propaganda tool, with hidden attacks on the Allies too. This led to conflicts of interpretation and belief.

World War Two and the Rise of Communism

Central and Eastern Europe was the main theatre of war in Europe from 1939 until the Allied Landings in June 1944. The whole area was subject to the horror of modern warfare, wartime restrictions and then at the end of the war boundaries were redrawn. The result was millions were killed, millions were displaced and had to resettle and new power blocs came into place.

The war resulted in the death of 56,125,262 people. Nearly 40% were the 21,300,000 Russians, 12% were the 7,060,000 Germans and another 12% were 6,850,000 Poles. In percentage terms the Poles lost more than anyone else in that the almost 7 million who died were nearly 20% of the population.

Under the Yalta agreement in 1945 Poland and Germany experienced the greatest changes. Poland lost its territories in the east to the Soviet Union and gained large sections of what had been Germany up to the Oder- Nisa Line. Hungary also lost all the territory it had been given by the Axis powers in the early 1940s. In other countries there were minor boundary changes. These political decisions led to massive shifts of population. This affected every area of life, including the testimony of believers.

Large and effective assemblies were closed overnight as their members were displaced and forced to move, usually westwards. There are numerous examples of this but one will suffice. The famous spa city of Jesenik, now in the Czech Republic was the German City of Freiwaldau, before the war. It had a large Czech as well as German population. There was a thriving German speaking assembly there, which was attended by Czech believers too. The Yalta agreement moved the border and gave the city to Czechoslovakia. The Germans had to leave and with it the testimony they had set up disappeared. Today the building they had had has gone and a tiny Czech assembly meets in a building owned by the Hussite Church. In more recent times the large migration of the German minority from Romania since the fall of Ceausescu has had a similar effect in Transylvania.

Millions died in the European Theatre of the war and the aftermath of that war and among the millions were thousands of believers on both sides of the conflict. Young men with real spiritual gifts were caught up in the war and their lives changed and in some cases extinguished. For example, many young German believers from states like Saxony and Hessen, where there still are many assemblies, were sent to the Russian front. Some died there or were traumatised by the things they saw and were forced to engage in and this caused them problems for the rest of their lives. This resulted in a leadership, teaching or evangelistic gaps in some

assemblies. What was true for our German brothers and sisters was true for believers from all Central European States.

This effect was multiplied in the majority of these countries with the rise of communism. Those who escaped the deepest horrors of war were faced with the reigns of terror both physical and/or mental that engulfed the communist world order.

The Yalta Agreements not only brought new borders but also ensured the rise of communism in the spheres of Russian influence. The result was the fledgling democracies of Central Europe were swallowed up by communist dictatorships. The whole of Central and Eastern Europe, with the exception of Austria, which was partitioned until the mid fifties, fell under communist rule. The forms of communism were different but the citizens of every country saw their human rights and their freedom to worship, as they wished, circumscribed in some way.

Communism was a centralised system, which dominated every area of life. Control and command were the key words and concepts, which determined actions. In a church context this demanded the setting up of or the controlling of nation wide committees, which had responsibility for all aspects of Christian Work. In most countries the stated goal was the eradication of religion deemed to be the "opiate of the people". The spiritual response to these dictates was to obey those who ruled in as far as that did not prevent the believers following Peter's rule in Acts 5 that we should obey God rather than man. The practical implications of this are well exemplified by advice that Professor Ferenc Kiss gave the assembly in Munkacs (Mukachevo – Ukraine), which became part of the Soviet Union after World War 2. He said, "Put the children in a room next to the assembly hall. Leave the door wide open and forbid them to listen." ⁸ This sound advice led to the law being obeyed and to many children and young people being saved. Hine commented, "It was amazing how many children got baptised on their eighteenth birthday the age they were allowed to listen to the Gospel!"

Christian work needed outside help and much of this was clandestine. This caused numerous debates both within Central and Eastern Europe and the wider world. The conflict between what was in practical terms "obeying the government and obeying God" was NOT easy to resolve. Very fine lines had to be drawn as to what was deception and what was faithfulness to God. To me the line was well drawn by a very dear friend of mine, who told the Stasi, in the former German Democratic Republic, "We will only smuggle what you will not allow to be sold openly on the street. If you make it legal for all who want bibles to have them then we won't smuggle them."

Literature support in terms of bibles, books etc was not the only type of help needed. Those in need required help too. Often that need arose through faithfulness to God, a refusal to compromise truth or simply because an individual was a believer. The support came in various ways. Many have said that the most important was individual fellowship through visits but in addition financial and material aid was much appreciated.

These are the some of the significant conditions out of which the society of Central and Eastern has grown. The freedoms of the last fifteen years have changed the countries again. Western influence, many would say, western economic imperialism has replaced the Soviet Union's Marxist empire. This has demanded a complete revolution in people's thought processes and has affected Christians too.

Conclusions with their Implications

Central and Eastern Europe has a totally different political history to Western Europe and the British Isles. This has caused the people to look elsewhere than government for protection and security of their culture and ideals. In many countries it was the state church, the language, significant writers, musicians, artists etc. who have sustained national identity. There is the danger that this can transfer into church and Christian activity as it did in England in the sixteenth century when the Church of England was formed mainly as a result of socio-political pressures rather than the doctrines of the Reformation, which it later embraced. Instability has been a key feature of life. In one life time people who have lived in the same village all the time have lived under the rule of at least three different countries and have been occupied by a least two foreign armies.

The whole of Central and Eastern Europe has been dominated twice in recent history by foreign powers and alien ideologies. This has made its people wary of anything dominated by a foreign culture. Americanisation is grudgingly accepted, as a part of the new way of life but the home, despite the intrusion of western culture in the media, is a bastion against this new way of thinking. This has long been the case, many Hungarians,

⁸ Stuart Hine in "Not You but GOD" 1982 published by the author page 56 of part 2

living in Romania have told me that during the Ceausescu regime when they got home, they moved into their mini Hungarian World and shut out all the pressures of the Romanian world that was all around them.

The dominant Church whether Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant still plays a large place in society. It is often seen as being both morally and physically the protector of the nation. It is the church that protects St Stephen's Crown in Hungary and Mary the Mother of God is Queen of Poland. One of the late Pope's biggest threats to the Communist regime in Poland was that he would prevent its leaders being buried in consecrated ground. A visit to Poland on November 1st is sufficient evidence of the size of such a threat. With the possible exception of the Czech Republic belief in God is not an issue. The issue is how that belief is exercised. Who has the truth? The Central and Eastern European world is not post Christian when comparing it with Western Europe many have belief in God.

The whole of the area has experienced at least fifty years of communism (Eastern Ukraine has 70 years). This experience was one of centralism, dependence on others, clandestine operations, ideological and propaganda warfare and of corruption. These experiences have had an affect on the people. They still influence the way people, particularly those who are over forty, think and act. However the legacy of the period has other effects. For example. Many capable people were unable to study for higher qualifications during the communist period. Now their children do have that opportunity but have few who can guide them as to the pressures of university and business life. In some places not having higher education has been spiritualised while in others it is seen as vital for spiritual development. Neither extreme is a valuable contribution to Christian life.

The Development of the work that can be loosely defined as brethren took place as the Austro-Hungarian and Czarist Empires were in decline and as the new countries of Central and Eastern Europe were developing. Such evidence that we have indicates that there was a beautiful spiritual partnership between German, British and local brethren. The tributes from Jozef Mrozek, Joseph Prower, and many others in Ransome Cooper's work on the James Lees 9 ably demonstrates this. There is little doubt that the key figures were local men such as those named above, Frantisek Kresina, Ferenc Kiss and many more. This should be a clear guide to us too. Those of us who are, under the hand of God, working outside our home cultures and language need to be true partners. As Paul encouraged Timothy we need to be loyal yokefellows. "Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life."¹⁰

⁹ James Lees – Shepherd of the Lonely Sheep published by Pickering and Inglis 1959 pages 79 - 108

¹⁰ Philippians 4:3

