

Can Stalin Concede Religion?

THE QUESTION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

in Russia was thrown into the political pool last month by President Roosevelt, and the ensuing concentric circles spread all over the public press. The political purpose is not our concern; the economic and social questions involved are more vital.

There cannot be in any country a political or social structure unrelated to its economy. Every culture, in the broadest sense of the term, rests directly on the economic conditioning of the people. And choice in the form of worship, as well as in any other individual expression, is impossible where the individual is denied choice as to the kind, place or results of his occupation. There is only one kind of freedom—human freedom; and when the individual no longer has the right to own things, he no longer has the right to worship or even to think as he sees fit.

Can a slave, anyone whose productive efforts inure only to the benefit of his master, select the church he wishes to attend? Suppose that church preaches the dignity and equality of all men, slaves and masters. Would it be possible for such a church to co-exist with the institution of slavery? If only those churches that teach doctrines consistent with the institution of slavery are permitted, then it is clear that religious freedom does not exist.

In Russia the right of the individual to own property is denied. No church that questioned that doctrine could be tolerated. Since on that point every western religion is at variance with Russian ideology, it would be necessary to establish a Sovietized State church, or to Sovietize the existing creeds, before religious worship could be allowed. That could hardly be called religious freedom.

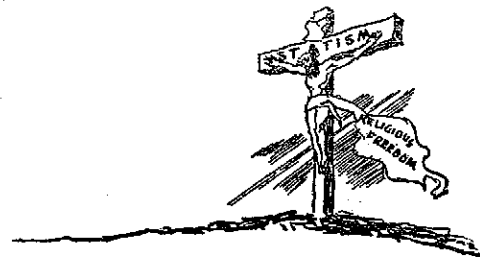
But the inter-relation of cultural freedom with economic freedom goes deeper. The entire scheme of a planned economy is involved. In any variation of that scheme the production of goods is predetermined; it is the plan rather than the market place which decides what human desires may be gratified. The political essential is complete control of the expression of such desires. An expressed desire for things not contemplated in the blueprint makes for social unrest and political instability. It must be curbed, by propaganda or by force.

Suppose the plan embraces the printing of so many Christian liturgies, and no more; so many Torahs, and no more; so many Korans, and no more. Also, for the building and maintenance of so many churches for each religion.

Any shift of the population from one to the other

of these three creeds, or any increase in the number of communicants of any one or all three, could not be accommodated until the planners had been duly advised of the change and had made provision for it in the next year's plan; by the time this had been accomplished a new unbalance may have occurred by desertions or accretions. And as for proselytizing by a church not recognized in the plan—well, that would be just too much.

Where private property prevails, every new desire—cultural or material—which shows its head



in the market place immediately calls suppliers into being. Only there can religious freedom obtain because only there can communicants freely exchange their goods for the necessary appurtenances of religion.

Therefore, regardless of Marxist diatribes against religion, the nature of controlled economy (Marxist or any other brand) precludes religious freedom, or any other kind of freedom. The President could convince us that the Soviet constitutional provision for religious freedom means what it says only if he could prove to us that private property had replaced State slavery in Russia.

Stalin can no more concede religion to the propertyless Russians than Hitler to the despoiled Germans.

The Freeman

A Monthly Critical Journal of Social and Economic Affairs

Published monthly by The Freeman Corporation, a non-profit corporation, at 30 East 29th Street, New York, N. Y. Officers and Directors: Lancaster M. Greene, Chairman; Anna George de Mille, President; Otto K. Dorn, Secretary-Treasurer; William H. Quasha, Counsel; Ezra Cohen, Francis Nelson, John C. Lincoln, Leonard T. Recker, Frank Chodorov. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of Congress of March 3, 1897. Single subscription, fifty cents a year; five or more, forty cents each. Title registered U. S. Patent Office.