FFWPU International: Dr. Sang Hun Lee on Communism That Erased God - Part 4

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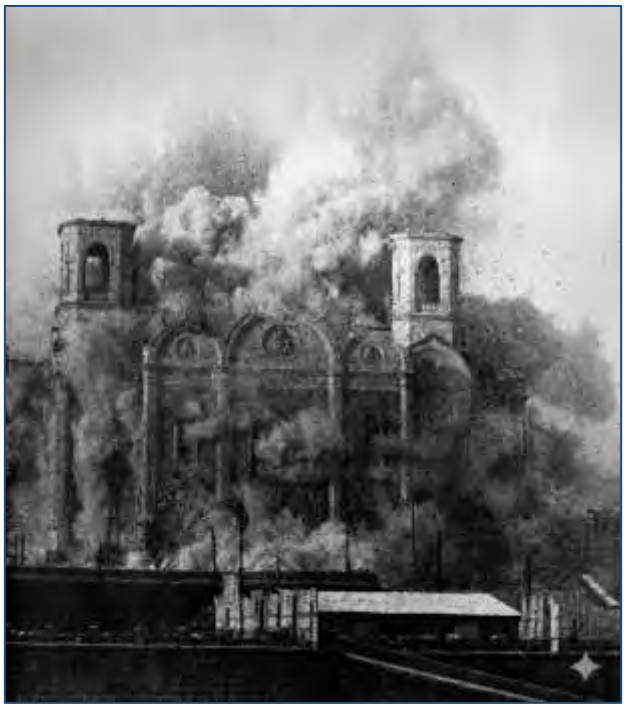

The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow being demolished by Soviet authorities on December 5, 1931. The communist regime's violent anti-religious policies led to the destruction of churches and the persecution of clergy and believers. The cathedral was later rebuilt through the request of the Russian Orthodox Church and support from the Russian government and the City of Moscow, and was rededicated in 2000 after approximately 70 years

Communism That Erased God: Dr. Sang Hun Lee's Ideological Journey and the Path to Human Liberation] - Human Liberation That Suppressed Faith

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Claiming to Liberate Humanity, Why Deprive Freedom of Faith?

Can an ideology that claims to liberate human beings dictate even what they are permitted to believe? Communism asserted that the working class had to break free from exploitation and class domination. It promised to bring an end to poverty and oppression, enabling people to become the masters of their own lives. However, communism regarded religion as an oppressive force that sustained the existing ruling order, claiming that even God was merely a human invention. In reality, across communist nations such as the Soviet Union and China, this rejection of religion translated into state-sponsored persecution of faith. A power that championed human liberation ended up oppressing religion and controlling the inner spirit of humanity.

If such a standard is applied, that critique must not halt before the Party and the state. The state is also an institution established by human beings. If a state established for humanity comes to dominate faith and conscience, human beings fall into yet another form of alienation. From the perspective of Dr. Sang Hun Lee, this is the very starting point for identifying the fatal errors in the communist view of religion.

The Claim That Humanity Created Religion

In his 1844 work A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction, Karl Marx took the critique of religion as the premise of all criticism, arguing that the critique of religion must transition into the critique of law and politics. This was four years before The Communist Manifesto appeared in 1848. Looking at the development of Marx's thought, one can see that it progressed from the critique of religion to political and social criticism.

Marx traced the origin of religion to human beings and society. Believing that people suffering in reality without control over their lives sought solace and salvation in religion, he argued that society - the very source of that suffering - had to be transformed first. This was the rationale behind transitioning from the

critique of religion to the critique of society.

However, the fact that some people find solace in religion can never justify the suppression of faith. Nor can explaining the sociological origins of religious forms serve as definitive proof that God is merely a product of human creation. Christianity identifies the starting point of faith in God's revelation. It holds that God revealed Himself first, and human beings responded to that divine call. A clear distinction must be drawn between humanity's participation in organizing churches and developing rituals, and the claim that the ultimate source of faith is a human invention. The fact that human beings have formed concepts about God is entirely different from the claim that God is nothing more than those concepts. Just because human understanding of nature is formed within the human mind does not mean nature itself was created by humanity. Likewise, merely analyzing the social processes through which religion took shape cannot disprove the existence of God.

Faith touches the realm of conscience in that it allows human beings to determine what is true and discern the purpose for which they should live. Yet when state power commands what people must believe or abandon, individuals can no longer live as masters of their own inner life. Genuine human liberation does not end with freedom from external exploitation and oppression; it must guarantee the freedom to discover life's purpose and choose whether to believe or not believe.

Liberated from Religion Only to Be Bound to the State?

Marxism-Leninism, grounded in atheistic materialism, rejected religion and treated it as something that ultimately had to be eradicated. Lenin designated freeing workers from religious belief as an ideological task of the Party. Indeed, following the rise of Communist regimes in the Soviet Union and China, large-scale suppression of religion was carried out. Church properties were confiscated, and clergy and believers were subjected to severe persecution. In the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church, which had been closely tied to the old regime, became a primary target of attack. Under the anti-religious policies of the Stalinist era, Soviet authorities went so far as to demolish the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow on December 5, 1931, to make way for the Palace of the Soviets. Other religions were not spared from this persecution either.

To a communist regime intent on monopolizing power, religious bodies posed an inherent threat. The church was a community that united people outside the bounds of the Party. It had its own leadership and organizational structure, and believers could evaluate even the commands of the state in light of faith and conscience. Thus, the suppression of religion involved not only a collision of worldviews, but also the overlapping political objective of controlling an independent community.

In his work The End of Communism, Dr. Sang Hun Lee pointed out that communist nations failed to realize the ideal society they had promised, leading instead to far worse outcomes regarding freedom and human rights. For him, human liberation could not be evaluated merely through declarations or political slogans. One had to ask how freely and truly humanly people actually lived under that system. This exact standard applies to religious freedom. If religion is considered wrong because it allegedly robs humanity of freedom, how then can state power that suppresses faith be justified? How can a system demand that people surrender their conscience to Party directives while arguing that one must never entrust conscience to clergy?

The state exists to protect human life. If the state goes so far as to dictate what to believe and what to deny, freedom of conscience becomes entirely subservient to the permission of political power. To claim to liberate human beings from religion only to subordinate them to the state does not eliminate alienation; it merely swaps the ruling authority.

Dr. Sang Hun Lee criticized Marxism for having set out toward human liberation only to end up becoming a "philosophy of human bondage." The paradox he identified is vividly revealed in the suppression of faith. If, instead of restoring individuals' freedom to judge for themselves, you compel

them to obey the Party and the state, the very structure of human bondage remains intact.

This problem does not belong solely to the past. Even today, in nations such as China and North Korea, the control and persecution of Christianity and other religions persist unabated. Independent religious activity continues to be treated as a threat to state authority.

Not all communist parties have pursued identical policies. Certain parties, such as the Japanese Communist Party, have officially recognized freedom of faith and permitted Christians to join their ranks. This demonstrates that ideological critiques of religion do not inherently have to manifest as the persecution of faith. Any regime that turns the critique of religion into the active suppression of faith has, by its own actions, betrayed the promise of human liberation.

Human Liberation Begins with Freedom of Conscience

Whether a religious practice is truly oppressive must be evaluated through concrete actions. If property is confiscated, violence is exerted, or subjugation is coerced in the name of faith, accountability must be demanded. But what if faith empowers a person to rebuild their life amidst despair, forgive their enemies, and lay down their very life to save others? The assertion that even such faith must be eradicated directly contradicts the ultimate goal of human liberation.

A state may assess whether the actions of religious individuals infringe upon the rights of others. However, it cannot step in to decide on behalf of the individual which beliefs will give meaning to their life. Even the work of rectifying shortcomings within religious institutions must proceed in a direction that expands human freedom. Coercion cannot produce genuine faith. A person might confess that they have renounced their faith out of fear of punishment, but such words do not signify conviction in the heart. In such moments, all that power manages to obtain is superficial obedience and silence.

In China's case, even officially recognized religions do not enjoy full guarantees of independent activity. How much more precarious, then, is the standing of religious communities excluded even from that framework? Freedom of faith must be guaranteed equally to minority religions. Faith communities with few adherents or those unfamiliar to mainstream society deserve equal protection, demanding even greater care to ensure they are not exposed to discrimination and marginalization. If only the majority faith is protected, religious freedom for the minority is effectively nonexistent. Freedom of religion becomes complete only when the beliefs of minority religions are safeguarded as well.

Churches can be shuttered and religious organizations can be dismantled. However, the fundamental questions concerning the meaning of life and humanity's ultimate origin remain. Persecution may force faith underground, but it cannot cultivate a truly free human being. This runs directly counter to the promise of human liberation proclaimed by communism.

Dr. Sang Hun Lee appealed to communists to return to the foundational starting point: the "restoration of human nature." In The End of Communism, he observed that communists, too, ultimately yearned for the genuine liberation of humanity. He addressed the very aspiration for human liberation that they had originally embraced. If human liberation is the true objective, persons of faith cannot be excluded from that liberation. The moment faith is targeted for control and subjugation, an ideology that champions human liberation turns into yet another chain of bondage.

Critiquing the errors of communism directly serves the safeguarding of human freedom for those living today. If communism is to remain faithful to its promise of human liberation, it must apply the very standards of criticism it leveled against religion to the state power it built. One cannot champion the freedom not to believe in God while simultaneously stripping away the freedom to believe in God. Any regime that tramples upon freedom of faith loses the right to speak of human liberation.