
Interview: Bishop S.E. Pangratos Majdanski Vsevolod

A moral challenge faces eastern Europe

S.E. Pangratos Majdanski Vsevolod, bishop of Skopelos, Ukraine and a representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, was interviewed by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach and Leonardo Servadio at the Seventh International Meeting for Peace, held in Milan, Italy Sept. 19-22.

EIR: In your speech you addressed the moral challenge posed by developments in Ukraine, particularly due to the degenerate character of certain western culture, or counterculture, which has been introduced.

Bishop Vsevolod: The degeneration began long before the West exerted its influence, and it is not western *culture*, but the bad aspects of western civilization. People in the East were deceived for 70 years by false promises, building hopes on something that did not exist, that has no spiritual existence. They were promised that the Golden Age would come and we would build socialism, the Golden Era, but it was all falsehood and the whole society existed on the basis of this belief. Then it collapsed because it was based on false premises.

When it collapsed, people started seeking some new formula, what to believe, how to believe, whom to believe. And they moved to the church. Younger people, who were not prepared for the church; older people who remembered some spiritual support they had received from the church. But the young people, who were never exposed to it and were forbidden from having intercourse with any spirituality or religious aspect of life, were bewildered. And here comes the West with all its glory, with all its material wealth, all kinds of gadgets, and everybody wants, wants, wants, and the material needs become more important than the spiritual needs. Thus we have a moral collapse, which will exist for quite a while.

I am a bit pessimistic, because to build up moral fiber, it has to start not only from religious people, religious institutions, but also from the family, it has to start from childhood. So I find to my chagrin that perhaps a whole generation is lost. But what is good is that—with God's help, and miracles do happen—there are people who had moved into the empty field of atheism, materialism, and disbelief, who will pick up the pieces, and the family will start building up morals,

philosophy, outlook, expectations of spirituality they can gain from the great religions of the world, especially from the religion of the Orthodox or Catholicism. So I do feel that eventually, maybe within a generation, we may see the moral fiber permeating through the family and children, and the next generation will regain its spirituality. Right now people are looking for something and don't know what they will find.

EIR: What you describe is something that has been observed in eastern Germany; people had great expectations, not for consumer goods but for infrastructure, industry, and improvement in their living standard. Is this the cause of the demoralization in Ukraine?

Bishop Vsevolod: We don't have to drink the whole ocean; we can take a spoonful and know it is salty. Take an example from Ukraine, which is similar to Germany, because all men are the same, they have the same desires and expectations. The eastern Germans, after unification, felt they'd improve their lot. Instead, they became weak; not everyone has job security, they have to struggle for security and find a job and they find it's not so easy, there's a competitive system and values are expressed in nothing but monetary fashion. Again, here we have the same phenomenon and again the only solution is for people to find richness in themselves, in spiritual life. If you are satisfied because of what you have, and you know that what you have is not more than what others have, because you have this kind of faith and conviction in higher powers, then you're not afraid of anything. You don't need to seek this false security in material things because it is all a sign of deprivation, anxiety, and insecurity. How can we satisfy somebody who is insecure? He can be a millionaire, he can be a Rockefeller, and still he will feel insecure, unhappy, and anxious, and go to his psychiatrist to seek help.

What we need is spirituality, a spiritual approach to life, and hopefully our clergy in Germany will stand up to that. They have to do double work. I see no solution to this. We will be hungry for material things no matter what we have. Because this hunger is not for things which we need. It is a hunger expressed because of anxiety, desire to be accepted, and that's all this materialism. If we have spiritualism, we don't need this.

EIR: What do you expect out of this conference, especially in reference to what Gorbachov said in his speech?

Bishop Vsevolod: There is a parable in the New Testament, the sower goes and sows the seed. Some falls between the rocks, some falls between the thorns, and some falls on good ground. I feel that the people who came here came with good will and good ground, and will sow the seeds. I'm impressed with the young, enthusiastic people of St. Egidio—young, bright, intellectual, and willing to sacrifice. So the seed sown here cannot be lost.