

And so Stephen dies at the hands of fellow Jews and Saul, later Paul, entirely approves of the killing. What were they afraid of?

Stalin is infamous now for the show trials of those deemed opponents to his particular brand of Communism: elaborately staged performances to prove the guilt of those already condemned. What was he afraid of? Anyone who challenged his own personal power, and this included any communist more fervent than himself. So the divide in Russia before the Second World War and afterwards, also, in the newly acquired states in Eastern Europe, was not between communism and its opponents but, in the words of Tony Judt in a superb analysis of Europe since 1945, *between those in authority – the Party-State, with its police, its bureaucracy and its house intelligentsia – and everyone else*. It was an exercise in power-play and, in Stalin's paranoid state, one's enemies could be anywhere, communist or non-communist, Jew or non-Jew alike.

This sort of power-play permeates human history. We see it at work at the time of Stephen and later, for example, at the time of St. Benedict when his first monks try to poison him, and even now, in the time of Pope Francis, where the knives are out to get him because he threatens the present structure of institutional power. And this, of course, is the story of Jesus, too.

Jesus was killed, not because he was a bad Jew, but because he was so true to his Jewish heritage and challenged the Jews, lost to the world of power-play, who saw success in terms of Temple worship and a highly structured institution which had become an end in itself. Like Jesus, Stephen, and later, Paul, deliberately place themselves on the other side of this power divide where their only power comes from above – the power of the Holy Spirit and a life lived by grace. Anyone who chooses to stand with them will inevitably find that the division is not between those in the Church or not in the Church but between those 'in authority' – the Party Church, with its curial officials and house intelligentsia – or, at least, some of them – and everyone else, especially those whose only power is that of love.

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