

2-1990

Editorial: On the Threshold of New Church-State Relations Regarding Religious Liberties

Paul Mojzes

Rosemont College, Rosemont, PA

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Eastern European Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mojzes, Paul (1990) "Editorial: On the Threshold of New Church-State Relations Regarding Religious Liberties," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol10/iss1/1>

This Article, Exploration, or Report is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

EDITORIAL
ON THE THRESHOLD OF NEW CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS REGARDING
RELIGIOUS LIBERTIES

Events in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe continue to change with an amazing and sometimes alarming speed. While most of these changes have been astonishingly non-violent, violence did erupt, regretfully, in several places. The degree of anger and violence is seemingly in proportion to the degree of oppression. It is not surprising that the greatest amount of violence erupted in the U.S.S.R. and Romania. Surprisingly repressive Bulgaria is an exception to this pattern thus far. One might expect that if changes are to occur in Albania, they, too, are likely to be violent.

When I wrote the "From the Editor" essay in the last issue (Vol. IX, No. 6), I made an analogy of the predicament of the Romanian church leaders vis-a-vis Nicolae Ceaucescu with the apocalyptic Biblical book of Daniel. Little could I anticipate that the turn of events would so soon take an apocalyptic dimension and an apocalyptic ending for the tyrant. He and the structures that he built, as is now evident, were fearful beasts who had clay feet. We pray that the Babylonian captivity of the churches in Romania comes to an end. Whether it is wise, as the Reverend Michael Bourdeaux of Keston College (United Kingdom) is reputed to have called for, to remove those church leaders who have not spoken out against the tyrant, is debatable. Accountability is as needed in the churches as in the government and new beginnings might be easier with a new leadership, but the degree of repression was so severe that allowances need to be made for the terrible predicament which these people faced. In any case it does not seem to be our task to initiate the call for removal of any Soviet or Eastern European leadership; that is best done from within and undoubtedly there will be acute tensions and calls for resignation over issues of cooperation with the past governments in many churches in Eastern Europe.

What is remarkable is that people often rallied around the churches during the dramatic events, that many clergy were in the forefront of social and political movements arising out of them, that many additional clergy aided the grieving as well as the celebrating populace. The churches were often some of the most immediate beneficiaries of the transformations as all new governments proclaimed their desire to guarantee true religious liberties rather than the facade of religious liberties so cynically paraded by the communist governments of the past. It will be fascinating to watch the new developing relationships between church and state.

In a research project on religious liberty in Eastern Europe I explicated a typology of church state relations which can be summarized here as follows:

Type A society: a state church which has monopoly and exclusive support by the government.

Type B society: equality of all religions before the law with the government promoting religion but restricting atheism.

Type C society: the state persecutes and subjugates all religions.

Type D society: the state is neutral toward the exercise of religion or atheism, allowing genuine freedom to believe or not to believe.

The latter, at least in regard to Eastern Europe, seemed to be an utopian model of a more distant future because Type C held sway in different degrees of severity and intolerance. Alternatives for Type C seem to be realistic options for the not so distant future.

It should be fascinating to watch in which direction the new governments will go. Undoubtedly not in the reestablishment of Type A, for that would be bad not only for atheists but also for the non-state religions. It would seem that Type D is more logical for Eastern Europe than Type B, though a country such as Poland may well opt for Type B. In any case Type C will hopefully disappear altogether from the human horizon as it surely represents a severe restriction of human rights and caused almost incomprehensible misery for millions.

The greatest danger appears to be the volatile bonding of religion and nationalism that has already led to some excesses, such as the Armenian Christian vs. Azerbaijani Shi'ite Muslims, the Bulgarian Orthodox vs. the Turkish Muslims in Bulgaria, as well as the Serbian Orthodox vs. the Albanian Muslims and vs. the Croatian and Slovene Catholics in Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia, Romania, and the U.S.S.R. seem most vulnerable to the religio-nationalistic conflicts, reaching a level of violence although practically no Eastern European country is likely to avoid some confrontations of this kind. It is our hope that the leadership of religious and national groups will exert a prudent influence in order not to abuse this historical legacy. The legislation of a few of the countries in Eastern Europe contained prohibitions of the misuse of religion for political purposes and the fanning of national and religious hatred. Most of that legislation was sweepingly broad in scope and led to government abuses of religious liberty. The problems that those provisions addressed, however, are quite real and potentially very explosive in the near future. Religious people East and West need to find ways of cooperating in order to prevent potential violence and to defuse it and lead to reconciliation in places where it already reached the dangerous stage. Methodologies of dialogue that have been used with some success in various parts of the world need to be taught and implemented in order to prevent dangerous escalations of the long existing but partially suppressed tensions. It may not be possible to prevent the Balkanization of Eastern Europe for the time being, but it should be possible to prevent its Lebanonization.

Paul Mojzes, Editor