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In This Issue

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In This Issue

The position of the Jewish community in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has been an ongoing concern for many millions of Jews and non-Jews throughout the world. In recent issues (Vol. 6, Nos. 4 and 5, and Vol. 7, No. 3) we printed some articles on the situation in East Germany and the Soviet Union. In this issue we turn to Poland.

One of the factors influencing the European Jewish existence is anti-Semitism in its social, racial, nationalistic, and religious forms. Such anti-Semitism used to be blatant, open, and during the war years it culminated in crazed destructiveness when many claimed anti-Semitism to be a virtue rather than a vice. With the defeat of Nazism much has changed, including a retreat of anti-Semitism from the arena of public discourse in practically all Eastern European societies. Generally, social movements "come out of the closet" with the passage of time; anti-Semitism, on the contrary, became closeted. Generally there is either neglect and silence, sometimes vigorous denial, or spacious rationalization, but most often anti-Semitism is "alive and well" not only in the people's psyche (Christian and atheist alike), but thrives publicly in the form of "anti-Zionism." The "imperialist state of Israel" has been the target of attack presumably for the protection of the rights of Palestinian Arabs but all too frequently this is a thinly veiled excuse to give open vent to the closeted anti-Semitism, characteristic, to different degrees, of nearly all Eastern European societies. Even the exploration of anti-Semitism is a highly explosive issue.

When Dr. Bob Donnorummo of the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Russian and East European Studies submitted his provocative essay with the intriguing title, "Bourbon and Vodka: A Comparison of the Southern-Black and Polish-Jewish Questions," I realized that this could be the beginning of a very useful opportunity to explore this issue on the pages of OPREE. Hopefully the readers will, indeed, find the essay thought-provoking and will write responses to the complex issue of anti-Semitism in Poland or in other Eastern European countries. But instead of leaving this to chance, several respondents were invited to initiate the discussion.

The first response was obtained from Dr. Lawrence Schofer, who continued the use of metaphor, changing it somewhat to "Chitterlings and Garlic: The Ignoring of Things Past." Dr. Schofer is in substantive agreement with Dr. Donnorummo's thesis that in Poland an honest historical confrontation about anti-Semitism has not yet taken place.

While the analogy with the American South has its limits, both think that an open dealing with the issue of racism has helped the South deal more effectively with the scourge of racism than Poland has with its burden of anti-Semitism.

As one may expect, Polish Catholic authors do not fully share this appraisal. One cabled response from Poland read, "Donnorummo's text gobbledygook bourbon overdosed," merrily continuing the use of the metaphor. The written response is by Jan Zaborowski, a Catholic journalist from Warsaw. His piece avoids direct response to Donnorummo, but rather provides a brief survey of Polish-Jewish relations over the long span of time, of which only some aspects of the relationship were dominated by anti-Semitism. Poles are rightly proud of their long history of tolerance at a time when it was not valued much elsewhere in Europe. In the cover letter Mr. Zaborowski adds that if one compares Donnorummo's and his piece one "will see why Donnorummo's text did not seem to me to be agreeable at all. That's a very complicated problem and the people are often confused when confronted with a problem the key word to which is 'different' (different from their own situation and different from what they used to think about this problem)."

A third respondent, a Polish Catholic scholar from the U.S.A., was contacted. Despite some initial reservations, this scholar yielded to my persuasion and wrote the piece, but eventually decided not to submit it for publication because of her/his perception that the piece, against her/his intention, would be misunderstood as veiled anti-Semitism, although the person primarily took issue with Donnorummo's methodology.

Thus this issue of OPREE reflects, in more than one way, the complexity of Polish-Jewish relations and the "loaded" nature of the charges of Polish anti-Semitism. For those who are not close at hand with this tragic problem, these essays begin the process of understanding the difficulty and complexity of this issue. We hope that other knowledgeable people who read these essays will decide to further the cause of better understanding with their own contributions, as we continue to pledge ourselves to seek additional papers on the same and related topics.

The last piece is by Dr. Marko Oršolić, a Franciscan from Sarajevo, Yugoslavia. In his piece, "The Political-Social Origin of Atheism," he explores some of the conditions in medieval and capitalist society in Europe which tied the church so closely to the governing elite that movements which sought socio-politico-economic changes necessarily found themselves in conflict with the Christian and Islamic religions. Thus he lays considerable blame on the religious institutions for the rise of atheism. The last section of the paper

provides an application of the theme to Yugoslavia, in which the relations between communists and believers are highlighted. That Oršolić is a Franciscan is a factor of importance which would tend to escape the attention of most readers. Namely, in Bosnia and Herzegovina the Franciscans were the only Catholic clergy permitted to serve the people during most of the Turkish rule over these territories and thus the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Roman Catholics are extraordinarily loyal to the Franciscans, considering them the protectors of their national and religious identity and well-being. Thus Oršolić's writing may have an added weight in a context which normally considers atheism and communism as a simple enemy of religion and religious institutions.

Paul Mojzes, editor