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In This Issue: Religious Liberty in Eastern Europe and the USSR

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**IN THIS ISSUE:
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE U.S.S.R.**

In December 1988 the Office of International Justice and Peace, Department of Social Development and World Peace of the United States Catholic Conference sent us a copy of a document adopted unanimously in November of 1988 by the U.S. Catholic Bishops entitled, "A Word of Solidarity, A Call for Justice: A Statement on Religious Freedom in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union." The statement was published in Origins and received a reasonably wide distribution in the American Roman Catholic community.

Upon reading the Statement I became convinced that it is a very valuable document which needs wider ecumenical dissemination, study, and response. OPREE seems eminently suitable for such a task. Therefore I contacted the U.S. Catholic Conference with the suggestion that we devote an entire issue to it, reprinting the document along with solicited scholarly responses. They graciously agreed and even provided the text of the Bishops' Statement on a computer diskette. OPREE's Advisory Editors were invited to respond along with additional experts who were suggested by the Office of International Justice and Peace.

The result is the current issue in which four of our editors and six other invited experts present their assessment of the U.S. Bishops' Statement. Among our respondents are three Eastern European Catholics (Adam Szostkiewicz of Poland and Laszlo Lukacs and Peter Torok from Hungary, the latter presently in Canada completing his Jesuit formation). The others are expert observers from the United Kingdom and the United States representing a wide range of religious traditions (Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, and Mennonite).

As far as we know, the Statement is the only official address by an American church (even the U.S. Catholic bishops have not addressed the problem since 1977) to the rapidly changing situation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. These economic, political, and social changes have also made an impact on the practice of religious liberty.

Previously there have been divergent approaches on how to deal with the troublesome issue of religious liberties. Some de-emphasized the issue fearing that condemnation of repression of religious liberty in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe will fuel the cold war sentiments and incite mindless anti-Communism as well as jeopardize hard-won concessions. Low key work behind the scenes was preferred by the protagonists of this approach, which, by its very nature tended to be unnoticed and generally unappreciated.

Others took an opposite track by publicly accentuating the instances of persecution and limitations of religious liberty. This was done both out of a conviction that it is the most effective way to help those who were oppressed and in order to somehow combat the appeal which the socialist model may have on those not sufficiently aware of its dangers. They were willing to neglect peace and justice issues and risk confrontation.

Few have combined these two approaches. Some of the tensions produced by the two approaches are evident in the writing of some of the respondents who provide a fairly broad spectrum of opinion. But more impressive and pronounced are some welcome areas of agreements. All of the responses are nuanced evaluations welcoming the careful depiction of the situation by the U.S. Bishops, yet avoiding a triumphalistic approach which does not take into account the historical co-responsibility of the churches for the deplorable lack of toleration and limits on freedom. Also welcome is the keen awareness of marked differences between countries and even between various regions within a country in regard to religious freedom both on part of the authors of the Statement and by the respondents.

Cautious hope permeates all the responses--an attitude currently shared by many East and West. There is an awareness that in respect to some countries there is still little reason to celebrate (Albania, Romania, Bulgaria). Yet for others one may rejoice that there are various degrees of changes. Profound changes in church-state relations and significant expansion of religious liberties and other human rights are not ruled out in a number of countries.

More and more people recognize the fundamental complementarity between peace and justice issues and human rights and religious liberty issues. Certainly the U.S. Catholic Bishops do. The mistaken notion that somehow advancement in one area is at the expense

of another (which was a cherished notion by some both East and West-- for very different, even antagonistic reasons) needs to be discarded in favor of a more holistic approach. The holistic approach suggests that human welfare is indivisible and that none of these values (if properly understood) can be significantly advanced while others are suppressed.

Technical restrictions of our publishing equipment mandates that each issue of OPREE be kept to no more than 50 pages. Hence more extensive editorial comments are not possible in this issue. This also regretfully forced us to publish the Statement single-space, which may make reading more strenuous for some. This seemed preferable to splitting up the articles.

I urge our readers to seriously study the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Statement and the published responses. Particularly desirable would be if denominational and ecumenical leaders in various countries would be inspired to issue their own careful and balanced statements focusing on Orthodox, Protestant, Jewish or Muslim approaches to religious liberty which might supplement the Catholic Statement. This might be analogous to the complementary work done by various church agencies on issues of peace and the nuclear arms race. Human welfare is promoted when various religious bodies cooperate ecumenically by using each other's statements or issuing joint or common pronouncements as they wrestle with an issue of concern to the larger community.

OPREE would be willing to publish such statements or responses by denominations, ecumenical bodies or individuals in forthcoming issues.

Paul Mojzes, editor

CORRECTION:

We regret the mistake in Vol. IX, No. 2 (April 1989), p. 35 in the report by Joseph Loya, O.S.A. in which the title incorrectly identifies the Christian-Marxist Dialogue in Moscow, October 14-16, 1988, in Moscow as the sixteenth such meeting in a series of dialogues. The text correctly identifies it as the fifteenth. The sixteenth dialogue will take place in Leusden, Netherlands, August 27-31, 1989.
