

7-1989

On Religious Liberty in Eastern Europe

Adam Szostkiewicz

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



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Szostkiewicz, Adam (1989) "On Religious Liberty in Eastern Europe," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 9: Iss. 4, Article 7.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol9/iss4/7>

This Article 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 administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University.

ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN EASTERN EUROPE

By Adam Szostkiewicz
Editor, Tygodnik Powszechny, Krakow, Poland

This is an important document, informative as well as well informed; one can hardly find any major actual flaws in it. The general assessment of the situation of Catholic churches in this region of the world is right and can be easily shared by the faithful living there. This is equally true of both of description of governmental policies toward the Church, and the presentation of the plight of Churches and their approaches to those policies.

The step-by-step analysis rightly reveals religious policies of Communist governments in Albania, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and the USSR to be especially harsh and repressive. Many Polish Catholics are much concerned over the plight of our brothers and sisters in Christ in Czechoslovakia, Albania and the USSR (the Greek Catholic Church in the Ukraine). The situation in Romania is wholly unacceptable, posing a challenge to people of good will throughout the world.

Regrettably, the document ignores the fact that churches in the nations under the Soviet type political and social systems have adopted different policies toward the Communist state with its aggressively atheist and anti-religious Marxist-Leninist ideology. These different approaches have in turn resulted in painful internal divisions among bishops, priests, and lay people. In Poland, one can observe a growing division over the implementation by the Polish Church of its role as a mediator in the current socio-political crisis. The authorities tend to exploit this division by way of various forms of manipulation. Interestingly, it is a well known policy of the Government at the moments of a severe political crisis to play up the differences between the Catholic Church and other Christian minority denominations that are far less eager to risk an open ideological confrontation with the State.

It is difficult for an outsider to assess any proposals concerning foreign policy of another country but it seems doubtful whether it is at all possible to avoid "the polemics . . . which are so tempting" in the area of education which seriously takes "the differences in the treatment of religion between communist countries as well as the common problems". These differences are, after all, crucial in a proper understanding of the situation faced by the Church in countries like Poland.

Similarly, one may wonder whether "application to businesses operating in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union of the same norms of corporate responsibility that are used to evaluate the appropriateness of U.S. business presence and activities in other parts of the world" is indeed the best action to be taken when dealing with the realities of life under Communist

rule that by its very nature tends to seek a total monopoly on all kinds of relations linking the society with the external world.

Without denying the importance and usefulness of international agreements such as the Helsinki Accords, one is tempted to emphasize the crucial significance of constant and strong pressure by the governments and institutions of the free world on Communist rulers and their proxies in order to make them implement these agreements in their actual policies. Additionally, one should not forget about the practice of using some church officials--usually those belonging to minority denominations--or officially sanctioned lay political activists who are in fact controlled by the authorities, as spokespersons for wider religious communities, although they are not authorized by the hierarchy or any genuine religious group, movement or institution to act in such a capacity.