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## INTOLERANCE AND TOLERANCE ARE HISTORICAL PHENOMENA

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The U.S. Catholic Bishops' "Statement on Religious Freedom in Eastern Europe" is a carefully reasoned and reasonable document. Assimilated by the constituencies to which it is addressed, it can contribute to the perestroika of U.S. attitudes and policies toward the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe that history now demands. Whether the regimes whose policies are criticized by this statement will also find the bishops' words reasonable or conducive to dialogue remains to be seen. In any case, the Marxist-Leninist regimes in Eastern Europe clearly need continued prodding.

The occasion for the statement, namely the commemoration of the establishment of Christianity in several countries, is appropriate. While the millennium of the baptism of Prince Vladimir of Kiev in 987 has likely received the most attention internationally, important historical milestones were being observed in Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Moravia. With special attention thus focused on Christianity, raising the issues of religious freedom appears timely.

Nevertheless, for a statement occasioned by historical commemoration, the bishops' appeal is remarkably ahistorical in its reasoning. Admittedly the statement stresses the "complex historical, cultural, religious and political factors unique to each country" that must be taken into account. Moreover, there are many historical allusions, especially in the country-by-country review section of the paper. But the latter serve primarily as identifying markers, hardly as substantive disclosures. To be sure, strictures against religion in Soviet and Soviet-style regimes are ideologically inspired, and thus can be challenged in those terms. Yet in the end, ideology can be repealed more readily than the history and culture that reinforce it.

Obviously a bishops' statement is not a treatise in history. This statement, however, needs a bow to history in two directions, first in recognizing the continuities in the suppression of dissent before and after the October Revolution. There are differences, to be sure, nor do pre-revolutionary practices excuse present-day abuses. But historical awareness is essential to a sympathetic understanding from the outside, and this statement might well have alerted its audience to this fact.

More importantly, the statement could have been enhanced by a recognition of the ambiguity of the history of organized Christianity with regard to religious freedom. The record of established churches over the centuries in this regard, whether Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or Protestant, is hardly exemplary in this regard. Indeed, sobering parallels can be drawn between church and regime in earlier centuries in western Europe, and party and regime in the Soviet system today. Moreover, adjusting for language and content, arguments against religious pluralism in the sixteenth century West are similar to those employed by Party officials and ideologists in the Soviet Union in the twentieth, at least until recently. In neither case were the protagonists of establishment able to imagine political cohesion without ideological uniformity. Civil insurrection seemed implicit in religious or ideological dissent. Similarly, the wrath of modern revolutionaries against institutional religion finds some justification in the legitimating ties of religion to pre-revolutionary privilege.

At another point, however, the bishops' statement rightly invokes the logic of historical development. On the one hand, appropriately enough, it invokes the church's own teaching in defense of religious freedom: "Religious liberty is unique among the many essential requirements of human dignity because its object is an individual's relationship with God, the ultimate end of the human person". On the other hand, when speaking generally, the writers invoke various international conventions, such as the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Helsinki Accords. In this vein they speak in their concluding paragraph of "religious persecution and intolerance" as "unvenerated relics of an unhappy past, anachronisms with no place in modern societies" (emphasis added).

Tolerance for diversity of beliefs and practices is a socio-historical achievement. Societies, at whatever scale or level, must achieve both stability and diversity if they are to be tolerant. Globally, tolerance is still a precarious achievement, because many societies are not yet at that stage. This affords no excuse for intolerance. To the contrary, growing global interdependence and consensus must surely speed the process. The U.S. Catholic bishops' statement is good news.