

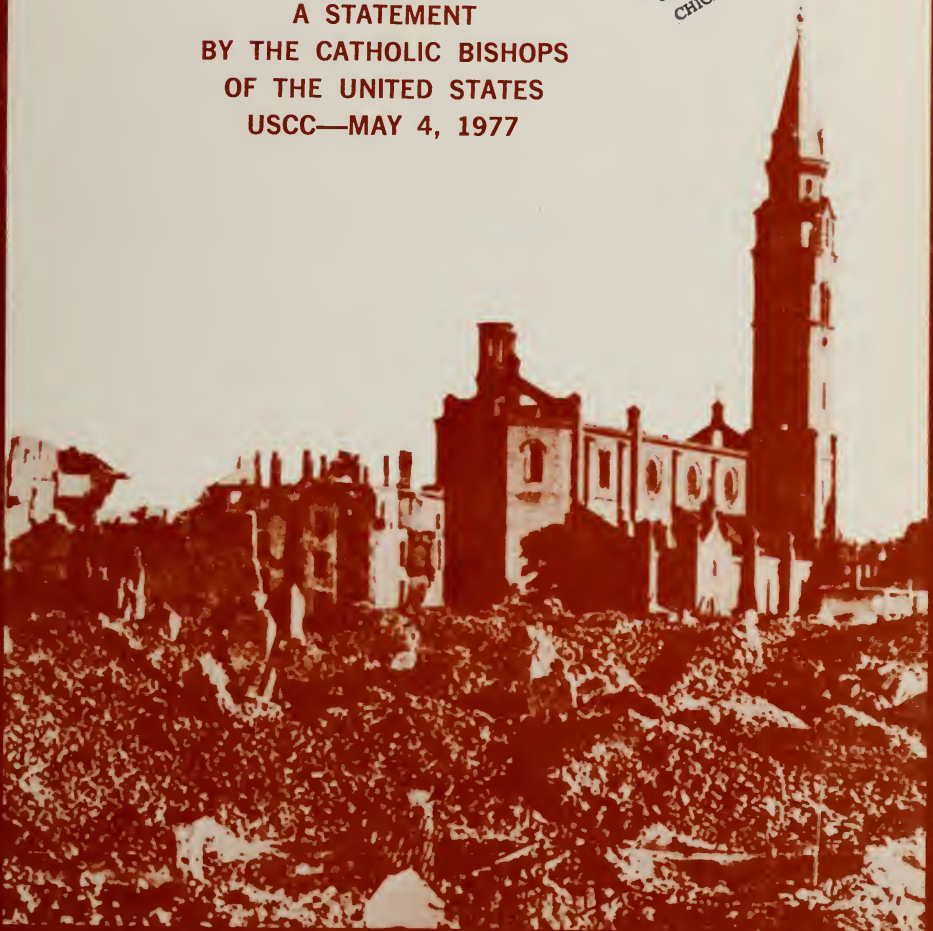
Religious Liberty in
Eastern Europe
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RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN EASTERN EUROPE

A TEST CASE
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

A STATEMENT
BY THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS
OF THE UNITED STATES
USCC—MAY 4, 1977

SERVITE FATHERS
ASSUMPTION CHURCH
323 WEST ILLINOIS STREET
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60610



COVER: A Catholic Church
in Warsaw in 1945, after
World War II.

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**A BACKGROUND STATEMENT
BY THE COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
AND WORLD PEACE
OF THE UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
February 17, 1977**

1977
UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005

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STATEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 4, 1977

The protection of human rights continues to be a major pre-occupation among those who pursue peace, and with just cause. As Christians, we have become increasingly aware that the defense and promotion of human rights is a central task of the ministry of the Church. As Pope Paul VI in his 1977 Peace message has indicated: "where human rights are truly professed and publicly recognized and defended, Peace becomes the joyful and operative atmosphere of life in society."

Today, human rights in many places in the world are severely restricted. While no nation is faultless in the defense and promotion of human rights, we are obliged to note two recent statements by Episcopal Conferences—the bishops of West Germany and of Poland—deploring the denial of the human right to religious liberty in Eastern Europe.

We feel all the more obliged because so many American Catholics have their ancestral roots in these countries or are themselves refugees from the oppressive regimes of East Europe. The denial of religious freedom in the countries from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Black Sea in the south is a tragic episode in humanity's efforts to defend and promote human rights. Churches and individual religious believers are continually hindered by governments in the practice of their religion. In some cases, they are subjected to outright persecution, and, in others, as in the instance of Eastern Catholic churches, they have been forcibly suppressed. No religion is spared: Christians, Jews, and Moslems all suffer. The intensity and the scale of the suppression of religion is vigorous and comprehensive.

Attacks on the churches vary from country to country in East Europe, reflecting the diversity of cultural traditions in each country, the depth and variety of religious conviction among the people, and the degree of tenacity and pragmatism of the Communist party leadership. Despite the differences in degree, a general pattern of religious oppression is clearly evident.

It is especially at the level of the individual believer that the infringement of the person's human right to practice his or her religion is most insidious, since in all of the East European countries atheism is supported by the full apparatus of the state. For example, membership in a Christian community disqualifies one from becoming a teacher, a civil servant or an official in the government. In some situations, even visits to the sick and the administration of the sacraments to the dying require prior official permits. Conditions are especially severe in Lithuania where the church is subjected to constant and intense persecutions. In the Ukraine, no churches of the Ukrainian Catholic Rite and the Ruthenian Rite, are permitted or open, while in Albania there exists perhaps the most systematic repression of the Church in all of Eastern Europe.

Religious instruction is constantly hindered by a variety of intimidating measures taken against students and their parents by state officials. This process of violations of human rights was the subject of a recent courageous pastoral letter of the Polish bishops (September 1976). While Catholics in Poland have displayed remarkable resilience in the face of persistent and official suppression, the bishops said that the Church is now being subjected to a sophisticated program of atheization: existing building regulations are used to restrict the construction of needed churches in expanding urban centers; employment opportunities are reserved to persons who declare themselves to be non-believers or at least non-practicing Catholics; and admission to some schools is made dependent upon a declaration of non-belief. Similar practices are common throughout the East European bloc.

In Czechoslovakia, the regime is under the control of the most hardened Stalinists. More than half of the Catholic dioceses do not have bishops because the intransigent government refuses to acknowledge the Holy See's nominees and refuses even to dialogue on the issue. The clergy are under severe repression as are the seminaries. The very existence of the religious orders of women is especially precarious. The law forbids women from joining religious orders, and the indications are that, due to the regime's restrictions, the women's orders may be virtually extinct within 25 years.

In summary, the lives of individual believers and the existence of the Christian community in Eastern Europe are both in serious jeopardy. Both are subject to the capricious whims of

state bureaucrats, the intellectual abuse of ideologues and the continuous harassment—with the ultimate goal of extinction—by the state apparatus.

Since World War II, the political fate of Eastern Europeans has depended heavily upon relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. This relationship has been dominated by U.S. fears that provocation in East Europe might precipitate a nuclear holocaust. This grim prospect has inhibited U.S. relations with the East.

The resulting U.S. policy of non-interference in the affairs of East European nations has prevented the United States from making any form of effective protest against Communist oppression. Advocates for the defense of human rights, including courageous dissenters in the East, have earnestly appealed to the West to apply multiple kinds of pressures against regimes in Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union.

A series of recent developments—the signing of the Helsinki Accords, an increase in the volume of commercial and cultural exchanges between the United States and the East European nations, and a growing sense of independence within the bloc itself—may have given the United States a potentially greater measure of influence with Communist governments in the region. The real question is whether and how we can use that influence to protect one of humanity's most precious rights: the individual's religious freedom.

While we do not have any illusions about the political realities of international affairs, it does appear to us that circumstances and events suggest that new opportunities are present for the United States, which, if utilized, may contribute to the defense of human rights in Eastern Europe. We therefore urge the U.S. policymakers to give respect for religious freedom a more prominent role in the conduct of our relationship with these nations. We take note of the Congress' efforts to protect human rights and encourage it to expand on these efforts.

Specifically, we encourage the new Administration to engage seriously in the preparations for the follow-up to the Helsinki Accords scheduled for 1977. These include the establishment of an appropriate monitoring system to measure the compliance of nations—ours as well as the East Europeans—in implementing the Helsinki Accords. We also encourage U.S. trade officials, busi-

nessmen, intellectuals, performing artists, technicians, and scientists to introduce the issue of religious liberty, as well as other human rights, into their relationships with individuals and groups in Eastern Europe. And, further, advocates of corporate responsibility are encouraged to apply to Eastern Europe the same norms for evaluating the appropriateness of U.S. business presence and activities there as they do in the Third World.

We recall that the 1974 Roman Synod of Bishops affirmed that the promotion of human rights is required by the gospel and is central to the Church's ministry. However, in some countries, members of the Church cannot speak up about human rights, while in others, they can do so only at great peril. We, in the United States, are not hampered in this regard. Therefore, we pledge ourselves to continue to make the public advocacy of human rights a matter of our prime concern.

We associate ourselves in solidarity with the persecuted Church in those regions around the world where the human right of religious freedom is severely restrained by overt acts of suppression or by subtle intimidations. We especially ally ourselves with the bishops of Eastern Europe in their suffering and their ministry to their oppressed peoples. We recognize that the best efforts of nations, private groups and concerned individuals will not necessarily thwart those who "persecute believers and speak all kinds of slander. . . ." (Mt. 5:11-12) While pledging ourselves to support these efforts, we pray that those who suffer will recall Jesus' assurance that public persecution bears witness to his name and contributes to the evangelization of the world. (Mk. 13:9-13)

We also acknowledge that there is a power beyond that of policymakers and politicians. Therefore, as we pray for the persecuted Church throughout the world, we also pray for its persecutors. In this way, we trust that God's wisdom and grace may provide what is lacking in our own efforts.

A BACKGROUND STATEMENT

**BY THE COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
AND WORLD PEACE
OF THE UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE**

February 17, 1977

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BACKGROUND STATEMENT BY THE COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND WORLD PEACE

Over the past thirty years, relations between the United States and East European countries—the North-South tier of nations from Poland to Bulgaria—have posed perplexing problems for many Americans. From the U.S. point of view, a number of factors in Eastern Europe contribute to make this a strained relationship: the suppression of religious freedom is a persistent source of painful concern to American Christians and Jews; the totalitarian communist regimes are a continuous irritant for millions of Americans of Eastern European descent; the political-economic system inhibits the potential for expansion of American trade and commercial interests; and the intensity of communist ideology has created a difficult relationship between the East and the United States. The result is an uneasy peace.

In August 1975, in Helsinki, Finland, the President of the United States and representatives of 34 other nations, including seven East European nations, signed the "Final Act" of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe—the so-called Helsinki Accords. The participating nations agreed to respect each other's borders, to renounce as a general principle the use of force and to provide for the free circulation of ideas, persons and information.

They also reaffirmed their commitment to "respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction to race, sex, language or religion [and to] recognize and respect the freedom of the individual to profess and practice, alone or in the community with others, religion or belief acting in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience." The signatories also agreed to convene a follow-up meeting in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in June 1977, to review progress made in implementing the agreement. It is necessary to note that in the area of human rights, the ideology of the communist parties in Eastern Europe gives priority to social and economic rights over civil and political rights.

While some analysts in the West believe that the Soviet Union and its allies in Eastern Europe tend to promise more than they will deliver, the agreement is viewed by many Americans and West Europeans as a positive step toward international peace and co-operation in East-West relations. At the time of the signing of the agreement, Pope Paul VI said, "Peace with harmony and fraternity among nations will be given

a solemn affirmation at Helsinki, along with pledges of integral and real justice."

In order to place U.S.-East European relations in some perspective, three dimensions of the problem are presented for review: the relationship of East European countries to the superpowers, the role of the Church in Eastern Europe and the prospects for the future U.S. policy.

The Relationship of East European Countries to the Superpowers

East European countries are caught in the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Two factors contribute to this dilemma: the fear within both superpowers of nuclear war and the persistence of the two governments in conducting foreign policy in terms of classical diplomacy.

First, the conduct of the Soviet Union and the threat of nuclear war since World War II has been the dominating element in the formulation of U.S. policy vis-a-vis Eastern Europe. For the United States, the East European nations have been seen as possessing distinctly different political and strategic value than the countries of Western Europe. For the USSR, on the other hand, since the absorption of the Baltic States and the accession to government power of communist parties, the tier of countries from Poland to Bulgaria represents a region for expansion of communist ideologies, a zone for commercial and industrial integration into the Soviet system and a military buffer against a perceived threat from the West.

For U.S. policy makers the tier has been of relatively secondary concern. With the abandonment of the aggressive rhetoric of the Cold War period, the United States has followed a moderate policy of "building bridges" to these countries. The American policy has been delicately balanced between verbal support for the aspirations of East Europeans for greater autonomy and less domination by the Soviet Union and a strong desire to avoid at virtually all costs any appearance of intervention which might provoke the Russians to respond militarily. Consequently, while the United States has encouraged a modest level of cultural and commercial exchanges and provided refuge for East European exiles, official U.S. policy has been passive in the face of the uprisings in Poland and Hungary and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The United States seems to have accepted the "Brezhnev Doctrine," that is, the right of the Warsaw Pact forces to intervene militarily in East European countries in order to suppress counter-revolutionary activities or to reduce the threat of internal social upheaval.

The overriding consideration for U.S. policy makers has been the confrontation between the two superpowers, and, more specifically, the

fear of doing anything vis-a-vis the East European zone which might precipitate a nuclear war. The enormity of such a disaster has been such as to inhibit the United States from challenging the Soviet's presence and policies in Eastern Europe.

A second factor affecting U.S. relations to East European nations is the tenet of classical diplomacy that the nation-state is the basic unit of international politics. In this view, in both style and substance, international affairs are conducted on the premise that each nation is virtually a self-contained and sovereign unit. For the United States, in practice, the doctrine of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other nations is normally observed, subject only to exceptions of the most extraordinary nature. In the conduct of relations between sovereign nations, this concept has demonstrable advantages, for example, in promoting the self-determination of peoples and in sustaining dialogue and interaction among nations of very different cultural and historical patterns and domestic policies.

Significantly, one of the issues pursued by the nations at Helsinki was the acceptance of the principle of the rights inherent in national sovereignty, the inviolability of the nation's boundaries, the nation's territorial integrity and the non-interference in the nation's internal affairs. Expressions of these elements of national sovereignty are positioned in first place in the Helsinki Accords. These hallmarks of classical diplomacy are expressly viewed in the agreement as essential to the promotion of lasting peace and mutual security in Europe and in the whole world as well.

A major flaw in this doctrine of conventional diplomacy, aptly pointed out by Pope John in "Pacem in Terris," is the structural gap in the present international system between the kinds of transnational problems facing the world community and the limited and frail structures of public authority evident in the traditional nation-state concept of world affairs. Many contemporary problems require certain responses which individual nations either cannot make or do not choose to make, such as environmental pollution, world hunger, and utilization of ocean resources. The protection of human rights on the level of international decision-making is a primary example of such a problem. While governments subscribe to the universal standard for human rights as elaborated in the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights and frequently assert that human rights enjoy a high priority in the conduct of their domestic and foreign affairs, the practice of nations in the face of blatant and sustained violations of human rights is often characterized by selective concern, sporadic response or outright indifference. Furthermore, in the absence of an appropriate international entity, governments define unilaterally the exceptional cases which warrant violation of the doctrine of non-intervention, e.g., the cases of the United

States and the Dominican Republic, and the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia.

Consistent adherence by the United States to the doctrine of non-interference in the affairs of other nations has had the effect of condoning the disregard for human rights in Eastern Europe. It is necessary to note, however, that the recent effort in the United States to accelerate emigration for Soviet Jews presents an ambiguous picture. While the "quiet" diplomacy of the Department of State appears to have been productive, the tactics of the Congress in writing sanctions (denial of most-favored nation treatment, export-import bank credits, etc.) against the USSR were counterproductive. The Soviet Union suspended negotiations on a pending trade agreement and cut back drastically on the number of Jews allowed to emigrate. Nevertheless, advocates of a more vigorous defense of human rights, among them such courageous individuals as Andrei Sakharov and Alexander Solzhenitzyn, have earnestly appealed to the West not to allow the conventional standard of non-intervention to stand in the way of the application of all available measures, such as world opinion and economic and diplomatic pressures, on the oppressive regimes in Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union. The question of tactics and style in negotiating the human rights issues is admittedly a difficult question.

The Role of the Catholic Church in Eastern Europe

The experience of religious freedom in the Eastern-bloc countries manifests a persistent record of violations of human rights. In all cases, the churches and other religious groups have difficulties imposed upon them by governments, and, in some cases, they are subjected to outright repression. The roster of the victims is all-inclusive: Roman Catholics, members of the World Council denominations and the national orthodox churches, Mennonites, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and Moslems. The scale of the suppression of religion is sustained and comprehensive.

The churches' desperate struggle over the last quarter century is marked by tension: the legally stated protection of the individual's right to believe is made illusory by the *de facto* attacks on the expression of that belief and on the Church as an institution. The consequences of the latter, of course, have had an adverse effect on the former. These realities frame the Vatican's diplomatic overtures with these governments and they influence the prospects for future negotiations.

In the late 1940s, when communist parties gained political domination in East European countries, they concentrated on imparting Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy in all sectors of national life. On the level of ideological confrontation with the churches, the state was not to assume a

neutral posture, as in France, or a separate but respectful distance, as in some Western nations (for example, the so-called Wall of Separation in the United States). Rather, the state was to take an active antagonist role against religion. In the radical restructuring of society, the efforts of the state are intended to reveal to the citizens the inner contradictions of religious belief through "correct" educational programming. Ultimately religion, along with other more fundamental misconceptions, especially those related to the economic order, would wither away.

Historically, Marxists confronted religion not only at the level of personal convictions about a set of tenets held by individual believers. More often, and more significantly from the point of view of totalitarian ideology, the confrontation was with an established church which had an effective presence within the civil community. In Czechoslovakia, for example, one of the country's political parties after World War I was led by a Catholic priest; his successor, also a Catholic priest, served as premier and president of the autonomous and independent Slovak regime during World War II.

The ruling party's theorists accepted Marx's tenet that, in newly established socialist societies, there remain the cultural and social marks of the society at an earlier stage. No matter how anachronistic religion may be for committed party members, it was regarded as primarily a private matter for the general citizenry and, therefore, a phenomenon which warranted a certain degree of toleration. All of the Eastern-bloc countries formalized the relationship between the state and the individual's belief in their national constitutions which guarantee the individual's religious freedom: everyone can hold some kind of religious belief or choose no belief at all, and the person can perform some religious acts which are permitted by the law of the State. (Even the Constitution of Albania, a non-participant at Helsinki, states: "Freedom of conscience and religion is guaranteed to all citizens." However, Albania's head of state boasts that it is "a country without churches and without mosques, without priests and without imams.")

On the pragmatic level, implementation of the communist ideology varies in the East European bloc and reflects the diversity of national cultural traditions, the depth and differences in religious convictions and the degree of tenacity of the Marxist leadership. In legalizing religious "freedom" the ruling communist parties established regulations governing church activities so that, on the one hand, some means of preserving church life is provided. On the other hand, churches are prevented from engaging in practices which the government might deem antisocialist. The means are prescribed by the state. Here again, Czechoslovakia, among the Helsinki signers, offers the extreme case: church officials and priests are on the government payroll; they are vir-

tually state employees whose assignment requires prior approval by a government official. In other situations, such as Bulgaria and East Germany, churches receive regular subsidies from the government. Poland is a notable exception, since the Catholic Church after World War II was permitted to retain possession of some landholdings.

On the operational level, the structuring of religion into the life of the young socialist republics provoked serious tensions in church-state relations. Three features characteristic of the Church's identity posed a threat to the ideology of the state's domination of all citizens' activities. In the first place, the Church teaches that there is a higher authority than the state and its man-made laws. This factor heightened the government's perceived need to separate the churches from the schools where anti-Marxist doctrines might be promulgated. Since, in the socialist system, the state has an obligation to purge its citizens of religious notions, all forms of religious teaching in state schools is prohibited. In some cases, for example, Lithuania and Bulgaria, all religious instruction of young people under eighteen years of age is against the law. In others, such as Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and East Germany, catechetical instruction is permitted under state surveillance.

Secondly, an active church ministry often includes a voluntary association of persons engaged in organized acts of charity and other social affairs. The notion of such voluntary associations of workers, whether church-affiliated or union-oriented, was regarded as inconsistent with the idea of a supreme state. Except for Poland and East Germany, programs of private citizens conducting charitable enterprises are deemed unacceptable, since these activities properly come under the state's purview.

Third, a church which has an elaborate international structure, such as the Roman Catholic Church, poses a threat to the state's authority, at least implicitly, because of the prospect of an outside influence competing for the allegiance of the citizens and providing a possible source of interference in the state's internal affairs. The experience of Czechoslovakia is illustrative of this problem in that more than half of the Catholic dioceses do not have bishops because the government refuses to acknowledge the Holy See's nominees.

It is at the level of the believer that the infringement of the person's human right to practice his or her religion is most insidious. In the years immediately following World War II, attacks on individual church leaders were particularly vehement. The Catholic hierarchy was especially subjected to direct assault by the state. Many leaders were indicted and publicly ridiculed in widely publicized trials, which frequently resulted in house arrests, imprisonment, deportation, and for some, death.

Within a few years, the episcopal leaders of Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Rumania and Bulgaria were in prison. In 1948, four of Albania's bishops were executed. A Lithuanian, Bishop Vincentas Borisevicius, was condemned to death after a secret trial and executed. Several of his brother-bishops were deported to prisons in Siberia and, by 1947, the number of bishops in Lithuania was reduced to one. In 1960, the bishop of Vilnius, the capital city, was forced out of his diocese without any verbal or written charge made against him, and he remains in exile today.

While the degree of religious repression varies in each of the Eastern European countries, the statement by the bishops of West Germany (October 1976) is especially informative about the general characteristics of the oppression. For example, a professing Christian cannot be a teacher, a civil servant nor hold an official office. In some situations, for example, Lithuania, even visits to the sick and the administration of the sacraments to the dying require prior official permits. The German bishops' statement singled out the conditions in the former territory of Eastern Poland, in Armenia and in Lithuania, where the Church is being subjected to especially severe persecutions. To this list might be added the conditions in the Ukraine.

In Czechoslovakia, where among Helsinki-signers the staunchest East European Stalinists are firmly in control, one of the most troubling episodes is being enacted: the days of religious orders for women are perhaps numbered. The state law prohibits the admittance of women as novices, and some projections indicate that, due to the government's restrictions, the women's orders may be virtually extinct in a short time.

Even in those countries which profess to permit religious instruction, state officials exercise a variety of intimidating measures against students and their parents. This process of sophisticated violations of human rights was the subject of a recent courageous pastoral letter of the Polish bishops (September 1976). While Catholics in Poland have displayed remarkable resilience in the face of persistent and official suppression, the Church is now being subjected to what the bishops call "a skillfully concealed program of atheization." The campaign is vigorous and comprehensive. For example, building regulations are used to restrict the construction of needed churches in expanding urban centers. When Catholics became impatient with the bureaucratic delays and erected temporary chapels, they were subjected to severe harassment and even blackmail. Employment in certain professions and advancement in others is reserved to persons who declare themselves to be non-believers or at least non-practicing Catholics. Admission to some schools is made dependent upon a declaration of non-belief.

U. S. Foreign Policy and Human Rights

The place of human rights in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy is ill-defined and ambiguous. This results, in the first place, from apparent indifference of the policymakers or the view that the state of human rights in a particular country is of necessity—for good or ill—not the concern of the U.S. government. By the norms of conventional diplomacy, our nation does not interfere in the domestic affairs of another nation, except under the most unusual circumstances, such as those which threaten our national security. In addition, in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy, the human rights factor must compete against other pressing issues of an economic, political or strategic nature which tend to possess a high quotient of self-interest for the United States. In U.S. negotiations with other nations, issues of common interest normally define the agenda: trade relations, investment prospects, technology transfers and strategic considerations. If human rights is a subject of discussion at all, it is frequently only peripheral to the other issues. On the other hand, there are signs that human rights may be gaining a higher priority in policy formulation.

Efforts by the Holy See to improve church-state relations in the East European bloc highlight the difficulty of defending human rights. In the instance of the Vatican's negotiations with Eastern Europe, human rights is *the* issue—specifically the human right of these countries' citizens to exercise their religious freedom. It is for the Vatican a "security" issue; that is, one affecting the survival of the Church. For the other parties to the negotiations—the communist bloc—it is, of course, precisely and exclusively an issue affecting internal domestic laws and policies. The chief representatives of the Holy Father in these affairs, Archbishop Agostino Casaroli, is keenly aware of the sensitive nature of these negotiations and of the fragile character of his bargaining position. In the hope of strengthening one of his bargaining points—public opinion—he recently said that world public opinion is not only concerned about detente, important as it appears in the promotion of world peace, but it is "no less concerned about problems of the Catholic Church in individual countries . . . and especially about relations between the Holy See and the socialist world.

Several recent developments lend urgency to the suggestion that human rights be given a higher priority in U.S. foreign policy. At the same time, they provide fresh opportunities for raising the issue. The first is the recognition at the international level of an accepted code of conduct for nations regarding the defense and promotion of human rights: The U.N. Universal Declaration on Human Rights, adopted by the member-nations in 1948, set a new standard for the international community. More recently, the Helsinki Accords reiterated this commitment and gave renewed prominence and expression to the subject

of an individual nation's conduct toward its own citizens. The implementing provisions of the agreement place human rights as an acceptable item on the agenda of East-West relations. Implicitly, at least, the 35 signatory nations acknowledged that the internal conduct of each of them regarding the human rights of its own citizens is the subject of legitimate scrutiny for the other signers.

A number of groups are working effectively at evaluating post-Helsinki activities. Among them are the Council of Europe, the U.N. Economic Commission for Europe, UNESCO, and such private agencies as the East-West Institute in the Hague, the John F. Kennedy Institute in The Netherlands, the Institute of Jewish Affairs in London, Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists, Keston College in England, the U.S. Advisory Commission on International Educational and Cultural Affairs, and the Research Center in New York City for Religion and Human Rights in Closed Societies. Especially deserving of commendation is the journal, "The Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania." This remarkable publication is prepared in Lithuania by Catholics subjected to the most dangerous and difficult circumstances, and provides concerned Americans with a credible source of information about the persecution of religion and the suppression of human rights in Lithuania.

The second development is U.S. involvement in European affairs. The range and significance of these activities is mounting and American citizens cannot fail to note that the presence of U.S. power creates a responsibility to use that power in the defense of human rights. The forms of U.S. interrelations with Eastern Europe and the USSR are multiple: increasing foreign trade, large grain sales, extensive investment credits, growing cultural and scientific exchanges, potential reductions in tariff regulations and, of course, the enormous issues of arms and troop negotiations. These bargaining points are not neutral nor exclusively apolitical in their nature. They do offer potentially, at least for the United States, direct and indirect points of influence on the governments of East Europe.

In addition, in recent years, there have been increasing indications of dissatisfaction among the East European nations both internally and in relation to the USSR. As the bloc searches for new liaisons to promote political and civil freedoms and national independence, the belief that the United States is prepared to provide economic assistance to governments that demonstrate an active concern for these aspirations may be warmly received.

The third point involves the integrity of the United States as a nation. The consistent suppression of the human right of religious freedom in Eastern Europe challenges America's integrity. While the

principles undergirding the concept of human rights in political affairs are universal principles—acknowledged as such by the member-states of the United Nations—they hold an especially preeminent position both in U.S. domestic political life and in its historic tradition. To affirm the dignity of the human person and the role of human rights in our domestic life is to commit ourselves to uphold particular standards in U.S. foreign policy. Pope John summarized the point: “The same moral law which governs relations between individual human beings serves also to regulate the relation of political communities with one another.”

Faced with suppression of one of the most fundamental human rights—the freedom of religion—it is necessary to note that the United States is not simply an impartial, uninvolved observer of East European affairs. When we fail to speak out in defense of human rights because we fear our strategic or financial interests are at stake, then we are part of the human rights problem. The United States is not omnipotent, but neither can it hide behind the claim of impotence. Since we have potentially some effective measure of claiming respect for human rights in East Europe, whether and how we use this potential is a moral issue of the first order.

NOTE: Materials that were especially helpful in the preparation of the background statement were:

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