

INTRODUCTION: PLURALISM, PROSELYTISM, AND NATIONALISM IN EASTERN EUROPE

In a series of projects conducted over the past decade, the Law and Religion Program of Emory University in Atlanta has explored the religious sources and dimensions of human rights and democracy. These projects have sought to uncover the contributions of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and other faiths to the cultivation – and abridgement – of ideas and institutions of human rights and democracy. These projects have also sought to uncover, within these religious cultures, sources and sanctions for an emerging global understanding and practice of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

The obvious premise of these projects is that a regime of law, human rights, and democracy is indispensable to the establishment of local and world order. The less obvious premise is that religion is a vital dimension of any such regime. Democratic and human-rights norms are inherently abstract ideals – universal statements of the good life and the good society. They depend upon the visions and values of human communities and cultures to give them content and coherence. Religion is an ineradicable condition of human persons and communities. Religion invariably provides universal sources and scales of values by which many persons and communities govern and measure themselves. Religion invariably provides the sources and scales of dignity and responsibility, shame and respect, restitution and reconciliation that democracy and human rights need to survive and to flourish. Religions must thus be seen as indispensable allies in the modern struggle for human rights and democratization. Their faith and works, their symbols and structures must be adduced to give meaning and measure to the abstract claims of democratic and human-rights norms.

Our first project, on “Christianity and Democracy in Global Context” (1989-92), was designed to review the past and potential contributions of Christianity to the precocious rise of democratic movements in various parts of the world. That project commissioned a series of case studies of the positive and negative contributions of Christianity to the democratic transformation of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Indian subcontinent, Latin and Central America, and the former Soviet Union. The findings were reported in a large international conference in Atlanta in 1991, in several journal publications, and in a comprehensive anthology, *Christianity and Democracy in Global Context* (Boulder, CO, and London: Westview Press, 1993).

Our second project, on “Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective” (1992-96), had a broader theological scope but a narrower legal scope. This project analyzed the positive and negative contributions that Christianity, Judaism, and Islam have made and could make to the theory and law of religious rights and liberties. The project commissioned a series of critical studies of both the human-rights theories and laws developed by Christians,

Jews, and Muslims and the religious-rights protections offered by political leaders in the United Nations, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. The project's findings were reported in a major international conference in Atlanta in 1994, in a number of journal publications and reports, and in a two-volume anthology, *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective* (The Hague and London: Martinus Nijhoff, 1996).

Both projects uncovered a growing paradox of the new global revolution of human rights and democracy. In the 1990's, the world seems to have entered something of a "Dickensian era." We have some of the best human-rights protections and democratic polities on the books but some of the worst human-rights abuses and autocratic policies on the ground. Religious groups — in all their theological, cultural, and ethnic diversity — have emerged as both leading villains and leading victims in this Dickensian drama.

Our most recent project, on "The Problem and Promise of Proselytism in the New Democratic World Order" (1996-99), has been focused on one dimension of this emerging global problem of religious conflict — the growing clash within and between indigenous faiths and foreign faiths over proselytism and conversion. This conflict has taken on a variety of forms in the newly transformed (sometimes democratized) polities of the world.

On the one hand, religious, ethnic, and cultural rivals, previously kept at bay by a common oppressor, have renewed their hostilities, sometimes with catastrophic results. In some communities, such as the former Yugoslavia, these local rivals have converted their new liberties into licenses to renew ancient hostilities — featuring mass murder and rape, ethnic cleansing and genocide, violent iconoclasm, forced baptisms, coerced conversions, and many other vile forms of pathos. In other communities, such as the Sudan and Rwanda, ethnic nationalism and religious extremism have conspired to bring violent dislocation or death to thousands of religious believers each year and false imprisonment, forced starvation, and other savage abuses to tens of thousands of others. In still other communities, most notably in Western Europe and North America, political secularism and resurgent nationalism have combined to threaten a sort of civil denial and death to many minority believers, particularly "sects" of high religious temperature or low cultural conformity.

On the other hand, in Russia, and parts of Central and Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America, the human-rights and democratic revolution has brought on a new war for souls between indigenous and foreign religious groups. This is the most recent, and most ironic, chapter in the Dickensian drama of human rights. With the political transformations of these regions in the past two decades, foreign religious groups were granted rights to enter these regions for the first time in decades. In the 1990's, these foreign groups have come in increasing numbers to preach their faiths, to offer their services, to convert new souls. Initially, local religious groups welcomed these foreigners. Today, they have come to resent these foreign religions, particularly those from North America and Western Europe who assume a democratic

human-rights ethic. Local religious groups resent the participation in the marketplace of religious ideas that democracy assumes. They resent the toxic waves of materialism and individualism that democracy inflicts. They resent the massive expansion of religious pluralism that democracy encourages. They resent the extravagant forms of religious speech, press, and assembly that democracy protects. A new war for souls has thus broken out in these regions — a fight to reclaim the traditional cultural and moral souls of these new societies and a fight to retain adherents and adherence to the indigenous faiths.

The goal of our current project has been to assess this emerging problem through empirical and normative studies and, where possible, to seek to assuage the most acute forms of conflict through the cultivation of theological and human-rights solutions. We have sought through this process to try to parse the line between legitimate and illegitimate forms of exercise, enhancement, and extension of religious, cultural, and ethnic traditions. This exercise has required us to open some difficult theoretical issues and to explore them in various cultural and religious contexts.

In Christian theological terms, the dialectic is between the Great Commission and the Golden Rule: How does a person or community abide simultaneously with the callings to “Go forth into the world and make disciples of all nations” and to “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”? In human-rights terms, the dialectic is between free exercise and liberty of conscience: How does a community balance its own right to expand the faith with another person’s or community’s right to be left alone? In sociological terms, the dialectic is among sharply competing understandings of conversion: How does one craft a general rule to govern Christians who have easy conversion into and out of the faith, Jews who have difficult conversion into and out of the faith, and Muslims who have easy conversion into the faith but allow for no conversion out of it? Neither conventional missiology nor current human-rights jurisprudence has as yet developed a coherent methodology to resolve these dialectics.

We are publishing some of the general volumes to emerge from this inquiry in a new book series on “Religion and Human Rights” published by Orbis Books.¹ We are publishing more specialized materials in symposium issues of leading interdisciplinary and interreligious journals in North America and abroad.

This symposium issue of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* uses the binocular of proselytism and pluralism to view afresh some of the cultural,

¹See, to date, Abdullahi An-Na’im, ed., *Proselytization and Self-Determination in Africa* (1999); Paul E. Sigmund, ed., *Religious Freedom and Evangelization in Latin America: The Challenge of Religious Pluralism* (1999); and John Witte, Jr., and Michael Bourdeaux, eds., *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls* (1999). Currently in press are: John Witte, Jr., and Richard C. Martin, eds., *Sharing the Book: Religious Perspectives on the Rights and Wrongs of Mission* (2000); Natan Lerner, *Religion, Beliefs, and International Law* (2000); and T. Jeremy Gunn, *Rights of Peculiar Delicacy: A Comparative Analysis of European and American Rights of Religion and Belief* (2000).

ethnic, and religious conflicts in Central and Eastern Europe. Sixteen distinguished scholars, of diverse political persuasions and religious convictions, assess critically the contests within and among various Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant communities, as well as among numerous new religious and ethnic groups that have sprung forth in Central and Eastern Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The opening articles of this symposium are designed to map the rapidly shifting religious and cultural pluralism of Central and Eastern Europe. Paul Mojzes provides a general religious topography of historical and contemporary Eastern Europe, which is particularly helpful for nonspecialists to get their bearings. In a later, separate chapter, he provides a much closer insider account of the complex religious, cultural, and ethnic compounds that made up the former Yugoslavia, and that exploded in what he aptly calls "The Yugoslavian Inferno." Jonathan Luxmoore and Jolanta Babiuch-Luxmoore supplement Mojzes's general religious picture, particularly adding an unprecedented analysis of the scores of religious movements in Eastern Europe that have been newly crafted or newly awakened after decades of political and religious repression. Julie Mertus and Kathryn Frost provide cutting-edge empirical research and analysis of the (sometimes grim) experiences of religious and cultural minorities in three very different kinds of religious environments — Poland, Ukraine, and Romania.

The later articles of this symposium provide illustrative case studies of the frictions and more than occasional explosions that have resulted from this volatile pluralism in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe. The case studies deal with Poland, the Slovak Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, the former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania. This is by no means an exhaustive case study of all the countries and regions of Central and Eastern Europe, and a country-by-country study is by no means the only way to undertake the analysis. However, these articles do provide illuminating windows on the multidimensional tensions that confront Central and Eastern Europe today. Many of the current tensions are products of ancient theological, cultural, ethnic, and sometimes linguistic controversies. Thus, a number of the authors — most notably Magdalena Forgačova and Paul Hinlicky — have dug deep into the soils and souls of their subjects to help explain to outsiders what is at stake.

What holds many of these diverse communities together is their common tragic experience with Marxism-Leninism since World War II. In her valuable study herein, Radmila Radić shows that the Marxist-Leninist state, in all its local varieties, was the most efficient and vicious proselytizer that Eastern Europe has seen in the twentieth century. The studies of Tamás Földesi on Hungary and Linford Stutzman on Albania offer particularly pointed illustrations of the insidious forms of Marxist-Leninist indoctrination, propaganda, and coercion that beset local Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities. The bitterness born from experience of this state proselytism of a false religion has made many contemporary Eastern Europeans deeply suspicious of any state involvement in religious proselytism, whatever its denominational stripe.

What also holds a number of these diverse communities together is a common unease—sometimes an outright suspicion—of the Western Enlightenment's democratic experiment. For all the political fervor and favor of the West, the "Great Transformation" of Eastern Europe was not simply the *en masse* implementation of Western ideals of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. In the course of the past decade, these ideals have often been severely tailored and tempered by local religious and political experiences and expectations. As the case studies of Romania by Ion Bria and Earl Pope illustrate, local Orthodox churches that have historically enjoyed prominence, if not hegemony, have sought to reassert their authority, even in the face of strong constitutional norms of religious liberty for all. Similar such tendencies are evident among some Catholic leaders in Poland and Slovenia, as the studies herein of Halina Grzymała-Moszczyńska and Marjan Smrke make clear. Especially these predominantly Orthodox and Catholic communities of Central and Eastern Europe have found the sudden influx of new religious movements both from abroad and from within to be deeply troubling.

Moreover, it has proved notoriously difficult thus far for some of these deeply scarred societies to work out a pristine constitutional and legal calculus for the restitution and restoration of religious properties, the protection of and from religious education, the distribution of charitable services, and the like. Invariably, some of the new statutes and cases seem to contradict flatly the basic norms of the new constitutions as well as international human-rights norms. Both Tamás Földesi's study of Hungary, and Emil Cohen's and Krasimir Kanev's study of Bulgaria provide excellent illustrations of these legal difficulties. Both studies also wisely counsel those of us quick to condemn these human-rights lapses to have a margin of appreciation for local difficulties and a measure of patience for the cultivation of the local habits of constitutional law and democratic life.

Most of the articles included in this special double issue were first prepared for conferences convened in Budapest in May, 1996, and in Dresden in June, 1997. It is testimony to the fragility of modern Eastern European life that a number of our key contributors in the first conference, including a number of Jewish and Muslim colleagues from the former Yugoslavia, were unable to participate in our second conference—and then sadly fell out of communication altogether.

It has been a special privilege for the Law and Religion Program to engage Professor Paul Mojzes, Academic Dean of Rosemont College, to lead this study. A native of Yugoslavia, and former Professor and Dean at the Graz Center in Austria, he is one of the nation's leading scholars of Eastern Europe. He has served as editor of *Religion in Eastern Europe*, co-editor of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, and president of Christians Associated for Relationships with Eastern Europe. He has lectured widely in the United States and abroad and has published a number of important articles and books. Two of his recent books are destined to become classics: *Religious Liberty in Eastern Europe and the U.S.S.R.: Before and after the Great Transformation* (Boulder,

CO: East European Monographs, 1992); and *Yugoslavian Inferno: Ethnoreligious Warfare in the Balkans* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

On behalf of my colleagues in the Law and Religion Program, I wish to express my gratitude to all the contributors to this volume for lending their time and talents so liberally. I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Leonard Swidler and Nancy Krody of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* for their kindness and expertise in organizing this symposium issue and for assisting in its wide dissemination in Eastern Europe and beyond. I thank Eliza Ellison, Louise Jackson, Anita Mann, and Amy Wheeler, who assisted in the administration of the project, the preparation of the two conferences, and the production of this symposium issue.

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Ion Bria (Romanian Orthodox) has been an associate professor of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Sibiu in Romania since his 1994 retirement from the World Council of Churches, where he was executive director of the Unity and Renewal Unit. He was a professor of systematic theology (missiology and ecumenism) at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Bucharest, 1963-73, prior to his W.C.C. position in Geneva. He has authored and edited a wide variety of studies in French, English, and Romanian in the areas of missiology, worship, spirituality, culture, and renewal. His best-known works include the *Dictionary of Orthodox Theology* (Bucharest, 1981 and 1994) and *Dogmatic and Ecumenical Theology* (Sibiu, 1996), both in Romanian. He is a priest of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Tamás Földesi (Lutheran) has been a professor at the Law School in Budapest since 1951, where he served as dean during 1983-89. He received his Ph.D. from the Law School in 1959. He has published (in Hungarian) *Harmony and Disharmony of Rights and Duties* (Budapest, 1995).

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