

# EXCURSUS I

*Charles G. Robertson, Jr. on  
John Paul II and the "Captive Churches"*

Pope John Paul II, formerly Karol Cardinal Wojtyla, Metropolitan Archbishop of Cracow, signaled in his inaugural sermon of October 22, 1978, new dimensions in the Vatican's so-called *Ostpolitik*. Vatican efforts toward improved relations between the Holy See and Catholic churches in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are in for some changes. Delivering his homily in Italian, the new pope concluded the sermon with greetings to his fellow Poles in their native language. He also extended greetings to other Christians throughout the world in English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and, significantly, in Ukrainian, Czech, and Lithuanian.

John Paul's inclusion of these last three languages is of consequence because they refer to three of the most severely oppressed Catholic groups in the part of the world from which the new pope comes. His were words of encouragement and hope to those peoples, but he also signaled, to the Soviet and Czech governments in particular and to Eastern European governments in general, that he intends to have the status of these and similar churches on the agenda of their future discussions with Rome. Each of these churches has suffered materially from state efforts to control and eventually eliminate religion in their territories. These churches have suffered spiritually as well, as a result of a policy of "benign neglect" on the part of the Vatican in the last ten years or more. In its efforts not to inject embarrassing questions into negotiations in pursuit of détente, the Vatican has sometimes left the impression of being indifferent to these suffering churches.

The Uniate, or Greek Catholic Church, in the Ukraine (a church with a Slavonic-Byzantine rite but united with Rome) was forcibly incorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church after World War II. Its hierarchy and priests, dissenting from that merger, were arrested and sentenced to forced labor, where many died or were executed. Many of the clergy and laity went underground, and there are today an estimated four million believers, two to three hundred priests, and one bishop, who continue to meet secretly, forming an illegal and persecuted church. The leader of this church, Josef Cardinal Slipyj, was released from prison and allowed to come to the West in 1963, but he maintained silence on the subject of his church until 1971. Since then he has charged that the silence of the Holy See and its apparent lack of effort to alleviate the suffering of the Ukrainian Uniate Church represents a betrayal. Indeed, many critics of the Vatican's *Ostpolitik* have charged that this church has been sacrificed as the price of Rome's détente with the Soviet Union.

The Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia has been

under the tight control of that country's neo-Stalinist government since the Soviet-led invasion of 1968. The church comprises about eight million believers, or roughly 55 per cent of the population. Of its thirteen dioceses, ten are without bishops. Those bishops who were consecrated with the blessings of the Holy See in 1973 were all formerly associated with the government-sponsored "peace movement" of priests, and are therefore suspect in the eyes of many of the faithful. Of its nearly 4,500 parishes, about 1,600 are without priests, yet there are more than 500 priests without state permits to exercise their religious function, many of whom form the base of a secret underground church in Czechoslovakia.

Attempts to suppress the Catholic Church in Lithuania have eased somewhat since 1964. It underwent severe persecution during the eras of Stalin and Krushchev, and even today its life remains extremely precarious. The church has about two million believers, or roughly 80 per cent of the population. Its six dioceses are headed by five apostolic administrators and one vicar capitular. There has been considerable unrest about the appointment of these bishops because of the extensive involvement of the government's Council for Religious Affairs in the selection process. In 1972 a number of priests, strongly supported by the laity, distributed a letter protesting their bishops' readiness to collaborate with the government. The government exercises a policy of attrition with regard to the clergy: Of eight hundred priests, one-third are over sixty years of age; only three hundred new priests have been ordained since 1945, and in recent years government restrictions on seminary admissions have permitted only four new priests to be ordained each year. As in the Ukraine and Czechoslovakia, an active underground church movement exists in Lithuania.

In greeting the faithful of the Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, and Lithuania in their own tongues, John Paul clearly indicated that his pontificate will be guided by a heightened awareness of their plight. At the same time, he put governments on notice that he intends to broaden the range of discussion so as to include more delicate, complex, and controversial questions—questions involving the right of a church to exist (as in the Ukraine) and the freedom of churches to conduct their mission free from state interference and suppression.

While John Paul has committed himself to the principles that guided his predecessors, John XXIII and Paul VI, in working toward accommodation with Communist governments, his experience as archbishop of Cracow in dealing with the Polish government shows a greater sensitivity to the political and social realities confronting such churches. He well knows, for example, the way Communist governments deliberately interpret all agreements to conform in practice with their ideological objectives. At the same time, the new pope has shown a greater

appreciation for the moral and international influence Rome is able to exercise on Eastern European governments on behalf of the churches, as well as for the spiritual and transpolitical strength the Holy See gives those churches. Negotiations between the Vatican and the governments of Eastern Europe are likely to be more difficult because of Wojtyla's knowledge and experience, but the results are likely to be more just and lasting.

John Paul's more comprehensive policy toward improving relations with Communist states will undoubtedly be misunderstood. Some Western commentators have speculated that the new pope may favor a general rapprochement between Catholicism and Marxism, in a form suggested by the "historic compromise" in Italy. But such a view ignores the former archbishop's insistence that genuine dialogue can only take place if neither side abandons its principles. Asserting that social and political justice is consistent with the teaching of the Catholic Church, he insisted that the church in Poland should play a greater role in shaping the future of the nation. His track record definitely does not suggest ideological compromise, a reluctance on the part of the church to assert itself on social, economic, or political matters, or a preference for the "socialist option."



Yet other Western commentators have described John Paul as a "staunch anti-Communist" in tones that conjure the memory of Jozef Cardinal Mindszenty. This conservative embrace of the pope also ignores Cardinal Wojtyla's achievements in Cracow. He presided over the erection in Nowa Huta of the largest church building in Eastern Europe since World War II—an accomplishment that necessarily involved difficult negotiations with state authorities. He has also publicly rejected extreme anti-Communist positions that would only aggravate the situa-

tion of Catholics in Eastern Europe and could lead to a setback in liberties they have gained thus far.

Pope John Paul's greetings to Ukrainian, Czechoslovakian, and Lithuanian Catholics undoubtedly will have wider ramifications than I have mentioned. Any such gesture affects other Catholic groups in Eastern Europe, such as the Uniates in Rumania and the Catholics in Bulgaria. What all this might mean defies prediction, but it is evident that new dynamics are at work in the Vatican's *Ostpolitik*.

*The Reverend Charles G. Robertson, Jr., serves the Howesville United Presbyterian Church in Jasonville, Indiana, and is a graduate student at Indiana University. He was in Cracow, Poland, from 1972 to 1974 at the Jagiellonian University as part of the Frontier Internship in Mission program of the United Presbyterian Church and taught English in Katowice, Poland, from 1974 to 1976.*

## EXCURSUS II

### *Takeshi Watanabe on International Cultural Barriers*

When I was with the Asian Development Bank, men and women of thirty-four different nationalities worked in the organization. One obvious obstacle to communication was language. We decided on English as the working language of the bank, but in practice we had to be flexible about the kind of English each staff member spoke. Japanese, Indian, and Australian varieties were allowed, as well as American or, in fact, any other mutation of English. This created a little confusion, but with some effort at accommodation we could understand each other sufficiently.

Another obstacle—at first sight not as apparent as language—was the broad cultural barrier, which proved to be even more formidable and persistent. It was like a hidden shoal on which communication might run aground. It would require an in-depth study to analyze the cultural barriers existing among the staff of international organizations. I believe such a study would be, not only fascinating, but also a contribution to world peace, since such organizations are, so to speak, microcosms of human society. I limit my observations here mainly to some peculiarities of my own countrymen, the Japanese, particularly in how and why they differ from people of other nationalities in their behavior at international meetings.

Let me cite one experience I had with a Japanese staff member newly arrived at the bank. His English was good, yet he kept a complete silence at the first conference he attended. After the meeting he told his colleagues: "I was not in agreement with the proposed decision today, but I was silent because I