

## COLUMNISTS

## Reflections on Eastern Europe

In September, I promised to tell you about the two weeks I spent in Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia as part of a Catholic Press Association symposium. Sponsored by the U.S. Catholic Conference, the project was designed to enhance the editorial and business skills of Eastern European Catholic journalists.

Our delegation was led by Archbishop John P. Foley, president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications and former editor of *The Catholic Standard and Times* in Philadelphia. The other participants were: Tony Spence, president of the CPA and editor of the *Tennessee Register* in Nashville; Monsignor Owen Campion, associate publisher of *Our Sunday Visitor*; Richard Haas, business manager of *Commonweal* magazine; and Mark Lombard, senior business officer for Catholic News Service.

Before we left Oct. 15, I tried to imagine what the three countries would be like, and Cold War imagery quickly came to mind. Our approach to the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius fitted those expectations well. As we came in for a landing, the view out the airplane window could have been a backdrop for a gulag scene in some Cold War movie — row upon row of monochromatic buildings that sent chills down our spines.

The tiny Vilnius airport was intimidating as well. Its runways were littered by Soviet aircraft in various stages of disrepair. Armed soldiers guarded these aircraft, though I doubt that any of them were capable of flight.

The mood warmed considerably once we left the airport and headed toward the beautiful old city of Vilnius. The Lithuanian government just now is beginning to return church property the Soviets had pressed into alternate service. The cathedral had been used as an atheistic museum of religion; another church had been used to store coal.



between  
the  
lines

BY KAREN M. FRANZ

Each of the countries we visited regulates the use of heat in public buildings, permitting heat to be turned on only after the average temperature falls below a certain level for a number of consecutive days. Vilnius had not met its quota when we arrived, so we lectured for three days in an unheated, uninsulated building that had been a Jesuit novitiate. By the time we left Lithuania, Archbishop Foley had the flu, and Tony and I came down with bad colds a few days later.

Fortunately, the heating regulations do not apply to hotels, or at least not to the Lietuva (Lithuania) Hotel in which we stayed. All foreign visitors to Vilnius had been required to stay in this utilitarian facility during the Soviet era. So we examined our rooms, trying to guess where the "bugs" had been hidden!

The Polish leg of our junket made me think of the film "If it's Tuesday, this must be Belgium." We flew to Warsaw, where we spent the evening at the Polish Bishops' Conference. The next day, we took a train to Krakow, where we visited Wawel Castle and Cathedral. The ornate cathedral had been the seat of Krakow's famous cardinal-archbishop, Karol Wojtyla. We shopped in Market Square and got an eerie sensation walking by landmarks we had seen in "Schindler's List."

The next day we took the train back to Warsaw, then a bus to a suburban retreat center. We ate, slept and taught in the

same facility for three days, which was a blessing for those of us who had become ill; we could sneak back to our beds when we weren't lecturing. Finally, we took the bus back to Warsaw for one more night at the bishops' conference.

Our last stop was Bratislava, Slovakia. We had been told Slovakia was the most oppressed of the three countries, so we didn't expect much by way of accommodations, teaching facilities or audience participation. As a result, our visit there came as a very pleasant surprise. The Slovaks were friendly and engaging, and the hotel and lecture hall were the most comfortable of the trip.

I had assumed "Eastern European" nations lost much of their cultural distinctiveness during the communist era. Perhaps that is what the Soviets wanted to achieve in their satellite nations, but they did not succeed in Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia, each of which retains a unique national character.

The Lithuanians — especially those over 40 — most closely fit my "Eastern European" stereotype. They seemed guarded and cynical. Repeatedly, they said they needed to tailor their publications for the "intelligentsia," and few Lithuanian journalists had much interest in writing for the average Catholic. They perceived their mission as forming political and social leaders in Catholic thought, in order to influence Lithuania's ongoing political development.

The Poles were the most gregarious and assertive. Their economy suffered least under Soviet rule, so it came as no surprise that the Catholic journalists we encountered in Poland had the greatest interest in marketing. In fact, Poland boasts what is probably the only Catholic daily newspaper in the world!

The Slovaks were a joy — humble and a bit shy, but open to our ideas and grateful for assistance. Their publica-

tions were the most sophisticated we saw during the trip, and many U.S. Catholic publishers would envy magazines for Slovakia's Catholic children and teens.

I was particularly impressed by the graciousness of the two men who drove us to Bratislava from the Vienna airport and then attended to our every need for the next three days. Dr. Hlavac Teo, who orchestrated the Slovakian symposium, is a retired physicist once ordered by the Soviet regime to spend years alone on a remote mountaintop studying the effects of cosmic rays. He scurried about attending to details and ensuring that his guests were treated like royalty.

Driving the van to and from Bratislava was Jesuit Father Peter Zahoransky, a physician who was secretly ordained during communist rule. Even the parents of this humble man did not know that their son had become a priest!

By the time we arrived in Bratislava, Archbishop Foley's flu was waning, but Tony and I were still struggling to lecture through clogged sinuses. During one coffee break, Father Peter appeared, bearing various medications. Although we were certain he scarcely could afford them, he refused our repeated efforts to reimburse him for the preparations.

All our visits were memorable, but the hospitality, gratitude and warmth of the Slovaks were especially touching. I almost cried myself as Anna Kolkova, head of the Slovakian Catholic Publishers Association, tearfully presented us with souvenir books about her country.

Catholic publications in all three countries face challenges, especially in business management. But based on the determination and creativity they showed during our visit, we U.S. "experts" expect them to rival — or even exceed — our own efforts before many years elapse. I, for one, look forward to watching their work evolve.

## Events show need to balance work, family life

"It is not possible to get used to the nightmare of life without you. The television never ceases to broadcast pictures of you, and you are so alive that I can almost touch you — but only almost, and I won't be able to anymore."

With these sad words, Noa Ben-Artzi Philosof, age 17, bade farewell to her grandfather, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, murdered by an assassin's bullet.

What made Philosof's words all the more poignant was their juxtaposition with the eulogies by the famous and powerful — people like U.S. President Bill Clinton and Jordan's King Hussein. For, while these men focused on the public life and work of Rabin and his leadership in the efforts to forge peace in the Middle East, she reminded us all that he was first and foremost a private



faith &  
work

BY GEORGORY F. AUGUSTINE PIERCE

man: a son, a husband, a father ... a grandfather.

"I know that people talk in terms of a national tragedy, and of comforting an entire nation," Philosof said, "but we feel the huge void that remains in your absence when grandmother doesn't stop crying...."

"Others greater than I have already eulogized you," she continued, "but none of them ever had the pleasure I had to feel the caresses of your warm, soft hands, to merit your warm embrace that was reserved only for us, to see your half-smile which is no longer, frozen in the grave with you."

This tension between the public and the private, between the political and the personal, is an important issue for the spirituality of work. For many people, their work is of utmost importance. They are willing to make any sacrifice, take any risk, endure any anger. Their friends and family are expected to support them completely because of the importance or urgency of the cause or effort.

Others are much more careful to take their loved ones' needs and wishes into

account. Shortly after Rabin's funeral, for example, Colin Powell took himself out of the presidential race, at least partly because of the opposition of his wife Alma to his candidacy.

Some people discount such personal reasons as excuses or signs of weakness, but for anyone trying to balance work and family life they are acts of courage and conviction.

Should people put themselves in harm's way for the public good? Certainly they should when, as in the case of Rabin, there is great need, even if their families must suffer. Should people always put themselves in harm's way for the public good? Certainly they should not when, as in the case of Powell, there are others who can do the job and their loved ones need them to refuse.



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