

News in Brief

GENERAL

WCC Draft Programme on Human Rights

An initial five-year church-centred human rights programme to monitor and support the implementation of the Helsinki Final Act, has been drafted by the WCC's Commission of the Churches on International Affairs. It is to be submitted to WCC member churches and to the three ecumenical bodies in the Helsinki area. The plan provides for joint sponsorship of the human rights programme by the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCCC USA) and the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) with the CEC assuming administrative responsibility and employing a programme secretary in consultation with the sponsoring organizations. An 11-member working committee, to be formed by the sponsoring bodies in consultation with the Churches, will consist of four from Eastern Europe, four from Western Europe, to be appointed by the CEC, and three from North America, to be appointed by the NCCC USA and the CCC. An alternative delegate for each will be appointed at the same time. Annual costs of the programme have been estimated at \$80,000.

According to the plan, the working committee is to convene at least once a year for the purpose of reviewing and evaluating human rights violations in the signatory States of the Helsinki Agreement. National church councils and regional church councils are the two other levels on which the plan is expected to work. Each level has been

urged to place responsibility for human rights and religious liberty in an existing body, or to create one specifically for this purpose. It was also recommended that the Roman Catholic Church and other concerned religious bodies should be informed of the programme. (*Ecumenical Press Service*, 21 July 1977, p. 2)

Baptists on Religious Liberty

In a statement adopted by the General Council of the Baptist World Alliance in July 1977, Baptist commitment to religious liberty was affirmed. At the meeting, held in Miami, Florida, Baptist leaders spoke out on religious liberty. To promote the fulfilment of all the articles of the Helsinki Agreement was both a duty and a privilege for the world's 33 million Baptists, they said. The statement continued: "We deplore persecution of Christians and others by government agencies or religious bodies wherever it occurs. The Baptist World Alliance General Council voices grave concern and charges its offices to give all possible aid and support to persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ." (*Ecumenical Press Service*, 18 August 1977)

SOVIET UNION

Archbishop's Concern for Human Rights

Dr Donald Coggan, the Archbishop of Canterbury, impressed on representatives of the Russian Government the deep concern for human rights felt by the world-wide Anglican communion during his 12-day visit to the Soviet Union in October 1977. His visit was primarily to meet members of the

Armenian and Russian Orthodox Churches, but the Archbishop also met Jews and Baptists. The Baptist meeting was not on the original schedule, but while in Kiev visiting the Jewish community the Archbishop asked to see the Baptist churches. In the church of Georgi Vins he asked after the welfare of their former pastor.

Apart from Georgi Vins, several other names of religious prisoners were mentioned by the Archbishop in a list of people in the Soviet Union about whom churchmen were concerned. This list was handed over personally to the Soviet authorities. "They are not deaf," commented the Archbishop, "they know we represent a very large group of people throughout the world-wide Anglican communion who share with us deep concern for human rights." Dr Coggan also had talks with the Russian Orthodox leaders on church unity. "These discussions," he said, "would be continued in spite of the ordination of women in some parts of the Anglican communion." The Archbishop added, however, that ordination was still regarded by Patriarch Pimen as an insurmountable obstacle to the achievement of the aims of the dialogue. (*Ecumenical Press Service*, 6 October 1977, p. 2)

Jesuit Leader Visits Soviet Union

Fr Pedro Arupe, general of the Jesuits, made his sixth visit to the Soviet Union in July 1977. The Soviet change of attitude to such official visits was shown by the contrast of publicity afforded to his two-day stay in Moscow on this occasion with that of six years ago. Fr Arupe met representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, at whose invitation Fr Arupe was in Moscow. He was delighted with the opportunity of addressing a packed congregation of Orthodox believers. (*AKSA*, 12 August 1977)

EBF Secretary Baptizes in the USSR

On 15 June 1977 Dr Gerhard Claas, Secretary of the European Baptist Federation, participated in a baptismal service in the River Inya, Western Siberia. Thirty-three new converts of the Novosibirsk Baptist Church were being baptized. The service began in the crowded church on

Wednesday evening; then the congregation processed to the river, which runs behind the church, for the actual baptism. Dr Claas was invited to join Pastor Jacob Fast and the Rev. Konstantin Borodinov, Superintendent of the West Siberian Baptist Churches, in the baptismal act. Later the congregation returned to the church for the ordination of six new deacons, each of whom received a new Bible from Dr Claas. He also gave them their charge. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 25 July 1977, p. 6)

Patriarch Pimen Visits Patriarch of Constantinople

The Russian Patriarch Pimen has recently visited the Patriarch of Constantinople, Demetrios. The principal subject of discussion concerned the preparations for the Pan-Orthodox Council. The communiqué issued at the conclusion of the discussions emphasized the strengthening of cooperation between the two Churches. (*AKSA*, 4 November 1977; *Ecumenical Press Service*, 26 October 1977)

Changes in the Russian Orthodox Church Hierarchy

During the months of June and July 1977, the Holy Synod decided on a number of significant changes in the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church. Archbishop Nikolai of Kaluga and Borovsk has been appointed Archbishop of Gorki and Arzamas. Bishop Nikon of Arkhangelsk and Kholmogorsk has been appointed Bishop of Kaluga and Borovsk, while Igumen Isidor Kirichenko, a lecturer at the Leningrad Theological Academy, will be consecrated bishop and fill the seat left vacant by Bishop Nikon. The head of the Mission in Jerusalem, Archimandrite Serafim, has been relieved of his duties and assigned to Metropolitan Sergi of Odessa and Kherson; the Deputy Head, Hieromonk Nikolai Shkrumko, will take his place. On 2 September 1977 nine bishops were elevated to the rank of archbishop.

Georgian Orthodox Patriarch Dies

David V, Catholicos Patriarch of All-Georgia, died on 9 November 1977 at

nine o'clock in the morning. He had long suffered from diabetes and was taken to hospital on 4 November. David V was born Khariton Dzhiboevich Devdariani on 24 March (old style) 1903 in the village of Miroshchminda, Kharagoulski District, in Georgia. He was ordained in 1927, took monastic vows and was consecrated bishop in 1956, was elevated to the rank of metropolitan in 1966, and elected Catholicos-Patriarch in 1972. His funeral and burial were held in Zion Cathedral in Tbilisi on 15 November; present were Vazgen I, Catholicos-Patriarch of All-Armenians, Metropolitan Alexi of Tallin and Estonia (representing the Russian Orthodox Church), a delegation from the Orthodox Church of Greece, and a representative of the Roman Catholic Church. David V is buried alongside his immediate predecessors to the Patriarchal throne, Melchisedek III and Yefrem II. Metropolitan Ilya of Sukhumi and Abkhazia, as *Locum Tenens*, presided over the ceremonies. (Metropolitan Ilya has since been elected Catholicos-Patriarch). (*Zarya Vostoka*, 12 November 1977, p. 4; *Tass* in Russian for abroad, 15 November 1977)

New Appointment for Metropolitan Yuvenali

Metropolitan Yuvenali, head of the Russian Orthodox Church foreign affairs department, has been appointed administrator of the Moscow diocese, with the title of Metropolitan of Krutitsy and Kolomna. He succeeds Metropolitan Seraphim, who has retired for health reasons. Metropolitan Yuvenali's jurisdiction does not include urban Moscow, which continues to be administered by Patriarch Pimen. (*Ecumenical Press Service*, 21 July 1977, p. 3)

Petition for Church in Gorki

More than 1,700 Orthodox Christians have signed a petition demanding permission to build a new church in Gorki. A city of almost 1½ million inhabitants – the third largest in the RSFSR – Gorki does not have a single Orthodox church open for worship. Ten years ago, the people drew up a similar petition, collected 1,500 signatures, and sent it to the

Chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs, V. Kuroedov, to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and to the CPSU Central Committee, all to no avail. Not only were they not allowed to build a new church, but many were harassed at their places of employment. At that time, it was pointed out that in 1917 there had been 40 churches for the 110,000 inhabitants of the city; now only three are open and all of them are in surrounding villages. In 1968, Venyamin Kozulin, who still leads the campaign for a new church, appealed to UN Secretary-General U-Thant. This time, in addition to the petition to President L. I. Brezhnev, they have enlisted the help of the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights, which distributed a statement to Western correspondents in August 1977 on this issue. The believers in Gorki have formed five *dvadtsatki* (*dvadtsatka*=a group of twenty believers of the same faith – the minimum number of people needed to form a religious association, i.e. church), which have, in turn, handed in the appropriate applications to five different *soviets* throughout the city. Permission was refused and an official has threatened them with reprisals after the Belgrade Conference ends. Meanwhile, the petitioners have requested as much publicity as possible. (*Novoe Russkoe Slovo*, 13 October 1977; *Le Monde*, 6 November 1977; *Russkaya Mysl*, 27 October 1977)

Baptism of Academicians

According to secret information given to the editor of the Brussels journal, *Cahiers du Samizdat*, 13 members of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR were baptized by a priest in Moscow during the course of 1977. The Soviet Academy of Sciences, which includes the top representatives of the intellectual life of the USSR, consists of 690 Soviet and 70 foreign members. The baptism of these intellectuals contradicts Marxist-Leninist teaching, according to which academic enlightenment will automatically lead to the disappearance of religious faith which is viewed as a mere "bourgeois relic". (*Glaube in der 2. Welt Informationsdienst* 11, 3 August 1977, pp. 3a-4; *The Tablet*, 27 August 1977, p. 829)

Restriction on Orthodox Choirs in Moscow

An authorized representative of the Council for Religious Affairs has telephoned the Orthodox churches in Moscow to issue the order that no person under the age of 40 may be admitted to the choir. It is well-known that many young people, including some music students, are brought back to the Orthodox faith through their contact with church music. (*Glaube in der 2. Welt: Informationsdienst*, 18 November 1977, p. 13; *Russkaya Mysl*, 27 October 1977, p. 3)

Soviet Support for "Charter 77"

Soviet dissidents have signed a declaration in support of *Charter 77*. The document signed by, among others, Sakharov, Peter Vins, Lev Regelson and Fr. Zheludkov, praises *Charter 77* as outstandingly humanitarian; it furthers the most important and pressing aim of socialist society, that of humanity. The *Charter* does not disturb the basis of government, they claim, since the demands and propositions of *Charter 77* all comply with the Constitution. The signatories state: "The realization of such basic rights as the right to independence of the judiciary, freedom of movement, freedom of conscience or belief and its expression, and freedom to express one's professional interests, strengthens government rather than impairs it."

Appeal for Arrested Georgians

Fr. Gleb Yakunin, Hiero-deacon Varsonofi Khaibulin and Viktor Kapitanchuk, members of the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights in the USSR, appealed in May 1977 on behalf of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Merab Kostava. These Georgians, whose arrest follows those of Rudenko, Orlov and Ginzburg, were arrested for their part in monitoring the implementation of the Helsinki Agreement on matters concerning the Georgian Orthodox Church. They had taken up the case of the David Garezhii Monastery complex, which had recently been destroyed because it had been in the area of an artillery range. Prior to

their arrest, a smear campaign had been waged by the media against those defending human rights in Georgia. The late Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church also publicly denounced them in a letter published in the press. Ironically, Gamsakhurdia and Kostava were arrested on Easter Thursday. They ask us to pray for them and to stand up in their defence.

Torahs for Soviet Jews

The Kremlin gave permission in 1977 for an American religious foundation, the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, to send 10,000 Torahs (the first five books of the Old Testament) to Soviet Jews. The move is seen as a concession by the Soviet Government to reduce criticism of their human rights policy. No Hebrew Scriptures have been printed inside the Soviet Union since the 1917 Revolution, and none have been allowed into the country from abroad. One of the men responsible for this agreement is Rabbi Schneier of New York, who brought the matter up with the Council for Religious Affairs during his visit to the USSR on 29 January–9 February 1977. (*The Christian Science Monitor*, 21 March 1977; *The Observer*, 10 April 1977, p. 6)

Archbishop Tooming Dies

Archbishop Alfred Tooming, Primate of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, has died. He was 71. (*The Times*, 15 November 1977, p. 16)

Lutheran Church Restored

In October 1977 the Lutheran Church in Pushkin, 20 kilometres south of Leningrad, was due to be re-opened after extensive restoration. The congregation had carried out repairs on their church in their spare time and at weekends. The cost of the work was met through personal gifts. The congregation was only registered last year. It is made up of Soviet citizens of predominantly Finnish but also German and Russian origin. The church which was given to them on registering last year had been closed in 1933 and used for other purposes. As soon as a flat can be provided,

they will be able to obtain a pastor for Pushkin. Until then they are being served from Tallinn, situated 600 kilometres away. (*Idea*, 10 October 1977, p. 2)

Atheist Education in Latvia

The Soviet Latvian-language journal for teachers, *Skola un Gimene*, published an article in August 1977 attacking the indifferent attitude of many teachers to religion. Schoolteachers often insist that there are no religious believers in their school, while emphasizing the continuing need for atheist education. The author, G. Rolova, a member of the *Znanie* society, agreed that the number of believers in the republic was steadily diminishing, but that vigilance was still needed to ensure that everybody would eventually be an atheist. She had happened to go into a Roman Catholic Church in Riga the day before and had seen 50 schoolchildren taking First Communion. This showed that schools were not doing all they could to propagate atheism. (*Skola un Gimene*, August 1977, p. 14)

Campaign Against Latvian Baptists

According to information from recent Latvian Baptist emigrés now in Germany, the Soviet authorities have launched a fresh campaign of intimidation and harassment against the Baptist communities in Latvia. There have been threats to deprive congregations of their registration permits, preachers and church activists have been interrogated by the police, and a man who allowed minors to sing in the church choir has been fined.

In the town of Aizpute, the local authorities refused to recognize the election of 23-year old Viesturs Kalniņš as secretary of the Baptist congregation there in March 1977. When Kalniņš asked the vice-chairman of the Liepāja district soviet's executive committee why he was not confirmed as secretary, he was told that he had engaged in harmful political activity. For example, he had complained to other Baptists that the authorities were not recognizing officers elected by the Aizpute congregation. Kalniņš pointed out that this could not have happened until after the

authorities refused to confirm his appointment, and could not be the reason for it. He was also accused of scattering political leaflets in a factory where he worked. This he denied doing. The real reason for the authorities' action probably lies in the fact that Kalniņš is a young man and that young people are members of the Aizpute congregation. The authorities were also annoyed by the growth of ecumenical relations between Baptists and Lutherans in Latvia. In the town of Ventspils, for example, the Lutheran pastor Augstkalns was interrogated about his links with "underground" Baptist groups. He had preached in a congregation of unregistered Baptists in the small town of Jurmalciems.

Police Fight Baptists

A force of 300 police and KGB security men battled for six hours to break up a demonstration by Soviet Baptists who were protesting against the closure of their prayer house, according to the Moscow-based Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights. The clash occurred on 30 August 1977 in Bryansk, 220 miles south-west of Moscow.

The trouble started two days earlier when police told the Baptists that their new prayer house, nearly completed at the cost of £39,000, was being taken over by local authorities. The order coincided with police visits that day to Baptist communities in Rostov on the Don and in the Ukrainian town of Gorlovka, in which prayer meetings involving hundreds of believers were dispersed. In Bryansk 62 Baptists refused to leave the building and spent two days inside without food. Finally police moved in with truncheons and fire hoses after trying to drive out the protesters with smoke. Other Baptists congregated at the scene and in all 150 believers were beaten in the clash which followed. Pastor Pavel Kozorezov and Pastor Vladimir Sergeyenkov were both severely beaten.

Recent reports from the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists state that the congregation had erected the building without a construction permit. Its location was just opposite a statue of Lenin. The congregation

have now purchased another building which opened in December on an accessible site according to official Baptist sources. (*Guardian*, 8 September 1977; *European Baptist Press Service*, 23 December 1977)

Secret Printing Press Discovered

In a communication from the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (CCECB) and from the "Christian" printing press in April 1977, three believers were arrested in Ivangorod near Leningrad. The arrested were I. I. Leven, L. Zaitseva and L. Zaitseva (Ludmilla and Larissa), and the arrest took place on 21 March 1977. A printing press, other equipment and almost three tons of paper were confiscated. On the same day flats of two believers in Ivangorod and one believer in Narva (Estonia) were searched. A week later, a second detailed search was conducted in the house where the three believers were arrested, and the owner, D. I. Koop, was then arrested too.

In the communication the writers appeal against this new attack on the "Christian" printing press. They say that it indicates the fear felt by the atheists for the Word of God, which they call a "weapon". The Christians are sure that fresh attacks are pending, but this will not stop their work, they say. Those arrested should be released, they claim, because their detention does not accord with civil and human rights. Their hope, however, will remain in God alone, whatever the outcome of the appeal.

In an earlier raid on the "Christian" printing press in Riga, Latvia, in 1974, several believers were arrested. Three are still serving their sentences. One of them, V. I. Pidchenko, is in very bad health and deprived of meetings with his family, according to *Bulletin No. 41* of the CCECB.

Death of Soviet Muslim Leader

Sheikh ul-Islam Ali-Aga Suleyman-Zade, Chairman of the Muslim Board of Transcaucasia, died on 26 November 1977 in Baku. He was 92. He had studied in Meshhed, Iran and Nadjaf, Iraq and for many years was the Akhund of the

Mosque Taza-Pir in Baku. He had been Sheikh ul-Islam for the nine years before his death and had received an award for his patriotic activities in defence of peace. (*Tass in English*, 26 November 1977)

Banished Lithuanian Bishop Celebrates Mass

On 27 January 1977, the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church celebrated the 50th anniversary of the death of Archbishop J. Matulevičius. In Kapsukas (formerly Marijampole), the crowds of Roman Catholics who attended the jubilee Mass had a pleasant surprise: one of the two bishops celebrating the Mass was Bishop V. Sladkevičius, who had been banished to a small village and prevented from exercising his pastoral duties for many years. Bishop Sladkevičius also preached the sermon, in which he urged those present to follow the path of sacrifice. The editors of the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church No. 26*, in reporting the presence of the banished bishop at the anniversary service, point out that this was an achievement of the struggle for religious freedom in Lithuania and proved that the sacrifices made in that struggle were not in vain. (*Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*, No. 26)

Rector of Kaunas Seminary Denies Authenticity of Interview

The Rev. Dr Viktoras Butkus, Rector of the Roman Catholic priests' seminary in Kaunas, who has sometimes been criticized by the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* for cooperating too closely with the Soviet regime, has denied giving an interview reported in *Moscow News* on 12 June 1976. The alleged interview included assertions by Dr Butkus that religious believers in Lithuania were not hindered in practising their faith, that bishops could exercise their pastoral functions freely and that religious literature was published in adequate quantities. According to *Moscow News*, Dr Butkus attributed the destruction of churches to the effects of the war and blamed the scarcity of priests on emigration. The interview was republished in issue No. 24 of the

Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church, where it was severely criticized for misrepresenting the facts.

Dr Butkus now insists that he never gave any such interview to either the French or English language *Moscow News*. "I have been unable to find out who wrote the alleged interview with me. Unfortunately . . . I have been unable to check the original text of the interview, but the report on Vatican Radio contained a number of errors which no priest, particularly a seminary rector, could have made." He has protested to the representative of the Council for Religious Affairs in Lithuania, K. Tumenas, asking him to find the persons responsible for writing the interview, to have it repudiated and to ensure that this sort of thing never happens again.

Dr Butkus's letter of protest was published in the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* No. 29, accompanied by a somewhat guarded and suspicious commentary. The *Chronicle's* editors suspect that the protest may be a political manoeuvre on the part of the authorities: if Dr Butkus remains as rector and continues to travel abroad after his statement, this will have been proved. If Dr Butkus is sincere, he should repudiate all his other misleading statements on the position of the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania. (*Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*, No. 29)

New Religious Samizdat Periodical in Lithuania

The first issue of *Tiesos Kelias* (Road of Truth), a new Lithuanian *samizdat* journal for the clergy, brings the number of *samizdat* periodicals in Lithuania to seven, five of which are Roman Catholic in orientation. The new publication is named after a pre-war religious monthly and aims to inform priests about new developments in theology and philosophy, to present news items on Catholics throughout the world and to foster a dialogue among Lithuanian priests. According to *Tiesos Kelias*, the Church must provide the moral and ethical guidance which is lacking in the secular modern world, especially in a totalitarian atheist State. Bishops

Steponavičius and Sladkevičius, banished to small villages and prevented from exercising their episcopal ministry, are held up as an example to all priests for their principled attitude. The journal asserts that the difficulties which Lithuanian priests encounter must not serve as an excuse for defeatism. "It is still possible for us to work . . . Although we have lost many areas of activity, we must nevertheless admit that our working conditions are much easier than, for example, those faced by the clergy in England during the 17th century." Anti-church measures and censorship in Brazil and Chile are denounced and the Church's positive social activity there is praised.

Young People Confirmed in Lithuania

Some 2,000 young Roman Catholics were confirmed at a service in the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul, Kaunas, in the presence of 8,000 people. Three East German bishops had been invited by the Lithuanian Bishop, Joseph Matulaitis Labukas, Administrator of Kaunas, to participate in the ceremony. Regular contacts between the churches of Lithuania and East Germany have existed since the visit to Lithuania of Cardinal Alfred Bengsch of Berlin in 1975. Labukas returned the visit the following year. (*Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*, No. 29; AKSA, 9 September 1977; *Tablet*, 10 September 1977)

ALBANIA

Criticism of Soviet Religious Policy

The Albanian Communist Party recently attacked the Soviet Union for slackening its anti-religious struggle. Albania accused the Soviet Union of seeking an alliance with the Church in order to attain its hegemonic goals more easily. (AKSA, 12 August 1977)

Jews in Albania

There are more than 200 Jews in Albania according to a senior Albanian diplomat. The diplomat, Mr. Begai, said that they were all very satisfied with their conditions. Mr. Begai told an Israeli correspondent of *Davar* that the Albanian

Jews are mainly employed as scientists and economists. They were highly regarded, and none of them were interested in leaving the country. The diplomat went on to reject as impossible and undesirable any ideas of informal trade or other links between Israel and Albania, or of Israelis visiting Albania. (*Jewish Chronicle*, 29 July 1977, p. 1)

YUGOSLAVIA

New Albanian Translation of St. Matthew

A new translation of the Gospel of St. Matthew in Gheg, a modern Albanian dialect, has been published by the United Bible Societies. The 15,000 Scriptures will be distributed among the one million Albanians who live in Yugoslavia. (*Crusade*, December 1977, p. 15)

Muslim Theological Faculty Opened

A Muslim Theological Faculty (the first in Yugoslavia) was opened in Sarajevo on 29 September 1977 in the presence of many representatives from Arab countries, the Yugoslav authorities, the Catholic and Serbian Orthodox Churches, and the General Secretary of the Rabita (the world-wide council of Islam) who had come from Mecca with greetings from the King of Saudi Arabia and a donation of \$250,000 from a legacy of the late King Feisal. Other Muslim representatives came from Kuwait, Sudan, Tunis, Jordan, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the Al Azhar University in Cairo and the Muslims of Chicago. Among Christian representatives were Dr. Ljubo Lučić, the Franciscan theologian, Bishop Jablanović (Roman Catholic) of Sarajevo, and Dr. Radović of the Theological Faculty of the Serbian Orthodox Church. All made speeches in which brotherly contacts between Muslims were welcomed, President Tito was praised for religious freedom in Yugoslavia and Muslims were asked to remember Muslims in countries where it is forbidden to build mosques. The new faculty was welcomed as a sign of Islam's progress in Europe and as a contribution to the spread of religious toleration. The Serbian Orthodox representative said that Christians and Muslims share the faith of Abraham; the Bishop of

Sarajevo said that the new faculty was a sign of the Muslim community's vitality, and welcomed a dialogue which he hoped would go beyond the exchange of visits and congratulations on each others' festivals. (AKSA, 7 October 1977)

Yugoslav Paper Reports on Vatican Visit

An article in *Večernji List* (21 November 1977) by I. Mihovilović, one of the leading commentators on religious affairs, discusses the significance of the conversations at the Vatican which took place between the Yugoslav Foreign Minister Minić and Archbishop Casaroli. It notes that both the latter and Pope Paul referred warmly to Tito as the founder and one of the leaders of the non-aligned movement, which plays an irreplaceable role in the promotion of world peace. This favourable evaluation of Yugoslavia's international role based on a desire for peace and security, the idea of co-existence and action to liquidate armaments and blocs is leading the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia along the road to constructive cooperation and the harmonizing of its specifically spiritual activities with the movement for a socialist society. He pointed to the gesture of the Vatican just before Minić's visit, the final canonical establishment of the diocese of Koper (on the frontier between Italy and Yugoslavia, long a subject of dispute) so that there can no longer be any revanchist movements under cover of Church activities. (AKSA, 25 November 1977)

Church Leaders on Television

For the first time in Yugoslavia some church leaders have taken part in a television broadcast. Radio TV Belgrade broadcast a programme on religious communities at 10:30 p.m. on 23 November 1977. The programme dealt principally with the Roman Catholics and Muslims in Serbia and the Serbian Orthodox Church and their relations with the State. Bishop Vasilije of Žiža (who spent a month in prison in 1973 for attacking the policy of the State on education - *Ed.*), the Roman Catholic Bishop Bukatko of Belgrade and the mufti of the Belgrade mosque all took part in the programme. The life of

Orthodox nuns and their work, which includes farming and weaving, were described, and some Roman Catholic nuns were interviewed about their work in hospitals. (Many Catholic nuns expelled from Slovenia and Croatia after the war were taken on by hospitals, including military hospitals, in Serbia – *Ed.*) A woman doctor who became a nun was also interviewed.

The commentary pointed out that religious communities function freely in spite of some difficulties, and the State gives assistance in the form of social insurance and the restoration of cultural monuments. New churches and other religious buildings are being erected. In answer to questions, the religious leaders expressed a number of complaints – Bishop Vasilije complained of difficulties in obtaining permission to rebuild a church damaged during the war; Bishop Bukatko urged that some questions concerning church property confiscated after the war should be resolved as quickly as possible; and the mufti emphasized that Muslims expected the State to give permission for new religious premises to be built, or at least for existing ones to be extended, as well as the Belgrade mosque to be renovated.

Newspaper Comments on Religious TV Programme

The official daily *Politika* of 25 November 1977 commented favourably on the religious TV programme. As well as its picturesque and spectacular aspects, the cameraman combined curiosity with discretion: he filmed the consecration of a new church in Stopanj, the Orthodox convent at Ljubostina and its services, a celebration of the eucharist in the Serbian Orthodox Cathedral in Novi Sad and a wedding in the Slovak (Evangelical) Church in Posova. Viewers were shown a world which is still a part of present-day realities, the newspaper commented, and the television programmes have been thematically enriched by this showing. The director conducted it in the form of an enquiry, and the dialogue was characterized by sincerity, no hesitation in facing problems but also showing the satisfactory aspects, the whole giving a picture of the situation as it really is today. (AKSA, 2 December 1977)

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Czech Brethren Complain about Lack of Freedom

Thirty-one Czech Brethren signed a letter which was sent on 31 May 1977 to the Federal Assembly of Czechoslovakia. In it they complained about the treatment of believers and the Church, and expressed particular concern about 18 pastors whom the State would not permit to perform pastoral duties. Furthermore 13 students had been dismissed from the Comenius Theological Evangelical Faculty because of their personal beliefs and attitudes towards the State. The Czech Brethren also objected to the poor pay of pastors and to the fact that pastors were prevented from reaching important positions in society. The police interfered in meetings and the circulation of religious literature was severely restricted. Even those who had participated in the Christian-Marxist dialogue of an earlier period were now being discriminated against, the letter added.

Czech Brethren Appeal to Cardinal Tomasek

In October 1977 fifty-five members of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren sent a letter to Dr. Gustav Husak and the Czech Federal Assembly complaining that despite the ratification of internal agreements, believers do not enjoy full freedom. The letter was originally sent to Cardinal Tomasek who was asked to forward it. The Cardinal was unable to help as he was leaving for Rome, but he offered to help the signatories in the future.

Roman Catholics Appeal to Czech Leader

On 28 October 1977 Roman Catholics sent a letter to Dr. Gustav Husak and the Czech Federal Assembly. The letter is entitled "Suggestions from Catholics for the resolution of the position of believing citizens in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic". The letter is divided into three parts. First, there are five theses dealing with the contradictory interpretation of religious freedom which is guaranteed in the Constitution.

Second, the writers remind their leaders about the international conventions which they have signed and which guarantee religious rights. Third, they discuss the more philosophical question of freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Church Statistics

In an article entitled "Religion and the Churches in the CSSR", which appeared in the 17 May edition of *Prace*, the Czech trade union daily, religious freedom in Czechoslovakia was affirmed. The author showed how religious liberty was being guaranteed under the Constitution: he gave some basic statistics for churches, church personnel and institutions of theological education. There are 4,860 full-time clergymen, 470 theological students, who study in six theological seminaries in the country. The article hoped to prove that the "so-called *Charter 77*" accusations, which denied the existence of such freedom, were like those of other "slanderous pamphlets".

Reports describing the difficult circumstances of religious believers in Czechoslovakia continue, however, to reach the West. One of the clergy who signed *Charter 77*, the Rev. Jakub Trojan, gave details of these difficulties in a five-minute interview which was filmed inside the country for distribution in the West.

New Ordinations in Slovakia

Twenty-seven new priests were ordained in Bratislava, Slovakia, on 12 June 1977. The ordaining bishop was Dr. Julius Gabris, the Apostolic Administrator of Trnava. (*Hlasy z Rima*, 8/9, August-September, 1977)

HUNGARY

Positive Future for Jews

Hungary's Chief Rabbi, Dr Laszlo Salgo, before visiting the World Jewish Congress held in Washington, DC at the beginning of November 1977, affirmed in a press interview in Budapest that Jews in Hungary have never "had it so good". "For the first time in our history," he

said, "we feel that this is our country. We are not Marxists. But the State has demonstrated its respect for our religious rights." In backing up his claim he invited Jewish leaders to visit Hungary.

There are now 80,000 Jews living in Budapest and 20,000 in the provinces. Budapest has two functioning synagogues with a good attendance at the regular Friday night services. Celebrations and major holy days such as Yom Kippur attract crowds which overflow into the streets. There are some Jews who hold high positions in the Communist Party. "But these we do not count as Jews," said the Chief Rabbi. Most jobs, with the exception of teaching, are open to Jews, and the Chief Rabbi compared this with the exclusion of communist teachers in West Germany. The Jewish community has a rabbinical seminary which celebrated its 100th anniversary in December. They also have one secondary school and run several Talmudic schools where children come on the Sabbath. (*The Guardian*, 28 October 1977, p. 8)

Billy Graham's Visit

On Saturday, 3 September 1977, the well-known American evangelist, Dr Billy Graham, arrived in Budapest at the start of his eight-day visit to Hungary. He had been invited by Sandor Palotay, the Chairman of the Hungarian Council of Free Churches, to which many of the smaller Protestant denominations, such as the Baptists, Methodists and Pentecostals belong. This visit, apart from a low-key visit to Yugoslavia several years previously, was Dr Graham's first preaching tour in a communist country.

Between twelve and fifteen thousand people arrived at Tahí Baptist Youth Camp on the Sunday morning, to welcome the evangelist, and he was also enthusiastically received in the evening at Sun Street Baptist Church in Budapest. The church was so full that hundreds had to stand outside and listen to the proceedings over a loudspeaker, whilst hundreds of others filled two nearby churches to hear piped-in sound.

On Monday, 5 September, Dr Graham met privately leaders of the Jewish community in Budapest, and on the Tuesday was received by Sandor Palotay at

the headquarters of the Council of Free Churches. That same day he travelled on to Debrecen, where he toured the Reformed Church's theological academy, and in the evening preached to a crowd of over a thousand at the Baptist Church, which has 200 members.

The evangelist's schedule was full, and it included lunch with US Ambassador Kaiser, conferences with Reformed, Lutheran and Catholic leaders, sight-seeing, cultural tours, visiting a collective farm, and press interviews. His wife, Ruth, visited an Adventist old people's home and four of Dr Graham's aids, travelling with him, had opportunities themselves to preach to large church audiences.

Dr Graham spoke at a fourth evangelistic service in Pecs Baptist Church, where half the audience were young people, and 2,000 people attended his final farewell service on the Friday evening at the Sun Street Baptist Church in Budapest.

During his visit, Dr Graham preached to about 30,000 people in all, many of whom indicated a desire to accept Christ or to rededicate their lives in His service. (*Christianity Today*, 23 September 1977 and *European Baptist Press Service*, 14 September 1977, 8 September 1977)

Church of the Nazarene Recognized

The Church of the Nazarene has been accorded full legal recognition by the Hungarian government, under a new agreement with the State Office for Church Affairs. The Nazarenes, a pacifist Church, have agreed to perform non-combatant military service, and they will be drafted for medical, engineering and other non-combatant duties. The Church recently amended its statutes so as to conform with the new Church-State accord. There are 3,300 Nazarenes in Hungary. (*Ecumenical Press Service*, 11 August 1977)

New Bishop of Hungarian Reformed Church

Dr Karoly Toth has been elected as Bishop of the Reformed Church in Hungary. Dr Toth is well known in ecumenical circles as the General Secretary of the Christian Peace Conference and

as the man responsible for foreign relations in his own church. (*Ecumenical Press Service*, 10 November 1977)

ROMANIA

Romanians Detained for Human Rights Appeal

Six Romanian evangelicals were detained by the Romanian secret police (Securitate) on Monday, 4 April 1977. All of them were involved in the preparation and signing of a 20-page document, which demanded that the human rights of evangelical believers in Romania be respected. The document first arrived in the West on the day of the earthquake. At the request of the signatories, it was not published out of respect for the Romanian people.

The first signatory, Baptist pastor Josif Ton, was arrested by the secret police at the end of a service, at which he was preaching, in the Baptist Church of Iasi, northern Romania. The police took Ton to Bucharest. The other five signatories, Pavel Nicolescu, Aurel Popescu, Radu Dumitrescu, Constantin Caraman and Dr. Silviu Cioata, were all taken for questioning by the police the following morning. Ton and Cioata are from Ploiesti, and the rest come from Bucharest. All were released later in the day, but were recalled for questioning the next morning. This procedure continued for five weeks.

In the introduction of their appeal they say: "The greatness of the era in which we live lies in the awakening of the whole of mankind to the need to affirm and uphold the dignity of man and his fundamental rights and liberties". They see this new awareness expressed in the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference. They quote the words of the Romanian President, Nicolae Ceausescu, when he reminded the delegates that history would judge the participants of Helsinki, not by their promises and words, but by their application of those promises.

For evangelical believers in Romania, however, the problem of human rights has become more acute since Helsinki, claim the signatories in their document. They highlight three ways in which believers' rights have been infringed.

Firstly, the document lists people and places where Baptist, Pentecostal, Adventist and Brethren groups have been heavily fined in the past two years for holding meetings in private houses. The major complaint is not that these fines were imposed, but that Christians have been charged under a law which deals with groups of hooligans, parasites and anarchists.

Secondly, they list 50 cases in the past four years when evangelical Christians were demoted and dismissed from positions of responsibility. They claim that this was discrimination on religious grounds. People in all the cases cited were told that their demotion or dismissal was the result of their obvious involvement in the Church. Most of those demoted are now employed as labourers. Thirdly, the document complains about discrimination against the younger generation. It gives the names of schools where pupils have been discriminated against on account of their faith, or the faith of their parents. They expose a secret order from the state authorities: over the past two years special files on the religious backgrounds of the children had been opened, and, as a result of these files, children of evangelical families had been excluded from the Young Communist Union. This action had been accompanied by further orders barring access to six university faculties to anyone without a Young Communist Union recommendation. The document claims that this order was to be extended to all university faculties by next Autumn.

Only since Helsinki, the document constantly repeats, has the discrimination against evangelicals and their children increased to its present proportions. Such widespread and uniform persecution, says the document, can only occur with the blessing of the higher authorities of the Romanian State. The situation in Romania has not improved despite promises from above. The signatories declare that they have, therefore, been obliged to make their situation known abroad.

The investigation of the six was officially suspended in May. (*Keston News Service*, No. 37, 6 April 1977, pp. 1-2)

POLAND

Bishop Visits Vatican

Bishop Bronislaw Dabrowski, Secretary of the Episcopate of Poland, stayed in Rome from 10-20 May 1977. He had talks at the State Secretariat of the Holy See and other Vatican departments. He met Cardinal Jean Villot, the State Secretary and head of the Vatican Council for the Public Affairs of the Church, and the Council's Secretary, Archbishop Agostino Casaroli. On 18 May Bishop Dabrowski was received by the Pope. He returned to Poland on 20 May accompanied by Archbishop Luigi Poggi, who is leader of the Vatican delegation for Permanent Working Contacts with the Polish Government. (*Information Bulletin*, Christian Social Association, No. 5, May 1977, p. 6)

Wyszynski and Gierek Meet: Audiences with Pope Paul

The meeting on 29 October 1977 in Warsaw between Edward Gierek and Cardinal Wyszynski marked a new step in relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Polish communist authorities. This interview, the first between the Party secretary and the Polish primate since Edward Gierek came to power in December 1970, showed a desire for dialogue on both sides which contrasts with previous relations.

During his two-day visit to Rome in November 1977, Mr. Gierek called on Pope Paul. It was their first official meeting and it is believed they exchanged views on the most important problems facing the Church and the Polish State. Cardinal Wyszynski spent over a month in Rome, returning to Warsaw on 16 December. He saw the Pope three times altogether. On 11 November he was received at a private audience which lasted an hour. On 12 December 29 Polish bishops, led by Cardinals Wyszynski and Wojtyla, were received in the Pope's private library. The Pope thanked the bishops for their zeal in pastoral work and their loyalty and devotion to the Apostolic See. (*Le Monde*, 30 October 1977; *AKSA*, 11 November 1977; *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 1 January 1978)