

News in Brief

Concern over religiosity in Albania. The first atheist state in the world, Albania, wants to continue its active struggle against the Churches. For religious life, it is reported, continues underground. The secret police has noticed disguised pilgrimages and observed a growing religiosity in the country's largest port, Durres. Pictures of saints, which should have been handed in for destruction, are being secretly worshipped. In spite of mortal danger priests – in civilian clothing – have visited families to conduct baptisms and weddings. In a secret resolution of the Central Committee objectives in the struggle against the Church were laid down for the immediate future. The Party leadership wants to spread atheism by all possible means. Refusal of invitations to attend "atheist seminars" is to be subject to police reprisals. At the same time there were voices in the Central Committee saying that this action was too radical. (Translated from *Evangelischer Pressedient*, 5 December, 1973)

Ecumenism in Bulgaria. The Ecumenical Press Service reports a unique ecumenical event that took place last month when for the first time a Metropolitan of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church met and prayed with Congregational Christians. The small Congregational community in Bulgaria, some 5,000 strong, has had increasing contacts with the Orthodox Church but never before had bishops of the Orthodox Churches attended a Congregational service. While the Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service of the World Council of Churches was meeting in Bulgaria, it visited several Protestant churches. In the group worshipping at the Congregational church in Plovdiv were Metropolitan Pankraty of Stara Zagora, head of the Ecumenical Relations Department of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and Archbishop Irinei of the Russian Orthodox Church. The two bishops spoke from the pulpit and led a surprised but delighted congregation in prayer. In response to a hymn led by the local Pentecostal pastor, the bishops sang an Orthodox hymn and gave the blessing. Pastor Assen Simeonov, president of the Congregational Church in Bulgaria, said he hoped the ecumenical breakthrough would lead to even greater exchanges. (Reprinted from *Solia*, Detroit, January 1974, p. 4)

Ecumenism in Cardinal Kominek's last days. A week of prayer for Christian Unity ended in Warsaw in the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church with a service in which the faithful of various denominations took part, also clergy among whom were Catholic priests, nuns and seminary students of the Warsaw ecumenical centre of the Metropolitan Curia. Fr. Romanczuk, Director of the Metropolitan Office, led the service. In Wroclaw the week of prayer ended with a solemn service which took place in the Dominican Church. Bishop J. Marek celebrated mass. Cardinal Kominek also took part in the service. Bishop Marek spoke to the faithful about the great need for Christian unity. The congregation also listened attentively to the address by Cardinal Kominek, the Wroclaw Metropolitan, who pointed out encouraging ecumenical developments which were leading to Christian unity. (Translated from *Gazeta Niedzielną*, London, 24 February 1974 p. 6)

Death of Polish Cardinal. In the July-October 1973 issue of *RCL* (p. 64) we reported the appointment of a third Cardinal in the Polish Catholic Church. This obituary is taken from *Gazeta Niedzielna*, 31 March, 1974: Metropolitan Cardinal Boleslaw Kominek died on Sunday 10 March in the early hours of the afternoon. The news of this sad event was given to the faithful from the pulpits during the afternoon and evening masses in the churches of Wroclaw. Prayers were said for the repose of the soul of the deceased Archbishop. The death of Cardinal B. Kominek was unexpected for the faithful of this archdiocese since, after several weeks of illness and then convalescence, the Archbishop and Metropolitan of Wroclaw had again taken up his pastoral activities with great vigour, visiting religious institutions, giving sermons and taking an active part in clerical conferences. Cardinal Kominek was a son of the land of Silesia and a priest wholeheartedly devoted to the service of the Church and to Poland, whose good was his constant endeavour and aim. His sudden demise has placed in deep mourning not only the clergy, but also the people of the Western and Northern regions, for whose spiritual well-being the deceased worked unceasingly for 30 years. For many years Cardinal Kominek was Chairman of the Episcopal Commission for the affairs of the Western and Northern regions, he was the co-founder and active member of the governing body of the Association for the Development of the Western Regions from 1957-1970. Alone and with the daily co-operation of the priests working with him he greatly stressed the need to strengthen Polish religious life in the regions along the Oder and the Baltic. The whole Polish population said a deeply sorrowing farewell to a priest of great heart and to a patriot totally devoted to the Polish cause.

"Insane" Priest Released. *RCL* No. 2, 1974 (p. 31) reported that a Polish Catholic priest, Fr. Piotr Zabielski, had been put in mental hospital. On 27 March this year *The Guardian* reported that: "he has been freed by the Polish authorities. An official said Fr. Zabielski had been found sane by doctors who examined him."

Catholic Church in Soviet Kirgizia. In June 1973 Cardinal Willebrands, head of the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity, visited the Catholic church of St. Peter in Odessa (formerly called the "French Church"). In a letter he remarked: "The priest presently working there looks after his congregation very zealously and with much success." He also spoke of the Catholic church in Frunze, capital of Kirgizia, which he said had been officially recognized a year previously. According to other sources this church, a German congregation, has been registered for some time. In May 1972 the priest, Fr. Michael Köhler, celebrated 50 years of ordination. A triumphal service was held with many attending, and with official permission. Fr. Köhler was born in 1897; he was one of the last students at the Odessa episcopal seminary. He served a total of 23 years in imprisonment. Fr. Köhler came to Frunze in 1969. His jubilee was mentioned in the local German-language newspaper; the article praised his "social activity" but omitted to mention the fact that he was a priest. (See: *Heimat im Glauben*, Stuttgart, July 1972, April and December 1973)

Moscow Appeal. In *RCL* No. 2, 1974 we considered Solzhenitsyn as a Christian writer. On 13 February Professor Sakharov and nine others published an appeal,

for which they requested signatures in the West, demanding the free publication in the Soviet Union of *Gulag Archipelago*, Solzhenitsyn's documentary book on the prisons and labour camps. Among the other signatories are the writer Vladimir Maximov, Mikhail Agursky, Pavel Litvinov and Fr. Sergi Zheludkov. The "Moscow Appeal" also demanded the publication of archives relating to the activities of the secret police; the creation of an international tribunal to investigate the crimes committed in the Stalin period; and that Solzhenitsyn be protected from persecution and enabled to work in his own country. They write: "We request all mass media to spread our appeal. We also ask all cultural, social and religious organizations to form national committees to gather signatures under this appeal." (Various organizations have responded to this request in a number of countries. The full text of the appeal in English may be obtained from "Aid to the Russian Church", 25 Aldermay Road, Bromley, Kent.) On 17 February Yevgeni Barabanov, together with four others, wrote a letter supporting the Moscow appeal. They state: "We are suffocating in a web of lies . . . Unless you want our voice to be stifled for ever, help us. The best help you can give now is to support the MOSCOW APPEAL." Barabanov had already penned a personal letter on 28 January in support of Solzhenitsyn and *Gulag Archipelago*, which he describes as "the book of a Christian". Barabanov himself is still under threat from the authorities and an appeal on his behalf by Mikhail Agursky will be found in this issue on p. 24. In the article "Alexander Solzhenitsyn: Christian Writer" (*RCL* No. 2, 1974, p. 14) mention was made of the attack on Solzhenitsyn by Metropolitan Serafim of the Russian Orthodox Church, printed in *Pravda* on 16 February and *The Times* on 1 March. On 17 February two Soviet citizens replied to this, Ye. Ternovsky, a literary critic, and E. Steinberg, an artist. They write: "Not only with amazement, but also with deep sorrow, did Orthodox Christians read your declaration printed in *Pravda* about the expulsion of A. I. Solzhenitsyn from the Soviet Union . . . The main feeling one gets on reading your declaration, Your Eminence, is a feeling of terror on your account. A Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church has condemned a Christian writer, expelled 'for righteousness' sake' . . ."

Conditions in Soviet Labour Camps. In *RCL* No. 2, 1974 we printed a review of Eduard Kuznetsov's *Diaries*, a book which adds considerably to our knowledge of conditions in the Soviet labour camps. It is reliably estimated that there are some 10,000 "political" prisoners in the camps. Last August ten former political prisoners addressed a letter to the Security Conference meeting in Geneva. They requested an investigation into conditions for political prisoners in European countries, and gave considerable detail on the Soviet situation. Among the signatories of the letter are Vladimir Osipov, editor of the uncensored Orthodox journal *Veche*, and Anatoli Levitin-Krasnov (see *RCL* No. 2, 1974). The full text is now available and includes this passage: "Receiving books is prohibited . . . The following are confiscated in the course of searches, and are not returned even after release from camps: the Bible, individual pages from the Scriptures and other writings of a religious nature, especially prayers, psalms and liturgies. In prisons and camps the hunt for religious literature is accompanied by the harsh persecution of believers. Breaking up prayer meetings in the yard, confinement in a punishment cell for failure to go to work on major religious holidays (Easter, Christmas), prohibiting all rites – even confession and communion for prisoners dying in the camp: such are the methods of 'educational'

influence by which they try to root out religious dissent. It should be added that a defendant's acknowledgment that he believes in God always constitutes a circumstance aggravating his 'guilt'." (Extract from: *Chronicle of Human Rights in the USSR*, New York, No. 7, pp. 48-9)

Solidarity with a Christian Mother. On 8 March, Women's Day in the Soviet Union, a group of Christians gathered outside the Soviet Embassy in London to protest about the treatment of a Russian Christian mother. Mrs. Zoya Radygina of Perm was deprived of her three younger children by court order in the summer of 1973 because she gave them a Christian upbringing. The police took the two smallest children away on 1 August, the third child is in hiding with friends. Mrs. Radygina belongs to the reform Baptist Church in the USSR; congregations all over the Soviet Union have written to their government in protest. The London demonstrators kept vigil for 1½ hours, taking turns to pray kneeling on the pavement; the action was repeated on 23 March, Mothers' Day in Great Britain. Both events received publicity in the British church press.

Soviet response to CSRC. Rev. Michael Bourdeaux, director of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism, has on many occasions been attacked in Soviet publications for his writing and broadcasting. More recently the scope has widened to include the work of the CSRC (founded in September 1970). One of the very first references came in the May 1972 issue of the Ukrainian atheist magazine *People and World*; it gave little more than an indication of the existence of the new Centre. This was repeated briefly in the December issue of the same journal. It was mentioned again at greater length in a book published the same year and entitled *Diversion without Dynamite*. This was an attack on the work of all religious organizations concerned with the Soviet Union, not least the broadcasting stations; several pages were devoted to the CSRC. In January 1973 an article appeared in several newspapers attempting to discredit the now famous story of the Baptist martyr Moiseyev. The CSRC was cited here as one organization which sought such information. The attack was continued in *Agitator* No. 5 (March) 1974 and some details are given of the first issue of *Religion in Communist Lands*. In an atheist booklet published in 1974 and entitled *Western Religious Centres in the Service of Anti-communism*, a considerable section is devoted to the CSRC and the reader is offered a point-by-point critique of *RCL* No. 1, 1973, thus for example: "The article by Katharine Murray also witnesses to the character of this journal. This supports the *initsiativniki* sectarians and again raises the provocative 'Moiseyev affair', which has become a subject for the propagandist speculations by militant anti-communists and evil opponents of the Soviet system. Actually there was no such 'affair'." In April 1974 the campaign moved to the pages of the central atheist journal *Science and Religion* where a certain A. Belkin devoted three pages to the CSRC. Again the first issue of the journal is criticized in detail, this time with a personal attack on the editor. This article is remarkable for one very unusual thing: an attack on a book that has not yet been published. This is the English edition of selected works by Anatoli Levitin, announced in *RCL* No. 6, 1973, p. 25. It is customary for Western books which offend the Soviet authorities to be pilloried some 2-3 years after their appearance. It is almost unique for a book to be attacked before publication. This may indicate the concern felt by the Soviet authorities over Levitin's human rights activities and writing.