

News in Brief

ROMANIA

New Patriarch of Romanian Orthodox Church

On 12 June 1977 the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church elected Justin Moisescu, Metropolitan of Moldova and Suceava, as the new Patriarch. Patriarch Justin was formally received by the President of Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu, on 18 June, after being declared Patriarch by Presidential decree at the Council of State. President Nicolae Ceausescu congratulated Justin, and at the same time remarked on the rich traditions of the Romanian Orthodox Church. He was glad that this tradition had been carried on into the new era of socialist Romania. (*Scinteia* 19 June 1977, p. 5 and *Romania Libera* 20 June 1977, pp. 1 & 5)

Fifth Volume of "Philocalia" Printed in Bucharest

One of the most outstanding moments for Romanian theology in the past 28 years was the appearance last year of the fifth volume of the *Philocalia* in a Romanian translation. The edition was prepared by Fr. Dumitru Staniloae with notes and commentary for the reader and was published by the Printing House of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate. Volume Four appeared in 1948. The new volume contains the writings of St. Peter of Damascus and the paraphrase by Simeon Metaphrastes of the 50 sayings of St. Macarius of Egypt. Fr. Staniloae, one of the world's leading Orthodox

theologians, has also recently been made a doctor *honoris causa* of the University of Thessalonica. (*Credinta*, June 1976, p. 1)

Romanian Orthodox Church Hosts Orthodox Women's Consultations

Forty-five women from 18 countries and four continents met together at Agapia Monastery, Moldavia, to discuss the role of women in the Orthodox Church. It was the first such gathering. Apart from the Romanian delegates there were women present from three other East European countries – Bulgaria, Poland and the USSR. The conference concluded that religious and higher education is important if women are to grow in their understanding of the Christian faith and Orthodox tradition and fulfil their responsibilities in the Church, family and society. (*Ecumenical Press Service*, 30 September 1976, p. 2)

Jews Seek to Emigrate

A large number of young Jews in Romania are seeking to emigrate. In theory there is no discrimination of Jews in Romania at work or elsewhere but in practice there is a limit to what Jews can achieve. They are prevented from reaching higher posts in industry and the professions because the authorities do not wish to waste time educating young Jews because, in their view, they all intend to emigrate. Ironically, the Jews want to leave because of the lack of opportunity in Romanian society. (*Jewish Chronicle*, 29 October 1976, p. 5)

New Baptist Church Opened in Timisoara

Despite tensions in the leadership of the Romanian Baptist Church, there are signs of progress in other areas. The Secretary General of the European Baptist Federation, Dr. Gerhard Claas, saw many such signs during a short visit to the country in October 1976. He was invited to Romania to participate in the opening of a new Baptist church in Timisoara and also to attend the opening of the academic year at the Baptist Theological Seminary. Forty students in all were admitted last year. The building in Timisoara seats 1,000 people and it was full for the service attended by Dr. Claas. Dr. Claas also heard that in nearby Arad another congregation, which for several years had met in overcrowded conditions, had now been able to complete an extension to their building. Though aware of the problems of the Baptist Church in Romania and also ready to mediate between the various factions, Dr. Claas was nevertheless impressed by the growth of the Church. He said that if one could speak of revival in Europe, then Romania must be included. (*Baptist Times*, 3 December 1976, p. 2)

Romanian Orthodox Institute Awards Doctorates

On 15 January 1977 ten theologians of international repute were awarded honorary doctorates by the Theological Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, in Bucharest. Among the ten theologians were three Anglicans: Bishop Mervyn Stockwood, Canon A. M. Allchin and Bishop Gordon Hill of Kingston, Ontario. Mgr. Wilhelm Nyssen of Cologne University, Archbishop Olaf Sundby of Sweden and Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate represented the Catholic, Lutheran and Orthodox traditions. Dr. Philip Potter, a Methodist, was also honoured, thus revealing the links of the Romanian Orthodox Church with the WCC. Others awarded an honorary degree were Orthodox theologians Olivier Clément of St. Serge Institute of Orthodox Studies in Paris and Prof. Nikos Nissiotis, the Dean of the Theology Faculty of Athens University.

Pride of place, however, was given to the late Romanian Patriarch who was also awarded a special degree. Each of the guests expressed their thanks to the Patriarch and described their relations with the Romanian Orthodox Church through the years. No story was so outstanding as the one told by Prof. Nissiotis who said that his first trip to Romania was as a basketball player for the University of Athens. He was an Orthodox believer but had no intention of becoming a theologian at that time. He paid a visit during that trip to the Romanian Patriarch who spent over an hour discussing theology and his personal career. It was from that meeting, he confessed, that he felt called to study theology. He was also accompanied to the interview by a girlfriend who was not then a believer. As a result of the talk with the Patriarch she began to re-think her position.

During the week of festivities the theologians lectured to the students of the Institute. In Cluj-Napoca the Protestant Theological Institute also held a special degree conferring ceremony, honouring three notable theologians with doctorates. (*Ecumenical Press Service*, 20 January 1977).

SOVIET UNION

New Soviet Constitution and Religion

The hostility of the Soviet State to religion has been reflected in the wording of successive Soviet Constitutions. The first post-revolutionary Constitution of 1918 guaranteed freedom of "religious propaganda", but in 1929 this phrase was omitted. The 1936 Constitution guaranteed anti-religious propaganda and restricted religion to the mere "performance of a religious cult". In spite of the weakness of the legal position of religion in the Soviet Union as reflected in the Constitution, it has survived and the Church is alive - perhaps more than ever.

According to the new Constitution made public on 4 June 1977, Art. 52 stipulates that the "right to profess any religion and perform any religious rites, or not to profess any religion and to conduct atheistic propaganda, shall be recognized for all citizens of the USSR".

Gone is the humiliating restriction on religious practices which limits them to the "performing of a cult", and "freedom of anti-religious propaganda" has been replaced by the right "to conduct atheistic propaganda" which is a much less offensive formulation.

Some fundamental questions will have to be answered before a proper assessment of the Constitution can be made. Does it recognize the right of religious instruction for children? Can the Church profess its religion by openly printing and distributing its literature? Does it mean an end to state interference in religious affairs? The incitement of hostility and hatred on religious grounds is now banned. Does this mean that the Soviet media will cease producing offensive attacks on religion? The future treatment of Soviet believers by the authorities will provide the answers to these questions.

Experts Disagree on Religion and Law

In 1975 a book called *Religion and Law*, by G. R. Golst, chief legal adviser to the USSR Council for Religious Affairs, was published (see review in *RCL*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1976). However, in the May issue of the atheist journal *Nauka i Religia* this book was criticized by another Soviet expert on legislation relating to religion: the Moscow University lecturer I. Brazhnik. Brazhnik comments that some of the passages in Golst's book could be misinterpreted by religious extremists and their supporters abroad. For example, Golst attributes legal force to decrees by the Council for Religious Affairs and declares that attempts by parents to "enforce" a religious outlook on their children must be "decisively suppressed by law". Brazhnik feels that this could be taken to mean that any religious instruction by parents is unlawful, which is not the case. Although Brazhnik follows the usual official Soviet line and asserting that illegal treatment of religious believers is due to the misguided zeal of individual local officials, it is interesting to note that some of the legal criticisms he makes of the Golst book are identical to those made by Yakunin and Regelson in their letter to WCC General Secretary, Dr. Philip Potter (6 March 1976); Yakunin and

Regelson even quote some of the same passages as Brazhnik. (*Nauka i Religia*, May 1976)

Official Output of Atheist Literature

Every year *Politizdat*, the largest publishing house in the Soviet Union, publishes some 400 new books, of which a significant number are atheist books. Its editorial office for scientific atheist literature is the only one of its kind in the country and titles published include a well-known series on contemporary religions and atheist readings. More than 20 titles are planned for next year. The head of the section, A. V. Belov says there has never been such a demand for atheist literature. There are regular conferences with readers and academics from Moscow University. (*Nauka i Religia*, 5/76 p. 89)

Student Teachers Insufficiently Prepared to Teach Atheism

At the Kishinev Pedagogical Institute changes have been made in the course on scientific atheism: it is now a lecture course instead of a seminar course, and it now follows a student's practical teaching term instead of preceding it. This means that students have no chance to discuss the subject thoroughly beforehand, although they are often expected to teach it in the classroom. Some students try to improvise, but one group of student teachers refused to teach scientific atheism, saying that they had been insufficiently prepared. The dean and two lecturers of the faculty of philosophy and scientific communism call for a longer course, including both lectures and seminars, in scientific atheism and they want it to be taught before the students' teaching practice. (*Sovetskaya Moldavia*, 10 August 1976, p. 3).

Religious Believers on the Increase

One in five of the adult population of the Soviet Union are believers according to an official Soviet publication. This means that in spite of 60 years of intensive atheist propaganda there are still 33 million adults over the age of 18 who

would call themselves believers. The figures appeared in a review of a booklet published in Leningrad, entitled *Public Opinion and Atheist Propaganda*. The authors of the booklet, D. Danilov and V. Kobetsky, drew attention to the fact that most of the believers are people born and educated in the "Soviet period". In Leningrad itself, of those questioned by the researchers, 41% admitted to celebrating religious festivals in their own homes or in homes of friends. Students did not show much interest in religion, though the generally high level of young believers did alarm the authors. Among the intelligentsia religious belief was considered reasonable by one in five of those questioned. It can be assumed that the actual number of believers is probably considerably higher than the official publication's claim. (*Daily Telegraph* 30 November 1976)

New Figures for Soviet Baptists

According to official sources the All Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists reports that in 1975 44 new churches were opened. In the same year 6,200 were baptised and 14,589 members of the unregistered Baptist communions returned into the union. (*Ecumenical Press Service*, 12 November 1976, p. 3).

Forty-three Baptists Write to Brezhnev

Forty-three Baptists from the town of Shchuchinsk in Kazakhstan have written an appeal to L. I. Brezhnev, protesting against the unjust imprisonment and treatment of their co-religionist I. Ya. Pauls who has been sentenced to 2½ years in a camp for infringing Art. 130-2 of the Kazakh SSR Criminal Code. He has been unlawfully deprived of his qualifications as a doctor and forbidden to practice medicine. He is being persecuted in the camp where he was sent, having been put in the punishment cell for singing religious songs. The camp administration does not allow him to pray undisturbed. The Baptists appeal to Brezhnev to correct these injustices, as they contradict the Declaration of Human Rights, the Soviet Constitution and Article 131 of the Criminal Code of the Kazakh SSR, which forbids the ob-

struction of religious rites. A reply from the Procurator's Office, asserting that Pauls was rightly punished for breaking camp regulations, is attached. (*Arkhiv Samizdata* No. 2573)

Moscow Patriarchate Prints New Testament

The Moscow Patriarchate has printed 75,000 copies of the new, small-sized edition of the New Testament. The text is the same as that of the Bible published by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1968. They will be distributed throughout Orthodox dioceses and parishes. The edition has been prepared by Archbishop Pitirim with the help of students from the Moscow Theological Academy and a group from the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. Archbishop Pitirim is the head of the publishing department of the Moscow Patriarchate. Another recent publication which appeared in July is the *Orthodox Hymnbook*. It contains prayers to be sung and read, the sequence of hours and scores for canticles, for the Sunday services. The music is scored for a four-part choir. (*Ecumenical Press Service*, 16 September 1976, p. 3).

US House of Representatives Demands Vins' release

The US House of Representatives passed by 381 votes to two a resolution calling for the release of Georgi Vins. The resolution also urged the USSR to honour its constitutional commitment to religious freedom. (*Ecumenical Press Service*, 30 September 1976, p. 7).

Georgi Vins Seriously Ill

In a letter dated probably 3 May and addressed "To all who love the Lord", the Vins family described a serious deterioration in the health of Georgi Vins, whom they had visited in labour camp in Siberia on 12-14 February. They write: "On the last day that we were together ... he got a high temperature, his blood pressure went up and he began to get strong pains in the heart. In addition, his face swelled up."

Later Georgi Vins wrote to his family to say that he had been in the camp

hospital, where he had been given three blood transfusions and 70 injections of penicillin.

In a further letter, dated 14 March, Vins wrote:

"... the unnatural swelling over my whole face, the ride to the hospital with my fever, and on 1 March the strongest heart attacks, constant pain in my heart and the paralysis of my left hand all contributed to my hardly being able to sleep at night, for when I lay down my heart immediately began thumping. Only by staying sitting up could I get some relief. Mentally I had already taken my leave of you."

However, his health later improved. The letter continues: "... I feel much better again. I believe in the power of your prayers and the prayers of God's people!"

A visit to Vins by his wife Nadezhda and son Peter on 20 May brought more bad news. They found him so ill that he could barely stand, his head covered with chapped, cracked skin and suffering from continual headaches and exhaustion. Vins, it is reported, told his wife that he suspects that he may be suffering from mercury poisoning. Apparently another inmate of the camp died recently after suffering from the same symptoms. The hospital staff leaked the information that this man had died from mercury poisoning. The inmates of the camp have verified that at least eight kilograms of mercury are kept in the camp, though there is no known reason for it to be there for any normal use.

Georgi Vins has asked that an international commission be appointed to investigate conditions at the labour camp. Neither he nor his family have claimed that he is actually being poisoned with mercury, but they naturally want to establish whether or not this is the case.

Vins, it is reported, wrote to his family before their visit, with a copy to the authorities, describing bad conditions in the hospital, inhumane treatment in the camp and the death of an inmate by suspected poisoning. His family did not receive the letter, and now Vins is refusing to write or receive letters until this letter is delivered to his family.

The Rev. Michael Bourdeaux, Director of Keston College, has appointed a lawyer, Mr. G. R. M. Beadle of Boys and Maughan, Canterbury, to look after Georgi Vins's interests in the West. This particularly involves administering the Vins Fund, which consists largely of royalties from his book, published in Britain as *Three Generations of Suffering* and under other titles in several other countries. Mr. Alf Haerem, the Norwegian lawyer who formerly represented Vins, has now retired from legal practice.

Moscow Patriarchate's New Representative

The Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church decided on 19 July 1976 to nominate a third representative for the foreign department of the Moscow Patriarchate. At the recommendation of Metropolitan Yuvenaly of Tula, they elected Bishop Job of Sarask, who is at present directing the Russian Orthodox Community under the Moscow Patriarchate in Canada. (*Episkepsis* 1 October 1976, p. 3)

Russian Archbishop Supports WCC Debate

In an exclusive interview granted to *The Orthodox Church*, the official monthly of the Orthodox Church in America, Archbishop Basil Krivoshein of Brussels said that he believed the debate on religious freedom recently begun in the WCC would be of great benefit to the Russian Orthodox Church. Bishop Basil's comment is significant because he is himself in the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. He added that it was the duty of every bishop to tell the truth about the Church when she is persecuted. He criticized the WCC for remaining silent for too long about the obvious absence of much freedom in the Soviet Union and in other parts of Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the Archbishop did not think that to accuse the leaders of the Church in Russia of being too passive or even of complying with the authorities was helpful. These were slanderous campaigns, possibly engineered by the KGB which tries to discredit the Russian bishops and divide

the Church. "This does not mean," he said, "that I agree with every action or statement of theological or political character made in the name of the Moscow Patriarchate. Whenever I feel that the interests of the Church require it, I express my disagreement". (*Orthodox Church in America*, 16 November 1976)

Pope Paul Receives Orthodox Delegation

On 16 October 1976 Pope Paul received in private audience a delegation from the Russian Orthodox Church led by Metropolitan Yuvenaly of Tula. The Pope welcomed the contacts between the delegation and the members of the Roman Curia and also the visit which a delegation from the Holy See had paid to the Soviet Union at the beginning of October at the invitation of the Moscow Patriarch. These two visits followed an agreement between the two Churches that there should be regular contacts between them. (*AKSA*, 29 October 1976).

Historic Armenian Celebration

Three days of Armenian religious festivities reached a climax on 26 September at Etchmiadzin, Soviet Armenia, with the blessing of the Holy Chrism (oil) by Catholicos Vazgen I, the spiritual leader of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church. The blessing took place before a crowd of 40,000 people with many representatives of other Churches and nations present. Patriarch Pimen of the Russian Orthodox Church, Cardinal Willebrandt as the Papal delegate, and Dr. Ellison, the Bishop of London, were among those sharing in the occasion. The oils were distributed during the following week to all the communities of the Armenian Church. This celebration takes place only once every seven years. (*AKSA*, 29 October 1976 and *Ecumenical Press Service*, 30 September 1976; p. 6).

Persecution of Soviet Baptist Children

A recent issue of the "Bulletin of the Council of Evangelical Christian and Baptist Prisoners' Relatives" (No. 36) gives details about the continuing per-

secution of Baptist children in the Soviet Union. One family in the town of Salavat, Bashkir ASSR, has been harassed since 1970 for bringing up their children in a Christian manner. Pavel and Ilya Vydys, aged 12 and 14 years respectively, were sent to a school for mentally handicapped children after a "diagnosis" made in 1973 by Dr. Maslova, a neuropathologist at the children's clinic. The diagnosis was based on a single conversation with the boys. The Council of ECB Prisoners' Relatives has produced a report on the children's mental abilities. It based its assessments on reports about their abilities at ordinary schools where they were considered average pupils. This report was presented to Mr. Kosygin and the Ministry of Education; it appealed to them to declare Dr. Maslova's diagnosis invalid and asked that Pavel and Ilya be allowed to live a normal life, both at school and at home with their parents. (*Keston News Service*, 25 November 1976)

New Baptist Churches Opened

The November issue of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (AUCECB) Bulletin records that in 1976 over 50 new churches were opened in various parts of the USSR. In the Orenburg region, six Mennonite churches were opened in Podolsk, Kamenka, Petrovsk and others. Six new Mennonite churches were organized in Kazakhstan, in Leningorsk, Lugovaya, Chkalov and other towns. New Pentecostal churches were opened in Minsk and Vitebsk, Belorussia. An Evangelical Christian and Baptist church was organized in Alexandrovska-Nikolaevska, Krasnodar territory. There were also new churches of ECBs and Pentecostals in the Altai territory, Novosibirsk region and the Perm and Volga regions. Four new ECB and Pentecostal churches were opened in the Bryansk region. Over 20 Pentecostal churches were opened in Ukraine and new ECB churches have also been started in Kiev, Zaporozhe, Chernovitsi and other cities. New members too have continued to be added to the Church. In 1976 100 persons were baptized in the Crimea, 37 in Voronezh, 64 in Lutsk and about 100 in Kiev. New pastors were ordained to work in more than 100 churches. From reliable sources

it is also understood that there have been more than 1,000 ECB conversions in Ukraine alone in 1976. (*AUCECB Information Bulletin*, 29 November 1976.)

Pentecostal Conference Ignores Soviet Appeals

Thousands of Pentecostals from all over the world came to London last October to attend the world Pentecostal conference. The delegates, however, never publicly mentioned the numerous appeals sent to the West from unregistered Pentecostal believers in the Soviet Union. Although an appeal from the Vaschenko family was sent to the conference chairman, Dr. T. F. Zimmerman, asking for help to emigrate from the Soviet Union because of religious persecution, none of the conference directors acknowledged receiving it. (*ECL News Release*, Oct/Nov 1976)

Enforced Internment in Psychiatric Hospital

Anatoli Ponomarev was forcibly detained in the Leningrad psychiatric hospital for the third time on 20 October 1975. He was released from the special psychiatric hospital on Arsenalnaya Street, Leningrad, in October 1973 only to be re-interned within a year in hospital No. 3 (ordinary type). He was discharged in the summer of 1975 but spent only three months at liberty. He wrote various letters and protests for which he was detained for this third time.

On 20 October 1975 Ponomarev went for a monthly check-up to his doctor. L. F. Lomotseva, who as soon as she saw him shrieked that he should be detained. Three men burst in, beat him unconscious and carried him out of the door to a waiting car. This took a minute and a half. At that moment M. S. Bernshtam, who had witnessed the incident, came in from the corridor and announced that he was a representative of the Soviet Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, which stunned everyone into silence. Bernshtam and Ponomarev's mother then had a long conversation with the deputy of the chief doctor, Lyudmila Dmitrievna Fedoseyeva. Mrs. Ponomareva said that her son behaved

normally. The doctor said that she was not competent to judge and that his letters and protests revealed his illness. Questioned by Bernshtam, Fedoseyeva admitted that she had not read the letters but had been told their content by the KGB. Next day the head of the clinic, Dr. E. Ya. Obolsky, said that Ponomarev would be treated for a long time. Fedoseyeva stated that his letters would not be added to the case sheet but would remain with the KGB. Ponomarev is being held in ward No. 8 (for violent patients) of psychiatric hospital No. 3, Leningrad. The head of department is Dr. Tobak.

It was reported in February 1977 that Ponomarev had been seen in hospital by friends. He had been treated with chlorpromazine, a drug normally used in the cases of violent patients. He walked, it was said, like an automaton, with expressionless face and arms held rigidly by his sides. (*Chronicle of Current Events*, No. 38, 31 December 1975, pp. 40-42, and *Sunday Observer*, 27 February 1977, p. 1)

Orthodox Believers Released

Reports reaching Keston College have confirmed the news of the release from psychiatric hospital of Alexander Argentov and Georgi Fedotov. Argentov's internment was reported earlier in *RCL* (Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 60). Fedotov, a member of the same young people's Christian seminar as Argentov, was interned later, in October 1976. In January 1977 reports in the Western press stated that Argentov had been interned again, but according to the new information he was called in for questioning but was not detained. Fedotov, it is reported, did suffer some unspecified illness and had to return to hospital for treatment.

Hymn Books for Russian Baptists

The AUCECB in the USSR has been given permission to receive 20,000 hymn-books of the 1968 Moscow edition in the Russian language. The project will be arranged by the United Bible Societies, with financial support for the hymn-books and transport costs coming from the European Baptist Federation. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 22 November 1976)