

The common prayer of Christians will thus become in itself a sign of peace. Let us not be dissuaded by the reproach that prayer simply serves as an alibi for people who do not otherwise want to do anything for peace. Out of prayer for peace grows the disposition towards peace, and this will not remain without consequences for our actions.

Dear brothers and sisters, Pope Paul VI declared in 1965 in an address to the UNO that "Peace does not come about only with the help of politics and a balance of power and interests. It comes about with the help of the spirit, ideas and works of peace." Peace between men grows like a fruit from certain spiritual principles. It occurs where truth, justice, love and freedom prevail. The Church can make an important contribution in the preparation of these spiritual founda-

tions for a sustainable peace, and its contribution will be most convincing where it subjects itself completely to the word of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That will not come about unless there is a willingness to take the way of the cross. But where in this world could a Christian or a Church which is guided by the word of Jesus live totally without opposition? It is not the opposition of the world that should make us uneasy, but rather the lack of "works of peace" in our midst. May it be our common concern that God might equip our Church for convincing works of peace. Trusting in the peace of Christ which dwells in our hearts, we ask for you the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Berlin, the day of prayer for world peace,  
1 January 1983.

*Translated by G. M. Abbit*

## "Our True Christianity — Today and Tomorrow"

*The text of the lecture below was first published in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung on 23 August 1979. It was prefaced by an introduction which we reproduce here in full.*

*In November 1978 Dr Franc Rode, Professor of Theology, gave a lecture entitled 'Our true Christianity [in Slovenia] — today and tomorrow' as part of the traditional theological course for students and young intellectuals at the Catholic theological faculty in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia. A number of professors and lecturers gave presentations on different theological topics. The lectures were published at the beginning of June (1979 — tr.) in a book entitled 'Do not quench the spirit — A collection of lectures taken from the theological course on current topics'. Professor Rode's lecture is the only one omitted from the collection. Theological students were informed by the Republican Conference of the Union of Socialist Youth of Slovenia that Rode had falsified history and was misleading the public and therefore the publication of his lecture had been forbidden.*

*The President of the Slovene State Commission for relations with religious communities, the former Yugoslav ambassador to the Holy See, Stane Kolman, recently told*

*theological students in Maribor, in Slovenia, that it would not be possible to publish an explanation in the collection as to why Rode's lecture had been excluded. There is some speculation that Rode may face trial because of his lecture.\**

*The Ljubljana party newspaper, Delo of 8 June stated the following:*

*The lecture given by the Professor of the Ljubljana theological faculty may be seen as an expression of clericalism. The lecturer stated, among other things, that our struggle to liberate people has been a struggle between two opposing views and he criticised the relations in our society because believers are, apparently, second-class citizens. The fact that his lecture was published in Naša luč, the émigré newspaper, hostile to Yugoslavia, gives an indication of the contents of his presentation.*

*We are publishing Professor Rode's lecture, which deals critically with the Catholic Church in Slovenia as well as the communist authorities, in a shortened form."*

\*Dr Rode did not in fact face trial. He is currently working in the Secretariat for Non-believers in the Vatican — Ed.

The Church in Slovenia is emerging from a period of awesome testing from which it has not yet completely recovered. In the middle of the twentieth century this politically influential, rich and self-confident Church has been confronted by opposing ideologies which have given rise to universal war. At the same time these ideologies have been the cause of a bitter power struggle in some regions. Here, in Slovenia, the Communist Party has fought this battle with a world view which is totally alien to Christianity. Confrontation with the Church was practically unavoidable but not primarily because of the social revolution which the party intended to bring about. The Church would probably have had no lasting or major objections to social change. The points at issue concerned a particular concept of Slovenia, a certain picture of our people, a particular spiritual and cultural atmosphere in our midst. It was fundamentally an ideological confrontation between two opposing views of the world.

After the victory of the revolution the Church found itself in a very difficult position. It lost many of its sons and many left the Church during this period of trial. More than half of its priests endured periods in prisons and forced-labour camps. They conducted themselves well. Several years ago when I asked an old priest whether there had been much heroism in the prisons, he replied, "No, everything was very human". Perhaps Slovene heroism is not on an epic scale as is, for example, Roman heroism. It is a native, modest, peaceful heroism which is hardly aware of itself. Despite this it is still true heroism. These people survived three, five, eight, ten years without denying their faith. There were apparently no renegades.

Our clergy emerged purified from the storms of the post-war years. They became humbler, and also, unfortunately, often more fearful, but the outcome was a positive one. A different type of priest emerged: a priest with fewer worldly ambitions, no potestate, but a priest who was much more concerned with essentials and with the supernatural.

The Church also very rapidly became poorer, but truer to the Gospel. Our Church was too rich before the war. The pastor was also often powerful economically, the monasteries were, in general, too rich, the bishops spent their holidays in castles. The Church possessed property which it did not need to fulfil its mission,

property which dated from the age of feudalism. These properties had to be voluntarily relinquished and given to the poor. Despite this, how often has anything like this happened in the history of the Church? Not often. In this way we have become poorer and less arrogant. The Word of God has therefore also become freer and it reaches people more easily. The Church is no longer burdened by these things. Today it cannot be accused of exploiting other people, of defending a certain social order for its own ends, of supporting the government because it pays for the services of the Church. The Church is not in league with the rich because it has become poor. It lives among the people and from the people. If it is close to anyone, it is to those who are less privileged. Our Church is proletarian. We Christians are the proletarians of socialism. The Word of the Gospel has in this way become purer. The people cannot suspect it of self-centred interests. This situation is, without doubt, a blessing for the Slovene Church.

Our Christianity today is closer to the Gospel because it is further from political battles. The Church wastes neither time nor effort with politics, as happened in the nineteenth century when priests were political leaders, took part in political election campaigns, put themselves forward as candidates to become members of parliament and took important posts in the government. The Church today has no organisations which are outside its pastoral activities. Our pastoral work today is exclusively concerned with the realisation of spiritual values. It has no political ambitions and has no intention of intruding into areas of expertise which are not its own.

Naturally there is a danger here of Christianity's becoming disembodied, timeless, abstract and exclusively inward-looking. This danger is a real one. The danger is that we can no longer find our way in this world because we are at the edge of political, social, economic, and to some extent also of cultural life. The danger is that our religious experience is becoming weaker because it is no longer nourished by real life. The danger is that our Christianity will become a religion which misses out on real life, a religion which no longer enriches life today or our present civilisation.

The Slovene Church today is internally much freer because it has been purified

through many trials, it is materially poor and it has distanced itself from political confrontation. The Church has the great advantage that virtually every one of its members belongs to the Church of his own free will. (Perhaps one should ask the question whether those who do not belong to the Church, similarly, do not belong of their own free will.) There is hardly a single Slovene who at some time or other has not had the opportunity or been advised to abandon the Church. The advantages of doing so are considerable. Whoever still wishes to remain a Christian impedes his own progress in society and downgrades himself to the level of a second-class citizen.

All this gives rise to a special atmosphere in our Church—an atmosphere of freedom and integrity. The Church does not have a police force at its disposal and rejects any idea of force. This is a sign of great progress in comparison with the past. It is not my place to pass judgement on the situation which prevailed in the Slovene Church before the war. However, I have the impression that our Church was very authoritarian, that the priests were inclined to seek power and that there was an overriding feeling of constraint in our midst.

The post-war regime, among other things, brought about the separation of Church and State. The process of separation is not, however, akin to that which took place in western democracies. Here it is a question of excluding the Church from the life of society. Within such a structured organism the Church is an alien body, a relic of the past, discarded era. Its end has been foretold. (Despite this, the prophets of today have become more reticent about it.) A thousand year-long symphony of Church and State created in us a certain deep reflex reactions. It was taken for granted that the Church had its own privileges conferred by the State, that the State supported it and offered it the necessary requirements for its existence, that the Church enjoyed respect among the people as does every organisation which is supported by the State. This has all come to an end. So much the better. The consequences are not all negative. We have achieved an independence (and we must not give up this independence) which we did not have before when we were dependent, materially, or in any other way, on the State. Without doubt this situation demands more from us, but is unambiguous. In any case this is the situation in

which we have to live. Further, we must say that we do not want to go backwards. The conditions for living a Christian life are here in our midst.

If the Church speaks to man today, it appeals to what is best in man, to his freedom, to his ability to make a voluntary religious decision. A man decides for spiritual values without receiving any material, political or other advantages. The Church speaks to the sinful centre of man, to his conscience, to the part where he freely decides for himself. It calls man to justice, honesty, uprightness, courage and love. Not to anything else. In the midst of the moral desert and the nihilism in which we live, this is an extraordinary blessing for the Church. It calls people to be sober, to be independent, and to be free. Thus the Church, in the midst of a monolithic ideology, is the only place of freedom, the only place in which a Slovene hears other words, words about other things.

Among the factors which make it difficult for a Christian to be fully integrated into society is the leading role of the Communist Party. The Christian as a Christian has nothing against this leading role insofar as the party is concerned for general well-being and protects universal human rights. However, the ideology of the communist is Marxist atheism. Atheism is propounded to a disproportionately greater extent than other world views and has the advantages of an official ideology. This ideology pervades the whole atmosphere and permeates the whole of public life. This ideology determines the pattern of life and young people are educated under its strict leadership. As a logical consequence of this ideological exclusivity, Christianity is forced into a corner, pushed to the edge of society, ignored, disqualified because it is designated as opium, necessary only for the weak, a spiritually intoxicating liquor in which enslaved people look for a human face, an imaginary sun around which a human being who has not yet found himself, or who has lost himself, travels in circles. As long as atheism remains the official dogma of the ruling party, believers will not enjoy equality.

I would like to make another point with regard to the so-called cooperation of Christians in building socialism. During Christmas 1976 a lecture by Ivica Račan, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia, was published

in the Saturday supplement of the newspaper *Delo*. He reported on the success of party policy with regard to believers. One of the great achievements of this policy was, according to Račan, "Involving and mobilising theists in the process of building socialism and the destruction of material and spiritual conditions for religious belief respectively. (Who can fail to have their eyes opened by that little word "respectively"?). According to Račan, this is one of the "unusually positive results of our policy". Whoever thinks and acts in this way not only offends Christians, but also man, because he sees in him a naïveté which, under the efficient leadership of the party, will undermine the foundation of an individual religious existence. How can a Christian in all honesty actively participate in a society when he knows that the intended and expected result of his activity means the loss of that which is most valuable to him and which gives his life and death significance?

The official letter of the law "Religion is a Private Matter", also gives rise to speculation. If the party declared that atheism, as religion, were a private matter, there would be no problems at all. But here atheism has a right to publicity, it is the only valid and correct ideology. This is a question of ideological discrimination.

Because of the clause "Religion is a Private Matter", an atmosphere of pretence and dishonesty is created among us and this is certainly not beneficial to the character of the nation. A division between the private and the public sphere is created. In this atmosphere a new type of Christian emerges — a Christian who is like Nicodemus. Nicodemus was the first to sense that belief in Christ is "a private matter" and that it is not appropriate to proclaim the faith openly. We Christians should not be involved in this conflict. We must overcome the conflict between what is private and what is public. In our actions we must strive for unity and accord. We must be in public what we are in our hearts and in our family circle although in doing so we create many barriers for ourselves.

We can bring a new dimension of meaning and hope to our society. We talk a great deal about building socialism, about a humanitarian society, about progress. If however, we put aside abstract ideas and look at reality and question what it actually means, we would perhaps have to admit

that, in the final analysis, and at best, it is a higher form of the consumer society. If we remove the dazzling veil in which we continually enfold socialist society, we notice that eventually everything is reduced to the following: then we shall live in brotherhood and friendship, we shall freely create cultural and aesthetic values. All very well, but is this sufficient for human beings and their civilisation? Are both destined to die? What is the meaning of it all if death has the last word? We Christians bring hope to men and civilisation, because we tell them that man does not live his life on earth in order to progress from the stone age to the atomic age, to create empires and civilisations, but to look for, and to find God, the only guarantee against death for the whole world.

One of the significant tasks of the Slovene Christian today is to struggle for freedom. We Christians must always stand on the side of freedom, not only when it is a question of our own freedom, but also when it is a question of the freedom of a particular person or a community, even when it concerns those who think differently from ourselves. The Slovene Church must stand on the side of freedom more consciously and decisively. Not in order to win popularity, but because freedom comes from God. While the Church defends freedom, it defends a godly right.

We Christians must struggle against the danger of totalitarianism which favours a certain ideology and we must strive for a peaceful, pluralistic society. We must not allow ourselves to be deceived by official pronouncements about freedom. There is no shortage of these. We must not be deceived by the statement that all is well between Church and State. This is often heard too. Look at the reality of the situation. While we have no access to any of the official means of communication, while Christians or non-communists are disadvantaged, while we are barred from whole areas of economic life, while there are no free schools, no school system without indoctrination, while we are given no opportunity even to celebrate a Christian festival such as Christmas, while the government forces its ideology on to the believer, while we ourselves do not have the opportunity publicly to state what our situation is like instead of others beating into our heads that all is well with us, while these things continue, we cannot speak of a free society,

of respect for human rights nor even of socialism. We Christians must fight for this concrete freedom. We must work towards creating and securing an atmosphere of freedom. We shall achieve this if we remain fearless, if we demand equality for everyone, peacefully, but with determination, if we oppose every kind of injustice, regardless of who is affected by it, if ultimately we try to create a place of freedom in and around our own lives.

As in the first centuries we Christians must compete against myths. In the Roman Empire Christians were, from time to time, regarded as atheists because they dismissed mythical stories about gods, because they did not recognise the mythologising of the rulers and because they did not accept the mythical concept of nature and history. We must fulfil this task today.

Despite their scientific appearance the basic structures of our society are expressly mythical. This mythical structure which enfolds mankind is the source of social stagnation because it points people to the past and forms a barrier. The socialist society is based on myths. It is based on a mythical interpretation of history, lives in a typically mythical atmosphere. Let us enumerate some of these myths. The myth of the redemptive role of the proletariat, the myth of revolution as a holy battle between chosen and damned, the myth of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the myth of a golden age, that is a perfect socialist society. All these myths are secularised in Marxism, they are the same myths which slumber deep in the soul of mankind.

We can amalgamate all these myths in the old concept of chaos and cosmos. There are demonic forces which subdue mankind in darkness and injustice. In our case they are dark epochs of slavery, of the feudal and the capitalist age. Then a heroic power emerges, individual or collective, the proletariat with the Communist Party at the top. This overcomes the powers of evil and changes the world. Everything is renewed. Everywhere justice, freedom and equality reign. The revolutionary struggle which changes the world in its basic form is necessary and independent of any moral norm. Everything which aids this struggle is justified. This struggle is sacred, untouchable history. This struggle is the source of all rights and all renown. Because this struggle is one between darkness and light the

opponents of it are not only politically otherwise motivated, but the allies of darkness. Reconciliation with them is impossible. Because the revolution has laid the foundation for a new world we continually turn back to it. The revolution is inviolable.

So we have turned backwards. The important thing is behind us. Nothing which is not a continuation will happen or will be allowed to happen in the future. After the revolution there is a new world, a new society, a perfect one. If it is not perfect, man must still claim that it is perfect or the best. Therefore everything that is not perfect is concealed. In the newspapers you can read all about the scandals taking place in America, all about the wealth and corruption of German aristocrats — there is nothing mentioned at all, or very little about anything similar in our society. And so whispers and jokes start to circulate. In Russia the newspapers do not even report their own aeroplane disasters. Theoretically this should not happen in a perfect society. This type of perfect society is not very creative and easily stagnates. After the revolution nothing significant has happened, nor should it happen. It is as if time has stood still. But outside the old chaotic, hostile, strange world in which dark forces rule, still exists. Between our world and this old world there is no continuity. There is as little contact as possible with it. If we could, we would shut ourselves in our own world. In this other world, hostile powers prevail, therefore we have to remain alert, and the curtailment of freedom is justified, because these forces can also lead us astray. These myths spring from an obsessive feeling that everything is divided into two camps. This socialist awareness is such that attempts are made to instil it into everyone at school. The feeling is that these two opposing camps in irreconcilable. All this is primitive.

Christians must not be taken in by this mystical view of the world. They must not look at the world from such a perspective, as if on one side there are heroes and on the other only scoundrels. Our consciousness must be catholic, that is, all-embracing, a consciousness which all men accept, one that knows that the boundary between good and evil passes through our hearts, that good and evil are mingled in every being and in every society.

*Translated from German by Lorna Bourdeaux.*