

# Editorial

Yugoslavia, of all the East European countries, is generally considered to be politically and culturally the most liberal. The "human face" of socialism has replaced the monstrous visage of Stalinist totalitarianism and created a society where human beings are no longer continually threatened by a system before which they have no protection. For the Churches, too, Yugoslavia has offered a more equitable arrangement since the mid-50s, following the death of Stalin and the dismantling of a system based on the Soviet model.

On paper, before the reforms of the 1950s, the Constitution of 1946 offered various guarantees to believers: they were granted freedom to worship; religious communities were given the right to establish religious schools for the training of clergy; believers were allowed to help the Churches materially; and all citizens were granted equal rights. Such guarantees, however, were not respected initially: the Churches until the mid-50s underwent severe harassment and their clergy experienced persecution, often in the form of "administrative" action by Party and State organs.

The Serbian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church are the largest Christian denominations in Yugoslavia claiming the allegiance of about 40 per cent and 32 per cent respectively of the population. Approximately 0.8 per cent belong to Protestant Churches. In addition there is a highly organized Muslim community composed of about two million believers. About 8,000 Jews still live in Yugoslavia. Of the 76,000 Jews who lived there at the outbreak of the Second World War, 60,000 were murdered in the concentration camps, and of those who remained 8,000 emigrated to Israel.

The possibilities for communicating the Christian faith are numerous compared to the situation in other communist countries. The Bible is available for any who wish to obtain it. Religious teaching is permitted: almost all Roman Catholic parishes provide religious instruction for children as do many Serbian Orthodox parishes. The training of the clergy takes place at the Theological Faculty where those who enrol are mainly Roman Catholics. A number of seminaries offer a course of five or six years which is attended by those wishing to prepare for the priesthood in the Serbian Orthodox Church. Some of the latter are able to obtain a degree from the Faculty through a correspondence course. There is a thriving religious press, which in recent years (since 1971

particularly) has sometimes come into conflict with the political authorities.

Relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the State in Yugoslavia (Christopher Cviic gives some recent information about this in his article, pp. 8-12) during the early years of the Communist regime were exacerbated by the Vatican's control over Church appointments. In the case of Archbishop Stepinac, who was openly hostile to communism, the Vatican refused to comply with the request to have him removed. He was tried and sentenced to sixteen years' imprisonment (only five were actually spent in prison) in 1946. In 1952 Pope Pius XII made Archbishop Stepinac a Cardinal, an act of defiance in Tito's view which led to a break in diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the Yugoslav government. In 1966, however, after six years of negotiation an agreement was signed. This so-called "Belgrade Protocol" is unique in East Europe: the separation of Church and State was reaffirmed as well as the guarantee of freedom of conscience; the Roman Catholic Church was able to reopen some of its seminaries and expand its publishing activity. In return the Vatican agreed that the Church should accept the political system and not meddle in politics. By 1970 full diplomatic relations were restored. But in December 1971 this *modus vivendi* was undermined by the inauguration of a less tolerant ideological policy by the Communist Party. The Party launched a campaign against "nationalism", "liberalism" and other undesirable forces which were regarded as a threat to the system and the unity of the Yugoslav Federation. Croatia—which, with Slovenia, is almost entirely Catholic—had been the scene of a nationalist upsurge which reached its apogee in 1971. This movement was crushed by the combined forces of the Party, State and army: many members of the Party and intelligentsia were dismissed and some imprisoned. Thus relations between the Yugoslav State and the Roman Catholic Church must be seen against this background of political and national conflict. As so often national sentiments and religious allegiance are closely allied.

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