

News in Brief

Ten-million Muslims in China? For the first time in a long period, a representative of a foreign religious community has had the chance to be in Peking and to find out about the situation of the Churches in China. Nikkei Nivano from Japan, president of the Risiko Kosei Kai, a sect of Buddhism, has reported on a conference of leading representatives of Chinese Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and Taoists, at which he was able to participate. Nivano was told that there are at present ten million Muslims and 800,000 Protestant Christians in China. He was unable to ascertain any precise information about the number of Catholics . . . The Japanese Buddhist leader reported that Chinese Buddhism was being reactivated "under the protection of the Peking regime". It was receiving help in the restoration of Buddhist temples, "which had been destroyed during the great Cultural Revolution". The Islamic religion too, he said, found support from the government. The official "League of Chinese Muslims" has, the Japanese visitor was told, played an important role "in the strengthening of friendly relations between China and the Islamic, particularly the Arab states" . . . (Translated from *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 14 May 1974)

A Former Canadian Missionary, Mr. James Endicott, after a visit to China last year, expressed his belief that in the future Chinese Christianity will probably become a non-institutionalized religion and more family-centred. The Christian fellowship will not be clergy-centred but lay-centred. For the time being they will not be able to have a Sunday morning meeting, because days off work are staggered throughout the week. Church meetings will be after work hours. He said: "Discussions of limited scope with a few friends, mostly former Christians or church members, make me speculate that from now on there will be fewer and fewer young people who will feel the need to 'become Christian' in the usual meaning of that term. The educated young Chinese will not respond to evangelistic claims of authority or dogmatism, nor will they listen to any preaching from those who have not espoused the cause of liberation in the world today."

Otto Gross Dies. Widely regarded as the "grey eminence" of the Roman Catholic Church in East Germany and for that reason much criticized, he died suddenly in East Berlin at the age of 57 after a heart attack. He had been a close confidant of Cardinal Bengsch; the representative of the hierarchy in dealing with the State; editor-in-chief of the East Berlin religious paper *St-Hedwigs-Blatt*; spokesman for the East Berlin episcopal office; director of the religious relief body "Not in der Welt"; and an unofficial representative in contacts with the West. Hence Fr. Gross had been an influential figure in ecclesiastical affairs, as well as in the no-man's-land of Church-State relations. Seigewasser, the East German Secretary for Church Affairs, had had in Gross a determined and skilful negotiator for many years whenever it came to sustaining the freedom of manoeuvre of the Church or of believers. Together with Cardinal Bengsch, he had fought up to the highest levels of the Vatican

to maintain formal links with the Catholic Church in West Germany. In the context of the Church, Gross had been regarded as a conservative. He even had the reputation of favouring a tacit complicity between Church and State, which both wished to avoid trouble. Those who knew Gross more closely, however, soon recognized how unfounded such speculation was. Fr. Gross was far more open-minded than many of his critics would have thought possible. (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 August 1974)

Poland: New Priests and Missionaries. According to data published by the Polish Episcopate, 557 priests were ordained in Poland in 1973: 450 diocesan and 107 monastic. This figure is slightly lower than the previous year, but higher than 1970/1. According to a report of the Mission Bureau of the Conference of the Episcopate of Poland, 82 persons left Poland in 1973 for missionary work abroad. They went to 24 different countries, including for the first time Rwanda, Nigeria, Upper Volta and French Guyana. With ten retirements and six deaths in the same period, the number of Polish missionaries now working abroad is 826. (See: *Catholic Life in Poland*, Warsaw, Nos. 2 & 3, 1974)

Piotr Kalwa, the Bishop of Lublin, Poland, died on 17 July, 1974 at the age of 81. He had been bishop of Lublin for 25 years and held a chair of Canon Law and Ethics at the Catholic University of Lublin. (*Slowo Powszechnie*, 18 July, 1974)

Bishop Simeon Kokov, the Last Roman Catholic Bishop in Bulgaria has died at the age of 78. He had been in charge of the apostolic district of Sofia-Plovdiv since 1958. It is believed that there are approximately 50,000 Latin-rite Catholics in Bulgaria and some 100,000 Uniate Catholics of the Byzantine rite. However, there are at present no facilities for training Catholic clergy and the priests who are still living are elderly and their numbers declining.

Teilhard de Chardin Translated. In Hungary the first of Teilhard de Chardin's books to be translated into Hungarian – *The Phenomenon of Man* – sold 8,000 copies within a few hours. The publishers are a small firm in Budapest.

Orthodox Prisoner Threatened with Psychiatric Internment. Igor Ogurtsov, born 1937, was arrested in Leningrad in 1967 as one of the leaders of the "All-Russian Social-Christian Union for the Liberation of the People". This group engaged in the study of philosophical writings, particularly Berdyaev, and discussed the possibility of a change of Russian government. For this they were arrested as "conspirators". Most of those arrested were sentenced to lesser terms, but four, including Ogurtsov, were charged as "traitors". Ogurtsov was sentenced to 20 years of prison, camp and exile. In March 1974 he completed his term in prison and was transferred to labour camp. But in April he was brought back to solitary confinement in Perm and told that he was to undergo psychiatric examination. His health has already been broken in prison. Vladimir Osipov, ex-editor of the Russian patriotic journal *Veche*, appealed on his behalf on 25 May to Sean McBride and Amnesty International.

Roman Catholic Priest Convicted at Lvov (Ukraine). He was accused of breaking Soviet law by preparing children for communion and by conducting other pastoral work. This case was the subject of a three-column article in a recent edition of *Lvovskaya Pravda*. The article, under the heading "The Crime of Father Bernard", said that Bernard Vikentievich Mitskevich was charged with systematically teaching children religion, performing actions directed at arousing superstition and religious fanaticism, and spreading slanderous fabrications against the Soviet system. Father Mitskevich was given "the punishment he deserved", although the journal did not specify what this was. The article concluded by criticizing the local schoolteachers and Komsomol organizers for "their unwarranted passivity and for not taking up arms decisively" against the priest. (*The Guardian*, 28 August, 1974)

A New Baptist Church Building in Jablonec, Czechoslovakia, has apparently been in the process of construction for some time. Members have supplied volunteer labour, some volunteering as much as 120 hours of work a month in addition to working at their regular jobs. European Baptists hope the building will be able to open for worship in 1975. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 5 July 1974, p. 4)

Baptist Seminary Reorganized. Five students graduated from the Yugoslavian Baptist Seminary in Novi Sad on May 26. At the same time the seminary also observed its twentieth anniversary. Franjo Klem, director of the seminary who had been with the school since it opened in Zagreb "asked to be released from his responsibilities, effective immediately". S. Orcic, pastor of the Novi Sad Baptist Church who has been selected as interim director will work with a three man team on curriculum revisions and public relations. Pending reorganization no new theological students will be admitted but four female students will continue their courses in religious education uninterrupted. During its history the seminary has enrolled a total of 70 students and given 44 diplomas. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 31 May, 1974 p. 1)

Remembering Savka. Recently in Yugoslavia a Catholic priest was condemned by the courts, because he allegedly failed to prevent children waiting for religious instruction classes from damaging the gravestones in the churchyard. A priest as a kind of indirect violator of gravestones – an unusual concept. In the judgement of the court, it was further held against the priest that someone had painted the word "Savka" on one of the gravestones. Savka is the forename of the economics professor Dabcevic-Kucar, who was at the head of the Communist Party organization in Croatia for several years and was popular on account of her nationally-minded and anti-stalinist policies. She fell from power in December 1971, when the clamp-down on the Croats began the process of restalinisation in Yugoslavia. Since then, Mme Dabcevic-Kucar has been expelled from the Party and has been employed in an unimportant post in Zagreb. She has not been permitted to take part in works meetings at her place of employment. But among the Croats she is as well remembered as the dismissed Serbian party leader, Marko Nikezic, is among the Serbs. The new leadership knows this. Their uncertainty is demonstrated by the fact that the one word "Savka" written on a gravestone has been enough to irritate them. (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 July 1974)