

# Readers' Letters

The Rev. Michael Bourdeaux writes :

I was puzzled by George Schöpflin's review of Cardinal Mindszenty's *Memoirs in Religion in Communist Lands*, No. 6, (1975). Here is the problem I had hoped our reviewer would grapple with, for it has been shirked by reviewers in other journals and it is a vital one.

Cardinal Mindszenty took a certain stand during the war under the Nazis, from which he suffered. He took what to my non-specialist eyes seems the same stand against the communists in 1949 and 1956. In all three instances the world applauded and said here was a great man. Yet by the 1970s the Cardinal found himself widely condemned, first by diplomatic opinion and finally by the head of his own Church. The following questions therefore arise :

1. Did Cardinal Mindszenty change?
2. Did communism change?
3. Did the Catholic Church change?

Reviewers generally have suggested that Cardinal Mindszenty should have "recanted". If so, what should he have recanted? Would they follow this by suggesting Cardinal Slipyj should be the next to do so? Do others follow and where does the list end?

11 February 1976

George Schöpflin replies :

These are fair questions and fairly put. Yet there is a fourth question which Michael Bourdeaux might also have put and this, as I tried to suggest in my review, was the central one. I have in mind the historical context in which Cardinal Mindszenty lived and from which his role cannot be divorced. In other words, his role cannot be assessed exclusively by his having resisted the Nazis in 1944 and the communists in 1949. His intransigence against dictatorship had as its obverse his inability to recog-

nize how much had changed in Hungarian society in 1945. Mindszenty, by setting himself and his Church against change actually helped to provoke the conflict which was one factor among the many undermining the fragile parliamentary democracy in post-1945 Hungary (e.g. Mindszenty's role in the crisis of summer 1946). Hence what I am arguing is that the people who applauded Mindszenty for his courage and fortitude in 1944, 1949 and 1956 were just as partial as those who harassed him so shamefully in the last years of his life for not having "recanted". Mindszenty's career and personality must be judged in their entirety and this can only be done fairly by asking all the relevant questions. I had hoped that I had been successful in this in my review of his *Memoirs*.

David V. Benson writes to the Rev. Michael Bourdeaux

*The following letter was addressed to Michael Bourdeaux by David V. Benson, president of "Russia for Christ, Inc." and is dated 25 November 1975. It was written in response to the report "Religious Broadcasting into the Soviet Union" by Jane Ellis. Ed.*

In *Religion in Communist Lands*, Vol. 3, Nos. 4-5, July-Oct. 1975, on p. 46, 1. (c) "Sponsorship of programmes," you have made two errors, which I would kindly bring to your attention.

(1) "Russia for Christ" has always made its own programmes. What sponsorship we have given to the programmes of other missions has been very minor in comparison with the sponsorship we have given to those programmes to Russia that have originated within our own organization.

(2) From the very beginning of our work (1958) we have paid for the airing of all of our programmes when the radio stations have asked us to do so. When the oil crisis sent broadcasting costs skyrocketing, we fell behind in our payments for the first time in our history. Now we are moving ahead to remain current in our airtime payments and to make up for the debts brought about by increased financial demands during the oil crisis.