

News in Brief

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Assistant Bishop of Linz Appeals to Husak

According to the news agency, Kathpress (Austria) (19 August 1976) assistant Bishop Wagner of Linz has written to President Husak of Czechoslovakia expressing his concern for political prisoners. He drew Husak's attention to the provisions of the Helsinki conference and expressed his disquiet that the Church in a neighbouring country should be so fettered. (AKSA*, 27 August 1976)

Czech Christians Criticize Christian-Marxist Dialogue

A 22-page communiqué from a group of Christians in Czechoslovakia, addressed to various journals in France including *Informations Catholiques Internationales* and *Christian Marxists*, has been received by the Italian Centre for the study of Eastern Europe. A brief survey of the spread of communism in Eastern Europe and its practical implications for Christians is followed by comments on the economic predicament of Czechoslovakia. The document takes up the question of the official dialogue between representatives of the Holy See and the Czech government. Such attempts at dialogue are severely criticized. (*The Tablet*, 10 July 1976).

Baptist Union of Czechoslovakia

The annual conference of the Baptist Union of Czechoslovakia took place in Prague from 11-13 July 1976. The Union's

internal problems were discussed and a part of the programme was dedicated to considering the poor in Africa. A declaration was issued by the conference which declared the Union's love for its socialist country in whose development and prosperity it participated. (*Kostnické Jiskry* (evangelical weekly), 11 August 1976)

New Baptist Churches in Czechoslovakia

A new building, constructed by the 60-member Baptist congregation at Jablonec will be dedicated in December of this year. Jablonec is a "preaching station" of the Baptist Church at Liberec, which has a total membership of about 150 persons. The building project has continued over the past six years. The attractive structure has about 200 seats in the main section, and another 50 in the balcony. In addition there are a number of rooms, as well as residential accommodation for the pastor and the church caretaker. Described as one of the best and most beautiful Baptist church buildings in Europe, it is the sixth structure opened in the CSSR during recent years. The others are at Bohata, Cheb, Lucenec, Neswadi and Tec-Lujani. The Baptist

* AKSA is a Roman Catholic news service published by Krscanska Sadasnost (Contemporary Christianity) Zagreb, Yugoslavia. This institute was founded in 1967 by Archbishop Seper of Zagreb to study and propagate post-Vatican II ideas. *Ed.*

congregation at Bratislava has also obtained a "new" church building; it received permission to purchase an old Lutheran church. For several years the congregation has shown an interest in buying this building after their own was condemned some time ago having been damaged in an earthquake. A national tradition made it impossible to purchase church buildings, but with the encouragement of the state officials, the site is now to be sold to the Baptists for CSR Krone 270,000. The money was raised by the 450 members of the congregation through a special offering, by which members were asked to sign "building stone" payment promises. The new site will also house an office for the Baptist Centre of all Slovakia. The final service in the old building was held on 27 June 1976. There are many young people in the church which is looked after by Pastor Daniel Saling. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 20 July 1976)

Slovak Evangelical Church Peace Committee Meets

The Committee for Peace Work of the Slovak Evangelical Church in Czechoslovakia organized a conference from 9-11 June 1976 in Presov. Sixty priests attended, including three Slovak bishops of the Evangelical Church. They discussed disarmament and the final act of the Helsinki Declaration, which deals with the question of human rights. In conclusion the Soviet Union was thanked for creating peace policies on an international level. (*Cirkevne Listy*, No. 7, July 1976 pp. 99-100)

Candidate for Rabbinical Post in Prague

An 18-year-old student has volunteered to study at the Budapest Rabbinical Seminary as a candidate for the post of Rabbi in Czechoslovakia. The post has been vacant since the death of Dr. Richard Feder in 1970. The news was announced as part of the festive meeting held in Prague marking the 30th anniversary of the reconstitution of Jewish communities in the Czech lands. Government approval, however, is still outstanding. (*ICJC Newsletter* Vol. vii, No. 3, 1974, p. 3.)

Orthodox Church in Czechoslovakia

Up to the beginning of 1976 there were 189,000 believers in the Czechoslovak Orthodox Church. They are divided into four dioceses: Prague, Olomuc, Presov and Mikhailov. There is a Theological Faculty at Presov which serves 18 students. The Faculty publishes a theological journal. The Church publishes a monthly journal called *The Voice of Orthodoxy* and another entitled *The Inheritors of St. Cyril and St. Methodius*. The latter is produced in both Russian and Ukrainian. Religious instruction is permitted for children of believers, and in certain parishes bible study groups are held. (*S.O.P.*, February 1976, p. 4)

Results of the Lausanne Congress

As a result of the Lausanne Congress on Evangelism, four evangelical denominations in Czechoslovakia have been drawn together. The leaders of the Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist and Pentecostal Churches have decided to establish an Evangelical Theological Faculty to serve the four Churches. (*Information Bulletin of Lausanne*, September 1975, p. 4)

YUGOSLAVIA

New Legislation for Religious Communities

Drafts of new laws concerning relations between the State and religious communities in Yugoslavia have been published during the last two or three years in each of the six republics and the two autonomous regions. They are intended to implement the provisions of the new Yugoslav Constitution. Some light is shed on the puzzling delay in passing these laws by a report to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of 12 August, 1976 from their usually well-informed Belgrade correspondent. The Slovene law, he writes, has now been passed.

The government, he continues, has taken this opportunity to weaken the legal position of the religious communities and to open the door to greater differentiation among the republics.

Local authorities have been given much more room for manoeuvre.

The new Slovene law and the draft of the law for the Vojvodina are the most liberal. In Slovenia the draft was discussed with the Slovene bishops and with some priests before it was passed, but in Croatia where relations are more tense (because of the strength of nationalist feelings) the authorities have not shown the draft text to the bishops. The draft laws for Macedonia, Bosnia Hercegovina and Serbia contain strict provisions concerning religious instruction: the Macedonian draft forbids the giving of religious instruction on any schoolday (i.e. only on Sundays), the Bosnia Hercegovinian draft forbids it during school hours or when extra-curricular activities are taking place (i.e. Sundays, when excursions are arranged may not be free) and the Serbian draft stipulates that religious instruction may not interfere with school instruction and its objectives. Since increasing emphasis is being laid on the teaching of Marxism in schools, this could in extreme cases mean a complete ban on religious instruction (although it could be argued that such a ban would be unconstitutional. *Ed.*).

In the opinion of experts, continues the correspondent, the new laws are directed principally against Muslims, whose spiritual activity has been growing in Macedonia and in the autonomous province of Kosovo (where the Muslim population is of Albanian origin). But the Party is anxious to avoid trouble with the Muslims and the draft Macedonian law only became public when it was leaked by the Skopje correspondent of the Zagreb Party daily *Vjesnik*. The report was picked up by *Glas Koncila*, the widely-read Catholic fortnightly, which wrote that this was an attack on the basic rights of citizens. As a result the new laws were temporarily shelved and private reassurances were given to the Catholics and the Orthodox. All religious communities in Yugoslavia, however, are clear that the new restrictions threaten them all. (N.B. We hope to have further comment on Yugoslavia when other republican laws are passed, in particular about the expected restrictions on the social and charitable activities of the religious communities. *Ed.*)

Protestant Theological Faculty Founded

Dr. Josip Horak, President of the Baptist Union in Yugoslavia, has been elected Dean of a new Protestant Theological Faculty named after Matija Vlacic Illirik (Mathias Flacius Illyricus), the 16th century reformer. The faculty, founded jointly by the Baptist Union of Yugoslavia and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Croatia, received its charter from the Secretariat of Education and Culture in mid-May. An opening celebration is scheduled for 31 October 1976. The Institute will confer degrees equivalent to those granted by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox faculties in the country. It is expected that an Islamic faculty will begin next year. Baptists and Evangelical Lutherans will each name 40% of the teachers. Other Protestant denominations taking part will provide the residual staff. Classes will meet in the building of the Evangelical Church at Gunduliceva 28. Members of the founding committee felt that the establishing of the faculty was an historical undertaking which will have far reaching consequences not only in Yugoslavia, but in neighbouring countries as well. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 20 July 1976)

Documentary on Religious Life in Yugoslavia Released

An hour long television programme documenting religious life in Yugoslavia, entitled *Faces of Hope*, has been released by the Radio-Television Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Broadcasting Company. The Jewish Theological Seminary of America and the US Catholic Conference are among the sponsoring groups. (*Baptist Times*, 12 February 1976)

HUNGARY

Hungarian Baptists Elect Presidium

The Hungarian Baptist Union re-elected Rev. Janos Laczkovszki as its president in recent meetings in Budapest. Kalman Meszaros and Laszlo Revesz were chosen as vice-presidents. Dr. Imre

Szakacs was named secretary. About 250 delegates, representing all Baptist congregations in the country, were present at the two-day Congress which elected the new officials. In addition to business sessions, three worship services were held. Addresses were delivered by presidium members; the choirs from the Kiskoros and Kispest Baptist Churches of Budapest and the United Baptist Choir of Hungary led the singing. Rev. Laczkovski's sermon was called, "With living faith and hope on the road of service". (*European Baptist Press Service*, June 1976)

Jubilee Exhibition at Esztergom Christian Museum

To mark its centenary, a jubilee exhibition has been installed at the Christian Museum in Esztergom, which is to remain open a whole year. The original collection, founded by a predecessor of the present Archbishop of Esztergom, became a public institution in 1954. Ever since, besides the permanent exhibition, there have been several temporary exhibitions in the castle, and in 1969 the museum was modernised under the joint sponsorship of the State and the Church (two thirds of the cost was paid by the State). (*Nepszabadeag*, 16 October 1975)

New Students Enter Greek Catholic Seminary in Hungary

The Greek Catholic Church in Hungary will receive 50 seminarians who will start their theological studies this year. There are 149 Greek Catholic parishes with 230,000 faithful and 200 priests who are nearly all married. The buildings of the seminary will have to be altered to hold this influx of students. Pope Paul has promised his personal help. (AKSA, 17 July 1976)

Production Figures for Hungarian Catholic Publishing House

Two Catholic publishing houses in Hungary will produce about 64 new titles this year with 600,000 copies. Twenty two new titles have already appeared with 350,000 copies. (AKSA, 17 July 1976)

Pope Receives President Dazara of Hungary

On 13 November 1975 the Pope received President Dazara of Hungary. As well as questions of international development and the European conference on security, they discussed Church-State relations in Hungary and contacts between Hungary and the Holy See. The Vatican communiqué stated that there was an evident desire on both sides to establish contact, to improve relations and to find acceptable solutions to existing questions. The Pope said: "We are convinced that sincere words between Church and State on a solid basis of respect for each other's independence and rights will serve both the Church, and no less, the State. On the one hand religious peace is in itself a worthy contribution to the harmony of national life, and on the other hand the Church will in this way be able to contribute increasingly successfully to the human formation of community, especially the youth. This formation embraces, as well as love for one's country and for the solidarity of society, also a spirit of understanding and brotherly cooperation among people and nations." (AKSA, 21 November 1975)

Primate of Hungary Appointed Cardinal

On 24 May 1976 Pope Paul VI conducted a consistory at which 21 Archbishops were raised to the rank of cardinal. Among them was the Archbishop of Esztergom, Laszlo Lekai. Since 1853 every Archbishop of Esztergom has been appointed cardinal. Dr. Lekai is the 20th cardinal-archbishop. His appointment strengthens his position as head of the Church in Hungary and enhances his authority in the eyes of his fellow bishops. (*Hungarian Institute for the Sociology of Religion News Service*, May 1976)

POLAND

Cardinal Wyszynski Offers his Resignation

The Polish Primate, Cardinal Wyszynski was 75 years old on 3 August and he has tendered his resignation to the Pope.

Vatican sources say it is still an open question whether the Pope will accept this or not. On 26 August, Cardinal Wyszynski spoke at the shrine of Chestohova to 15,000 pilgrims, against the atheist propaganda spread by the Polish government and warned of the unhealthy consequences which such a course might have on the development of the country. "The campaign against religion contributes nothing to the economic or social changes in our country; so I ask that it should cease." Atheism which is forced on people harms economic development for it induces mistrust toward the government even when it tries to introduce justified and necessary measures. He also told the pilgrims that he had written to the government asking them to soften their style of government, to listen to those who suffer and to bring imprisonment, interrogations and trials to an end. The Cardinal said that the numbers of prisoners could be cut by half, and the employees of the Ministry of the Interior as well. Since it is reported that there is a shortage of workers, all these people could be given useful work. If Poland is to be rebuilt it is necessary to exclude everything which creates mistrust. (AKSA, 3 September 1976)

Cardinal Wojtyla Protests

Cardinal Wojtyla, speaking on West German television on 15 August, declared his opposition to "conversion to the faith by force". The Cardinal was aligning himself with Pavel Wotkowiet, the 15th century rector of the Cracow Academy who at the time of the Council of Constance forbade enforced conversion. "This principle is still valid after six centuries" said the Cardinal, "and applies equally to enforced conversion to atheism". (AKSA, 27 August 1976)

Gierek Speaks on Church-State Relations

The chief of the Polish Communist Party, Edward Gierek, spoke of the positive relations between the State and the (Catholic) Church in Poland in a talk which was broadcast and televised. He was speaking to industrial workers at Mielc and answering their questions. "It

is legally forbidden in Poland to insult religious feelings as long as these are not being misused for political purposes which work against the interests of the state," said Gierek. The State and the Church in Poland are not in conflict and there are opportunities for fruitful co-operation", said Gierek. (AKSA, 10 August 1976)

ROMANIA

Romanian Orthodox Relations with Rome

During his recent visit to Vienna, the Orthodox Metropolitan of Banat, Archbishop Dr. Nicolae Corneanu, discussed with Cardinal König ways of increasing contacts between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Church in Austria. "The Romanian Church is looking forward with great joy to the visit of the Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal König," the Metropolitan said, and he added that the views of the Catholic leadership about some problems connected with relations and contacts between the Vatican and the Romanian Church had clearly changed. The Vatican had taken a realistic stand about the question of the Uniates who in 1948 rejoined the Orthodox Church; the problem "had been resolved by the faithful and the lower clergy". Turning to the communiqué issued on the occasion of President Ceausescu's visit to the Vatican, the Metropolitan said that the Romanian government was trying to meet the Vatican's wishes, which include the appointment of a Latin bishop for Romania, and, related to this, the organization of a Catholic diocese. At an ecumenical symposium on the historical development and present conditions of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Metropolitan underlined the historic links between the Church and the Romanian people. The Church has identified itself from the beginning with the aims of the Romanian people, and today is deeply identified with the national, social and economic realities of the people as they are expressed in the new social system. The Church enjoys full independence in its organization and work, the Metropolitan emphasized. (AKSA, 2 July 1976)

Massacre of Jews Commemorated

Leaders of the Romanian Communist Party, members of the Romanian Federation of Jewish Communities and members of the public have paid homage to the many thousands of Jews murdered by the Nazis and their agents in the Moldavian town of Iasi in June 1941. The tributes which marked the 35th anniversary of the massacres were given wide coverage by the Romanian press, radio and television. At the unveiling of the memorial built by the Iasi council in the square of the 300 year old Great Synagogue, Mr. Ion Manciu, the Mayor, said that it served to remind people that such atrocities should never again be repeated. The memorial meeting organized in the town's National Theatre hall by the Socialist Unity Front's national council was attended by Mr. Corneliu Manescu, the council's vice-President. Among the speakers was Dr. Moses Rosen, the Chief Rabbi of Romania. Dr. Rose later conducted a memorial service in the Pacurari Jewish cemetery in Iasi where a large number of the victims are buried in common graves. Nearly every member of the Iasi Jewish community, plus 800 representatives from other parts of Moldova, attended the service. (*Jewish Chronicle*, 16 July 1976)

Yiddish Theatre in Bucharest Celebrates

The Jewish theatre in Bucharest has recently celebrated its centenary. At a special reception given in honour of the festive occasion several members of the Romanian Communist Party and government and representatives of national cultural institutions were present. The Director of the theatre, Franz Auerbach gave the main speech of the evening. (*Scinteia*, 11 August 1976)

Romanian Churches Damaged by Floods

Both Orthodox and Reformed Churches suffered flood damage during early July of last year. The Reformed Church has appealed for £85,000 to repair or rebuild 24 Reformed churches and seven parish houses in the Diocese of Cluj which suffered severely in the flooding. 77 Ortho-

dox churches in five dioceses were also damaged, and the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church has voted to give money for their repair, (*Baptist Times*, 30 October 1975, p. 3.)

EAST GERMANY

Talks between Evangelical Church and East German Government

Bishop Schönherr of East Germany has announced that talks are taking place between representatives of the Evangelical Church and the government about providing space for religious buildings in all new suburbs. Bishop Schönherr expressed the hope that this question would soon be satisfactorily settled. (AKSA, 17 July 1976)

Pastor's Death in East Germany

Following the death of the Rev. Oskar Brüsewitz, aged 47, after his attempted immolation, Dr. Philip Potter of the WCC wrote to East German church authorities expressing the hope that they would succeed in clarifying the situation of young Christians in this socialist State. He noted that they had already discussed various Church-State matters with state officials. In his letter to the leaders of the Protestant Church of Saxony, Dr. Potter expressed "profound distress" at the news of the pastor's death and "my sympathy and that of my colleagues to the church authorities, the pastors of that area and the relatives of Pastor Brüsewitz". The pastor had doused himself with gasoline and set himself on fire in the marketplace of Zeitz on 18 August. A sign at his side read: "The Churches accuse communism of oppressing young people". Parish authorities expressed complete surprise at this act. "We know that Pastor Brüsewitz understood himself through his service and even through unusual acts as a witness of God", they stated. "However we cannot approve his action. In following Christ we must be ready to make sacrifices but not to end our lives voluntarily. We think that our duties lie in participating in society so that by our witness and example God's purposes may be realized

in our world". They felt, however, that they had no right to condemn a fellow pastor. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 2 September 1976)

SOVIET UNION

US Senate and House of Representatives Support Georgi Vins

Four senators have introduced legislation seeking the release of Georgi Vins. Senators Henry Jackson, Hubert Humphrey, Clifford P. Case and Ted Stevens have introduced Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 118 in the US Senate. The resolution calls on the Soviet Union to honour its commitments for religious freedom as expressed in its own constitution and in the Helsinki Declaration and UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which it has signed. The Senate measure is similar to one introduced by Representative John Buchanan to the House of Representatives (House Concurrent Resolution No. 606). Others have also appealed on behalf of Georgi Vins. Rabbi Alexander Schindler, the head of the Reform Jewish movement in the United States, has sent a telegram to Secretary of State, Dr. Henry Kissinger, urging him to use his influence and office to secure justice for Georgi Vins. It is also hoped that a petition with 600,000 signatures on behalf of Vins will be sent to the Soviet government by the UN Commission on Human Rights. The petition was organized by Christian Prisoners Release International and has been refused by every Soviet embassy in the countries where it has been presented. (*Church and State*, July-August 1976; *Referativny Byulleten*, 15 May 1976; *Baptist Times*, 20 May, 1976).

Moscow Conference of Religious Leaders

The Kremlin has called for a world conference of religious leaders in Moscow in July 1977. Representatives of all faiths are to be invited in order to increase and activate support for peace. (*Observer*, 30 May 1976 p. 1)

Alexander Argentov

Twenty-five-year-old Alexander Argentov, who participated in informal discussions on the history and philosophy of religion, has been detained in the Moscow Psychiatric Hospital no. 14 since mid-July. There he is diagnosed as mentally ill because of his belief in God and is housed with genuinely disturbed and violent people. He is forced to take the drug, aminazin, which when administered even in small, carefully controlled doses, has such side effects as "toxic inflammation of the liver, elevation of intraocular pressure, fluctuations of the arterial pressure, increased tension and cramping of the muscles, malaise and depressive moods". Protests on his behalf include an *Appeal to Public Opinion*, dated 16 July 1976, and an *Open Letter*, dated 25 July 1976, to Vladimir Kuroedev, Chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs. These documents, which reached Keston College in late August, are signed by Moscow Christians, including Gennadi Shimanov whose book, *Notes from the Red House*, describes his own experiences in a soviet psychiatric hospital. A brief post-script to these documents reports that the head doctor at Psychiatric Hospital no. 14 "stated that all those who had signed the, in his words, 'anti-Soviet' *Appeal to Public Opinion* would be sent to prison". M. Vvedensky (a signatory) has already received a summons to the Military Commission. (*Keston News Service*, 3 September 1976; see also this issue of RCL, pp. 45-47)

Ecumenism with a difference

On 20 June 1976 28 Soviet citizens signed a letter to the Presidium of the Supreme Court in which they described the fight against religion in the Soviet Union as an illness which was destroying the State. They appealed to the government to cease this struggle. This is the first time in the history of the Soviet Union that such a letter has been signed by Christians of different confessions - Roman Catholics, Pentecostals, Adventists, Baptists, Orthodox and members of the "Church of Christ" (a religious community which appears for the first time in such documents). Among

the signatories was the well-known mathematician, Dr. Shafarevich, who for the first time declared himself Orthodox. Other signatories included 81 year-old Vladimir Shelkov, President of the Adventist group, who is said to be in hiding, and also the Baptists, Alexei Prokofiev and Boris Zdorovets. The former was a founder of the reform Baptist movement, and the latter was due to leave prison only on 2 May this year.

The 15-page appeal states that the Churches in the Soviet Union today are in greater difficulty than they were under Stalin. The mass closure of churches and the introduction of discriminatory laws since the death of Stalin have increased believers' problems. The compilers of the appeal express their sense of responsibility before the country and history; this sense encouraged them to state their views in the hope that they would be heard. (*Keston News Service*, 15 July 1976)

New Post for Russian Priests

Fr. Gleb Yakunin and Fr. Dmitri Dudko have been given new posts by the Russian Orthodox authorities. The former has become a reader in the parish of Kashchnikovo; the latter officiates as priest in the parish of Grebnevo. Fr. Yakunin lost his position in his former parish after he wrote a letter about religious liberty in the USSR to the Fifth Assembly of the WCC (see *RCL* Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 9-14). He has been forbidden to exercise priestly duties since 1966. (*Church Times*, 21 May 1976)

Levitin Appeals for Bukovsky

In an open letter, Anatoli Levitin-Krasnov appealed to leaders of the British political parties to help Vladimir Bukovsky. Bukovsky is currently in the Vladimir prison because of his human rights activities. (*Open letter*, 10 August 1976)

Moscow Jews Harassed at Passover

Reports which reached the West in April describe the harassment of Moscow Jews while they attended Passover

synagogue services. One incident involved a car which was driven at high speed past the synagogue in Arkhipova St. when 80 young Jews were standing outside. On a second occasion the authorities tried unsuccessfully to arrest a participant who was protected by others in the group. The police, however, seized Mr. Andrei Okunev, beat him up, arrested him, beat him up again, and then released him only to rearrest him when he was on his way to the synagogue the next day. (*Jewish Chronicle*, 30 April 1976 p. 44).

Data on Jews in the Soviet Union

In a series of Moscow radio broadcasts to the British Isles and the United States in mid-April the commentator, identified as "the philosopher Joseph Shapiro", a member of the USSR Council of Ministers, supplied the following information. There are approximately 50,000 religious Jews in the Soviet Union (from a population of 3 million Jews), worshipping at a total of 92 registered synagogues, a number which he claims has remained constant for the past 12 years. One synagogue is sufficient to serve the 160,000 Jews of Leningrad because there are so few religious Jews (only 20-30 old people). The lack of interest in religion shown by Jews is due, he said, partly to their urban environment and partly to their high degree of education. Two of the three highest rabbinical posts remain unfilled because there are no candidates. (*Moscow Radio*, 14 April 1976)

Peace Medal Awards

Patriarch Pimen of Moscow and all Russia and other Russian Orthodox Church leaders have been presented with medals marking the 25th anniversary of the Peace Movement in recognition of their work for the movement. World Council of Peace medals have also been granted to Mufti Ziyaudin Khan Ishan Babakhan, President of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan Board of Muslims, and to Bandido Hambo Lama Gomboyev, leader of the Buddhists in the USSR. (*Soviet News*, 4 May 1976)