

News in Brief

ROMANIA

Romanian Patriarch Dies

Justinian Marina, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, died on the evening of Saturday, 26 March 1977, in Bucharest. He was 76 years old. In recent years he had kept his busy daily schedule in spite of personal ill health. He had been Patriarch for 29 years. Two events in the past six months reveal a great deal about his remarkable church leadership. In November the Romanian Orthodox Church celebrated 90 years as an autocephalous Church and 50 years as a Patriarchate. Many church dignitaries from churches of every denomination from abroad and from Romania were invited to the festival services and functions. Their presence indicated the success of Justinian's ecumenical policy. In fact, the agreement of his international policy with that of his secular counterpart, President Nicolae Ceausescu of Romania, underlines the cooperation between State and Church inspired by the Patriarch and worked out in difficult circumstances, and not without controversy. The sending of 75 red roses on Justinian's birthday by President Ceausescu gives some idea of the respect and good relations between them personally.

The second significant event happened in January this year. Patriarch Justinian was awarded an honorary doctorate by his own Theological Institute in Bucharest. With him nine leading churchmen and theologians from major Churches abroad, including three Anglicans, also received honorary doctorates. Theological education had been a special

concern of the Patriarch. Though two important theological centres, at Chisinau and Cernauti, were lost to the Church in the division of Bessarabia by the Russians, there are now 1,400 students of theology at the two remaining university level institutes in Sibiu and Bucharest. More than 20 students are studying for their doctorate and many of these will spend time studying abroad at major theological centres of all traditions.

In his writings and sermons, many of which were collected and published in the series entitled, *Apostolat Social*, he emphasized the Church's task of uniting the people behind the social concerns of the State. To this end he reorganized the statutes of the Church and also its monastic life. He leaves behind him, after almost 30 years of rule within a socialist regime, a Church of 13-15 million believers, 10,000 parishes, 11,000 priests, 1,400 university theological students and many more seminarians, and a Church of prestige and respect both at home and abroad. His successor, by tradition the Metropolitan of Moldova, will be elected by the National Assembly. It is believed that he would do well to follow the policies of his predecessor.

Romanian WCC Appointments

During the meeting of the Central Committee of the WCC in August 1976 at Geneva, Metropolitan Nicolae of Banat was appointed to the WCC's Commission of Foreign Affairs, Professor Dumitru Popescu of the Romanian Orthodox Institute in Bucharest and Professor Istvan Iuhasz of the Protestant Institute in

Cluj-Napoca were appointed to the WCC Commission on Faith and Order. (*Credinta*, September 1976, p. 3)

Vatican Official Visits Romania

A senior Vatican official, Archbishop Luigi Poggi, arrived in Bucharest on 8 October 1976, accompanied by an aide, Fr. John Bucowsky. Mgr. Poggi's visit was expected to last for two weeks and was to include meetings with Mr. Gheorghe Nenciu, the President of the Department of Cults. This was the second time Mgr. Poggi had visited Romania. The first visit did not produce any substantial results, and at Christmas 1975 Pope Paul named Romania as one of the countries where church-state relations have caused the faithful hardship. He expressed at that time the hope that solutions to these problems could be found within the spirit of the Helsinki Agreement.

The Romanian Catholic Church has at present only one of its five dioceses functioning with a resident Bishop, Bishop Aaron Marton of Alba-Iulia. Other leading officials of the Church include his auxiliary, Bishop Anton Jakab, and a consecrated titular Bishop, Mgr. Petru Plesca. Bishop Plesca, resident in Iasi, is unable to carry out his episcopal duties. The right ordering of the administration of the Catholic Church in Romania was expected to be one of the subjects for discussion during Mgr. Poggi's visit. It was also thought that the problems of catechism instruction, the establishing of a proper charter for the Roman Catholic Church in Romania and the re-opening of religious orders would also be raised.

Encouragement for Pentecostals

Improvement in the relations between the Romanian Pentecostal Churches and the Romanian State during 1975-76 was reported last autumn by the Field Director of the European Evangelistic Society (EES), Mr. J. P. Wildrienne. He had just completed a tour of the country during which he had been received for the first time by the President of the Department of Cults, Mr. Nenciu. He also received permission to speak at the annual pastors conference held in Bucharest, and was able to attend and preach at services held in the two recently

built Pentecostal churches in Arad and Timisoara. Both the new churches were built in the last 12 months and have a seating capacity of 1,500 people. On the occasion of Mr. Wildrienne's visit they were full to overflowing. In his talks with the state officials Mr. Wildrienne was able to bring up the subject of state approval for the construction of further new churches and he also discussed the possibility of a full-time Pentecostal Bible school being opened in Bucharest. Permission for both these ventures arrived at the Pentecostal headquarters while Mr. Wildrienne was still in the country. The Bible school was to be opened in November 1976 and permission was given for work to begin on a new church in Maramures. To assist with the teaching of courses at the new Bible school a manual of Instruction, written by Trandafir Sandru, the denomination's secretary, has been prepared and printed in 3,000 copies. The work was done on the printing press of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate. The first intake of students will consist of about 20. The President of Cults, Mr. Nenciu, told Mr. Wildrienne, that the Romanian authorities had noted the references to Romania in the EES magazine and that they appreciated their non-political attitude and non-intervention in Romanian internal matters. (*Keston News Service*, 28 October 1976, p. 3 and *Euroflame*, October 1976)

BULGARIA

Bulgarian Talks Help "Ostpolitik"

There has been a thaw in Vatican-Bulgarian relations since the visit of the Bulgarian President Todor Zhivkov to the Pope in 1975. Until then the Latin-rite diocese of Nikopol on the Romanian border and the Apostolic Vicariate of Sofia-Plovdiv were without bishops. At this meeting, Zhivkov agreed to let Rome fill the vacancies. Bishops Bogdan Dobranov of Sofia-Plovdiv and Vasco Siercov of Nikopol were nominated. All the Bulgarian episcopal jurisdictions are now filled for the first time since 1952. The thaw has continued since 1975 with the reciprocal visit of Archbishop Casaroli, the Vatican's "Foreign Minister", to Bulgaria in November 1976. (*Catholic Herald*, 26 November 1976).

Mgr. Casaroli Visits Bulgaria

Mgr. Casaroli, the Vatican's "foreign minister" said, after returning from a week's visit to Bulgaria, that his conversations with Bulgarian leaders had been "open and cordial". The first four days were spent visiting the bishops and their dioceses. "The government made no difficulties whatever to my meetings with all the representatives of the Catholic Church in Bulgaria," said Casaroli. "The Bulgarian government put a special plane at my disposal to return to Sofia from Ruscuk where mass was celebrated in the Cathedral." Casaroli did not meet the Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr. Gromyko, who was also in Sofia, but the latter had sent him greetings through the Bulgarian Foreign Minister. The last three days of his stay were spent in conversations with President Zhivkov and leading government representatives. The principal theme of the conversations was related to the Helsinki agreement and preparations for the second conference on security and cooperation which will be held next year in Belgrade, and the question of the Third World. This was followed by conversations about the Catholic Church in Bulgaria and the possibility of further exchanges of ideas and cooperation between Sofia and the Vatican in the field of history and culture, particularly in connection with the celebration in 1981 of the 1,300 anniversary of the founding of Bulgaria. The Vatican archives contain many documents relating to Bulgaria, particularly from the period before the Turkish domination. Mgr. Casaroli had been very satisfied also with his visits to Catholic communities and dioceses. The Catholic Church in Bulgaria is a small minority (between 60,000 and 70,000 out of a population of eight million). But it is a vital Church and although there are problems the religious climate is encouraging. "I have no illusions, but I return to Rome with hopes," said Casaroli. (AKSA, 19 November 1976)

Courses at Bulgarian Orthodox Church Seminary

There were 45 places available for 1976-77 at the Sofia Seminary of "St. John of Rila" for 30 students under 17 and 15 students under 35. Applicants had to send the necessary documents to the

Rector, Gara Cherepish, Vratsa Region, by 31 August 1976. Entrance was by exam (in Bulgarian and in singing) for those under 17 and the course was to last five years and would be followed by military service. The course for older students was to last three years and the candidates and their wives must not have been married twice. (*Tserkoven Vestnik*, 11 June 1976).

POLAND

Pastoral Letter from Cardinal Wyszyński

In a pastoral letter whose text was agreed upon at the Bishops' Conference in September 1976 and which was read out in all the Polish Catholic churches near the end of November, Cardinal Wyszyński, the Roman Catholic Primate of Poland, protested about government discrimination against Roman Catholics. "Regardless of their qualifications, skills and talents, leading positions in the professions are closed to candidates who do not profess atheism." Tricks, threats and police pressure have been employed to win students away from the Church; children were advised not to wear religious medals or crosses; and theological students were called into the army contrary to church-state agreements. (*Daily Telegraph*, 29 November 1976, p. 5 and *Tablet*, 4 December 1976, p. 1188)

Cardinal Wyszyński Not to Retire

Cardinal Wyszyński, who is now 75, has been asked by the Vatican not to retire from his post as Archbishop of Warsaw. According to AKSA, it is widely believed that the Polish government asked the Vatican to allow him to remain. This was referred to in a message to the Cardinal from the Secretary of the Polish Bishops' Conference, in which he was referred to as "the father of the Polish nation". The message expressed the desire of the whole Polish Church that he should remain. (AKSA, 6 October 1976)

Theological Conference in Cracow

"Theology: the study of God" was to be the theme of a theological conference held in Cracow between 14 and 16 September. It was to be organized jointly by the University of Lublin and the Theological Academy of Warsaw, and seminary professors from a number of Eastern

bloc countries were expected to attend. (*The Tablet*, 4 September 1976, p. 868)

Statement of Polish Minister of Religious Affairs

In a statement to the Italian weekly *Famiglia Cristiana*, the Polish Minister of Religious Affairs, Mr. Kazimir Kakol, said, "I have a high regard for Cardinal Wyszynski. He is a great patriot who clearly has no love for communism, but who recognizes that the regime has done some good. While opposing communism he is well aware of the limits within which he can act. I would call him a loyal adversary." In a separate interview with Mr. Kakol, which was published in *Documentation Catholique*, he spoke of the "normalization" of relations between the Church and State in Poland. "It is not capitulation. In no way are we giving in to the Church. It has the right to carry out its services within the limits of the sanctuary, let us say in the sacristy . . . but we are never going to allow evangelization outside the Church. We shall never permit the religious education of children and of youth. We shall never permit the Church any influence on cultural and social life." He went on to explain that the government would not use violent measures against the Church on the grounds that the Church would then seem to be a "citadel under siege" and would gain in popularity. The regime's tactic, he said, was to create a consumer society by which "we will have conditions similar to those in the West, which will hasten the dwindling away of the Church". (*The Tablet*, 4 September 1976, p. 867)

Znak and Pax Christi Hold Seminar

A seminar between the Znak group and the German Pax Christi organization was due to take place at the end of September at Tynec near Cracow. The theme of this seminar, the fifth, was "Work for peace as a pastoral task". The German group was, for the first time, to include members of Pax Christi from other countries, including Bishop Luigi Bettazzi of Ivrea in Italy, Wim Rood, secretary to the Archbishop of Utrecht, and M. Pierre Brachin, vice-president of the French section of Pax

Christi. (*The Tablet*, 4 September 1976, p. 867)

Requests to Build Churches

Bishop Jan Zareba of Wloclawek, Poland, has said that no request of his to construct new churches or to repair old ones has been approved by the Polish government during the past year. (*Catholic Herald*, 19 November 1976)

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Czech Samizdat

Four documents dealing with the case of four rock musicians sentenced to 8-18 months imprisonment on 23 September 1976 in Czechoslovakia have been made available to Keston College by Pallach Press Ltd. The documents include biographical details of the four musicians, an account of reactions from within Czechoslovakia at the time of their trial and also an essay in defence of one of the musicians by Helena Klimova. The defendant concerned is Svatopluk Karasek who is a graduate of the Protestant Theological Faculty. One of his sermons, entitled "Easter Sermon", accompanies the essay. The sermon calls for Christians to stand up and be counted. Among those demonstrating against the arrests of the musicians were several believers, both Protestant and Catholic.

Church Commitment in Czechoslovakian Elections

The strong atheist propaganda spread at places of work, in schools, and on a large scale through the daily papers in the Czech lands and particularly in Slovakia in 1976 almost ceased at the time of the preparations for the general elections, scheduled for 22 October and 23 October 1976. Such a tactic is a regular occurrence in Czechoslovakia, as in the Soviet Union. On this occasion the preparation of the Churches for the elections was particularly thorough. On 15 September a meeting of the Christian Peace Conference was held in Prague, with nearly 200 representatives of the 15 recognized Churches in Czechoslovakia present. The purpose of the Conference was to deal with the general elections. The organizers expressed the wish that such a gathering would encourage believers to play a responsible

part in the coming elections. On 21 September the Federal Deputy Premier, Matej Lucan, received representatives of all the authorized Churches to discuss the elections. The church dignitaries handed to the Deputy a lengthy document from the CPC, stating that the Czechoslovak clergy supported the election programme which the Czechoslovak National Front put before it. Along with the special treatment of church dignitaries in September, much attention was devoted to the Churches and religious societies in the mass media. Many problems however, remain: vacant sees, the removal of licences from priests and the restriction on the number of those allowed to enter the theological colleges. All these problems are being passed over in silence.

EAST GERMANY

Bishop Comments on Reaction to Pastor's Death

The death of Pastor Oscar Brüsewitz in August has released "long-suppressed concerns and worries in our congregations," Bishop Johannes Hempel told the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony which is the largest of the eight Churches united in the Federation of Evangelical Churches in East Germany. The reactions of the congregations have suggested that two criticisms are being directed at the church leaders in East Germany today. Firstly, that the church leaders do not keep the people sufficiently informed about the State's religious policy; and secondly, that the church leaders are not firm enough in their stand against the state authorities on certain issues. The Bishop advised the Synod that there was need for a "biblical clarification of the various central issues of the Christian life in a secularized socialist society". He pointed out that there are conflicts between "people of faith and people in the secularized world, between the possibilities of power and those of powerlessness". He disagreed with press reports in East Germany describing the relations of State and Church as "harmonious". Christians in the German Democratic Republic have had enough experience to know when they have received "good things from this society" and when "they have suffered in it," he said.

"Therefore, we are in a position to clarify among ourselves, with the Gospel as our guideline, what we have to think of the various challenges and how we have to react to them." (*Ecumenical Press Service*, 12 November 1976)

Church Building Permits in East Germany

It is understood that the Federation of Evangelical Churches in East Germany may get permission to build 40 new churches, while the Catholics will probably get authorization for fewer, in proportion to their smaller membership. The reasons for this sudden relaxation are not known. Some speculate that it may be partly to gain foreign currency since the West German churches are likely to provide the money so as to help their co-believers in East Germany. But it may be partly to get a better image abroad and among the numerous church delegations which visit East Germany. In particular the government has recently made efforts to improve its relations with the Vatican. The new churches will be concentrated in new towns and housing estates. (*Keston News Service*, 28 October 1976)

SOVIET UNION

Monitoring Group Reports on Religious Discrimination

In May 1976 the Group for the Promotion and Implementation of the Helsinki Accords was founded in Moscow. This Group has sent reports of its findings on "Separated Families" and "Repressions Against Religious Families" to the heads of those States which signed the Helsinki Agreement. These reports are dated 27 and 17 June respectively.

In the first report, the Group cites examples of violations against the provisions of the Act which guarantee the rights of an individual after he has applied to emigrate or join relatives abroad and which ensure that special attention is given to requests by the sick or elderly. Col. Efim Davidovich, former hero of the Second World War and fighter for Jewish civil rights, was deprived of his rank and pension after applying to emigrate in May 1975. He was refused a visa despite ill health and this led to his death in April 1976.

Boris Levitas, a young student of 22, was expelled from his educational institute, deprived of his internal passport, denied registration in Kiev and his home town of Lvov so that he is now unable to work, after applying to emigrate to Israel where the rest of his family has lived since 1973. For six years Maria Slepak and her family have been refused permission to join a sick mother in Israel.

The second report reveals how the authorities contradict Art. 7 of the Final Act which provides for freedom of conscience and religion and which prevents the forcible separation of families within a country for ideological reasons. The authorities are continuing to repress religious families who, in their eyes, violate the Code on Marriage and the Family. Art. 59 demands that parents raise their children in the spirit of the communist moral code and do not exert a harmful influence by immoral, anti-social behaviour. The authorities are using Arts. 59 and 64 of this Code as a legal basis for depriving religious parents (particularly Baptists, Adventists and Pentecostals) of their parental rights and, in some cases, of the custody of their children. Many such parents are named. A Baptist mother, Maria Supronovich, for example, has had her children taken away from her.

Helsinki Monitoring Group Established in Lithuania

The establishment of a group in Lithuania to monitor the observance of the Helsinki Agreement was announced at a press-conference in Moscow on 1 December 1976. The five-member group included the 70 year old poetess, Ona Lukaskaite-Poskiene, the Jewish physicist, Eitan Finkelshtein, and two religious activists, Fr. Karolis Garuckas (his letter to Brezhnev was published in the 23rd issue of the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*) and V. Petkus (he with others was detained at Vilnius railway station in December 1975, when he went to meet Andrei Sakharov before the trial of S. Kovalev). The group charged the Soviet authorities with violating the Helsinki Agreement: first was cited the continued

banishment of two Lithuanian bishops, J. Steponavicius and V. Sladkevicius, to small villages outside their dioceses; second was cited a new law "On the status of religious organizations", which subjects religious groups to the strict control of the secular authorities; and third, the arrest of J. Matulionis and V. Lapienis in Vilnius on 19 October 1976, for duplicating and distributing religious and "slandorous" literature. These actions all contravene the articles on human rights and basic freedoms in the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. (*Reuter's Report*, 1 December 1976, and *Documents from the Lithuanian Public Group to Promote the Observance of the Helsinki Accords in the USSR*)

Delegation to Baltic States Stresses Helsinki Agreement

The need for détente and the great importance of the Helsinki conference were emphasized by hosts and guests during a visit to Estonia and Latvia by a delegation from the Lutheran Church of Finland in September. The five-member delegation, led by Archbishop Martti Simjoki, met leaders of Church and State in both Soviet republics. The invitation for the visit had come from the Archbishops of the Lutheran churches in Estonia and Latvia, Alfred Tooming and Janis Matulis. In his speech to the state officials Archbishop Simjoki pointed out that increased contacts across state lines would be necessary from the point of view of the Helsinki agreement. The Archbishop hoped that the Church of Finland would be able to receive visits by young ministers from the Churches of Estonia and Latvia. He announced that the Finnish Church is prepared to give scholarships to suitable applicants from these Churches. While in the country the delegation learned that the Finns living in Leningrad had just been granted permission to establish a Finnish-language congregation. (*Ecumenical Press Service*, 7 October 1976, p. 7)

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