

# Czechoslovakia Ten Years After

MILENA KALINOVSKA

Life in Czechoslovakia on the 10th anniversary of the Soviet invasion (August 1968) is far from "normal". The word "normalized" is used unremittingly by the authorities to describe the situation in Czechoslovakia. They claim that all is in perfect order. Yet, since the invasion, by April 1972, about 1,200 journalists (40 per cent of the total membership of the Union of Journalists) had been expelled from their Union;<sup>1</sup> by 1975, 145 Czechoslovak historians are known to have been dismissed from their jobs;<sup>2</sup> in 1973 about 500 out of a total of some 3,500 Roman Catholic priests were barred from exercising their ministry.<sup>3</sup> At the Faculty of philosophy at Charles University in Prague from 1970-71 the following were expelled: 20 professors, 15 associate professors, and approximately 7 per cent of the total number of lecturers.<sup>4</sup> By 1970, 7,000 officers had been dismissed from service in the Czechoslovak Armed Forces.<sup>5</sup> These are only examples of what has taken place in every sphere of life in Czechoslovakia.

It is a year and a half since *Charter 77* – the human rights manifesto – was issued. Sources in Czechoslovakia say that it now has nearly 1,000 signatories. Many of the signatories have been interrogated by the police, threatened with the loss of their already menial jobs, and 162 of them are known to have been sacked. Thirty signatories were exiled, 12 were tried and received prison sentences of up to 3½ years, criminal proceedings are being started against six others, and another three are being threatened with charges. There have been some cases of suicide, and many prominent and less prominent figures are being constantly watched, and on occasion taken into custody for short periods. Altogether there are 50 known prisoners of conscience in Czechoslovakia, but this figure does not include those many people who were tried outside Prague and other large towns, and about whom it is particularly difficult to obtain information.

The government has been trying on an international level to create the impression that public opinion in Czechoslovakia is on their side and not on the side of a "handful of rebels". As for the trials, these are not numerous, they claim, and the accused have been tried on charges unrelated to

the *Charter*. At home the government has been trying to spread fear among the general public, attempting to isolate the leading Chartists and, through harassment or imprisonment, to break their resistance.

Nevertheless, the *Charter* group still exists with its spokesman Dr Ladislav Hejdanek, Marta Kubisova and Dr Jaroslav Sabata who replaced Jiri Hajek. They have produced numerous documents on a number of issues, from a statement on the Belgrade conference to protests against legal violations. In response to the Chartists' activities some individuals and groups from the Churches have produced a large collection of literature on the religious situation in Czechoslovakia.

Immediately after *Charter 77* was publicly condemned, three Roman Catholics (Karel Soukup, Tomas Vlasak, Vaclav Divis and Frantisek Vlasak)<sup>6</sup> wrote to Cardinal Tomasek criticizing the Roman Catholic Church for not speaking out on religious discrimination. A prominent Catholic, Dr Josef Zverina, sent two critical letters to Cardinal Tomasek and also wrote a letter to *Katolicke noviny*<sup>7</sup> (*Catholic weekly*) questioning the honesty of their approach to religious questions. Fr Viktor Trstensky, a dismissed priest, complained about the harassment of believers in Slovakia in a letter addressed to Peter Colotka, the Slovak Prime Minister.<sup>8</sup> He also referred to an article, "The Socialist State and Religion", published in *Rude Pravo*<sup>9</sup> (the communist daily) and written by Dr Karel Hruza, the head of the Department for Church Affairs, who claimed that religious freedom in Czechoslovakia is based on the Constitution and laws 217/1949 and 218/1949. These laws were passed by the National Assembly in Prague on 14 October 1949: Law No. 217/1949 set up the State Agency for Ecclesiastical Affairs, and Law No. 218/1949 concerns the economic protection of church buildings by the State. These laws interfere fundamentally with the life of the Church and place it in total submission to the State.<sup>10</sup> According to Hruza's article, the Church has the right to teach religion in schools, to educate new clergy for its hierarchy, to publish religious literature and to conduct services in churches without state interference. Fr Trstensky, however, points out that Hruza's description of the situation does not correspond to reality:

We can only dream about religious freedom. A certain interrogator in Zilina prison told me clearly what religious freedom is when I asked him: "We can freely destroy religion, and you have to keep quiet." I thanked him for his openness. This is what it is really like. Every public expression of religious belief is discredited and even legally prosecuted. Pilgrimages, religious celebrations, missions, associations of young people and children and monastic orders are forbidden; clergy are restricted in visiting hospitals and any kind of charitable work is made impossible . . . The Laws 217/1949 and 218/1949, particularly their arbitrary application, are the basis for the most cruel oppression against which the Church has struggled for centuries. According to these laws,

arbitrary decisions by state officials for church affairs give or remove consent for pastoral work by the clergy, prevent help being given to neighbouring parishes, modify the activity of the clergy in the churches themselves, forbidding them to deal with children or young people, visit households . . .

Fr Trstensky denies that the State is not interested in people's convictions, as school-children are given questionnaires which explicitly refer to religion. As regards religious instruction at school, children and their parents are constantly threatened and told that if the children enrol for religious instruction they will not be accepted for higher education. To build new churches, or even to replace churches which have been closed, is not allowed. Attendance at church is closely supervised, and, continues Fr Trstensky, the police demand information from the clergy about those baptized and married in church. He also criticizes the state-supported Catholic organization, *Pacem in Terris*, which, though allegedly looking after the interests of the clergy, has never helped any priest when in difficulty. It suppresses the truth, he writes, and claims publicly that all is well in Czechoslovakia and that religious freedom is flourishing. *Pacem in Terris*\* was headed by Plojhar, and became known in the '50s and '60s for its collaboration with the government and its fight against the Church. In April 1968 some Roman Catholic priests demanded Plojhar's resignation and as a result the movement was dissolved. But in 1971 it was re-established.<sup>11</sup>

Milos Rejchrt, a pastor of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, also criticized Dr Hruza's article in a letter<sup>12</sup> to the author of the article. He pointed out some of the contradictions in the Czechoslovak legal system. For example, although Art. 16 of the Constitution states that "All cultural policy in Czechoslovakia, the advancement of education, upbringing and teaching are conducted in the spirit of scientific Marxism-Leninism . . .", Karel Hruza in his article claimed that in Czechoslovakia "nobody is forced to be a believer or an atheist, to perform religious ceremonies or not to perform them". But in Rejchrt's view, a teacher who has to conform to Art. 16 of the Constitution does not have the freedom "to be a believer or an atheist". Rejchrt also wrote (see p. 171-3) to Bishop Dr Karoly Toth,<sup>13</sup> the Secretary General of the Christian Peace Conference, and informed him of Dr Ladislav Hejdanek's interrogation and of the widespread harassment of those the regime considers dangerous. He criticized the Christian Peace Conference because, though it calls for peace in other countries, it condemns those who call for peace at home.

The many letters and other statements written by individuals are supported by constructive and detailed documents prepared by groups and

\* Before its dissolution in 1968 this organization was called the Peace Movement of Catholic Clergy. Only in 1971 was it renamed *Pacem in Terris*. *Ed.*

signed collectively by members of various denominations. Thirty-one Czech Brethren sent a letter (see p. 170) to the Federal Assembly.<sup>14</sup> Attached to the letter was a comprehensive analysis of the position of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, covering restrictions on the activities of church councils, on ecumenical activities, pastoral work, religious education, employment of believers and the publication of church literature. This long document also deals with state interference in church conventions and synods. It begins with a general introduction about the structure of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. This Church is numerically the strongest Evangelical Church in Bohemia and Moravia and the second largest Evangelical Church in the country. It has 240,000 members in 272 parishes, and 5-7 per cent of them are actively involved in parish life. About 3,000 members serve on church committees and are elected, like their 250 pastors, by the parish assemblies. The position of the Church is determined by the Czechoslovak Constitution, which, though it speaks of the right of individuals to believe, does not mention the right of believers to form churches and other societies. This means that the existence of the Church as an organization is not recognized by law. The Church is also strongly affected by the fact that in Czechoslovakia atheism is the ruling ideology, and it is endangered by increasing restrictions and possible eventual liquidation.

The Czech Brethren give examples of these restrictions in their statement under the following headings:

*Restrictions on parish activities.* In an effort to isolate parishes from each other, pastors cannot preach outside their own parish unless they have received permission from the state authorities "though the law mentions no such obligation". Permission is often refused. "Still more rarely meetings outside the parish are permitted. Lectures, discussions, cultural activities, concerts, larger meetings of children and youth need special permission, so that in many places these activities have stopped altogether. Publication activity in parishes is limited to circulars to parish members, and their contents are by and large censored . . ."

*Restrictions on ecumenical activity.* Relations with foreign Churches and with the WCC are conducted by "official intermediaries", and ordinary church members are able to take no part. The Czech Brethren's Ecumenical Church Council is controlled by the Ministry of Culture. At parish level, ecumenical activities "like joint meetings, united prayers and practical co-operation with other churches are being limited and purposely suppressed. The exceptions are yearly prayer weeks and the co-operative work on the translation of the Bible".

*State permission for pastoral work.* "The state administration knows that the clergy are mainly vulnerable to the fact that their activities are sub-

ject to state consent. To refuse such consent is an effective way of preventing seminarians or pastors from transferring to a different parish, or makes parish work completely impossible for those who, in the eyes of the state administration, have committed an offence." The document lists 16 clergymen\* who have been deprived of state approval since 1971. Svatopluk Karasek failed to receive state approval after changing his place of residence; after resigning Milan Balaban could not get state approval again. Thirteen students† at the Comenius Evangelical Faculty were either dismissed or did not get state consent for their pastoral duties after graduation. Some of them were later allowed to return to their studies. The document further states that each year a number of candidates are not accepted as students. In the year 1969–70 there were 800 students of theology (for all denominations). This number declined to 400 despite the growing numbers of applicants. Meanwhile, in the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren alone, 30 parishes are without pastors. Applicants for theological studies are required to produce not only a recommendation from their Church and school or employer, but also from the government functionary responsible for church affairs. Thus admission to theological studies depends, to a great extent, on the government authorities, whose aim is to promote atheism and consequently to suppress theological studies. Yet there are no legal grounds for these administrative measures. The State refers to a law passed in 1949 (218–223/1949) but this does not stipulate that licences may be withdrawn once they have been granted. The state administration considers that a pastor without a permit is no longer employed by the Church: thus he cannot work as a pastor anywhere, he cannot take part in pastoral conferences (monthly meetings of pastors and superintendents), he cannot preach or publish in the church press, and he ceases to be a member of the Council of Elders. Even retired pastors have to re-apply for a permit and often fail to obtain one. Furthermore, pressure is put on the church leadership to dissociate itself from pastors who do not receive state approval, and even to condemn them.

*Pastors in active service.* Pastors are constantly threatened with the loss of state consent for their work. "At least one third if not half of all pastors have been visited by employees of state security or invited to give information. Ministers have to notify state organs of their contacts with foreign friends." State officials, who deal with church affairs, often attend pastoral conferences and thus hamper any free expression of opinion.

\* Petr Brodsky, Jan Dus, Jaromir Dus, Petr Capek, Pavel Fojtu, Vladimir Kalus, Ing. Alfred Kocab, Milos Lojek, Milos Rejchrt, Miroslav Hodr, Vlastimil Slama, A. M. Satko, Jan Simsa, Ing. Dr. Jakub Trojan, Jiri Veber, Jan Zlatohlavek. However, Petr Brodsky, Petr Capek and A. M. Satko have been granted state consent recently.

† Ales Brezina, Miroslav Cejka, Dan Drapal, Jan Kozlik, Jan Mamula, Frantisek Matula, Vera Matulova, Jana Mikolaskova, Frantisek Silar, Jan Tydlit, Jana Zlatohlavkova, Martin Zlatohlavek, Miloslav Vasina.

Pastors who meet friends and colleagues in their own homes can be accused of illegal activity; for instance, in February 1975 in Libstat a private meeting of friends was broken up and the host was fined and lost state consent for his pastoral work. In 1974 the Ministry of the Interior dissolved the association of pastors (of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren) which held a week's theological course twice a year. It is now difficult for pastors to contact one another and meetings of elders are either restricted or forbidden. For 28 years pastors' salaries have not been adjusted and they receive the lowest salaries of all. A pastor can be accused of anti-socialist attitudes and pressure is put on some pastors to follow the Party line. The state administration decides which pastors should be involved in planning programmes for important meetings such as conventions, Synod meetings and elections to church committees. Needless to say, official directives are seldom recorded in writing, but are passed on in personal conversation or on the telephone, so that there is little proof of the violation of religious liberty.

*Job discrimination.* A Christian will rarely be entrusted with an important post in the economy, the civil service or state administration, and some careers are closed to active members of the Church of Czech Brethren. Teachers have to swear "that they will carry out education in the spirit of scientific Marxist teaching". A similar oath is being introduced for doctors. "In artists' Unions and in the rules of the RTUM (Revolutionary Trade Unions) the principle is laid down that their members must be governed by Marxism-Leninism. This, however, explicitly contradicts Art. 20 of the Constitution . . ."

*Access to education.* "In our country there are a number of young people, who because of their Christian convictions or the convictions of their parents are deprived of the possibility of secondary or university education." This point is illustrated by the following case: a local council in Osek wrote to the authorities about a candidate for university education. The letter claimed that the candidate's mother had not participated in public life since her marriage and had not voted during local elections. The candidate's father also refused to vote and was a deeply religious man. Because of these facts the local council did not recommend this candidate for university education.

*The New Orientation.* "The New Orientation is a free, open association of friends. It has not become an organization or an order. It came into existence in the 1950s . . . The New Orientation is open to dialogue with all sides and is interested in other trends within the Churches and outside. For a number of years it has held debates with Marxists, with whom it began a mutually enriching dialogue in the 1960s." In 1973 some fol-

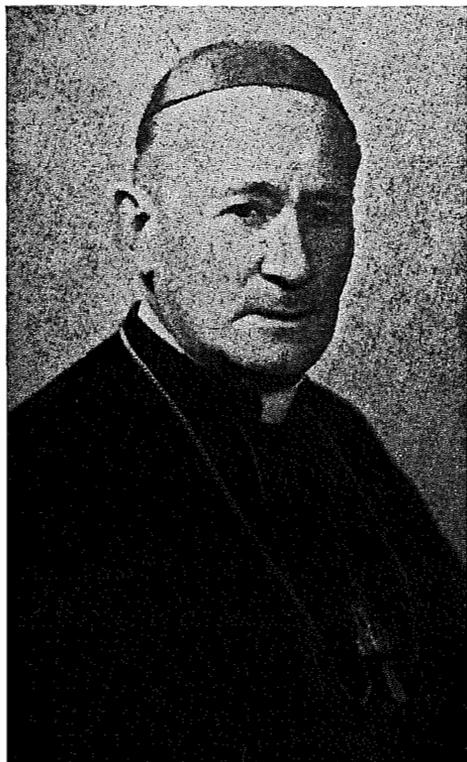
lowers of the New Orientation tried to express their critical views on, for example, the Church and society, faith and public life. Officially the New Orientation is not considered politically sound, and state officials for church affairs require applicants for theology courses or for the pastoral ministry to renounce their allegiance to this association.

*Church publishing.* The Church of Czech Brethren publishes its own monthly, *Cesky Bratr*, and is given space in the evangelical weekly, *Kostnické jiskry*, while the theological and intellectual public is served by *Krestanska revue*. All these journals, however, are issued in small editions, and in recent years *Cesky Bratr* and *Kostnické jiskry* have suffered from heavy financial sanctions for publishing articles which were critical of the state system. "There have been enforced changes in the editorial staff. Many authors are not allowed to publish, and themes are reduced to the narrowly religious-historical, without reference to current events . . ."

The last section of this long document, drawn up by members of the Church of Czech Brethren, is entitled *Conventions and Synods*. It states that the last four church Synods, held in 1969, 1971, 1973 and 1975, have all been monitored by state organs. The Department for Church Affairs keeps in close touch with the Synod council, not only so as to obtain information but also so as to endorse certain decisions. The text of a Synod's final resolution is known to the state administration long before it reaches the delegates. Nevertheless, it appears that thanks to some courageous representatives in the Synod, this body has not yet become a model of conformity.

Members of the Roman Catholic Church have also produced a collective letter (see pp. 173-5) protesting against restrictions. In October 1977, 55 members of the Roman Catholic Church<sup>15</sup> wrote to Cardinal Frantisek Tomasek, to President Gustav Husak and to the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly. The signatories pointed out that despite the ratification of international agreements, believers in Czechoslovakia do not enjoy full freedom and equal rights. They asked Cardinal Tomasek for support and requested that their letter be passed on to the other two addressees. The Cardinal was not able to do this, mainly because he was leaving for Rome, but promised to support their initiative. In February 1978 Ivan Medek wrote another letter, reminding him that he had promised them his support and that the injustices were still continuing. This letter<sup>16</sup> is described as a supplement to the October letter, and includes a list of Roman Catholic priests who were deprived of state consent for their ministry and thus could not perform their pastoral duties.

Another detailed letter (see pp. 176-8) was sent in October 1977 by Roman Catholic believers to President Gustav Husak and the Presidium of



Cardinal Frantisek Tomasek, a leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia, who was made Archbishop of Prague on 6 March 1978. An up-to-date account of discrimination against the Churches in Czechoslovakia is given on pp. 162-70.





Above Frantisek Lizna (b. 1941) now a Roman Catholic priest (centre) in Czechoslovakia, processes round the Church of St George, in Velke Opatovice, before celebrating his first mass after his ordination in 1974. Since then he has not been able to carry out his pastoral duties as he did not receive state consent to work as a priest. He signed *Charter 77*. Many other Roman Catholic priests, and pastors of the Church of Czech Brethren, are also banned from carrying out their ministry (see documents pp. 170–78).



Left The Church of St George at Velke Opatovice, Czechoslovakia, full for Frantisek Lizna's first mass.



Frantisek Lizna (centre) at the altar in the Church of St George.

the Federal Assembly of Czechoslovakia.<sup>17</sup> This letter suggests some solutions to the problems facing believers in Czechoslovakia. In an accompanying document, the Czechoslovak Constitution and other laws relating to believers are analysed: the document's authors argue that religious freedom is not clearly defined in the Constitution, that laws 217/1949 and 218/1949 impose restrictions on the Church, that while claiming to protect religious freedom, the State fails to do so in practice.

A Memorandum protesting against the threatened liquidation of monastic life in Czechoslovakia was sent to the Roman Catholic leadership in 1977 by the superiors of monastic communities.<sup>18</sup> To destroy monastic life, the signatories claim, would be a breach of the international agreements on human rights, which Czechoslovakia signed in Helsinki. The liquidation of monastic orders, they claim, began in 1950 when members of religious orders were forcibly deported to concentration camps situated in convents and monasteries. In 1968 the Department for Church Affairs admitted that this action had been illegal, and in November 1968 the Procurator-General in Prague confirmed that monastic orders had a legal right to exist. However, according to information about monastic orders in Czechoslovakia dated 14 June 1971, the Czechoslovak Ministry of Culture declared that Law 218/1949, para. 14, cancelled all regulations governing the legal rights of churches and religious societies, including monastic orders, with the result that *de facto* monastic orders and communities have no legal justification for their existence. The Memorandum lists ten points which show how members of monastic orders are forbidden to associate freely and to enrol new members, particularly since 31 March 1971 when this was made impossible by state interference. Members of monastic orders are also deprived of university and other specialized education, and are not allowed to finish their theological studies with a doctorate. The authors conclude their Memorandum by pointing out that Art. 29 of the Czechoslovak Constitution gives citizens the right to make suggestions to the State and its representative authorities. Therefore the superiors of monastic orders and congregations ask that their situation be examined, and that the 27 years of oppression be brought to an end.

All these documents are remarkable, not only because they exist at all, but also because they reveal in detail the discrepancy between the law, official statements and reality. They were all written within the last year and a half. So it seems that in the last 18 months many Christians in Czechoslovakia have ceased hoping that their situation will change if they remain silent, and have decided to publicize the anti-religious discrimination which is taking place, despite pressure against such publicity from some members of their own Churches and the state authorities.

<sup>1</sup> *White Paper on Czechoslovakia*, published by the International Committee for the Support of Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 117.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 123.

<sup>6</sup> Letters dated 30 January 1977 (see *RCL*, Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 163) and 15 February 1977.

<sup>7</sup> Letters dated 24 January 1977, 25 January 1977, 11 February 1977.

<sup>8</sup> Letter dated 10 June 1977.

<sup>9</sup> *Rude Pravo*, 12 February 1977.

<sup>10</sup> *The Church of Silence in Slovakia*, by Theodor J. Zubek, O.F.M., S.T.D., published by John J. Lach, p. 99.

<sup>11</sup> *Novy Zivot*, No. 4, April 1978, p. 95, "Francouzské Etudes o Pacem in Terris".

<sup>12</sup> Letter dated 8 March 1977.

<sup>13</sup> Letter dated 21 January 1978. This is printed on pp. 171-3.

<sup>14</sup> Letter dated 7 May 1978. This is printed on pp. 170-1.

<sup>15</sup> Letter dated 1 October 1977. This is printed on pp. 173-5.

<sup>16</sup> Letter dated 9 February 1978.

<sup>17</sup> Letter dated 28 October 1977. This is printed on pp. 176-8.

<sup>18</sup> Memorandum dates from 1977. The covering letter is printed on pp. 175-6 of this issue of *RCL*.

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## Czech Brethren Appeal to the State

On 7 May 1977 a long analysis (see summary on pp. 165-8) of the restrictions imposed on the Church of Czech Brethren was sent to the Federal Assembly of Czechoslovakia. The covering letter is printed below. (*RCL Bibliography ref. cz/1977/czb/2*).

Honourable deputies,

We are passing on to you, according to the law on petition, an analysis of church-state relations which concentrates on the position of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and its development during recent years. Some of us are clergy in active service, others are clergy without parish positions, and some others are active members of this Church in secular employment. It matters to all of us that believers, as well as other citizens, should be able to profess their beliefs and convictions publicly without hindrance in all spheres of public life, that they should be able to bring up their children and young people according to their own way of life, and to freely organize their own church and communal life. From the attached analy-

sis it is clear that this principle, which our fathers defended from time immemorial and which corresponds to our laws and to both international pacts, is at present being violated in our country.

We believe that it would help to improve matters in this field if the legislators gave ethical guarantees for the free development of church life, within the framework of the present law. It would help particularly if they accepted the interpretation of certain legal regulations (for instance Art. 29 of the Constitution, law 218/1945 of the legal code and so on) in a spirit of tolerance towards believers and the convictions of citizens, and in the light of the recently ratified pacts about civil and political rights, that is social, economic and cultural rights. It would also help if they recommended that ministers responsible for policy towards churches and believers should clarify the law where necessary.

Our application sprang from the initiative of the undersigned citizens. As members of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren we are familiar with the attempt of our Synod Council to im-

prove relations between Church and State during numerous negotiations. The purpose of our application, too, is to make such a contribution and so enable believers and church members to contribute to their own development and that of society as a whole, according to their abilities and traditions.

With greetings,

Milan Balaban; Zdenek Barta; Edmund Bauer; Ing. Tomas Bisek; Daniela Bis-

kova; Petr Brodsky; Daniela Brodska; Ales Brezina; Dr Ladislav Hejdanek; Pavel Hlavac; Jan Hrabina; Miroslav Jirounek; Svatopluk Karasek; Jan Keller; Marta Kellerova; Ing. Alfred Kocab; Dr Bozena Komarkova; Jan Kozlik; Ing. Petr Krejci; Milena Krejcova; Ing. Jan Litomisky; Marie Matzenauerova; Jaroslav Pfann; Bohdan Pivonka; Milos Rejchrt; Vojen Syrovatka; Dorkas Syrovatkova; Jan Simsa; Dr Ing. J. Trojan; Miloslav Vasina; Prof. Josef Vydrar.

## Czech Pastor Protests

*Milos Rejchrt, a pastor of the Church of Czech Brethren, wrote the following letter on 21 January 1978. It is addressed to Bishop Dr Karoly Toth, Secretary General of the Christian Peace Conference (address: Jungmanova 9, Prague 1). Pastor Rejchrt was born in 1946, studied at the Comenius Theological Faculty in Prague, and in 1972 was banned from exercising his pastoral duties. As a signatory of Charter 77 he signed the open letter, "Our Attitude to the Statements of Charter 77", in January 1977 (see RCL Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 161-2) and wrote to Dr Karel Hruza on 8 March 1977, criticizing Czech legislation on religion (see RCL Bibliography ref. cz/1977/cz8/1). He also signed the letter from Czech Brethren printed on p. 170.*

Dear Mr Toth,

Why am I writing to you? In addition to everything else, it is past midnight and on the 12-hour night shift I have to fight against falling asleep. By reading you deceive yourself: you soil the book with grease and heating oil, and at the same time you get the impression that you are deeply occupied with the text while you are falling asleep. But you cannot sleep because the water in the boiler might boil over. Writing is better. With one eye on the water-level indicator, I alternately switch the boiler on and off, and it shouts its 90 decibels at me in a friendly way. By concentrating on formulating this letter I drive away drowsiness. You would not believe how hypnotic the noise is; it is monotonous and continuous.

I can hardly concentrate on deep

theological meditation, which is probably more successful in a quiet study, but at least I can let recent events pass through my mind.

The telephone of my brother in Christ Dr Ladislav Hejdanek was cut off a few days ago. Yesterday three men in SNB (police) uniforms were stationed in front of his door and declared that they would watch him, that is register and check the identity of everybody who dared visit him. From time to time they would take somebody away. On 6 January this year Dr L. Hejdanek was visited in the boiler-room by the employees of the STB (secret police). It was not the first time. Ladislav Hejdanek is, as you should know, one of the spokesmen for *Charter 77*, which is fighting for the observance of law in our country. When the employees of the STB could not give him any reason for the summons, he refused to go with them. He was literally dragged away. They grabbed him by the sleeves, dragged him on his back down the stairs and across the yard, thrust him into a car and took him to Bartolomejska. In the office they kicked him (he himself says that he was kicked mildly, except for the kick aimed at his back bone which was more painful) while calling him a bloody swine, a "national hero" and so on. When he resisted passively on the floor, they trod on his instep. Then, before this chronically ill man, they opened the window and the door in freezing weather. Kicked about, frozen, without one shoe (the other was lost on the way when he tripped up on the stairs), dressed in a stoker's overalls with its buttons torn off, he was filmed and asked what the

television viewers would think of him when they saw him in such a state.

It is difficult to say what they would think. Maybe some of them would say that with his buttons torn off and one shoe missing he discredited Christians. Such a spectacle would be different from that of the representatives of the Church who are occasionally shown on television. They are properly dressed and do not have shoes or buttons missing.

L. Hejdanek was kidnapped on the day when the Supreme Court of the CSSR confirmed the sentences of citizens Machacek and Lastuvka (2½ and 3½ years). They were sentenced for distributing periodicals and literature which was produced in the Czech language abroad, at the time of the Belgrade conference and at a time when pacts concerning civil and political rights were valid as law in our country.

On 12 January four citizens were sentenced, three of them signatories of *Charter 77*, for the opposite offence: sending abroad for publication articles, literary works and reviews which could not be published in our country. They were given sentences of up to three years in prison.

So the detention of Ladislav Hejdanek is nothing new; so we know what is in store. Not far from our house a black car is parked and two men always get out when Mr Petr Uhl leaves the house; they watch where he goes and whom he meets. And when anybody comes to visit Uhl, whether by day or night, he is identified, registered and then released; at worst he is not allowed to enter or is taken to a police station. However, at Christmas, it is true, the policemen in front of the Uhl's door were visibly more liberal; the father of Mrs Uhl was allowed to visit his own daughter, which he had not been allowed to do before. These measures are by no means affected by or based on the law. It is true that Uhl has his eccentricities and irregular views. For instance, even between friends he declares that he is a Marxist and thinks that after February 1948 the events which followed were necessary. It would be better to keep to traditional beliefs. Soon it will be a year since an ex-student of the theological faculty, Ales Brezina, was sentenced to two-and-a-half years as a conscientious

objector for refusing to be drafted into the army. This pacifist spends his youth in prison at a time when, from the highest level we hear appeals to the parliaments and governments of the world for disarmament, and when the Christian Peace Conference is preparing for the All-Christian Peace Congress in Prague. Frantisek Matula, also a student of the Comenius Evangelical Theological Faculty, was sentenced to two years for the same crime.

Since 19 December 1977, M. Lojek, the evangelical clergyman, has been in custody. He has still not met his defence lawyer; his wife has received no news from him, and a parcel containing items needed for hygiene was returned to her. M. Lojek was accused of spreading libellous materials among the private soldiers of the army. It appears from the result of the search at his home, that this was either evangelical literature or the documents of the *Charter*. Why do I take you into my confidence, since you are familiar with the fact that I have never had any sympathy for the CPC? For instance, I succeeded in finding out how the CPC managed to rid itself of the uncongenial people in its own hierarchy, who did not agree with the intervention of the Warsaw Pact army in our country in 1968; and when I compared those facts with the lies in the bulletin of the CPC, I gave a lecture on this affair to the Association of Evangelical Clergy in 1971. My paper, ending with the proposal that our Church should withdraw from the CPC, was then accepted by a majority of 80 against two. That same year my paper about the practices of your institution became part of the legal documents used against the clergyman Vlastimil Slama, the chairman of the Association of Clergy. Slama was condemned for damaging the interests of the republic abroad, because he sent the official resolution of the Association of Clergy and of the Church to a friend abroad. The subversive character of the Association was proved to the court by my critical paper on the CPC. Because of this paper I was interrogated in August 1972 by the STB. In the autumn of the same year I participated in the so-called Peace seminary in Chotebor. For one day you came over in your Peugeot 504 and you made a very encouraging speech. You know,

you then mentioned that some people distrust the work of the CPC, and that you would strive to eliminate this distrust. I then retorted that this mistrust would last so long as criticism of the work of the CPC was the subject of interrogation at STB headquarters. You replied that you knew about certain difficulties but that everything would be all right. It was not. In about 14 days I was deprived of state permission to exercise my pastoral duties, and from that time I have not delivered sermons or criticized the work of the CPC, but have spent my time looking after the water in the boiler.

I must remove a possible misunderstanding: I do not reproach you for your luxurious limousine and the shoes on your feet. I do not reproach your institution for its existence. I am convinced that the institution can and should strive for justice, human dignity and peace, and that it is beneficial if it specializes in this field, so long as it preserves its freedom from the ideological and power interests of the State, in the borders of which it acts. Amnesty International proved this to me. I imagine that their officials travel by car and wear white shirts without debasing the respectability of their work.

I reproach you for one thing: that you say "peace, peace" where there is no peace. You claim that here you have no concerns, that you have to go elsewhere to find discrimination. Before the concrete victims of despotism you run away from our place and time into exotic countries, into a different world, as far as the Third World. And when you have to speak on home affairs, beside the applause, magnificent meetings and political-liturgical speeches, which must bore even those to whom they are addressed, you have only condemnation for brothers who thirst for justice and call for respect towards human freedom

— we are slandering the homeland and support the Cold War. How can one believe that you care for people far away (to whom you readily offer the Revolution for instance) if you run away from the people near you?

Your path is not from Jerusalem to Jericho, but from Prague to Budapest. On this road, at Slovenska 11, Prague 2, lies a kicked-about philosopher. I could not really ask you to visit the sick man — in 1978, in the CSSR, this requires a lot of civil courage, and no one has enough. At least do not lie and tell us that on that journey everything is all right and nobody lies there. Do not shout "peace, peace" where there is no peace, but rather say that there is war, a quiet and ruthless war between the powerful and powerless. War about what? The immediate answer is that it is about human rights. No, it is something wider, more extensive and essential, it is war about peace.

The night today passed quickly. Very soon our shift will be changed. However, the philosopher, Dr Sindelar, will not come; he is now working in another boiler-room, even less welcoming than this. Dr Hlavacek, the art historian, will come. Our stoker colleagues are very fond of him. He is a quiet man who is good with his hands; he quickly understood the secret of the central boiler and does not fall asleep during the night shift. This is important for the stoker's job.

I still owe you an explanation about why really I am writing to you. I am not asking you for help. If I were expecting help from you, it would have arrived long ago. I am writing to you so that you might know, so that it would not be true to say that you did not know.

With greetings,  
Long live peace,

MILOŠ REJCHRT

## Roman Catholics Demand Rights

*The following letter, dated 1 October 1977, was sent by 55 Roman Catholics to Cardinal Tomasek. The signatories enclosed another letter (see below) which they asked him to give to Dr Husak and the Federal Assembly. (RCL Bibliography ref. cz/1977/ROM/7).*

Your Eminence,

We present you with a letter, addressed to Dr Gustav Husak, President of the CSSR and the Federal Assembly of the CSSR. We ask you to kindly express your concern for this honest and urgent communication. We would be grateful

if you would support it with your authority and arrange for the letter to be passed on to the above-mentioned two addressees. If you decide otherwise, we will send it ourselves, and be answerable for it before our conscience and our Christian responsibility as individuals.

With respect

*Bishop Frantisek did not undertake this, mainly due to lack of time (on 3 October 1977 he was leaving for Rome). However, he promised the participants his full support and welcomed the initiative of the believers in this case and in future.*

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE CSSR, DR GUSTAV HUSAK, AND THE FEDERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CSSR.

By the ratification of both international pacts on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, our legal system underlined freedom of conviction, freedom of thought, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion or belief.

We consider it our duty to state that despite this believers in Czechoslovakia are still not fully free and do not have equal rights as citizens. So-called religious freedoms are limited to mere attendance at religious services in "cult" buildings. The rights of parents to give their children a religious education is purely formal. The children can attend religious instruction only at a certain age, in a lower class at school, and, moreover, the attendance of children at this instruction is prevented by humiliating chicanery, and, in some cases, is prevented by threats to the children and their parents. There are also frequent instances of discrimination against believers when they enrol at various kinds of schools. In some fields a religious faith is considered a hindrance to the performance of a job, particularly in the field of art and education in the broadest sense. The teachers in all schools, if they do not want to lose their jobs, cannot express their faith at all (for this, the wording of the teachers' oath is used). Access to theological faculties for young people is intolerably restricted from outside, while, as a result of outside interference in the choice of teachers and students, the standard of those institutes is dropping all the time. The granting and re-

fusing of state consent for the performance of ecclesiastical duties is not subject to certain legal criteria, and thus it is entirely uncontrolled; often it depends only on the personal attitudes of secretaries, commissioned to supervise the Church. The clergy are deprived of certain rights, guaranteed in the Czechoslovak Employment Code. Monastic orders are almost placed outside the law; the acceptance of new members is made impossible, and even the self-sacrificing charitable activity of the remaining small communities is constantly and increasingly limited. In the past decades hundreds of priests, monks and laymen suffered in prisons and concentration camps after being given illegal sentences or without being sentenced. Only a few were rehabilitated. Any contact between the clergy and laity is considered suspicious, is constantly watched and, under various pretexts, is made impossible. This applies to spontaneous ecumenical meetings and ecumenical co-operation. Believers have no opportunity to inform the public about their theological, philosophical and artistic activities. The public media of communication even excise distant reminders of Christian traditions (for instance carols). The activity of those publishing houses which some Churches were able to keep, is severely limited by special censorship and by other administrative measures. These facts amount to only a very brief summary of thousands of attested instances, which we are prepared to document in detail. We do not want to argue, and are fully aware that the Churches themselves are to blame for these conditions since they are often only interested in defending the external status of their institutions

In all seriousness we declare that we do not want to defend ourselves or obtain any privileges for ourselves. As Christians we have to be prepared to accept and overcome difficulties, conflicts and hostility of all kinds; not for nothing do we read in the Scriptures that in the world we shall have tribulation. However, we consider it essential not to hide the true state of affairs. Only by truthfully and openly examining our own situation will we be able to fulfil our tasks as Christians - to take full responsibility for the world in which we live.

This responsibility involves especially the duty of opposing all forms of injustice, whether in relation to believers or non-believers. The correct meaning and foundation for the formulation about human rights and freedoms should determine the limits imposed on both individuals and groups, as well as restricting state interference with human freedoms. This is no privilege, which is granted or lent to a human being by the State, because the State is the creation of the people; a State becomes corrupt when it undermines and opposes human freedom.

So we have decided not to keep quiet and to turn to you, the highest legal representative of the State, with an appeal for the gradual rectification of all these wrongs and injuries, even those which affect the least citizen of our country. We know that such rectification is an immense task which requires honest and persevering citizens, whether they occupy influential or seemingly only marginal positions in society, to carry it out.

In at least one instance however, the work of rectification should not be gradual or patient, that is, in the case of people whose civil and individual freedoms have been completely removed. Because they obeyed their consciences and defended their convictions, some of our countrymen are in prison or in custody. Each day spent by these people in prison, is not only a serious violation of basic human rights, but also a reproach

against society and the individuals who were responsible for this or who kept quiet about it. Finally, we feel that it is our duty to ask you to give explicit instructions for the complete and unconditional fulfilment of our law and the pacts which our State recently ratified, and to exercise your rights and make possible the immediate release of all those imprisoned. *Signed:*

Pavel Baldinsky; Ph.Dr. Vaclav Benda; Ludmila Borska; Vojtech Borsky; Zdenek Bonaventura Bouse; Vratislav Brabenec; Ing. Pavel Bratinka; Jaroslav Bumbalek; Frantisek Ciganek; Vit Ciganek; Ludmila Cigankova; Frantisek Cihlar; Ing. Viktor Dobal; Ilona Dobalova; Karel Domanek; Jan Dobrovolsky; Stepan Faber; Michaele Freisova; Miroslav Hacha; Frantisek Hochman; Jiri Hochman; Marie Hochmanova; Marta Hucinova; Iva Chaloup-ska; Vera Jirousova; Marie Kaplanova; Frantisek Klika; Vaclav Konzal; Josef Kordik; Daniel Kroupa; Antonin Krutilek; Zdena Kubrichova; Marie Kuglova; Ida Kuzelova; Vaclav Maly; Ivan Medek; Dana Nemcova; Jiri Nemecek; Dr. Martin Palous; Ph.Dr. Radim Palous CSc; Dr. Karel Pazdera; Milan Pisa; Ing. Frantisek Rund; Marie Rundova; Ing. Zora Rysova; Marta Seidlova; Anna Schwarzova; Ing. Bohdan Smlauer; Marie Vackova; Frantisek Vlasak; Tomas Vlasak; Ing. Vladimir Vojak; Ctirad Zdvoracek; Pavel Zeman; Th.Dr. Josef Zverina.

Ivan Medek is responsible for the accuracy of this letter.

## Monastic Orders Fear Liquidation

*In 1977 the superiors of monastic orders in Czechoslovakia sent a Memorandum to Cardinal Tomasek (?) describing their situation. Their covering letter is printed below. The Czech text of these documents was published in Studie No. 54, VI/1977, pp. 485-8. (RCL Bibliography ref. cz/1977/ROM/6)*

Most Respected Father Bishop,

We are turning to you in a difficult situation, which you yourself know very well, and which we want to clarify. Your declaration in the press, television and radio, published in the No. 23 of *Katolicke noviny*, has made us confident

that you are aware of your professional and personal responsibility before God and before the people, and that you alone are qualified to express the position of the Church on the extent of religious life for our believers.

In 1950 there were 12,570 members of monastic orders on the territory of our republic. Of these, 1,910 were friars and 10,660 nuns. In that year members of monastic orders were expelled from their monastic homes. The majority of nuns had to begin to work in other institutions or in factories. A small number of friars were given the opportunity to work in diocesan administration;

the others had to take their place as workers in civilian life.

The problems of our monastic life were discussed at the conference of Ordinaries in Litomerice on 3 February 1972. The document addressed to the Ministry of Culture and approved by the Ordinaries was the result of the conference. Since then five years have passed and our situation has grown worse; since then, in addition to discrimination against us, 1,000 members of monastic orders have died.

You too must be facing difficult problems, but further silence about today's situation would mean consenting to the actual liquidation of monastic orders here.

We are an integral part of the Church; a number of our priests work in your dioceses and our nuns, besides working in state institutions, help you in every way. Do not be surprised then, that we are turning to you with trust and await effective assistance from you.

Today we are no longer concerned with the past. The monastic vocation is a grace, a blessing from God. To stand in the way of God's plans and waste the

grace offered does not accord with your conscience or your responsibilities.

In asking you for help we declare that we are not concerned about the return of our possessions, but about safeguarding our right to a monastic life and the possibility of living a monastic life in our socialist society. The state of monastic life in our country today, as we explain in the attached Memorandum, is not based on a valid law; to satisfy our request would not require any legal adjustment, and would at the same time remove the existing discrimination. That the problems of monastic life can be justly and humanely solved, is proved by the situation in other socialist states.

May we remind you that to permit the existence of a younger generation of religious would not negatively affect the labour force in our country, because the members of monastic orders would go on working in their jobs, conscious that they are thereby fulfilling God's grace.

We ask you to send us written information about the fulfilment of our request.

## Roman Catholics Suggest Solutions

*In October 1977 members of the Roman Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia sent a document to President Husak and the Presidium of the Federal Assembly in which they analysed the Czechoslovak Constitution and other laws in relation to religion. The authors argue that religious freedom is not clearly defined in the Constitution and that certain laws impose restrictions on the Church. Their covering letter is printed below. (RCL Bibliography ref. cz/1977/ROM/8)*

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE CSSR, DR GUSTAV HUSAK

TO THE PRESIDUM OF THE FEDERAL ASSEMBLY

*Suggested solutions by Roman Catholics  
for the situation of believers in the  
CSSR*

Public functionaries of both Church and State, when discussing church-state rela-

tions, have stated many times that there are still unresolved questions in this field. This is certainly of particular concern to believers. It is thus right and in agreement with our Constitution (Art. 29) that believers should express their opinions, and so contribute positively to a solution.

We have noticed that in conventions, agreements and international pacts, ratified by our State, new elements have appeared. We want to draw attention to these in the interests of the highest level of state life and better order in our society.

### *The new attitude towards believers*

In the Helsinki agreement and international pacts about civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, ideas were expressed according to which religion, religious freedom and rights arise directly from human dignity and form an integral part of freedom of thought and conscience.

This new situation requires that in our society these obligations be enforced, and this involves respect for religion and the dignity of believers. Unfortunately, this is not the case at present and in recent official speeches (not to mention anti-religious propaganda) we are still obliged to hear words which we must consider an offence to our consciences. We feel that respect for believers would contribute decisively to the general good. Believers contribute much towards the construction of our country; they do not deserve to be considered second class citizens. They have no claims to power; it is not true to describe them – even in official speeches – as opponents of our state system because of their convictions, which do, nevertheless, constitute an ideological opponent of atheism. Is this not an unnecessary barrier in one's own country? Believers are solving problems of science and religion on the level of up-to-date science and contemporary religion, and it is not true to describe them as obscurantists, bigoted fanatics and so on. We also contribute with our work towards the development of knowledge everywhere in the world, as well as here, though we are often placed under administrative restriction and jurisdiction, merely because of our belief.

We see our faith as an opportunity for leading a higher and fuller life, like most deep moral motivations. We feel an equally strong responsibility for the all-round development of our native land. Differences of opinion must not be a reason for hostility, but a way towards fuller understanding of our problems, needs and duties.

If the government of this country takes into account the state of religious belief today among its citizens and the consequences which arise from it, then surely it will find a fruitful solution, not only to church-state relations, but also to finding a more harmonious means of co-existence for everyone.

#### *The new legal situation*

Because the above-mentioned international pacts were ratified by our State and now form part of our legal system, a new, qualitatively superior legal situation has been created. It is our wish that the ratified international pacts be respected in practice. To amend the law

on the material security of the Church is particularly urgent. It would certainly be useful if the legislation were clearly formulated, thus preventing arbitrary interpretations, which restrict the rights and freedoms established by the legal system, and impertinent interference by subordinate organs etc. The creation of justice would certainly be a contribution to our whole country.

#### *Solution of concrete problems*

In the spirit of new international obligations and obligations towards our own believers, we make the following justified demands: the religious freedom, mentioned in international pacts, should be extended, and not restricted in practice to mere attendance at religious (cult) services; freedom of assembly for believers should not be restricted only to buildings designated for services; the right of parents to give religious education and instruction to their children should be respected and not limited to certain ages and schools, where inadmissible pressure is exerted on parents and children; everybody should have access to further religious education; pressure on theological faculties and their professors and students should be stopped; the decision of young Christians to enter a monastic order should be respected and their life and activities should not be restricted in any way; the life and activity of the clergy should also not be restricted or threatened by administrative measures.

True and effective normalization of the position of believers in this State demands that believers be given an opportunity to fully participate in cultural life and creative activity. The following are a source of constant bitterness to believers: the restriction of the press and religious literature; the exclusion of believers from public educational and communication media; their exclusion from literature and other kinds of art; discrimination against them in schools and in employment because of their religious convictions.

We have no wish to emigrate from the society in which we live. There are many fields in which we, as believers, have our own specific mission: for example, work for family stability; the fight against abortion; the moral education of youth, which is particularly en-

dangered; physical and spiritual service to the old and ill in old-age-pensioners' homes, in hospitals and prisons. We are not allowed sufficient opportunities. Believers certainly have a great contribution to make towards the fight for human life and human dignity, for moral values and social responsibility.

We consider that the needs of believers cannot be determined, permitted at one moment and then restricted, by state organs, but are based on the inalienable rights of man.

We assure you that these suggestions of ours arise purely out of our needs, as experienced by us, out of our concern for a normal life in this State, out of our desire to work peacefully and fruitfully for this society; out of our sense of responsibility for the values which we con-

sider supreme; out of our respect for our faith and ourselves. We hope that we shall find understanding among the representatives of our public life, to whom we are turning with these suggestions. We hope that they will try to create effective external conditions for the development of our internal religious life, for the universal search for justice and truth, rights and freedoms, and so ensure a better future for us all.

We ask Cardinal Frantisek Tomasek to pass on these suggestions to the President of the republic and the Presidium of the Federal Assembly, and obtain an answer from them, of which we should then be informed.

*Prague, 28 October 1977*