

News in Brief

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Protest from World Council of Major Religious Superiors

A letter signed by members of the Council, who have their orders in Czechoslovakia, was sent to President Gustav Husak following an earlier memorandum which he received from the superiors inside Czechoslovakia (see *RCL*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1978, pp. 175-6). Signatories included Fr Pedro Arrupe S. J., the chairman of the Council. The appeal, written in strong terms, makes a number of points concerning the persecution of monastic orders:

They are not free to live according to their own rules.

Orders may not perform their apostolic work. (Preaching and charitable work is illegal. *Ed.*)

They are not permitted to accept novices. Orders are subject to harassment and special controls.

The Council then demands freedom for the orders, at least to the extent of that which exists in Poland, the GDR and Yugoslavia.

Meagre Results of Mgr Poggi's Visit

The protracted negotiations between the nuncio of the Roman Curia and the representatives of the Czechoslovak government from 20 to 28 April ended in a stalemate. Only the communist daily *Rude Pravo* and the official Catholic weekly *Katolicke Noviny* of 15 May mentioned that meetings had taken place. The Roman paper *Osservatore Romano* ignored the affair altogether.

It seems that the recent wave of protest among Catholics in Czechoslovakia has resulted in the Vatican adopting a more resolute line in dealing with the government. Catholics object to the Vatican's conciliatory *Ostpolitik*, the pro-government bishops, the *Pacem in Terris* organization for priests and the Catholic press in Czechoslovakia which gives the government line. (Protest letters can be seen in the *samizdat* section of the Bibliography, *RCL*, Vol. 6, Nos. 2, 3, 4)

According to Catholic sources it appears that the road to further compromise was opened during the joint effort to bring the hierarchical structure back to normal after the installation of the new Archbishop of Prague and the establishment of the new ecclesiastical province of Slovakia. (It is now more than 30 years since the communist takeover and only five of the 13 dioceses have bishops, while four other bishops are not recognized by the State and cannot exercise their pastoral duties even as ordinary priests.) In exchange for allowing a recently criticized and interrogated bishop, Julius Gabris, to become the new metropolitan of the Slovak province, the authorities demanded a concession from the Vatican - that is the appointment of Bishop Vrana as Archbishop of Olomouc. However, this much-hated apostolic administrator would only be acceptable to the Vatican if his links with *Pacem in Terris* were severed. The resulting deadlock means that neither Trnava nor Olomouc will have archbishops.

A second cause of friction was the appointment of theology professors. The Minister for Church Affairs, Mr Hruza, insisted that this is a prerogative

of the State which would regard any attempt by the Vatican to influence such appointments as unacceptable interference in the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia.

Christian Peace Conference

The fifth All-Christian Assembly of the Christian Peace Conference was held on 22-27 June in Prague. A total of 49 Christian denominations were represented by over 600 participants from 84 countries. Dr William R. Tolbert, President of the Republic of Liberia, and United Nations Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim were among the political leaders who sent greetings to the assembly. Bishop Karoly Toth of the Hungarian Reformed Church was elected President of the CPC to succeed Metropolitan Nikodim of the Russian Orthodox Church. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 4 July 1978)

Vitezslav Gardavsky Dies

On 3 April 1978, Vitezslav Gardavsky, a former professor of philosophy, died in Brno at the age of 55. As a Marxist atheist he was involved in the so-called Christian-Marxist dialogue, which opened in Marianske Lazne in 1967 and which was followed by a seminar in Geneva the following year. Christians from Czechoslovakia saw the conference only as a propaganda exercise because they were not invited and therefore even their existence was not recognized. For the hardliners in the Party, Gardavsky's recognition of religion as a permanent force shaping the future of mankind was a heresy. In the post-invasion period Gardavsky was barred from all academic posts and worked on a collective farm. Among his many works, *God is not yet dead* (Penguin 1973) is probably the best known: it is an apology for non-belief and an attempt to understand what Christianity can offer to Socialism.

Clergy Prosecuted

A young Protestant theologian and clergyman, Miloslav Lojek, born in 1949, has been in custody since 19 December 1977, charged with incitement and "endangering the political and moral state

of his unit". He was sentenced by a military court in Plzen to 15 months imprisonment. On 3 March 1978 legal proceedings were instigated in Bratislava against Marian Zajicek and Rubert Gombik, Roman Catholic chaplains, accused of subversion for distributing the *Charter's* original Declaration. (*Palach Press Limited*, April 1978)

Roman Catholic Poet Interrogated

Dr Zdenek Rotrekl, a leading Czech poet and author of religious essays, who spent 14 years of his life in Czechoslovakian prisons, has been blamed by the State Security organs for maintaining contacts with dissident intellectuals, particularly those of Christian orientation. He has become the target of attacks contained in a propaganda pamphlet published by the Ministry of the Interior. During a search of his home in Brno, the State Security organs confiscated many of his new manuscripts and a large number of letters. It is believed that he has been chosen as a scapegoat in the regime's actions against dissident Roman Catholics. (Radio Free Europe, *Czechoslovak Situation Report* 17, 18 May 1978)

POLAND

Polish Bishops' Conference

Speaking at a session of the Polish Bishops' Conference at Czestochowa, Cardinal Wyszynski said that normalization of relations between the Church and the State is not yet complete. The basis of "normal health" must be the admission by the State of the public and legal status of the Church. The Polish bishops are particularly concerned by attempts to hamper pastoral care of students, and by the lack of religious literature available in the country. Only 300,000 copies of the catechism were authorized in 1977, one copy for every 26 pupils. The comments made at the Conference were to serve as a positive stimulus for believers to share responsibility in overcoming existing problems. (AKSA, 19 May 1978)

New Bishop Elected

At its debates in Warsaw on 8 and 9 April 1978, The Synod of the Reformed

Evangelical Church elected Rev. Zdzislaw Tranda as bishop upon the retirement of the Rev. Bishop Jan Niewieczeral. Bishop Tranda was minister at Zelow near Lodz for 25 years, and has held the posts of the Consistory's councillor and secretary of the Regional Branch of the Polish Ecumenical Council in Lodz. On his initiative, ecumenical evangelization was organized. Bishop Tranda begins his duties as head of the 13 parishes and ministry centres of the Reformed Church on 1 October.

The Rev. Bishop Niewieczeral retired for health reasons after 25 years as head of the Reformed Evangelical Church.

Present at the Synod was a delegation from the Lutheran Church in Poland which expressed its gratitude to the retiring bishop for maintaining fraternal relations between the two churches, and conveyed best wishes to the newly-elected bishop. (*Christian Social Association Information Bulletin*, 4/78)

Ecumenism

The eighth meeting of the Mixed Commission of the Polish Ecumenical Council and of the Episcopal Commission for Ecumenism was held at the Metropolitan Curia in Warsaw on 18 April. Among the reports heard was one on the activity of the Subcommittee for Doctrinal Dialogue which is devoted to promoting ecumenical dialogue. This year's Week of Prayer for the Unity of Christians was assessed and suggestions were made by the Commission for next year's celebration, scheduled for January 1979. The Rev. President M. Staniewicz reported on Billy Graham's visit in October. The next meeting of the Council and Commission was scheduled for 23 November in Warsaw. The Mixed Commission has been in existence since 1974 and usually meets twice annually. (*Christian Social Association Information Bulletin* 4/78)

Prayer Book for Children

PAX, with the assistance of Pastor Stanislaw Bajko, has published a new prayer book in Poland. A product of liturgical reform, the prayer book has been adjusted to the experience of contemporary people, giving special explanations with the prayers and emphasizing the need for familiarity with

the life of the Church, liturgy, the mass and the sacraments. (*Informationsdienst*, G2W, No. 3, 18 February 1978)

Gift for Hospital

The European Baptist Federation (EBF) and the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) have given 10,000 DM towards the construction of the international Children's Hospital being built in Warsaw. The gift was presented to Mr T. Dusik by Dr Gerhard Claas of the EBF and Dr Paul Madsen of the BWA during their recent official visit to Poland. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 29 May 1978)

The Lutheran Church

A new Consistory was elected and a resolution against the production and proliferation of the neutron bomb was adopted by the Lutheran Church at its Synod held in Warsaw from 7 to 9 April. The Rev. Bishop Janusz Narzynski, head of the Church, reported on the results of the sixth General Assembly of the World Lutheran Federation, and pointed out that as a minority Church in Poland it cannot afford to isolate itself within its own society. (*Christian Social Association Information Bulletin*, 4/78)

HUNGARY

United Bible Societies Launch Appeal

The United Bible Societies launched an emergency appeal for approximately £18,000 to provide 22 tons of paper for a reprint of the Bible in Hungary. The request for paper came from the Hungarian Bible Society after their successful "Bible Sunday" held last Easter. At the suggestion of the Hungarian Reformed Bishop, Karoly Toth, the Hungarian Bible Society offered to sell Bibles at half price in connection with "Bible Sunday". The estimated figure of 5,000 Bibles to be sold was soon surpassed and, together with good trade in Bibles and literature at the recently opened Protestant bookshop in Budapest, more than 50,000 Bibles and New Testaments were sold. As Bible stocks were depleted, permission was granted to import paper for a reprint by the Hungarian Bible Society. (*Keston News Service*, No. 52, 25 May 1978)

Hungarian Free Church Publications

The Hungarian Free-Church Council and the Reformed Press Department have released new publications. The Free-Church Council published 3,000 copies of *He Went on His Way Rejoicing*, written by Baptist Pastor Mihaly Almasi. The Council also released 11,000 copies of an annual calendar book *Peace be Unto You* and saw 8,000 copies circulated among Baptists.

The Hungarian Bible Council reported through the Hungarian Church Press (HCP) that the Reformed Press Department, responsible for the publication of a new Bible translation, brought out 20,000 Bibles and 10,000 New Testaments in 1977. Reported sales figures were: 7,195 copies of the full Bible and 2,270 New Testaments in the new translation. Projected for 1978 was the publication of an additional 25,000 New Testaments in the new translation (or alternatively a colour-illustrated edition). (*European Baptist Press Service*, 78:66, 7 March 1978)

New Appointments in Baptist Church

The new Dean of the Hungarian Baptist Seminary is the Rev Attila Hetényi who succeeds Dr Josef Nagy. The Rev Hetényi is pastor of the Wesselenyi utca Baptist Church of Budapest, and has been at the seminary for the past ten years teaching Old Testament and Hebrew. Dr Nagy, who worked at the seminary for 30 years, will continue as professor of Systematic Theology.

The congregation of Pecs, with the largest membership of the Baptist Union of Hungary, has received the Rev Sandor Gerzsenyi as its new pastor. Gerzsenyi was formerly head of the Baptist editorial staff of the Hungarian Free-Church weekly, *Béki Hirnok*. The city of Pecs is located some 200 km. south of Budapest. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 78:68, 78:64, 7 March 1978)

Mgr Bank Changes Diocese

The Hungarian Archbishop of Eger, 67-year-old Mgr Josif Bank has been appointed, at his own request, head of the diocese of Vac. Archbishop Bank presided over the same diocese from 1969-74. The diocese has been vacant since the death of the former bishop last year. The

present Bishop of Veszprem, Mgr Laszlo Paskai, will take charge of the diocese of Eger. Mgr Bank keeps the title of Archbishop. The Vatican has also appointed Fr Ferenc Rosta of the diocese of Veszprem as the auxiliary Bishop Szekesfehervar. The present Principal of the Budapest Seminary, Fr Laszlo Paskai, becomes the Apostolic Administrator of the diocese of Veszprem with the rank of bishop. (*Le Monde*, 20 March 1978)

BULGARIA

Orthodox Churches Renovated

In honour of the centenary of the liberation of Bulgaria from the Turks, Orthodox believers in the villages of Kherakovö and Prolesha, Sofia diocese, decided to renovate their churches. Repairs to the Kherakovo church were finished by 22 August 1976, and to the Prolesha church by 25 June 1977. Aided by a master builder from Sofia, the believers worked voluntarily and provided their own building materials. (*Tsurkoven Vestnik*, 21 September 1977)

Orthodox Church Represented at Book Fair

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church was officially represented at the Tenth International Book Fair, held in Sofia 22-29 September 1977. Patriarch Maksim and Bishop Dometian, General Secretary of the Holy Synod, were present at the opening ceremony, and the Synod's publishing house was given its own stand. On display were 40 books dealing with theology, moral teaching, church history and liturgy, as well as Orthodox calendars. Among the authors whose works were on display were Patriarch Maksim, Metropolitan Sofroniy, Archimandrite Kliment Rilets, Professor Ivan Panchovski, Professor Todor Subev and Archimandrite Gavriil. (*Tsurkoven Vestnik*, 10 October 1977)

BWA Representatives Visit Bulgaria

Two representatives of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), Dr Gerhard Claas of the European Baptist Federation and BWA and Dr Denton Lotz of American Baptist Churches, present a glowing report of their 11-19 March 1978 visit to

the 500 members of the Baptist Churches in Bulgaria, the first visit made by the BWA since World War II. Their tour took them to a small chapel not far from the centre of Sophia, to the city of Plovdiv and to Varna where the representatives were again impressed by the number of young people. A visit to the Rila monastery, 130 kilometres from the capital, reminded them of the notable role Orthodoxy plays in the country's life. The two men considered that their meeting with the State Minister for Religious Affairs was profitable, and thanked him for making their visit possible.

The BWA representatives' report noted the shortage of places of worship and the need for more young educated pastors, since the Rev. Angelov, the Baptist Union General Secretary, is 73 years old and the Rev. Todorov, the Baptist Union President, is 78 years of age. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 28 March 1978)

YUGOSLAVIA

Position of Believers Discussed

An article in *NIN* (Belgrade weekly) of 5 February discusses the position of believers in Yugoslavia. In principle, it writes, the position of believers is clear, but there are quite a few exceptions; priests' associations, for instance, do not consider themselves to be associations of citizens but representatives of the Church. This attitude ought to be changed. There is also some abuse of religion and religious feelings for political ends, states the paper. But it is also necessary to fight against (secular) dogmatism which gives a false picture of believers and priests. Not only in films but also in literature, priests are often shown in a negative light, and this is undesirable. The article also deals with the relations between the Serbian and Macedonian Orthodox Churches (the latter declared its autocephaly in 1968). A commission has been set up between the two Churches for discussions and contacts. *NIN* observes that this is not only a religious question but a socio-political one.

In another article, *NIN* points out that many great works of music and drama are not performed because of their religious nature, and *NIN* cites the opinion of a number of cultural workers in

Serbia who feel that this is a mistake, "for without their spiritual values people would be impoverished".

Stane Dolanc, secretary of the Executive Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, said at the fifth session of the Central Committee, that it is not only communists who build socialism, and that society does not consist only of Marxists. There are others who may be ideologically backward and who are religious believers but who accept the Constitution and self-management socialism, and are dedicated to the equality, brotherhood and unity of peoples and nationalities. All these are citizens of this society and have the right to cooperate in making policy and taking decisions. This speech of Dolanc's was widely reported. AKSA of 3 March also reports an interview with Mitja Ribicic, president of the republic conference of the Socialist Alliance of Slovenia (*NIN*, 26 February) in which he stated that all citizens, including non-Marxists and Catholic intellectuals, could find a place for their activities. Speaking of the dialogue with the Church he said that "we ought to be making more use of the potential inside the Church". (*AKSA*, 10 February 1978 and 3 March 1978)

Serbian Orthodox Church Wants more Freedom

According to information from the Serbian émigré press in America, the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church addressed a petition to the Presidency of the Yugoslav Independent Republic of Serbia in May 1977 requesting more freedom than has been granted so far. The Serbian Orthodox Church obviously hoped that their demands might be met after the Belgrade Conference. The letter, signed by Patriarch German and two other bishops, contained ten items:

- 1 Permission to extend the Belgrade Patriarchal Cathedral
- 2 Return of cult objects now in the Historical Museum in Zagreb to the Church
- 3 Return of church register in state possession for over 30 years
- 4 Permission to build new churches
- 5 System of social insurance extended to the teaching staff and students at theological colleges

- 6 End to discrimination of children who take part in religious education
 - 7 End to any state interference in church affairs
 - 8 Directives to forbid all libelling and maligning of the clergy in the media
 - 9 Free burial rituals in accordance with the wishes of the bereaved
 - 10 Return of confiscated church property
- (*Informationsdienst*, G2W, No. 1-2, 8 February 1978, p. 5)

Death of Serbian Orthodox Bishop

Bishop Vasilije Kostic, the Serbian Orthodox Bishop of Zica, died in April. During the Second World War he was arrested by the Germans, together with the Patriarch, and spent the war years interned in a monastery. After the war as Bishop of Banja Luka he clashed with the Yugoslav authorities and was forced to leave his diocese. He was later elected Bishop of Zica, one of the most ancient and famous of the Serbian Orthodox dioceses. He was an outspoken defender of the Church and in 1971 – long after the Church and government had reached a *modus vivendi* – he spent a month in prison for a sermon denouncing the effects of atheism and the lack of religious teaching for the younger generation.

Yugoslav Ambassador to the Vatican

In an interview with the Zagreb daily *Vjesnik*, Professor Cvrlje, the first Yugoslav ambassador to the Vatican, emphasized Pope Paul VI's interest in contacts with socialist countries, and stated that during his time at the Vatican, President Tito and the late Pope had begun a regular exchange of messages. (AKSA, 31 March 1978)

Youth Conference

A nationwide Baptist youth conference, the first in Yugoslavia since 1955, was held in Novi Sad from 29 April to 1 May with about 800 young people in attendance. The speakers were N. Vukov, A. Franka, S. Orcic, and Z. Srnc. "Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in Heaven", from Psalm 119:89 was the theme. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 6 June 1978)

Statistics from Religious Orders

The union of heads of religious orders in Yugoslavia has issued a list of the numbers of people in monastic orders in Yugoslavia at the beginning of 1978:

1978	priests in religious orders	1,874
	students of theology	430
	seminarians	368
	novices	72
	lay brothers	288
	total	<hr/> 2,684
1977	total	2,759

In 1977 the number of women in religious orders totalled 7,575, of whom 825 were living outside Yugoslavia. (AKSA, 31 March 1978)

Attempt at Reconciliation

Druzina, the Slovene Catholic fortnightly, reports that the leaders of the Serbian and Macedonian Orthodox Churches have decided to renew contacts to try to resolve the dispute (over the breaking away of the Macedonian Orthodox Church) which has hindered co-operation between the two Churches for a number of years. Delegations from both sides have been appointed. (AKSA, 26 June 1978)

ROMANIA

New Committee Formed

A new Committee for the Defence of Religious Freedom and Freedom of Conscience in Romania has been formed with Pavel Nicolescu as its head. (*Bire*, 16 June 1978)

Ceausescu Speaks of Religious Situation to American Press

In answering a question regarding the religious situation in Romania during his visit to the USA, President Ceausescu said that in Romania there were 14 legally recognized denominations and thousands of priests. Both priests and citizens have full freedom to practice their beliefs. In fact, said Ceausescu, "If we could come to an understanding with your government by which Romanian priests could preach in American stadiums, then American preachers would be able to preach in Romania". (*Scinteia*, 15 April 1978)

Roman Catholic Official Appointed

In its first appointment of a churchman for Romania since 1971, the Vatican has named 37-year-old Petru Gherghel to the post of Apostolic Administrator of the diocese of Iasi. The bishopric has been vacant since the death of Bishop Petru Plesca in March 1977. Fr Gherghel has not been made a bishop but is "ordinary *ad nutum sanctae sedis*", at the disposal of the Pope, which means that his appointment is only temporary. He retains the rank of priest but has all the practical powers of a bishop, including confirmation but not ordination. His jurisdiction covers the area of the diocese of Iasi. Some Vatican sources suggest that this appointment may foreshadow improvements in church-state relations. (*Keston News Service*, No. 51, 21 April 1978)

SOVIET UNION

Vazgen I Visits WCC

The Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All the Armenians, Vazgen I, paid an official visit to the headquarters of the World Council of Churches on 20-21 June. He had paid his first visit in 1967. Both Catholicos Vazgen and Dr Philip Potter, General Secretary of the WCC, stressed the need to promote "the visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship, through worship and a common life in Christ" and to be "closely bound to the problems that affect society".

Out of the seven million Armenian faithful some four million live in the USSR, principally in Armenia where over 60 per cent of Armenians practise their faith. Two editions (10,000 copies each) of the New Testament in Armenian have sold rapidly, and there is an urgent need for a third edition. The Catholicos also reported that the authorities have authorized the opening of a fourth church in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan, which has a population of 900,000. (*Ecumenical Press Service*, No. 18, 26 June 1978)

Pentecostal Church Leader Dies

In Krupskoe, Dnepropetrovsk oblast, G. G. Ponurko died. He had been elected chairman of the Union of Christians of

Evangelical Faith in 1927 and joined the ECB (Evangelical Christian and Baptist) Union in 1955. He served as senior presbyter for the Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhe oblasts. (*Bratsky vestnik*, 3/78)

Fr Romanyuk Appeals to the Pope and President Carter

In two undated letters, one to President Carter and the other to Pope Paul VI, Fr Vasyl Romanyuk writes about human rights. The letter to President Carter, the American people and the US Congress, praises them for their stand on human rights and appeals to them not to pay attention to the theory of non-interference in the international affairs of other States, "since by means of this theory the Soviet Union and its satellites want to secure the right to carry out all kinds of illegal actions against their own peoples, and at the same time hypocritically to name their countries bastions of peace and freedom".

In his letter to the Pope, Romanyuk urges that more attention be given to the flagrant violations of freedom in the USSR. He requests that conferences about world peace should take human rights as their starting point, and should not be held in Moscow, a place which "wants an entirely different world" which would "allow them to establish their tyranny and destroy freedom".

Fr Romanyuk Appeals for Eduard Kuznetsov

Fr Vasyl Romanyuk has written an appeal to Jews and all people of good will to do everything in their power to see that Eduard Kuznetsov, Dymshits and the others involved in the Leningrad hijacking case of 1970, be released. They were seeking "to leave a country, which for them had become a prison", where assimilation is really a subtle, non-physical form of genocide.

New Baptist Hymnal

The Latvian churches received a new hymnal at the end of March 1978. The hymnal containing 712 hymns was approved by the government after lengthy delays. (*Bratsky vestnik*, 3/78, pp. 67-80)