

that we must all resist these policies, but we must seek new ways of doing so if we are to remedy the situation.

The first step, which we are eagerly awaiting, would be for the Church to identify herself with the people. We cannot demand freedom for the Church without at the same time demanding freedom for everybody. In this sense the defence of human rights is an activity which clearly has Christian foundations. The Church should not dissociate herself from this activity and should certainly not denounce it. Until now the Church in Czechoslovakia has shown a confused and often negative attitude towards Charter 77, informal ecumenical contacts, the activities of priests outside their prescribed duties and the independent attempts by the laity to defend human rights and the rights of the Church. This attitude has isolated the Church from reality, and has reduced her role to that of an administrative body. The isolation of the Church is, of course, precisely what the State is aiming at. The greatest danger is that isolation

will lead to internal tensions and disunity, from which as Christians we would not emerge unscathed.

For many years several people in this country have been trying to explain the Vatican's *Ostpolitik* by the fact that there has been no one in Rome who understands the situation in Eastern Europe. Your election was a historical turning-point. A man who knows everything that I have been describing from his own personal experience has been chosen as head of the Catholic Church.

I am therefore turning to you, Holy Father, with an urgent and anguished request. Guided by your conscience and your experience, do all in your power as quickly as possible to help Christians in Czechoslovakia. Do everything to ensure that the consciences of those who greeted your election with such joy and hope are not disregarded for the sake of church unity.

Yours sincerely,
IVAN MEDEK

Vienna, 25 November 1978

Czech Catholics Appeal to Pope

Czech Catholics sent the following appeal to the Pope in October 1979. By 3 November the appeal had been signed by 350 Catholics, and by December the number of signatories was thought to have risen to over 500.

This appeal was written in defence of 11 Czech Catholics who were arrested on 10 September 1979 after a secret printing press and a stock of clandestinely printed books were discovered by the police. The 11 include two Jesuit priests—František Lizna and Rudolf Šmahel—and Josef Adámek, a former printer, Josef Vlček and Jiří Kaplan. Fr Josef Zvěřina SJ, a prominent theologian, has also been charged, possibly because he had contributed articles to some of the clandestine publications. The impending trial against these 11 Catholics is the largest trial of believers in Czechoslovakia since the mid-50s.

Holy Father,

We write to you in our distress, because you are the Shepherd of all believing Catholics and therefore have the right to know of our sufferings. We have no court

of appeal in our church leaders. Our priests' association, which claims to speak on behalf of Catholics, in fact only serves the State in its plans to stifle the religious life of this country. Any attempts to obtain justice from the state authorities have ended in prosecution.

We do not see any other way than this. Many believers would like to join in signing this letter but cannot do so because of serious consequences. We have not asked the good priests who are still working in parishes to sign this letter in case we should lose them. We know that by signing this letter we are exposing ourselves to danger but cannot act in any other way when our official leaders keep silent. Permanent silence could be regarded as a sign that the Czech and Slovak Church is accepting its gradual liquidation. If we give up our right to existence, no one in the world can help us.

But our Church is alive and wants to live its own life. We are aware of our mission received from Christ and cannot be satisfied with the official so-called "gratification of our religious needs". The best evidence of our will to live according

to the Gospel is the increasing wave of police repressions. These repressions have culminated in the recent State Security operation against the Church.

On 10 September 1979 a number of believers, including priests, were searched; and religious literature, which included among other things your Encyclical, a biography of you and pictures of you inscribed with our prayer for you, was confiscated. This was followed by interrogations and detentions: already eight people are imprisoned. Others are also charged under Article 118 for "illicit trading". By this the authorities mean the selfless work of believers who in this primitive manner tried to satisfy the need for religious literature, which in your own country, for instance, is readily available. We know very little about the contemporary life of the Church, about Christian currents of thought, modern catechesis or pastoral theology. The little which the censors allow to be published is only in order to create the impression of a Church without a future.

All this is happening in a State whose Constitution and international agreements guarantee citizens religious freedom and free exchange of ideas. Persecution of believers for religious activity as opposed to mere faith was never exceptional in our country but is now put into practice even more. Our brethren who are now accused of criminal activities, in order to hide the real point of conflict, are facing harsh sentences; a few years ago, a priest was similarly sentenced to five years' imprison-

ment for making catechetical drawings. The huge contradiction between the constant suppression of religious freedom here and the government's protests against persecution of communists elsewhere is offensive to us. Of course this does not concern Catholics alone. When an ideological war has been declared which, instead of relying on an honest struggle of ideas, is backed up by the full force of the administration and police, this concerns not only believers but all honest men who demand freedom of thought as an integral part of human dignity. We express our solidarity with them. In this way we join you in your fight against every form of oppression in this world and for a true spirit of brotherhood in the family of man. We implore our Lord to grant you success in your efforts. We continue to pray for our enemies according to the Gospel demand, and we ask for divine grace in these difficult times so that we may not fail and may give good witness. We also ask the universal Church for help: may our brothers and sisters throughout the world remember us in their prayers as we suffer for our faith and its works. May they together with us ask that God may grant our prisoners strength and endurance to withstand violence and faithfully to carry their cross, which is also the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are aware that you, Holy Father, feel yourself one with us and will not abandon us; this is our strength and a sign of the love of God who never abandons his faithful.

✓ Czech Theologian Condemns Catholic Hierarchy

At the beginning of 1977, the Czechoslovak state authorities put pressure on leading religious bodies to join in their campaign against the human rights manifesto, Charter 77. On 23 January the Catholic newspaper Katolické Noviny (Catholic News) published a Declaration, signed by the Cardinal Bishop of Prague, František Tomášek, on behalf of all the Czech bishops, which implicitly condemned Charter 77. The bishops stated that life in their country had been disturbed by press reports about the Charter: "We, the bishops of the Czech Socialist Republic, would like to make it unmistakably clear that we are not signatories to this charter . . . As regards the sphere of religious life . . . we alone,

together with the Holy Father, are competent to make a judgement . . . Nobody else among the clergy or the laity is authorized to express the standpoint of the Church in our country."

Among the many letters sent to Cardinal Tomášek in response to this Declaration (see KNS No. 37, 6 April 1977) was one (printed below) from the best-known Catholic theologian in Czechoslovakia, Fr Josef Zvěřina SJ. A survivor of Dachau, he also spent a total of 13 years in communist prisons. During the Prague Spring, he was appointed Professor of Theology at the Catholic seminary of Litoměřice. In 1970, he was dismissed from his post and lost his state licence to exercise his pastoral duties.