

judiciary. Their case has generated a good deal of support in Moravia, even though communications and dissident activities are much more difficult there than in the capital. Further legal proceedings would lead

to great embarrassment for the authorities in Prague, in spite of Czechoslovakia's withdrawal from the World Psychiatric Association.

ALEXANDER TOMSKY

Review of Lutheran World Federation Meetings

The seventh Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, attended by two thousand guests, was held in Budapest from 22 July to 5 August this year (Assemblies take place every six or seven years), and was preceded for the first time by a pre-Assembly Youth Gathering which brought together over three hundred young Lutherans from all parts of the world. Official speeches at both gatherings noted the fact that a religious assembly of this kind was being held in an East European country for the first time, and the Hungarian authorities were certainly anxious to appear in positive support not only of the Assembly itself but also of the more unpredictable Youth Gathering. The organisers of the Youth Gathering had aimed to recruit fifty per cent of the delegates from Eastern Europe, and in fact achieved forty-five per cent. To Bishop Káldy, welcoming the delegates, this fact indicated that "practically the Iron Curtain does not exist any longer"; for Hungarian Vice-President R. Trautmann, welcoming delegates to the Assembly itself, the fact that the Lutheran World Federation had chosen Hungary to host its Assembly was "a sign of confidence in . . . the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, the Hungarian State, and the whole Hungarian nation".

The churches in Hungary enjoy substantial freedoms. There is no shortage of Bibles, and a surprising range of religious literature is available. Protestant Churches have facilities for teaching children and adults about the faith (opportunities in this respect are more limited for the Catholic Church). Many Christians point to the rising standard of living in Hungary and preoccupation with material wealth — problems of secularisation with which we in Western Europe are all too familiar — as representing more of a challenge to the churches than atheist pressure or anti-religious discrimination. From the point of view of the state, the churches are welcome as partners in the struggle for social

justice. Since 1956 state policy has been to involve a wide range of interest groups in the building of Hungarian socialism on the principle that "he who is not against us is with us". The attitude of the state towards the church was summed up by Mr Trautmann: "Our relationship is more than simple coexistence: it is a practical alliance (*szövetség*) within which we are able, on different ideological bases but out of a common sense of responsibility, to cooperate in the service of the interests of our people and of humanity."

The leaders of the main Hungarian churches, for their part, have enthusiastically entered into this "practical alliance" with the state. As far as the Lutheran Church is concerned, cooperation with the social, economic and political policies of the state is carried on in the framework of the "theology of diaconia" or "theology of service" (see *RCL* Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 130-48). Over the years there has been a good deal of criticism of this official theology and of Bishop Káldy personally for the autocratic manner in which he is said to impose this theology on his clergy and discipline those who do not adhere to it. I have heard the interesting statement that in many ways a Protestant pastor has less intellectual freedom within his own Church than, say, a university student in his faculty, where nominally obligatory Marxist-Leninist views are often enforced less rigorously than the official theological line within the churches. The state security forces do not need to interfere in the internal affairs of the churches in order to keep the clergy loyal to the state: the church leadership does this for them.

In the extensive publicity material on show at the Assembly about the Hungarian Lutheran Church and its achievements, the "theology of service" was illustrated in action. What was shown was charitable work amongst church members; but it was also stated that "service" for a Christian does not end with charity at home: the

Christian must work for the whole of "society". At the same time, as Bishop Káldy stated at the Youth Gathering: "We must not mingle the Gospel with any ideology". The whole question as to whether the "theology of service" is in fact anything more than an identification of the social aims of the Church with those of Marxist-Leninist ideology, or whether it does indeed contain anything specifically Christian, is one which has been raised in numerous publications, but which apparently has never been thoroughly debated within the Lutheran World Federation. Many who came to the Assembly must have been hoping for such a debate, but it never took place. Perhaps now that Bishop Káldy has been elected President of the Lutheran World Federation the Hungarian Lutheran Church will be more consistently in the public eye and its distinctive theology more accessible to scrutiny in the context of world Lutheranism.

Both the Youth Gathering and the Assembly itself were characterised by that attitude towards the churches in Eastern Europe which often makes itself felt at international gatherings and which is in the end unhelpful to a full understanding of their situation: the desire to give the authorities (in both church and state) every benefit of the doubt and to play down any "difficulties" the churches may be experiencing as minor and temporary setbacks in a steadily improving context. Official references to the "problems" of East European churches were usually couched in terms of ill-founded optimism. In his report as General Secretary, Dr Carl Mau expressed the hope that "this Assembly will . . . strengthen the trend which we have observed for some years, especially after the signing of the Helsinki agreements, towards relaxing the restrictions imposed on churches in socialist countries".

There was no public debate at either gathering on the steadily worsening situation for the churches in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and certain other East European countries, nor any substantial discussion of the experiences of churches in those East European countries where there is no direct persecution, such as Hungary itself: even to raise the question of the "theology of diaconia" was seen as inopportune and as amounting to an act of ingratitude towards the host church.

The attitude outlined above is usually

given involuntary endorsement at any gathering by the East European delegates themselves, who of course have to paint as rosy a picture as possible of their own situation. At the Youth Gathering, the only East Europeans who spoke up in a genuinely informative manner about their witness and the difficulties they experience in their own society were the delegates from East Germany.

One session at the Youth Gathering consisted of a panel on Christian witness in various social contexts. A young American delegate spoke at length on those built-in iniquities of the capitalist system which in his view make it difficult to live a truly Christian life in the USA. He was followed by the pastor of a Lutheran parish near Bratislava, who is also a teacher of practical theology at the Lutheran Theological Faculty in that city, who spoke of the positive features of his own socialist society (the Czechoslovak government aims at justice, works towards peace, guarantees full employment) and recommended that Christians work quietly within the social order, witnessing to one another at an individual level. There was no substantial criticism of the approach of either delegate, but one wondered what kind of outcry there would have been from the assembled young people if the American speaker had offered an endorsement of his own society as bland as that of the Czech pastor.

One of the high points of the Youth Assembly was the presentation by Pastor Harald Brettschneider of Dresden. He spoke on "Peace and Justice in the East-West Perspective" and concentrated on nuclear disarmament and the growing opposition to militarism in East Germany. He spoke in a notably even-handed manner, placing responsibility for the arms race on the Soviet Union as much as the USA, and described in some detail the efforts being made by young Christians in the GDR in the cause of peace and the difficulties they have experienced. (See this issue of *RCL* pp. 343-48 for a summary of his speech.)

Working groups at the Youth Gathering submitted recommendations to the Assembly. Some proposals concerned witness in a socialist context, and the East German youth delegates evidently had a hand in formulating these. One recommendation about improving the ease of exchanges between Eastern and Western Europe was

modified on the intervention of several East Germans to include *all* youth organisations and Christian young people rather than specifically theology students. East Germans also proposed that stronger churches should help weaker ones with supplies of books, material aid and technical equipment. Because legislation in socialist countries gives more opportunity for Christian witness than most Christians realise, the churches in socialist countries were urged by East German youth to be exhorted to be bolder in standing up for their rights.

It is not clear whether any of these recommendations were discussed at the Assem-

bly. The main business of the Assembly was already clearly laid down in a detailed timetable, and one of the main themes was the question of apartheid in South Africa. It was obvious that Third World delegates felt soul-searching by citizens of wealthy European nations to be a self-indulgent irrelevance and that the Assembly would do better to turn its mind to economic exploitation of the Third World by the wealthy nations, whether of East or West. In general, at both gatherings, issues of economic and social injustice in the Third World loomed much larger than any questions of East-West relations.

PHILIP WALTERS

Positive Coverage of Christianity in the Hungarian Media

The relaxation of restrictions on cultural and religious life which has been characteristic of the Hungarian government's policy in recent years has produced a flurry of television, stage and film productions dealing positively with religious themes. In Budapest and in the central provincial town of Kecskemet a play entitled "Jesus Christ, Son of Man" has been performed to enthusiastic audiences. The script is based on St Luke's Gospel. The reviewer of the Catholic weekly *Uj Ember* wrote that "the audience justly felt with joy that the stage play did not wound religious feelings." (*Uj Ember*, 11 March 1984.) In 1983 Hungarian Television broadcast a series of lectures about the mediaeval Church, in which Christian scholars participated. This series is to be followed by one dealing with the cultural history of mediaeval Europe, which will focus largely on the Church. The Reformed Church historian László Makkai, one of the programme's lecturers, stated that the new series "will document the role which the living faith and serving obedience of Christianity, and, above all, of individual Christians have played in Europe in the interest of human progress." (*Hungarian Church Press*, 1 November 1983.) The State has produced a 90-minute colour documentary in cooperation with the Christian Churches and the Jewish community. According to a review published in *Informationsdienst für Lutherische Minderheitskirchen in Europa* (29 February 1984), the

film, "A Better Way", "has emphasised positive phenomena and developments, and has passed over hitches in the relationship between the Churches and the Party." "A Better Way" was produced to coincide with the 7th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, which was held in July-August in Budapest. The film features leading figures from the Churches, the State and the Party. A film of the rock opera "Stephen the King" has been released. This musical is based on the life of St Stephen, the first Christian king of Hungary. One of its main themes is the tension between the responsibilities of the exercise of political power and those of the Christian life.

Anniversaries of the Bolshevik Revolution customarily inspire the Hungarian religious weeklies to expound their view of the significance of the "Great October Revolution". Its 66th anniversary was no exception. In an article appearing in *Reformatuskok Lapja* of 6 November 1983 entitled "Historical Lessons", Reformed readers were informed that the past has produced individuals and organisations which have "struggled for the happiness and the continuous progress of the community." However, the paper continued, "we must see that in truth their efforts have been condemned in advance to failure, and that their victories have signified merely 'moral triumphs'." But in contrast to all previous endeavours — presumably these include those of Christ and his Church — *Refor-*