

and thousands of "counter-revolutionaries" condemned during Mao's time have been rehabilitated, but not Bishop Gong. He is still a "counter-revolutionary criminal". A court decision placed him in the custody of the Shanghai Patriotics, and there he remains, isolated from the world. He is, therefore, in some ways in a worse position than he was when in prison, where he was highly respected and received privileged treatment. [See *RCL* Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 332-33 — *Ed.*]

In private conversations auxiliary Bishop Jin presents himself as a bridge, as someone who wants to work for conciliation between the Patriotics and Rome. If the Communist Party's United Front Department — which controls all religions in China — were looking for a "bridge" between Beijing and Rome, it could find one easily. There are

bishops in China who in the confusion of the early days turned Patriotic and are still formally in the Association, but now, realising that they were misled, are faithful to Rome. There are even some newly-ordained bishops in the Patriotic church — not in the big cities but in remote areas — who at their ordination omitted the oath against Rome. Unlike the auxiliary bishop of Shanghai, they never say a word against Rome. And there is of course the Archbishop of Canton, Dominic Tang, who lives in Hong Kong — a great patriot, totally loyal to Rome.

If the leaders in Beijing really wanted to commence a dialogue with Rome, they would not have far to go. Hitherto Beijing has shown no interest in negotiations.

L. LADANY

Jehovah's Witnesses in Czechoslovakia

"Clericalism and religious sectarianism are the main impediments to the successful implementation of ideological and political education (in our country). They represent a serious anti-social phenomenon, which has to be carefully monitored . . ." These are the words of Jaromir Obzina, Minister of the Interior, quoted in *The Crime Review*, a Czech journal of limited circulation — not available to the general public — in an article about the Jehovah's Witnesses. "This sect is the most anti-communist, anti-progressive and anti-scientific church denomination we have, despite the Witnesses' claim that they are totally apolitical," state the two authors of the article, security sergeants Gehringer and Lanc. They go on to argue that "it is precisely because they refuse to support any government that they do not acknowledge our state symbols, refuse to take oaths, to take part in elections or the voluntary brigades of socialist work. Their passivity has only one aim, which is the disintegration of the mobilisation of the masses and the defence-readiness of the country" (a reference to the Witnesses' refusal to be conscripted into the army). As an instance of the sect's anti-communism, the authors refer to the statement of the Witnesses' world congress (1950) which said that "communism is a red religion which could flood the world if barriers against it are not

erected.' Gehringer and Lanc go on to describe the incompatibility of the Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs with commonsense, rather than with Marxism-Leninism. What seems most to concern them, however, is not any theoretical point, but the Witnesses' ability to avoid detection. We learn that they have an iron discipline, that they are organised at district and at regional level, that the typical basic cell is composed of only six members, that throughout the hierarchical structure they communicate in coded messages and that they are absolutely intransigent when interrogated or tried. They refuse to answer any questions, and when they do respond they only quote from Lenin or party documents on religious liberty. They seem to be particularly successful in producing and distributing illegal literature such as the fortnightly *Watchtower* and the monthly *Serving the Kingdom*, as well as a host of other *samizdat* publications. The sergeants give an account, in a breezy and optimistic style, of their detection of a group of Witnesses in the provincial town of Valašské Meziříčí (Moravia) where seven active members were sentenced to terms of up to one year's imprisonment. One can infer, however, as some of these imprisoned elders had been active since 1970, that their work had gone undetected for 11 years. In fact, the groups are usually discovered only when young

men refuse to do military service, as becomes clear from another article which appears in a later issue of *The Crime Review*. The article also implicitly regrets the lack of success in curbing the growth of

the sect, which even if small seems to be the best organised clandestine religious group in Czechoslovakia.

ALEXANDER TOMSKÝ

Obituary: Archbishop Vasili of Brussels

One of the oldest hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church, Archbishop Vasili (Krivoshein) of Brussels, died on the night of 20-21 September 1985 at the age of 85. He was on a visit to Leningrad, his native city, at the time of his death.

Archbishop Vasili was born in St Petersburg on 30 June 1900. After completing secondary education he studied in the history and philosophy faculties of Petersburg and Moscow universities, completing his higher education as an émigré in Paris in 1921. He entered the church in 1924, and the following year he joined the monastery of St Panteleimon on Mount Athos. He was tonsured a monk in 1927 and remained on Mount Athos until 1947, devoting himself to studies of the works of the Church Fathers. From 1951 until mid-1960 he was in England, doing research work in Oxford and serving in the local Russian Orthodox church. In these years he published extensively, spoke on his field of study (patristics) at conferences and participated in congresses on Byzantology. He was raised to the rank of archimandrite in May 1959, and a month later was consecrated bishop. He was appointed Bishop of Volokolamsk, second vicar to the Patriarchal Exarch in western Europe. He was appointed Bishop of Brussels and Belgium in May 1960 and elevated to the rank of archbishop two months later. Alongside his duties in the church, Archbishop Vasili continued his researches and writings on patristics, which led to the award of a doctorate by the Leningrad Theological Academy. In 1972 he began to take part in the work of the "Faith and Justice" committee of the World Council of Churches.

Archbishop Vasili was by no means blind to the shortcomings and difficulties of the situation of believers in the Soviet Union. For example, at the 1971 Council (*Sobor*) of the Russian Orthodox Church, he put forward a suggestion that Patriarchs ought to be elected by secret ballot (thereby

making it more difficult for the Soviet authorities to "push through" a candidate of their choice). When the writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, a Russian Orthodox Christian, was facing arrest, Archbishop Vasili held a public service of intercession (*moleben*) for him, as did Archbishop Anthony (Bloom) in London. Archbishop Vasili went to Moscow, where he was confronted by the then Metropolitan of Leningrad (Nikodim) and taken to task for his support of Solzhenitsyn, but he refused to alter his stance in the matter. After Solzhenitsyn's expulsion from the USSR in 1974 Archbishops Vasili and Anthony protested vigorously about a statement issued by Metropolitan Serafim of Krutitsy approving the expulsion.

When in 1974 Archbishop Pitirim of Volokolamsk (Moscow diocese) said in an interview to the Soviet press agency *Novosti* that teaching religion to children is a violation of their freedom of conscience and that charity is unnecessary because of the excellence of the Soviet welfare system, Archbishop Vasili bitterly criticised him in a Russian-language BBC broadcast.

On his visits to Russia, Archbishop Vasili was able to have frank private conversations with Orthodox hierarchs. What they told him often added a great deal to what they were able to say publicly about church affairs. Sometimes they directly contradicted what they were obliged to say in public. For example, Metropolitan Nikolai (Yarushevich) of Krutitsy gave Archbishop Vasili a graphic account of how churches were being closed and destroyed wholesale throughout the Soviet Union during the anti-religious campaign of 1959-64. Publicly, however, Nikolai and other hierarchs were obliged to conceal the fact of persecution.

In another conversation, Metropolitan Iosif of Alma-Ata (d. 1975) thanked Archbishop Vasili for speaking out at the 1971 *Sobor* when he and other bishops resident in the Soviet Union felt obliged to keep