

“collectively listening to the heart and reason”.

Meanwhile, the meeting promised by Bishop Nagy took place on 23 June. Representing the church leadership were Károly Pröhle, Tibor Fabiny Sr — both professors at the Lutheran seminary — Dean Mihály Toth-Szölös and Dean Imre Szezik. From the reform group came laymen Drs Pál Gadó and Róbert Frenkl, and pastors Pál Zászkalicz and Gabor Ittész. No communiqué was issued after the meeting, although, according to one participant, there was agreement that “signs of crisis” were evident in church life, and that all churchmen should receive “identical” information about the meeting. But at the end of July Bishop Nagy released a statement in which he reaffirmed his acceptance of the majority of the reform group’s proposals, but rejected both the allegation of a “crisis of confidence” and the reformers’ “mistaken representation of diaconia theology and the role of the churches in Hungarian society”. The bishop also struck out against unspecified “Western church press organs” which had provided “biased commentary” about the life of his church, and against unnamed “individuals and groups” who wanted “to use the illness of Bishop Káldy to renew . . . accusations and attacks”.

On 2 September, Bishop Nagy reported to Keston College that a second meeting of representatives from both sides would take place later in the month. In view of the false starts since 1956 it is difficult to be very optimistic about the outcome of this latest attempt to initiate dialogue. The unwillingness of the state to relinquish its ultimate control of church life, or to tolerate theology or practical work which does not correspond to the party’s political analysis, leaves Lutheran leaders with little room for manoeuvre on key points of the reform group’s programme. This factor is compounded by the deep-seated passions and distrust which have accumulated in a highly polarised church over the past thirty years, and by the vital importance of face-saving to leaders in the Hungarian religious and political context. Yet, while the acceptance in practice by the Lutheran leadership of the better part of “A Brotherly Word” remains remote, there would appear to be some scope for the gradual implementation of moderate reform — for example, ecclesiastical decentralisation, greater lay participation, and the establishment of a Lutheran grammar school — without provoking a hostile and costly reaction from the state.

JOHN EIBNER

Augustin Navrátil.

One of several Catholic activists currently in detention in Czechoslovakia is Augustin Navrátil, a railway worker from Zlobice in Moravia. Navrátil’s case is unusual in that he is being held in the closed wing of a psychiatric hospital, rather than in an ordinary prison. However, this is in keeping with the authorities’ treatment of a man who for the past eight years or more has been a very vigorous campaigner on behalf of believers’ rights throughout the country.

Navrátil gained some prominence in 1968 when he served as a local councillor for the revived People’s Party under the regime of Alexander Dubček, but he first crossed swords with the authorities in 1977, when he was gathering signatures

for a petition for civil rights. He sent the petition to Cardinal Tomášek, who passed it on to the authorities. Navrátil was arrested on 27 January 1978, and after some delay was sent to a mental hospital for examination. His examiners pronounced him mentally unfit to stand trial. Their report describes him as suffering from “Hysterical self-stylisation towards the ideal of a strong leading personality and with a strong moral responsibility which the subject understands as ‘fidelity to his principles’ and an inability to adapt to an adequate view of social reality.” Furthermore, “. . . by analogy with the fate of past personalities, the subject thinks that for the truth, one must logically suffer.”

In the end, Navrátil was released from

the psychiatric hospital after considerable campaigning on his behalf both at home and abroad, but any hopes on the part of the authorities that this brief spell in detention might silence him were in vain. In the early 1980s, he devoted his energy principally to two causes, the case of Karel and Jindřiška Kořínek and that of Fr Přemysl Coufal.

The Koříneks are a Christian couple who spent many years of their lives as Seventh Day Adventists. When they tried to bring up their children in their faith, the children were taken from them and put in orphanages, while they themselves were held in a psychiatric hospital. Here Jindřiška gave birth to their fifth child, who was immediately taken away from her and put up for adoption. After much legal wrangling, the Koříneks were released from hospital and were given back custody of all their children except the youngest. In July 1985, however, when they were due to go on trial for not taking prescribed drugs at home, they went into hiding to avoid further incarceration. The Koříneks were the subject of Navrátil's "Open Letters", which dealt at length with their case and which were widely circulated in *samizdat*.

The case of Fr Přemysl Coufal is particularly unpleasant. He was a clandestinely ordained Greek-rite priest from Bratislava who was savagely murdered in February 1981. The authorities described his death as suicide, but in his "Open Letters" Navrátil persistently maintained that Fr Coufal had been killed by the State Security. It seems that these "Open Letters", and the authorities' suspicion that he had been helping to hide the Koříneks, led to his arrest on 11 November 1985 and his being charged with "incitement", the same offence with which he was charged in 1978. He was held in Brno gaol until mid-December, when he was transferred first to a psychiatric hospital in Prague, and then to another in Kroměříž, which is near Zlobice. On 21 April 1986, he was sentenced to indefinite detention in a psychiatric hospital, having been diagnosed as suffering from "Paranoia Querulans".

Even detention has not silenced Navrátil, whose writings since November 1985 have somehow been circulated within Czechoslovakia and abroad. On 11 December 1985 he wrote a letter to his

wife and their nine children. In it he shows no bitterness about his conflict with the authorities and welcomes the time given to him which he can spend praying:

So far, I have spent a fair amount of time engaging in what you might call exercises. Yes, spiritual exercises. Partly in peace and quiet, partly in compulsory or voluntary self-denial, partly in prayer and meditation with the help of the Rosary. This wasn't possible at home. At home, it was all work, work, work, of one sort or another. There wasn't much time for prayer and contemplation. Here, however, I begin each day not only with my regular prayers, but with all the prayers of the Rosary. Only then does my day begin, and it is followed by peace and tranquility: a surrender to the will of God. But there is nothing new about this. I have felt this way at many times in the past when I have been in a difficult position. Just one more thing: I can sense the prayers and petitions being offered up on my behalf to our Father in Heaven. You and other believers, close and distant, and those unknown, need to pray. Let us therefore remind ourselves that, in God's hands, no-one need be afraid!

Throughout the ensuing ordeal, Navrátil was never afraid to speak his mind and to protest at every stage. In March 1986 he pointed out that his hospitalisation was completely illegal, as it had been enforced without the legally required approval of a court, and without the diagnosis that he was a threat either to himself or to others. When on 21 April, the court in Kroměříž decided to detain him indefinitely, Navrátil made a final statement: "Remember that my God is also yours, and that He is not only a God of love and mercy, but also a God of justice. Beware, therefore, of His wrath if you do not abide by your conscience!"

Navrátil's supporters in Czechoslovakia have not been slow to rally round him. Within days of his arrest in November 1985, a statement was issued anonymously under the title "News of recent arrests of Catholic activists: fighters for human rights and freedom of speech". The statement deals mainly with Navrátil's case. It outlines his activities of

recent years, praises the way Navrátil and his wife brought up their children, and goes on to ask Christians throughout the world to pray for the Navrátils and other persecuted families and to do anything else they can to help them. In addition to this statement, a petition demanding greater religious freedom singled out Navrátil as being unjustly detained, and VONS, the Committee for the Unjustly Prosecuted, has issued numerous statements in his defence. However, a year has

now passed since his arrest and the authorities show no inclination to be lenient in dealing with one of their most vociferous critics. It is impossible to hazard a guess as to how long Navrátil will be held in the psychiatric hospital, and the only hope would appear to be that the authorities might be swayed by domestic and foreign protests, as they were in 1978.

Compiled by members of Keston College staff

Improvements in the Church Situation in Ethiopia?

The Ethiopian authorities have recently released from prison a number of religious prisoners from various evangelical churches, and have allowed churches which had been closed for many years to reopen, giving rise to hope that persecution is dying down.

The church which has probably been most under attack since the communists came to power in 1974 is the Mekane Yesus Church, an affiliate of the Lutheran World Federation. Estimates vary as to the number of members, but it has seen phenomenal growth in recent years. In 1959, the year it came into being, it had 25,000 members; recent reports put the current membership at nearly 700,000. Most of its members are from the Oromo ethnic group, and because of this the government is suspicious that it has links with the Oromo Liberation Front, which is fighting the government. In Addis Ababa, the other main stronghold of the church, there are reports of conflict with the authorities. On 23 July 1979, Rev. Gudina Tumsa, the General Secretary of the church, was abducted by suspected government agents outside the church's office in the centre of Addis Ababa. Nothing has been heard of him since then, and it is widely believed that he was killed shortly after his abduction. His wife Tsehai Tolessa, the leader of the church's women's organisation, was abducted at the same time, but was released by her captors within hours. She was, however, arrested in February 1980 and is now being held in the women's section of

the Central Prison in Addis Ababa. It is reported that she is now allowed visitors and food parcels. She has never been tried or charged. At the beginning of May 1986 a few members of the church were released from the same prison.

On 4 May 1986, 14 members of the Western Synod of the church were among 67 political prisoners released from Nekemte prison in Wollega region in the west of Ethiopia, including Rev. Olanu Lemu, former President of the Synod, and Rev. Magarsa Guta, former Executive Secretary, both detained without charge or trial since September 1982. The others released at the same time were lay officials of the church and welfare workers, all of whom had been in prison for between three and six years. Shortly afterwards, 65 political and religious prisoners were transferred from Assosa to Nekemte prison before being released. Among them were three of the church's pastors from Mendi, who had been arrested only shortly before, and two teachers. It is known that two pastors of the Synod from Begi parish, both arrested in January 1983, are still in prison in Wollega, as well as other lay members of the church. Many of the churches in the Wollega region which had been closed by the authorities over the last six years have been allowed to reopen.

Church leaders have expressed the hope that the situation is easing for the church, and normality has returned to church life in some areas. Conflict with the authorities is avoided where possible by, for