

When Cardinal Paskai visited the region earlier this year he was accompanied by two van loads of literature. During the course of negotiations with the authorities he gained permission for ordinands to train in Hungary and for priests from Hungary to work permanently in Transcarpathia — and five are now working in parishes in this region. More unexpectedly he gave public recognition to the banned Eastern-rite Catholic Church of Ukraine by twice meeting unofficially with Bishop Holovach, one of its 'underground' leaders.

Other denominations are also developing contacts across the border. In 1988 representatives of the Free Church Council in Hungary transported 2,000 scriptures to Baptist, Adventist and Pentecostal congregations. One Adventist pastor from Transcarpathia is now participating in the theology correspondence course of the Free Church Council. It also now seems that the Soviet authorities will allow all religious literature published in Hungary to enter Transcarpathia without hindrance.

JOHN V. EIBNER

Buddhism becomes the Cambodian State Religion

Among the changes to the Cambodian constitution adopted at an extraordinary session of the National Assembly in Phnom Penh on 30 April 1989 was a clause re-establishing Buddhism as the state religion. Article Six of Part I declares: 'Buddhism is the religion of the state. Religious activities which conform to the constitution [are permitted]. Activities which use religion to infringe upon security, public order and the people's interests are prohibited.' Other changes to the constitution included the re-adoption of the name Cambodia for the country and the re-establishment of a market economy. These constitutional amendments were made just before the resumption of negotiations on the country's future, this time in Paris.

In the past year the Cambodian government has been displaying a new attitude to the practice of Buddhism, the majority religion among the country's population. Since July 1988 Buddhist prayers

have been broadcast over state radio. In January 1989, in what appeared to be an improvised speech, the prime minister Hun Sen apologised for mistakes his regime had made in its treatment of religious believers. Speaking to about 200 monks and old people at the Chum Kriel Pagoda in a suburb of Kampot City, he said that these mistakes had led people to believe that his government was hostile to religion. 'It was also used by our enemies,' he said, in a significant reference to the guerrilla factions fighting his Vietnamese-backed government. 'I can assure you,' he told the group, 'that the party and the government respect Buddhism.' Government leaders have even worshipped in public on occasion.

The danger to the government's existence presented by the Khmer Rouge resistance seems to have led to this change of attitude. The government needs all the support it can get and does not want Buddhists to support the resistance. Hun Sen's

apology was far-reaching: he was apologising for the mistakes his regime had made since taking power in 1979 without referring to the even harsher measures, including execution, used by the Khmer Rouge regime between 1975 and their downfall.

During the years of Khmer Rouge rule from 1975 to 1978 more than 25,000 monks are reported to have been executed, and many more perished or fled the country. Pagodas were destroyed and religious books burnt. The government began a systematic campaign to wipe out all vestiges of religion. Following the installation of the Vietnamese-backed regime, the more vicious aspects of Khmer Rouge policy were abandoned. However, the new regime continued the harsh line against religion, albeit on an administrative level. For years after 1979 most pagodas remained closed. Whilst monks were again allowed, only men over 55 were permitted to be ordained. It is only gradually that religious practice has been allowed to resume. For further details see, 'Religion in Kampuchea', *RCL* Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 169-70.

Buddhism has been revived under state control. The newly-emerged hierarchy has been simplified and placed under the authority of the semi-governmental United Front for National Construction and Defence. The previous division of Cambodian Buddhism into two orders (*Thommayuth*, the aristocratic order, and *Mohanikay*, the common order) was abolished, and now everyone follows the same form of Theravada Buddhism. Candidates for ordination as monks still need the approval of the local authorities, although the age restriction has now been lifted. Many pagodas have been reopened — the current estimate is 2,800 — but they are unlikely to regain their dominant social position. Schools attached to

pagodas rebuilt after local fund-raising drives are run by teachers appointed by the Ministry of Education, which also sets the curriculum. Pagodas have not resumed their traditional social welfare programmes. Attendance at pagodas, except on major festivals, is not reported to be great.

The government has used its new approach to Buddhism in its propaganda campaign for the hearts and minds of the Cambodian people. Reports are issued stressing the government's insistence on the policy of freedom of belief. This is contrasted with the years of Khmer Rouge rule. The celebration of Buddhist festivals, the publication of Buddhist calendars, the repair and rebuilding of pagodas and the participation of Buddhist monks in relief work have all been trumpeted. The participation of monks in the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace shows that the government recognises the propaganda benefits of the involvement of religious believers in international bodies.

Brief mentions are made in government propaganda of the small Muslim minority — which has revived in recent years — and to the tiny Christian groups which continue to experience difficulty in building any institutional life.

The ever-present resistance groups and their supporters in the refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian border provide a reminder of the government's need to hold the loyalty of the people. Buddhism has experienced a revival in recent years in the camps belonging to the non-communist resistance. Pagodas and schools have been opened. The Khmer Rouge's 'show camp', known as Site 8 has an openly functioning pagoda — surprising in view of their known hostility to religion and their record while in power. However, in other camps that are closed or have

only limited access to the outside world there is no evidence that there are any Buddhist pagodas.

It is unlikely that the Hun Sen regime's new espousal of Buddhism will allow it to function outside government control and regain its former dominant position in society.

However, its position as state religion will give Buddhism a public profile, and therefore a degree of protection, which can only help Buddhists to expand their activity.

*Compiled by members of
Keston College staff*