

petition has come from the Czechoslovak party dailies, *Rudé Právo* and *Pravda*. In joint articles on 11 and 20 February they accuse "illegal church structures" of drawing up the document in collusion with "bourgeois centres" in the West. They cast doubt on the authenticity of the Cardinal's letter supporting the action and then go on to accuse him of sending followers to Slovakia to obtain signatures by deception. The articles name Navrátil as the organiser of the petition and state that his object was to "hinder the progress" of talks between the state and the Vatican. In their reply, the organisers of the campaign refute allegations of deception. They maintain that the state authorities were informed of the petition and insist that the Cardinal's

letter is genuine. "But even if it were not," they say, "we are quite capable of judging for ourselves the religious situation in this country." In their own words the aim of the petition was to demonstrate to Cardinal Tomášek that he is not a "general without troops". This the organisers have evidently achieved. What remains to be seen is what, if any, impact the believers' action will have on the regime's future treatment of the Czechoslovak Catholic Church. Yet even if the state does not satisfy the believers' demands, the petition has shown a unity of purpose within the laity which must reassure the Cardinal and alarm the leadership.

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## A New Primate: A New Policy?

Over the past two years the Hungarian Bishops' Conference has received an infusion of fresh blood. Seven of Hungary's 11 Catholic dioceses have new bishops, four of whom were new to the Bishops' Conference. The new Primate, László Paskai was consecrated as Archbishop of Esztergom on 26 April 1987 in succession to the late Cardinal Lékai, who died in June 1986. The Archbishoprics of Kalocsa and Eger were filled by László Dankó and István Seregély respectively in June 1987. Endre Gyulay was appointed to the see of Szeged-Csanád, József Szendi to Veszprém, Isidor István Marosi to Vác and István Konkoly to Szombathely.

Pope John Paul II's selection of Paskai to succeed Cardinal Lékai caused little surprise. At the time of his appointment Paskai, then 59 years old, was one of the youngest

and fittest among the country's mostly elderly and ailing prelates. He was also a man of experience. Paskai was awarded a doctorate in philosophy in 1952, and for many years he taught and held administrative posts at the Catholic seminaries at Szeged and Budapest. Before his appointment as coadjutor Archbishop of Kalocsa in 1982, Paskai served for three years as Bishop of Veszprém in western Hungary.

But above all, Paskai was known to be the favoured candidate of the Hungarian state. While coadjutor Archbishop of Kalocsa he acted as the chairman of the public affairs organ of the Hungarian Catholic Church, *Opus Pacis*, where he actively supported the government's foreign and domestic policy. Immediately following the interment of Cardinal Lékai, Paskai was elected Chairman of the Bishops'

Conference, and within months the hierarchy signified its continuing political loyalty by issuing two controversial policy statements. One was designed to reduce the influence of the pacifist basis community leader, Fr György Bulányi, by justifying the government's policy of gaoling Catholic conscientious objectors to military service. The other drew attention to the oppression of the Hungarian minority in Romania, thereby bringing the church into line with the government's new policy of outspokenness on this subject, so emotive for many Hungarians. Both statements received praise from the Chairman of the State Office for Church Affairs, Imre Miklós.

The appointment of another candidate could have led to confrontation between church and state, for under Hungarian law episcopal appointments are not regarded as valid without the prior approval of the state. Neither side wished this. The political authorities seek to avoid confrontation with the churches for fear that it would have a detrimental effect on the political equilibrium. The Vatican shuns confrontation for fear that it would result in greater restrictions on the Hungarian church, and diminish the chances of an improvement in the situation of the church in more hard-line Soviet bloc states.

Keeping in line with the decisions of the European Conference of Bishops, Archbishop Paskai's self-declared aim is no less than the reevangelisation of Hungary. The fulfilment of this aspiration will be no mean achievement. Hit by the powerful cross-currents of rapid industrialisation and the state's pursuit of the ideological struggle against religion, Hungary has become one of Eastern Europe's most secularised countries. Till the end of the 1940s the vast majority of Hungarians participated in organised religious

life. Belief in God and faithfulness to one's church were the norm. But surveys conducted in the 1980s by the Hungarian sociologist Miklós Tomka indicate that while somewhat over half of the population now regard themselves as religious, only 12 per cent of the "religious" regularly go to church.

Contrary to the vision of the architects of Hungary's "socialist" society, Marxism-Leninism has not been the main beneficiary of the decline in religious feeling. Instead, indifference to both organised religion and communism reigns supreme. This worries both the church and the state. Their spokesmen suggest that this indifference has produced a crisis of moral values, which is reflected in the country's high rates of suicide, abortion, divorce and alcoholism. They fear that nihilism will become the creed of the future generation. Their more immediate concern is that the nation's weak moral fibre obstructs the solution of Hungary's grave economic problems and could contribute to political instability.

The Catholic bishops have long wished to be able to expand the influence of the church so as to be able to help solve these problems, but it was largely deprived of the means during the first years of communist rule. The land reform of 1945 deprived the church of most of its income. All but eight of over 3,000 Catholic schools were nationalised in 1948. Church associations were banned and opportunities for religious instruction were limited. The religious press was reduced to a shadow of its former self, and what was left operated under the constraints of censorship. In 1950 the country's religious orders, which bore great responsibility for the performance of social work and the provision of education, were dissolved. In the same year, with

Cardinal Mindszenty in prison and thousands of monks and nuns interned, Archbishop Grósz felt obliged to sign an "agreement" with the state that imposed severe restrictions on church activity and bound the bishops to initiate proceedings against those who "oppose" the legally-based social order of the Hungarian People's Republic and the constructive efforts of the country's government. The State Office for Church Affairs was established in 1951 to supervise the execution of the "agreement", which still provides the basic legal framework for relations between the Hungarian Catholic Church and the state. The Secretary of the Bishops' Conference, Bishop József Cserháti of Pécs, pointed to the church's continuing dependence on the government concerning the expansion of its witness in society when he stated that "only those things happen in church life with which the state agrees".

During his ten-year reign Cardinal Lékai sought to gain for the church the means to influence society at large by forging a political alliance with the government, which became commonly known as the "small steps policy". Its starting point was strict adherence to the stipulations of the 1950 agreement whereby the bishops would publicly support government policy and would guarantee that individuals regarded by the authorities as opponents of the established order cannot work within the church. Bishop Cserháti testified to the late Cardinal's faithfulness in carrying out this part of the policy when he said shortly after the Primate's death that he "always" supported the "socio-political requirements of the Hungarian socialist government".

In return, the State Office for Church Affairs proved willing to ease some restrictions. For example, permission was granted for the establishment of a small retreat centre, several

institutions for social work, a theological correspondence course for lay people, a lay pastors programme, and a new order of sisters. Welcome as these concessions may be, they show no sign of being enough to enable the church to halt the decline in its own fortunes, let alone provide the means for the re-evangelisation of the country.

After the death of Cardinal Lékai Imre Miklós claimed that the "small steps policy" would continue and that the 1950 agreement would remain valid. However, the new Primate and his bishops are now seeking major changes in the relationship between church and state as they prepare for re-evangelisation. The first public sign of the shift from the "small steps" to a "giant steps" policy came on 24 January when Bishop Cserháti asked the government in an *Új ember* article to permit existing religious groups to form legal associations and operate fully outside church premises. Such groups would include basis communities, charity circles and study groups. Bishop Cserháti's article was followed on 14 March by a highly publicised meeting between Hungary's new Prime Minister, Károly Grósz, and the nation's religious leaders. Here the Catholic bishops revealed the full extent of their desire for a fundamentally different relationship with the state. Archbishop Paskai began by asking the government to allow Catholic conscientious objectors to military service the right to opt for unarmed alternative service instead of gaol. The Primate was followed by Bishop Szendi who declared that the church wants a "new, contemporary agreement" with the state. Szendi made two other requests: one for the reestablishment of dissolved religious orders and the other for the church to be allowed to operate freely outside church premises. Pressure for reform also came

from Bishop Gyula who asked the government to remove what he called "certain bureaucratic elements" from the day to day relations between church and state — a reference to the regulation of church life by the State Office for Church Affairs. To reinforce the Catholic Church's wish for fundamental reform rather than a few more "small step" concessions, an *Új ember* editorial commented on 27 March that the church is looking for the creation of a new system of institutions for church-state relations and not an up-dating of the old one.

Not long ago such publicly made proposals would have brought the church into conflict with the state. But the political climate in Hungary is changing rapidly. The communist party is deeply divided on the pace and the extent of the reforms needed to solve Hungary's grave economic crisis. While the economy is uppermost in the minds of Hungarian politicians, the debates on reform which are now carried out to a surprising degree in public extend beyond the economy to virtually all the country's political institutions. The laws governing church-state relations and the work of the State Office for Church Affairs are not excluded from these debates. There is a growing element among senior party officials that is convinced that a socialist Hungary can only prosper if freed from the "strait-jacket" of the Stalinist institutions imposed on the country in the late '40s and early '50s. With regard to the church they argue that it could make a much greater and badly needed contribution to the well-being of society, should the 1950 agreement and the State Office for Church Affairs be purged of their repressive characteristics, if not abolished altogether.

In making a case for their proposals the Catholic bishops put the same argument to the Prime Minister. To dispel any notion that the

church is joining ranks with the political opposition, Archbishop Paskai declared that the government has the full support and confidence of the church. Archbishop Dankó echoed this when he "sanctified" government policy, saying that in "many respects" it corresponds to the recent teachings of the Pope. Thus it is apparent that the bishops believe the best way to achieve their aims is to adhere to the church's longstanding political alliance with the state.

The Prime Minister responded positively to the bishops' proposals, calling them "reasonable" and promising that they would be carefully studied. But the signs are that Grósz had started the process of reforming church-state relations before the meeting with the bishops. On 13 March — just one day before the meeting — the Justice Minister Imre Markója announced to Parliament that new legislation on church-state relations is now being drafted, and will shortly be presented to the chamber. Grósz's main motive for placing church-state relations on the agenda for reform appears to be the need to build a broad constituency among communist reformers and non-party members, in order to obtain the support necessary to push through painful economic measures and to prevail in the race to succeed the 76-year-old János Kádár as First Secretary of the party.

Notwithstanding the government's commitment to new legislation, it cannot be assumed that the bishops' proposals will be accepted and implemented. The same conservative elements within the party that have had success in the past in obstructing economic and political reforms are not without considerable influence when it comes to the reform of church-state relations. Moreover, the outcome of this issue will be affected by the result of the personal rivalry

between Grósz and János Berecz in the succession competition. As the Central Committee Secretary for Agitation and Propaganda, Berecz is largely responsible for the party's church policy, and is widely regarded as being less inclined to ideological flexibility than Grósz. We are likely to know whether the bishops have done well to lodge publicly their requests for radical reform with

Grósz only after the dust has settled from the extraordinary Conference of the Hungarian communist party, which is to take place in mid-May, after this piece has been written. Some senior party officials believe decisive battles regarding reform and the succession will be fought at this conference.

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## News of Chinese Churchmen

It may be remembered that Bishop Gong Pingmei was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1955 on a charge of high treason. He was released from prison in 1985, subject to surveillance by leaders of the Catholic Patriotic Association in Shanghai and without political rights. On 15 January 1988, his political rights were restored to him. His period of probation is now at an end. According to the New China Agency, he thanked the Government for its leniency, and promised to devote the remainder of his life to the modernisation of China.

A somewhat different version of the Bishop's reaction to his new freedom emerged from an interview with the French news agency AFP (quoted by the *Tablet* on 30 January). According to this source the Bishop declared: "I have remained true to the Roman Catholic Church. I am ready to go back to prison tomorrow to defend my faith. I would be a traitor if I had dreamt for a moment of denying my faith and the Vatican. Catholics cannot live without the moral authority of the Pope." Bishop Gong criticised the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. It had "nothing to do with the Catholic Church", he said. He be-

lieved that about a dozen priests, all over fifty years old, had been arrested for their faith: "I do not know where they are. The communists sent them all to labour camps." The Bishop was unconvinced by the liberal policies of Peking. "I abstain from all judgement," he declared. "I have no interest in politics." For the first time he spoke about his experiences in detention. He was never tortured, he said, but he was not able to say Mass, or read the Bible or any other religious work. "I had the right only to Shakespeare." He added that he was free to leave China.

It has also been announced officially in the People's Republic of China that two Jesuits who had remained faithful to the Vatican were released on parole on 17 November 1987. These were Bishop Joseph Fan Xueyan of Baoding and Fr Chen Yuntang. Bishop Fan was the last bishop to be consecrated with Vatican approval.

It was emphasised by Chinese spokesmen that the churchmen had been released in accordance with ordinary legal procedures. The releases had nothing to do with diplomatic moves to prepare the way for a new relationship with the Holy See.

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