

# News in Brief

*Poland: the Church, the State and the Vatican.* On 12 November 1973 there was a significant meeting between Pope Paul VI and the Polish Foreign Minister Stefan Olszowski in Rome. It is the first time such a meeting has taken place, although it was only semi-official, since the Vatican has no diplomatic relations with Poland. The meeting lasted about an hour, and in a press conference later the same day, Mr. Olszowski described it as an "historic event". Progress was reportedly made towards further "normalization" of church-state relations in Poland. There was even a possibility, said Mr. Olszowski in reply to one journalist, that the Pope might now visit Poland. (Pope Paul, who once served as a Vatican diplomat in Poland, hoped to visit the country in 1967 for the millenium celebrations, but was unable to do so.) After seeing the Pope, Mr. Olszowski spent almost two hours with Archbishop Casaroli, the Vatican "Foreign Minister". As a follow-up to these meetings, the Archbishop was invited to make a return visit to Poland. Mr. Olszowski's visit coincided with the 25th anniversary of Cardinal Wyszynski's appointment as Primate of Poland. The Cardinal himself was received by the Pope a week later. In his Christmas sermon, Cardinal Wyszynski returned to the controversial question of school reform in Poland (see *RCL* 6/1973, p. 35). He expressed his satisfaction that the new measures, which the Catholic Church sees as a threat to religious education, had been "at least formally repulsed" but voiced concern that they might still be invoked. He referred to the visit of the Foreign Minister to the Vatican as a positive step, but quoted the Pope as stating that he would take no new initiatives without the agreement of the Polish Episcopate.

*Ecumenical service in Poland.* In Warsaw, in the church of the Jesuit Fathers, an ecumenical service in memory of deceased Christians of all Churches took place under the leadership of Bishop J. Modzelewski. Taking part in the service were representatives of Churches in the Polish Ecumenical Council. (Translated from *Gazeta Niedzielną*, London, 6 January, 1974, p. 6 - "Catholic News from Poland")

*Deaconess work in Hungary.* Dr. Tibor Bartha, Bishop and Chairman of the General Synod of the Hungarian Reformed Church, in a speech in Cologne on 16 October, declared that the communist government in Hungary neither forbids nor hinders, but rather welcomes Deaconess work. Currently the Hungarian Reformed Church supports 16 Deaconess homes which are primarily for senior citizens and handicapped children. The Bishop went on to state that: "The communists will not let themselves be taught by Christians any more. But when Christians take seriously their ethical norms and act accordingly, they will be accepted and respected by the communists." (reported in *Gustav-Adolf Blatt*, January, 1974, p. 16)

*Hungarian priests study in Rome.* Budapest, 17 October 1973 (KIPA). This year eight Hungarian priests were able to travel to Rome for supplementary studies at papal universities; they will stay at the Hungarian papal institute. Since 1965, altogether 40 Catholic priests have been able to study in Rome.

*Catholics under pressure in Czechoslovakia.* State pressure against the Churches in Czechoslovakia continues to increase. On 31 October 1973 factories were informed that they must stop manufacturing crosses, religious pictures and votive plaques. In a German broadcast in mid-November, Radio Prague complained of West German "anti-communist organizations of émigrés and Western reactionaries" which sponsored the smuggling of Bibles into Czechoslovakia. This was described as an anti-socialist campaign. Even the receipt of Catholic Bibles and prayerbooks, formerly permitted, is now threatened and recipients are interrogated about their contacts with the West. Towards the end of November, news was received from Slovakia about fresh arrests of priests. In these cases, unlike previous ones, the priests were informed of the charges against them, which included the performance of religious ceremonies without proper permission. Pressure continues against theological students (see *RCL* 6, 1973, p. 35) and women's religious orders.

*East German Catholic Synod.* From 19-21 October 1973 the second plenary assembly of the Pastoral Synod of Catholic jurisdictions in East Germany took place in Dresden. The 142 members of the Synod – about half of them laity – discussed three papers on renewal of faith, charitable work in the parishes and preparation for marriage. In the introductory public service, held in the Dresden *Hofkirche*, Bishop Johannes Braun, Apostolic Administrator in Magdeburg, warned against the total claims of the world or of an ideology. He compared the present situation of Catholics in East Germany to that of the disciples in the storm-tossed boat (Matt. 8 : 23-7). In his introductory address Cardinal Bengsch, President of the Synod, stressed its independent character. The necessity for such independence from outside influences was also underlined by the Vatican when granting permission for the Synod to take place. Cardinal Bengsch indirectly criticized Dr. Hans Joachim Zobel, Vice-President of the Synod, for attending a meeting sponsored by the state to prepare for the Moscow Peace Congress (this took place at the end of October). On 1 November Bishop Aufderdeck, Apostolic Administrator in Erfurt, sharply attacked certain "tasteless, insulting and false" articles in East German publications which he described as offensive to Christians. These had contained material on the revelation of statements made during confession. One of the articles was also mentioned by Cardinal Bengsch at the October Synod. Also at the end of October there was a Lutheran Synod at Elbingerode. Participants at this gathering expressed concern over discrimination against religious pupils in school. Again reference was made to East Germany's adherence to the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in the Field of Education.

*New émigré publication.* In 1973 an unusual new publication appeared in West Germany. It is entitled *Bruderblatt* ("Fraternal Leaflet") and is edited by Soviet Germans who, before leaving the USSR for their old homeland, belonged to the *Initiativniki* (reform Baptists). The title is the same as that of the bi-monthly publication which circulates among the Soviet reform Baptists in Russian (*Bratsky Listok*), although the content is different. The new publication circulates among the growing community of Soviet German Baptists in West Germany. It appeals for all news of the movement in the Soviet Union. In its December issue, the new magazine reported the release on 3 November of David Klassen,

a Baptist pastor in Kirgizia, after three years in strict regime labour camps. On 13 November he wrote a letter to his brethren in Germany, and the text is given in this issue.

*Church-state tension in Yugoslavia.* The (Roman Catholic) Episcopal Conference in Zagreb has taken a firm stand on church-state relations. At the beginning of September 1973 it forwarded to the state Commission for Constitutional Affairs, which has the task of preparing a new Yugoslav constitution, a series of proposals for improving the sections affecting religion. This was followed by a sharp press campaign against the Church and the Bishops. For this reason the Episcopal Conference, meeting early in October, felt it necessary to issue an Open Letter in defence of its proposals. The bishops had requested that freedom of conscience be made more explicit in the new constitution; that there should be a genuine equality between believers and atheists; that discrimination on religious grounds be removed, especially in the field of education (it is very difficult for a churchgoer to obtain a teaching post in Yugoslavia). In particular, the bishops protested against the enforced teaching of atheism in the schools, effectively rendering Marxism the state religion. There has been a noticeable deterioration in church-state relations in Yugoslavia in recent months. The Serbian Orthodox Church may have difficulty in having literature printed on state printing presses. Should this happen the Church has demanded the return of its own printing presses which were confiscated by the state.

*Romanian Baptist pastor reinstated.* In the last issue of *RCL* the text of a document by Romanian Baptist pastor and seminary teacher Joseph Ton was printed. News then reached CSRC that Pastor Ton had been expelled from his teaching post at the seminary in Bucharest. The *Baptist Times* on 20 December 1973 reported: General secretary of the Baptist Union, Dr. David Russell, accompanied Dr. Ronald Goulding, associate secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, on a three day visit to Romania last week. They were received by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Government Department of Cults with whom they had a three-hour conversation on various matters affecting relationships between the State and the Baptist churches in Romania . . . During their visit they met the Rev. Joseph Ton, his wife and baby daughter. They all send greetings to their many friends in England. Joseph Ton is now pastor of three churches in the important and growing industrial town of Ploesti, which is about 40 miles from Bucharest. He hopes to assist at the seminary if he has any time free from this busy new post. During their three-hour interview with the Department of Cults, Dr. Russell and Dr. Goulding had a full and frank discussion about the questions raised in a paper recently produced by Joseph Ton on the relationship between the Baptist churches and the State.

*Amnesty International group in Russia.* On 6 October 1973 a group of eleven Moscow intellectuals directed a letter to Martin Ennals at the International Secretariat of Amnesty International, informing him of their intention to form a national section of Amnesty International in the Soviet Union. They enclosed a copy of their proposed statutes and stated that the protocols of all decisions would be forwarded to the London headquarters. Among the signatories are Andrei Tverdokhlebov, also a member of Sakharov's Committee of Human Rights, Valeri Turchin, and Orthodox priest Sergi Zheludkov.