

# News in Brief

## *"Religious Survivals" in Albania*

The Albanian communist party paper *Zëri i Popullit* (1 June 1975) denounced the survival of religious customs in the country. It noted that in some areas "there have been occasions when religious services have been held, such as baptism or circumcisions, as for example at Barbullush, or worshippers have requested Masses from ex-priests. They have celebrated the Easter Vigil, Bairam, the Feast of St. Nicholas, Easter and in some areas local religious celebrations, e.g. Ramadan and Lent, are kept." The paper then described the emergence of religious activities in disguise. "Instead of a cross, a laurel branch is used; baptism is celebrated in other ways (by gifts); name days are celebrated as birthdays; suppers and dinners are held for the 'spirits of the dead'." Other indications of the survival of religious activities include the fall in attendance at canteens during Ramadan, religious literature still exists within the family and so on. "New religious objects" are also manufactured. These include "crosses from cloth, rosaries from olive stones, which are also peddled, blessings are found in the dowry of brides..." The paper called for an intensification of the struggle against religious remnants.

## *Religious Protest in China*

In the South West province of Yunnan, attempts to suppress the Muslim religion among the Hui people in June 1975 met with considerable protest. The suppression was part of a campaign to strengthen proletarian dictatorship and took the form of wrecking mosques and

obliging the Muslim workers to work on Friday, their day of rest. Troops were used to put down the uprising and 500 Hui were said to have been arrested or sent to prison camps. It is believed that there are some four million Muslims in China, mostly from the Hui area. (*Daily Telegraph*, 16 July 1975, p. 4).

## *Constitution for Cuba*

On 24 February this year a Constitution for the Republic of Cuba was ceremonially proclaimed in Havana. The draft of the Constitution was submitted to a national referendum on 15 February, in which just under 1% of voters were said to have voted against its adoption. The new document was hailed as the "first socialist Constitution in America". An English edition printed in Havana is available in a 12-page newspaper format. The Constitution guarantees various freedoms, but the phraseology is noticeably more guarded than even that of the Soviet Constitution. Article 54 states that: "The socialist State, which bases its activity and educates the people in the scientific materialist concept of the universe, recognizes and guarantees freedom of conscience and the right of everyone to profess any religious belief and to practice, within the framework of respect for the law, the belief of his preference. The law regulates the activities of religious institutions. It is illegal and punishable by law to oppose one's faith or religious belief to the Revolution; to education or to the fulfilment of one's duty to work and defend the homeland with arms, to show reverence for its sym-

bols and to fulfil other duties established by the Constitution." This is considerably sharper than the corresponding Soviet clause, and admits some of the limitations on religion which are concealed in the Soviet Constitution, although largely evident in the law.

#### *Religion Suppressed in Tibet*

For the first time since the Cultural Revolution a few foreign visitors were recently allowed to visit Tibet. The visitors reported that much effort was being made to preserve old masterpieces of Tibetan art. They were told that three monasteries, inhabited by old people, were still functioning. According to recent refugee reports, the Chinese campaign against Tibetan Buddhism is almost complete. "Nearly all the monasteries have been converted into military posts or schools. Thousands of the lamas have been forced out to beg or work as farm labourers or porters... The Chinese are also stripping the monasteries of their treasures." The recent visitors were told that the Tibetan population is now around 1,600,000, and that there are some 20,000 Chinese there at present. (See *The Times* 30 March 1976, p. 8. Quotation from *Sunday Telegraph* 7 March 1976, p. 1).

#### *Takeover in South Vietnam*

South Vietnam has nationalized all facilities for higher education, Radio Hanoi reported. Roman Catholic and Buddhist universities have been taken over by the University of Ho Chi Minh. (*Guardian* 1 April 1976, p. 2).

#### *Cambodian Constitution on Religion and Worship*

According to Art. 20 of the new Constitution of Democratic Cambodia, "every Cambodian has the right to worship according to any religion, and the right not to worship according to any religion". However, the article continues, "reactionary religion which is detrimental to Democratic Cambodia and the Cambodian people is absolutely forbidden".

#### *New Primate for Hungary*

Pope Paul has appointed Mgr. Laszlo Lekai, formerly apostolic administrator, as Archbishop of Esztergom in Hungary and Primate of Hungary. Mgr. Lekai automatically becomes president of the episcopal conference of Hungary. Lekai was born in 1910 and ordained in 1934. Among his former duties he was private secretary to Cardinal Mindszenty. One of his fellow students at the Germanicum in Rome was Cardinal König. The Hungarian press published on 14 February his statement on assuming his new post. Lekai said that it would be an anachronism for him to present himself as "first baron or prince primate" of the country. The Church must not look backward but must accept reality as it exists. He spoke of the position of the Churches in socialist countries and the relations between Church and State. The Church has found its place in the socialist society and the authorities allow freedom to profess faith; nevertheless many questions remained unresolved and it must be hoped that they would be resolved in an atmosphere of peace. "Although the world views and ideology of Christians and Marxists are different, we must nevertheless look for ways to work out a common future. We must look not at what divides us but at what unites us." (*AKSA* 20 February 1976).\* *The Times* 25 May 1976, p. 6, reported that Mgr. Lekai received the red biretta of cardinal in Rome on 24 May.

#### *Hungarian Bishop Discusses Christian-Marxist Dialogue*

The secretary of the Hungarian bishops' conference, Bishop Jozsef Cserhati, has published three articles in the Hungarian Catholic journal *Vigilia*, in which he discusses the possibilities, conditions

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\* *AKSA* is a Roman Catholic news service published by Krscanska Sadasnost (Contemporary Christianity), Zagreb, Yugoslavia. This institute was founded in 1967 by Archbishop Seper of Zagreb to study and propagate post-Vatican II ideas. *Ed.*

and aims of a dialogue between Christians and Marxists.

"There is a growing number of Marxists who no longer doubt that the Church is ready and eager to interest itself in people and a better human society" he writes. "Nevertheless, one still hears Marxists speak of the harmfulness and superfluousness of religious beliefs which are not concerned with human beings. Such people give offence to the faithful when they accuse them of being out-of-date and childish, of still living in the world of their grandmothers. The faithful do not accept this denial of their moral preparedness and cannot understand how they can be excluded from building the new society because of their religious faith or their behaviour as believers. Believers need to receive a sincere and just answer to the question of why they are not allowed to be full and honourable members of socialist society." Evasion or silence on this subject is harmful, the bishop underlines. The answer that only people with a scientific world outlook can build a socialist society puzzles believers even more, since this view contradicts fundamental socialist principles. Moreover, the Marxist outlook, which in its authentic form is not dogmatic, is constantly developing. The Second Vatican Council which proclaimed the Church's solidarity with human society, gave the essential impulse to modify Marxist criticism of religious phenomena. The Church today finds itself faced with "a great task of purification". It must get rid of the formalism and dogmatic rigidity which had developed in the life of believers and in the Church itself. "What does most harm to Christianity and all religious bodies today is to cling mistakenly to traditionalism and, linked with this, to a spiritual, social and political conservatism. The man of the Gospel always stands with one foot in the future". Self-criticism in the Church is essential. Cserhati then asks: "Is the Church still living and working in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and the new theology, does the new wind of reform still blow? If we do not accept the great thinking and reforms of the Council; if we do not adapt the opinions of the Church to the demands of the times,

then the Church will not be able to exert any influence on the shape of the world." (AKSA 26 March 1976).

#### *Hungarian Catholic Weekly Celebrates Anniversary*

Hungary's only Roman Catholic weekly newspaper, *Uj Ember* (The New Man) celebrated its 30th anniversary last year. It is published by the Hungarian Actio Catholica (Catholic Action) founded in 1933, which also produces a monthly publication *Vigilia*. *Uj Ember* enjoys a circulation of 70,000 copies, 90% of which is distributed on a subscription basis. Its chief editor is Fr. Baldwin Penzes. Managing editor, Ferenc Magyar, visited Poland and was interviewed by Poland's Catholic monthly *Zycie i Mysl* (Life and Thought). In the interview he traced the work of *Uj Ember* since 1945. Mr. Magyar stated that Catholic-Marxist dialogue is an important aspect of the newspaper's work.

#### *Christian Peace Conference Meets in Hungary*

An international and ecumenical gathering of churchmen met last September at the Hungarian resort of Siofok to confer on the subject of "Christianity and Peace". Russian Orthodox and Hungarian and Polish Baptists were among those present. Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad, President of the Christian Peace Conference, stressed the Christian responsibility of bringing peace to the world. The problems of the Third world were also discussed, and it was hoped that a new Christian life-style could be developed to use the earth's resources in a more responsible way. Economic and social systems must be changed if this was to be achieved. The CPC aims to arrange a global conference next year on the theme, "The Arms Race and World Hunger". (*Baptist Times*, 2 October 1975, p. 12.)

#### *Church Statistics for Hungary*

The Budapest daily *Magyar Hirlap* (23 December 1975) has published statistical details on the state of the churches in Hungary. There are 4,000 Roman Catholic churches and chapels with the same

number of priests; the Calvinists have 1,502 and 1,306, the Lutherans have 673 and 374; and there are 130 synagogues with 26 rabbis. There are between 250-300 Roman Catholic seminarians, instructed by 60 teachers. The Calvinists have two theological academies with over 100 students and there are about 40 students at the academy maintained by the Lutherans. Four Roman Catholic teaching orders are active – the Benedictines (at Pannonhalma), the Franciscans (at Szentendre), the Piarists (in Budapest) and the Sisters of Our Lady (also in Budapest) – at the secondary level. There is also a Calvinist gymnasium in Debrecen and a Jewish one in Budapest.

#### *New Church Building for Hungarian Baptists*

A new Baptist church was dedicated in the south-east Hungarian city of Bekescsaba on 18 October 1975. 420 Hungarian pastors, Hungarian church officials, and guests from abroad were present at the dedication service, which was conducted by the President of the Hungarian Baptist Church, Janos Laszkovski. Dr. John A. Moore of Switzerland, representing the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, spoke at the dedication. The Board had contributed funds for the church building project. The new church seats 320 worshippers, and was built by members of the church. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 28 October 1975.)

#### *75th Anniversary of Hungarian Baptist Church*

The Kispest Baptist church, one of the oldest Baptist communities in Budapest, recently observed the 75th anniversary of its founding. The anniversary sermon was delivered by President Sandor Palotay of the Council of Hungarian Free Churches. Representatives were present from the Budapest City Council, from Reformed, Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches and from sister Baptist congregations. A day of thanksgiving preceded the anniversary celebrations at which Baptist Union president Janos Laszkovski was guest speaker. The pastor of the Kispest church is Dean Jozsef Nagy of the Hungarian Baptist Theological Seminary. (*European Baptist Press Service*, 2 January 1976.)

#### *New Atheist Campaign in Czechoslovakia*

The start of the 1975/76 school year marked a new peak in pressure on believers, especially students and members of the Socialist Youth Union. An article in *Rude Pravo* on 5 September 1975 stated that a correct world-view and an atheist attitude to life are the only proper mainstay for the life of socialist man. Atheistic propaganda must be "an integral part of the educational programme". The article called on officials of the youth organization to use all means to replace the religious tradition by a socialist one. The position of the Roman Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia remains very difficult. A pro-regime organization, *Pacem in Terris*, has considerable influence. Seven students of the Bratislava Theological Faculty who graduated last session were denied ordination as priests because they had refused to attend the Slovak *Pacem in Terris* congress. There is evidence, however, that the Vatican is not prepared to have friendly relations with the organization, which sent a delegation to the Holy Year celebrations in Rome last year. The Pope did not mention the Czech delegation in his greetings. Ten Roman Catholic bishoprics in the CSSR are vacant and of 3,500 priests, 500 are forbidden to engage in any kind of pastoral activity. However, in spite of the government's determined measures, religious life in Czechoslovakia has not been entirely "normalized". Catholics, Protestants and Jews bear the brunt of the attack, while the Orthodox Church, which is linked to the Moscow Patriarchate, and the Hussite Church are to some extent sheltered from the blast. Their cathedrals are conspicuously empty, however, and their seminaries have the lowest numbers of students.

#### *Leaflets Circulated in Czechoslovakia*

The Western press reported that leaflets had been distributed in several areas of Slovakia in June 1975. The leaflets, which were circulated clandestinely to a fairly large number of people, rejected official anti-religious propaganda and attacked the policy of religious suppression practised by the Czechoslovak authorities. Among other places, leaf-

lets were reported from Zilina, Banska Bystrica, Prievidza and other places, all of them in Slovakia. The leaflet declared that spiritual values were being neglected in the country, that there was no freedom of the spirit, of information or of movement. The leaflet recalled the official statement made in January 1975 that the authorities regarded religious affairs as entirely an internal question for Czechoslovakia and argued that this meant that the authorities felt themselves free to discriminate against religious believers as before. It added that the Chilean junta adhered to the same principle of non-interference. Finally, the leaflet called for unity among all the denominations in the country. The police has yet to uncover the background to this action. A nun who was arrested on suspicion of having been involved was released soon thereafter. (Source *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 September 1975).

#### *Jews in Czechoslovakia*

Prague Jews believe that Judaism, once a powerful factor in the intellectual and artistic flowering of the Czechoslovak capital, will be dead within 20 years. Of the estimated 360,000 Jews in Czechoslovakia before the Second World War only some 5,000 professing Jews remain. This report shows the sorry ends to which anti-semitism, the Nazi policy of physical extermination, post war discrimination, the Stalinist and post Stalinist Anti-Zionist purges have brought a once prosperous community. Today 1,200 Jews live in Prague, meeting only for worship in the two remaining synagogues. Two cantors do what they can to fulfil the spiritual needs of the community. There is no pressure among the remaining Jews to emigrate, there are no appeals to the West. Most of the population are old. Those who wanted to leave did so after the war or during the upheaval of 1968, when an estimated 44,500 Jews escaped. One pensioner said: "To leave would mean giving up our pension to face very uncertain lives abroad, cut off from our beloved Czechoslovakia. Here, provided we don't make trouble, we don't get trouble." Since Czechoslovakia's Chief Rabbi, Dr. Richard Kedar, died at the

age of 95 on 18 November 1970, there has been no successor to the top religious office. (*ICJB*—June 1975, pp. 3-4 and September 1975, p. 5).

#### *New Archbishop Appointed in Poland*

The Polish government has taken a step towards improving relations with the Roman Catholic Church by agreeing to the appointment of Bishop Henry Gulbinowicz as Archbishop of Wroclaw. Because Wroclaw is on pre-war German territory, its Church leader has a particularly sensitive role in Church-State relations. Wroclaw has been without a Church head since the death of Cardinal Boleslaw Kominek in March 1974. The new Archbishop is only 47, one of the youngest appointments made in recent years. As part of the 1956 Church-State agreement State permission is required for all Church appointments, from parish church administrators up to the highest posts. (*The Times* 10 January 1976, p. 14).

#### *Poles Discuss Renewal Movements*

Contemporary charismatic movements in western Europe were discussed during the 11th Ecclesiological Week at Poland's Catholic University of Lublin (KUL), during the last week of October 1975. The discussion follows contacts in the West with both Catholic and Protestant leaders involved with renewal movements and the appearance of articles in Poland's Roman Catholic publications about such movements. For example, a special article on this subject was published in Poland's Catholic monthly, *Zycie i Mysl* (Life and Thought). The article, entitled "The Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church", states: "The conviction that our times are the beginning of a period when people are opening themselves to the action of the Holy Ghost, has accompanied the theological and pastoral thinking of the Church since the beginning of the last Vatican Council... In the re-capitulation of the discussion on the life of the Church in all countries of the world, the sense of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the world and in the Church, as well as 'charismatic

movements' were mentioned...in the point which summed up the factors promoting the preaching of the Gospel." To explain the word "charismatic", the editor included a dictionary definition under "Charismata" from Dufour's *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*.

The Catholic monthly discussed at length the following reports:

1. "Pentecost in North America" by Fr. René Laurentin.

2. The essay by Fr. K. McDonnell "Theological Foundations of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal", translated into Polish from the quarterly *One in Christ*.

3. Allocution of Pope Paul VI "The Spiritual Renewal as a chance for the Church and the World", addressed to the participants of the Third International Congress of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, translated from the French, *La documentation catholique*.

#### *Church Statistics for Romania*

About 150 priests and deacons have been ordained in the Romanian Orthodox Church. The Romanian Patriarchate has about 8,828 church communities; there are 9,821 priests, the majority of them married and in recent times 80 churches and chapels have been built. (AKSA 4 September 1975).

#### *"The Times" Comments on Georgian Church Controversy*

The controversy about the Georgian Orthodox Church begun by Peter Reddaway's article, "The Georgian Orthodox Church: Corruption and Renewal" (RCL Vol. 3 Nos. 4-5, pp. 14-23) and continued in the columns of *The Times* (the correspondence is reprinted in RCL Vol. 3, No. 6, pp. 45-54) has given rise to a report by Clifford Longley, "New Evidence in Georgian Church Affair" (*The Times* 15 March 1976, p. 14). Clifford Longley reports the arrival of Dr. Gamsakhurdia's letter to Professor Lang (printed in RCL Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 49-50) and states that Professor Lang considers the letter to be "tendentious and prejudiced". Professor Lang claims to be able to point to certain inconsistencies in the information available in the West. "But", continues Clifford Longley, "this has not shaken the view in Keston College, Lambeth Palace and else-

where, that Mr. Reddaway's original report had stood the test of time and that subsequent information has tended to corroborate it." Lambeth Palace, which houses the offices of the Archbishop's Counsellors on Foreign Relations, took an interest in the controversy and, adds Clifford Longley, "it can be stated reliably that private inquiries have not weakened confidence in Keston College, of which Dr. Coggan is a patron".

#### *Lausanne Committee Calls for Intercession for Persecuted Christians*

The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, a body which has grown out of the International Congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne in July 1974, has issued a "Call for Intercession for Persecuted Christians" dated 15 January 1976. The Committee says it is "painfully aware of the many areas of the world—especially the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China and other totalitarian countries—which are closed to or which severely restrict an open proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ". It is "deeply moved" by the courageous witness of Christians in these areas. They mention in particular the name of Georgi Vins, "as one representative for many unnamed other Christians". The "Call" concludes: "We commend these persecuted Christians and their families to the care and ardent intercession of their fellow Christians throughout the world, that God may sustain them in their faith . . ."

#### *Italian Bishops Condemn Marxism*

The steering committee of the Italian Roman Catholic bishops' conference stated in strong terms on 15 December that "one cannot be simultaneously Marxist and Christian". Both the Pope and his Vicar for the Rome Diocese, Cardinal Foletti, have also recently made critical statements of this kind, which are seen as a reaction to the rising tide of Marxism in Italy. Not all bishops agree with the view of the conference, feeling that the Church should not interfere in political affairs, but they will be expected to adhere to this statement of national policy. (*The Times*, 16 December 1975, p. 7.)

### *Jews and Christians Support Persecuted Believers*

People concerned for those who are persecuted for their beliefs in communist countries packed Westminster Cathedral Hall in December in order to draw attention to the situation of the sufferers. The meeting, which included both Christians and Jews, was chaired by Bishop Mahon, President of the Justice and Peace Commission. Speakers included Mr. Patrick Cormack, MP, who said that we must insist that the terms of détente include concessions from the other side on matters of human rights. Mrs. Doreen Gainsford, of the Women's Campaign for Soviet Jewry, introduced two young Jewish emigrants who had left a parent behind in Russia; the Rev. Michael Bourdeaux of Keston College spoke on the Catholic Church in Lithuania; and Bishop Hornyak, the Apostolic Exarch of the Ukraine, spoke of events in the Ukrainian Church. The meeting ended with the whole meeting standing for two minutes of silent prayer for the persecuted. Telegrams were sent by the meeting to the United Nations and the World Council of Churches, and letters to the Prime Minister and the Soviet Ambassador. (*Catholic Herald*, 12 December 1975, p. 2.)

### *Church of Scotland's Visit to East Germany Cancelled*

Due to changed internal political circumstances, a delegation of four representatives of the Church of Scotland had their visit to East Germany cancelled last year at only three days' notice. This would have been the first official visit by members of the Church. The leader of the delegation, Dr. Duncan Shaw, said that there was no question of any of the members of the group being unacceptable either to State or Church authorities. (*Baptist Times*, 30 October 1975, p. 3.)

### *Clergy Leave East Germany*

Lutheran Bishop Albrecht Schönherr of East Berlin and Brandenburg has appealed to ministers under his jurisdiction not to emigrate to the West. His appeal underlines an increasing trend which is affecting above all clergy

whose children face difficulties in education, and seminary students. Eight and a half million out of a population of 17 million are listed as Protestant (another 1.3 million as Catholic). Discrimination against believers in East Germany has taken less spectacular forms than in some other countries, nevertheless it has clearly led to considerable weariness on the part of those most affected. (See: *International Herald Tribune* 9 February 1976.)

### *New Library Facilities for the Baptist Seminary in East Germany*

Dedicatory services were held in February for a new library allowing twice the space formerly occupied at the Baptist Seminary in the German Democratic Republic. The Seminary faculty has seen the addition of a new assistant professor to teach Greek and practical theology part-time. He is Rev. Bernard Wittchow, who will continue as pastor of the Buckow Baptist congregation. Sixteen students are on two levels in this academic year. The school has received numerous applications but facilities do not allow room for more members at present. (*European Baptist Press Service* 19 March 1976, p. 4.)

### *Romanian Patriarch Visits Soviet Union*

Last year Patriarch Justinian of Romania visited the Soviet Union as the guest of the Russian Orthodox Church. The close ties between the Romanian and Russian Orthodox Churches, and particularly the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were emphasized. Patriarch Justinian began his visit on 9 June 1975, in Moscow, where he was met by Patriarch Pimen and other high Church dignitaries. He spent 10-13 June in the Ukraine, visiting churches in Lvov and surrounding villages, including the Pochaev Monastery. The Patriarch was greeted at all churches by girls in Ukrainian national costumes and parts of some church services were sung in Ukrainian as well as in Romanian. On his return to Moscow, the Patriarch visited the Trinity St. Sergius Monastery at Zagorsk, before leaving on 16 June. (*Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* No. 9, 1975, p. 10.)