

between the Bratislava vigil and this latest rally in Prague: the fearlessness of the participants.

These recent initiatives in Czechoslovakia speak of the beginning of

change in society: apathy is giving way to public protest, and fear to courage.

*Compiled by members of Keston College staff*

## Yugoslav Press on Religion

*Contemporary Christian News Service (Aktualnosti Kršćanska Sadašnjosti).*

*AKSA is a weekly Catholic news service published in Croatian in Zagreb by the organisation Contemporary Christianity. It includes reports on items in the Yugoslav secular press.*

### *Religious Communities and Society*

The involvement of religious communities, in particular the churches, in Yugoslav society has been a topic for debate in the media throughout the year. Comments by churches on the proposed amendments to the Yugoslav Constitution have provoked much of that debate. A document, published by the Yugoslav Bishops' Conference, suggesting that amendments to the Constitution should bring it into line with Christian principles and provide better guarantees of religious freedom received a negative response from some state officials. In an interview published in *Oslobodjenje* (Sarajevo, 19.12.87) Bozo Rudez, President of the Zagreb City Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, declared that religious freedom was already fully secured by the Constitution. The party journal *Komunist* (Zagreb, 1 and 8.4.88) printed a two-part article

on the churches' intervention in the constitutional debate. The article focused on the document of the Yugoslav Bishops' Conference and also on documents on the same theme published by *Iustitia et Pax* (the Commission of the Bishops' Conference of Slovenia) and by the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church. *Komunist* declared that the Federal Commission for Relations with Religious Communities thought the documents an attempt to politicise religion and indirectly to inaugurate a multi-party system by securing the status of partner for the churches in government discussions. The ideas expressed in the documents, said *Komunist*, far exceeded the limits imposed by the Yugoslav Constitution. Accusations of neo-clericalism and attempting to politicise religion have been directed against the churches, and especially the Catholic Church in Croatia and the Serbian Orthodox Church. One such accusation was made by sociologist Boris Vusković in an interview in *Nedjeljna Dalmacija* (Split, 20.12.87), (*AKSA* 25.12.87, 15.4.88). Amfilohije Radović, the new Serbian Orthodox Bishop of Banat, has been accused more than once of being anti-communist and a Serbian nationalist. (*AKSA*, March and April, 1988).

At their meeting of 2 February 1988 the Federal Committee for

Religious Affairs of the Socialist Alliance of Yugoslavia debated the affect of constitutional amendments on religious communities and the attempts by the churches to secure a greater role in society. This was reported the following day in many newspapers, amongst them *Dnevnik (Novi Sad)*, *Večernje Novosti, Borba* and *Politika* (all Belgrade).

Religious believers did receive some support at a later Federal Committee meeting. At a debate in May Dr Esad Simić, Professor of Sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, spoke in favour of greater freedom for believers. *Vjesnik* (Zagreb, 11.5.88) quoted Professor Cimić proposing that legislation concerning religion should be amended to outlaw any discrimination against believers, for example in education and journalism where certain jobs were reserved for atheists. Professor Cimić also suggested that sections of the party programme dealing with the religious beliefs of party members were out-of-date and should be changed. He declared that Marxism should not be a compulsory subject in secondary and higher education. (AKSA, 13.5.88)

According to *Večernje Novosti* (Belgrade, 8.10.88) the synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church protested against coverage by the media and by *Novi Sad TV* in particular of the so-called meetings of solidarity organised in support of changes in the Yugoslav Constitution in favour of the Serbian Republic. *Novi Sad TV* showed shots of men in priests' garb, who, said the synod, were not priests. In an article entitled 'The Priests did not Deserve such Treatment'; *Politika* (Belgrade, 9.10.88) agreed with the Synod that *Novi Sad TV* had attempted to suggest that the supporters of the present leadership in Serbia were the 'black shirts, the Četniks and priests disowned by the Church'. (AKSA 14.10.88 and

21.10.88)

Whilst the churches' attempts to take part in political debates received condemnation, support was expressed for the contribution to society made by Christian charitable work. The Republican Committee for Religious Affairs of the Socialist Alliance of Slovenia held a debate on the social work of the religious communities. Although the significant contribution to society made by this charitable work was acknowledged, some speakers felt that the work should be more clearly defined and regulated by law, lest social work become the prerogative of the religious communities. The debate was reported by *Zagreb Radio* (15.6.88), *Slobodna Dalmacija* (Split, 20.6.88) and *Borba* (Belgrade, 20.6.88) amongst others, (AKSA, 24.6.88). Radovan Samardžić, Federal Secretary for Relations with Religious Communities, said in an interview with *Večernje Novosti* (Belgrade, 24.7.88) that the law did not allow the churches to engage in any activities affecting the public life of society as a whole, but admitted that organisational shortcomings and lack of funds meant that many social institutions could not fulfil all their duties. There was, therefore, nothing wrong in allowing the churches to take care of some of the social functions; it was better than leaving those in need without any help whatsoever. (AKSA 29.7.88)

### *Military Secrets Trial*

The hierarchy of the Slovene Catholic Church did not remain silent over the arrest and trial of one conscript and three journalists who worked for the Slovene Catholic journal *Družina*. The four were arrested following an article about alleged secret plans for a military coup in Slovenia. The Bishops' Conference of Slovenia

issued a public statement, making general demands concerning individual rights. *Družina* published a statement by Archbishop Šuštar of Ljubljana and together with *Dnevnik* (Ljubljana, 15.6.88) printed extracts from an interview with the Archbishop broadcast on *Radio Student* (Ljubljana, 10.6.88), in which Dr Šuštar expressed his concern about the arrests. *Politika* (Belgrade, 18.7.88) reported the vigil held in the Franciscan church in Ljubljana at the time of the trial. Archbishop Šuštar held a service to open the vigil, which was attended by several thousand people. (*AKSA*, 17.6.88, 24.6.88, 22.7.88) In the course of a long interview published in the Slovene youth journal *Mladina* (Ljubljana, no date given), Archbishop Šuštar mentioned that he received anonymous death threats because of his intervention on behalf of the journalists and conscript. (*AKSA*, 12.8.88)

### *Christmas Controversy*

After the controversy caused by the broadcast of Christmas greetings in 1986 by Jože Smole, President of the Socialist Alliance of Slovenia, the media all over Yugoslavia gave wide coverage to the debate about the observance of Christmas. On 17 November 1987 the Presidency of the Socialist Alliance of Slovenia debated the issue. *Vjesnik* (Zagreb, 13.11.87) summarised the statement issued after the debate to the effect that Christmas day would not be a public holiday, but that current legislation allowed believers to take the day off work if they wished, and that the Socialist Alliance would convey Christmas greetings to all citizens who celebrate it, in accordance with the principle of religious freedom. The meeting was covered extensively by the Yugoslav media on 12 and 13 November. (*AKSA*,

13.11.87, 20.11.87)

Further comment on this issue appeared throughout the press in the approach to Christmas. *Nedjeljni Vjesnik* (Zagreb, 15.11.87) printed the results of an opinion poll carried out in Slovenia two years ago, which revealed that 79 per cent of Slovenes celebrate Christmas (43 per cent as a religious holiday and 36 per cent as a traditional family holiday) and almost 60 per cent declared themselves in favour of making Christmas a public holiday in Slovenia. In another article in the same issue *Nedjeljni Vjesnik* declared that the debate about Christmas should not be treated lightly as the issue was a part of the Vatican's strategy of involving the Catholic Church in Yugoslav political life. In an interview in *Mladost* (Belgrade, 30.11.87) Radovan Samardžić warned that using the media to convey Christmas greetings gave Christmas the status of a public event, and was in line with the efforts of the churches to politicise religion. (*AKSA*, 20.11.87, 4.12.87, 11.12.87)

Several newspapers made the point that any decisions about Christmas celebrations should take into account the members of non-Catholic and non-Christian religious communities. (*AKSA*, 27.11.87)

In their issues of either 24 or 25 December 1987 most of the Yugoslav dailies published a *Tanjug* agency report that the main daily current affairs programme on *Ljubljana Radio* (23.12.87) carried Christmas greetings from Jože Smole addressed to the citizens of Slovenia in the name of the Socialist Alliance Organisation. Christmas greetings by Archbishop Šuštar were broadcast on *Ljubljana Radio* and *TV* on 24 December. *Omladinski Radio 101* (Zagreb, 24.12.87) broadcast a translation into Serbo-Croat of the full text of Smole's greetings to prove that they had been offered to 'all

citizens who celebrate Christmas either as a family or religious or simply traditional holiday' and to those 'who celebrate Christmas on different dates' (i.e. Orthodox Christians). The *Tanjug* report had limited those greetings to Slovenes only. (AKSA 8.1.88)

The Christmas greetings broadcast in Slovenia brought about some change in other republics. For the first time *Politika* (Belgrade, 6.1.88) published the Christmas and New Year greetings of Patriarch German of the Serbian Orthodox Church. This was announced in advance by *Zagreb Radio* on 5 January. (AKSA, 21.1.88)

There was also wide coverage of actual Christmas celebrations, first in the Catholic and a fortnight later in the Orthodox areas of the country. *Zagreb TV* and *Radio* (25.12.87) broadcast Pope John Paul II's Christmas message, whilst all the Yugoslav TV centres carried a *Tanjug* agency report about the Pope's message. (AKSA 8.1.88)

*Borba* (Zagreb/Belgrade, 26 and 27.12.87, 29.12.87) pointed out that Christmas had received more coverage in the Yugoslav press in 1987 than any other topic.

### *Orthodox-Catholic Conflict*

There are still some reports of conflict between Serbian Orthodox and Catholic believers. The largely Serbian population of Parčići, a village near Bentcovac, Croatia, prevented the start of restoration work on a local 12th-century church. Admitting that the villagers had no Orthodox church for worship, *Politika* (Belgrade, 2.2.88) blamed society as a whole for allowing anyone to exploit emotions of a dubious nature to prevent the preservation of an historic building. The controversy was reported in a number of newspapers, amongst them *Vjesnik* (Zag-

reb, 6.2.88) and *Slobodna Dalmacija* (Split 6.2.88, 15.4.88, 17.4.88). (AKSA 12.2.88, 19.2.88, 26.2.88, 8.4.88.)

Controversy over the building of a new Serbian Orthodox church in Split received wide press coverage. The foundation stone of the church was laid more than a century ago, but the building has not been completed. According to *Pravoslavlje*, (Belgrade 15.4.88), the official journal of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the delay is due to the authorities in Split who have deliberately hindered the building process; according to *Panorama Subotom*, when the necessary building permit was granted the church told the local authority that they had insufficient funds to start building. *NIN* (Belgrade, 22.3.88) published a statement by Orthodox Bishop Nikolaj of Dalmatia attacking the authorities in Split for allegedly favouring Catholics and Muslims at the expense of the Serbian Orthodox community in the city. (AKSA, 3.6.88.)

### *Ecumenism*

Both church and state appear to recognise the potential contribution of ecumenism to an improvement in relations between the different Yugoslav nationalities. In October the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia issued a statement referring to the tensions and difficulties prevailing in society. The bishops appealed for a genuine dialogue in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding as the only way to a solution to all the controversial issues. They added that the basic rights of every individual and every nation must be observed. During a debate of the Presidency of the Republican Conference of the Socialist Alliance of Croatia on the role and activities of the religious communities, one of the speakers argued

that the Alliance should investigate thoroughly and assess the political implications of ecumenism as a means of improving relations between nationalities, (*Večernij List*, Zagreb, 12.10.88). (AKSA, 14.10.88, 21.10.88)

### *New Orthodox Cathedral*

Throughout the year progress reports have appeared in the Serbian press on the building of the new Serbian Orthodox Cathedral of St Sava in Belgrade. The building of the new church has undoubtedly boosted Serbian Orthodox morale. The weekly *Danas* (Zagreb, 12.4.88) declared in an article, excerpts from which were reprinted in *Slobodna Dalmacija* (Split, 13.4.88), that due to the building of the new cathedral, the Serbian Orthodox Church was rousing itself after many years of inactivity. The Cathedral is already being visited by thousands of pilgrims from

all over Yugoslavia. (AKSA, 15.4.88, 29.4.88)

### *Medjugorje*

Most reports on Medjugorje have concentrated on the commercial benefits of tourism. The fact that foreign tour operators have been exploiting the Medjugorje phenomenon to the full was regretted in *NIN* (Belgrade, 14.8.88) and *Nedjeljna Borba* (Belgrade, 20-21.8.88) (AKSA 19.8.88 and 26.8.88)

There was considerable press coverage of the claims by Goran Marjanović, a greengrocer from Split, that the Virgin Mary appeared to him on 1 March 1988 and promised to reappear again until 19 March, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, (Split, 7.3.88). (AKSA, 11.3.88, 18.3.88, and 25.3.88)

*Compiled by members of  
Keston College staff.*

*AKSA bulletin is translated into  
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## Religion in Laos

The communist Pathet Lao victory of 1975 after 30 years of bitter civil war brought a new and alien system of government to this traditionally Buddhist country. Fears of religious and political persecution after the communist takeover led many people to seek refuge in neighbouring Thailand. This was especially true of the tribal peoples of the north of the country, many of whom, such as the Hmong, had sided more or less openly with the anti-communist forces. Some Buddhists, however, had been prominent in the Pathet Lao forces, and monks had taken part in

the guerrilla war as doctors and propagandists.

The new government's attitude to religion had superficial similarities to that of its Indochinese neighbours, Vietnam and Kampuchea.\* The country was officially atheist, and the government took immediate steps to control religious groups. But in practice, life for religious believers in Laos has differed markedly from

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\*See 'The Catholic Church in Vietnam', RCL Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 80-83, and 'Religion in Kampuchea', RCL Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 169-70.