

Editorial

Canon Paul Oestreicher began his article in *The Times* of 31 July 1982 with the words: "When there is no tension between Church and State, the Church has ceased to be the Church". Later in the same article, he commended church leaders in East Germany who have challenged the growing militarism of their state for resisting the temptation to serve the State on its own terms: "They have not succumbed, which, in a Marxist-Leninist society, calls for high courage". In most of the communist countries of Eastern Europe, the price to be paid by believers whose conscience requires them to challenge the social order in which they live is much higher than in East Germany. In the Soviet Union, the range of activities open even to those believers who are anxious to obey the secular leaders is extremely narrow, and every Christian in that country who wants to bear witness to his faith will sooner or later be faced with choices directly affecting his own well-being and that of his family. In our Chronicle section, the leading item shows how the zeal of the Soviet authorities to prevent such witness taking place continues with increasing fervour.

The price to be paid by religious believers in such societies for continuing their Christian witness is that of suffering. One of the triumphs of religious faith in such circumstances is that suffering does not extinguish their faith: quite the reverse. Perhaps the most important lesson we in the West can learn from the Churches in Eastern Europe is that suffering can be accepted and transformed in the lives of Christians. In his speech accepting the award of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion on 15 May 1984, Rev Michael Bourdeaux said: "The Russian Church, so much more surely than the Church of the West, lives in the

knowledge that the path to resurrection leads through the door of Calvary [. . .] We have lost our nerve in affluence; they have discovered it in persecution". Moreover, he believes that this suffering is not merely a spectacle for our admiration: it is a vehicle for true Christian unity. The Church is the Body of Christ: "If one limb suffers, the whole body feels the pain".

The world Lutheran community, including that section which witnesses in communist countries, is united this summer in Budapest at the Seventh Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation. In this issue of *RCL* we are publishing three articles dealing with the nature of the "theology of service" which the Hungarian Lutheran Church has evolved as the theological context in which it cooperates with the secular authorities in that country. Vilmos Vajta criticises this theological stance for its failure, as he sees it, to include the concept of "suffering" as an integral ingredient in "service". The result, he maintains, is that the witness of the Lutheran Church in Hungary amounts to an uncritical endorsement of all aspects of state policy: witness of the type which Canon Oestreicher criticises when it is practised by any Church, whatever the political system — communist or non-communist — within which it lives.

If a Church which cooperates fully with an established secular authority can come in for legitimate criticism, it is not so clear whether it is just to subject a Church which is cooperating fully with revolutionary change in a particular country to criticism of a similar kind. The article by Humberto Belli "The Church in Nicaragua: Under Attack from Within and Without" which we published in *RCL* Vol. 12 No. 1, and which criticised those Christians in Nicaragua who justify their cooperation with the revolutionary programme of their government by reference to "liberation theology", has itself come in for a certain amount of criticism. We would be delighted to publish any responsible item seeking to correct the analysis offered in that article from any reader of *RCL* with inside knowledge of the Nicaraguan experience comparable to that of Mr Belli. Meanwhile, this issue of *RCL* contains an article by Fr Blachnicki on another kind of "liberation theology" — the results of the spiritual experiences of those involved in the Catholic renewal movement in Poland, the "Light-Life" movement. These two concepts are represented in the form of a cross. "Light" (Christ) can never be separated from "Life". According to Fr Blachnicki, the true way of liberation consists in living the light, overcoming fear, taking up the cross, living by the truth regardless of suffering. "The victory of the resurrection", he says, "can be achieved only through the cross". One essential element in this process is the renunciation of violence in seeking social change. In this respect alone, the Polish "theology of liberation" differs fundamentally from that presented by many "liberation theologians" of Latin America.