

# Editorial

“By and large, our situation and social climate are conducive to the revival of religious life.” This may seem a strange way to sum up the situation in Czechoslovakia today. But the author of “Czechoslovakia: The Church at the Crossroads” (pp. 250-60) writes on the basis of personal experience and of judicious reflection, and is sure of his ground. Writing anonymously from within the country, he provides many fascinating insights into the life of the Catholic Church as it is perceived by ordinary believers at grass-roots level. He concludes that the greatest threat to the revitalisation of Christian life does not come from the atheist propagandists, whose message he regards as moribund. It comes rather from the propensity among priests and other church members to accommodate themselves to the demands of the state, for the sake of a quiet life, or for material benefits. “I know from my own experience,” he writes, “that the greatest suffering is caused not by one’s declared enemies but by one’s own brothers in the faith.” Young Czechs and Slovaks are in great need of the message which the church has for them, but they will be repelled by such examples of fear, cowardice and self-seeking. The church will grow only if its members realise that what they must bring to the society around them is “Not the peace of *Pacem in Terris*, but a sword; not presbyteries locked for fear of the latterday conquerors, but ones that are open to the Holy Spirit and the young; not priests walking in fear . . . but priests proclaiming the freedom of the Gospel and attracting all those who seek the Truth.”

The support which the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia now enjoys was recently demonstrated when between 200,000 and 250,000 believers gathered at Velehrad on 6-7 July for an open-air Mass and celebrations. The occasion was the 1,100th anniversary of the death of St Methodius, the “apostle to the Slavs” (see article on pp. 261-68). This gathering, believed to be the largest religious assembly in the history of Czechoslovakia, was all the more remarkable because it was entirely unpublicised officially — news of it was spread only by word of mouth and by *samizdat* periodicals and leaflets.

On a more philosophical level, age-old questions concern Christians in Czechoslovakia as they do Christians everywhere. The theologian Father Josef Zvěřina and the unbelieving writer Eva Kantůrková

corresponded at a profound level about the meaning of the Christian faith (pp. 338-43). And the philosopher Václav Benda argues trenchantly and concisely that while social equality may seem to be a worthy ideal, it is by no means a specifically Christian one (pp. 336-38).

All this indicates that the revitalisation of Catholic life in Czechoslovakia is continuing and expanding. Having suffered the severe anti-religious repression of the 1950s, and then the failure of the "Prague Spring" of 1968, Czech and Slovak Catholics are now experiencing a resurgence of faith, which, as in other countries of Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union, is a decisive rejection of the official ideology. Catholic intellectuals were also given a new impetus by the lead which many of them took in the Charter 77 human rights movement. This revitalisation, however, is taking place almost entirely outside official church institutions, and, in the case of *samizdat* publishing, underground. Although the church's Primate, Cardinal Tomášek, is widely respected, it is clear that the majority of church leaders have accommodated to the state to such an extent that the church cannot officially respond to or channel this revival of grass-roots Catholicism. This, broadly speaking, was the thesis of the last major article on the church in Czechoslovakia which we published in *RCL*, "Modus Moriendi of the Church in Czechoslovakia", by Alexander Tomský (Vol. 10, No. 1, 1982). The events of the last three years have borne out his view.

"Ideology and Atheism in the Soviet Union" (pp. 269-81), is a perceptive and closely-argued article by William van den Bercken. It makes a number of important points about the nature of Soviet ideology — which is often misunderstood in the West — before describing the particular nature of Soviet atheism, and reviewing the reasons why it has to be an integral part of the Soviet system. Anyone who wants to get to grips with the question of why the Soviet authorities react to religion as they do will find this article required reading.

Two other items in this issue show how churches in the Soviet Union have to cope with severe persecution. The new *Chronicle of the Ukrainian Catholic Church* which has begun to appear in *samizdat* describes the extreme repressive measures which Ukrainian Greek Catholics (Uniates) are still having to endure since they were outlawed in 1946 (pp. 292-97). And a detailed report from Belorussia, using firsthand materials, shows how the Catholics there are attempting to resurrect a shattered pastoral network (pp. 298-311).

October 1985

J.E.