

Editorial

Two articles in this issue describe the fate of the Christian churches in Ethiopia since the 1974 revolution. Mikael Doulos provides many examples of repressive measures taken against them, particularly some of the smaller evangelical churches, not excluding cases of the imprisonment and murder of Christian leaders (pp. 134-47). Haile Larebo, himself a native Ethiopian, analyses the situation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (pp. 148-59). Although he does not shrink from describing some of the repressive measures which the regime has used against the church, he concludes that "The revolution did not directly attack the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. . . ." (p. 157). This may seem a strange statement, but it is supported by Doulos. "As the largest and most firmly entrenched church, the EOC has been treated by the junta in a singular way. . . . The regime chose to use methods of infiltration and subversion rather than confrontation." (p. 143). Larebo's article provides interesting background material on the relations between the regime and the Orthodox Church. He emphasises the importance of national issues and regional conflicts, and particularly the tensions between the political centre and the periphery of the country (p. 157). He suggests that the Derg had no comprehensive policy on religion, and that different factions within the ruling circles have sought to exercise their influence in different ways. Thus, in discussing a now notorious "leaked" document which bore the stamp of the Ministry of Information and National Guidance, and which outlined a 12-point plan of actions to be taken to eradicate the Christian churches, Larebo concludes, on p. 156:

It is as difficult to dismiss the document as spurious as it is to prove its authenticity. What is clear, however, is that it did not form part of the government's official policy, for this consisted more of *ad hoc* measures than of any defined programme.

This may be true, particularly in the case of the Orthodox Church, but we should also note Doulos's comment that the non-Orthodox churches did suffer to a greater extent along the lines outlined in the secret document (p. 141). Both authors agree that the Ethiopian churches are spiritually strong. Doulos notes that "church attendance has increased enormously" and says that the churches "are probably intrinsically stronger than they were" (pp. 145-46). Larebo observes that

“the [Orthodox] churches, to the government’s chagrin, are filled to capacity and interest in the Bible is growing” (p. 158).

An interesting thesis on possible developments within the Hungarian Catholic Church is put forward by János Wildmann in an article on pp. 160-71. Noting that in recent decades, and especially since the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church has moved away from former concepts of a “ruling church” and has begun to substitute the concept of the “church of the people”, he examines the extent to which such a transition has been possible in Hungary. Although he considers that so far as the church’s hierarchy is concerned, the signs of any such transition are negligible, he does note that there has been a shift of thinking in this direction at grass-roots level. This particularly applies to the basis communities, especially those which centre around the Piarist priest Fr György Bulányi. We have described the Hungarian basis communities before in *RCL* (Vol. 12 No. 1, 1984). Wildmann now updates the situation and provides more detail. He writes as an “insider”, being a native Hungarian who, when he lived in Hungary, was closely associated with Father Bulányi. Wildmann’s article ends with a prescriptive rather than descriptive account of the ways in which he, as a Bulányist, would like to see this network of basis communities develop in future.

The publication of this article in *RCL* is timely, because the writings of Father Bulányi are at present under consideration at the Vatican by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The Hungarian hierarchy has requested that the Vatican condemn Father Bulányi’s views as non-Catholic. Publication of an earlier version of this article by Wildmann in a Hungarian-language publication in Rome has already led to controversy between the three parties concerned — the Hungarian hierarchy, the Bulányists, and the Vatican.

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After five years as *RCL*’s editor, I am handing over to Paul Booth, Keston College’s specialist on Romania. I have greatly valued my time as editor, which has helped to increase my knowledge of countries which are *RCL*’s concern in a way that few other jobs could have done. I hope to continue to be involved with the journal, particularly during 1987 and 1988, when we plan to devote a good deal of space to coverage of the millennium of the Christianisation of the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia in about 988. I shall be sorry to miss the milestone of computerising the production of the journal, which we hope will take place later this year, and which should result in considerable savings in time for the editorial staff, and also in costs. The next issue of *RCL* will be the fiftieth, another important milestone.

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