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PROTESTANTISM IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

by Albert Rasker

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I. Josef Lukl Hromádka

Prior to describing the current situation of Protestantism in Czechoslovakia, I want to present to the readers some information and reflections in memory of Josef Lukl Hromádka, who may be respected as one of the greatest theological leaders of Czechoslovakian Protestantism, a man in a direct line with Jan Hus and Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius).

Josef Hromádka was born on June 8, 1889, in Hodslavice in Moravia (Walachia), one of those remote regions where Hussite Protestants, during the long and heavy persecution since the battle on the White Mountain (1620) had been able to survive in secrecy. In 1781 the emperor, Josef II, moved by ideas of the Enlightenment, gave the Hussites very restricted liberties, but only, under the condition that they had to choose between the Augsburg (Lutheran) or Helvetian (Calvinist) confession; adherence to the Hussite confession (due to its association with a revolutionary past) remained strictly forbidden. Only after 1918, namely after the collapse of the Austrian-Hungarian empire,
in the new-founded Czechoslovakian republic, was religious liberty for evangelical Christians acknowledged without restrictions, so that they could openly confess their faith in line with the Hussite tradition.

One of the first things that West-Europeans and Americans need to learn in ecumenical contacts with their Czechoslovakian sisters and brethren is to be conscious of their history full of suffering, since the death of Jan Hus (1415), the exile of Jan Amos Komenský (1621), the very restricted liberties of 1781 until the end of the Habsburg monarchy in 1918. For my Dutch compatriots it is essential to remind them that the same Westphalian Peace of 1648, which guaranteed the Dutch full national and religious freedom, took all those liberties away from them. Already by that Peace they were abandoned by the western countries, and that was repeated three centuries later, in 1938, by the Munich Agreement, in a different context but with an obvious analogy. When we are insufficiently conscious of this past as a chain of historical errors, all indignant contentions about the lack of political and religious liberty in their country seem to be idle and self-righteous.

In his youth, when Bohemia and Moravia were still a part of Austria under the Habsburg monarchy, Josef Hromádka studied in Vienna, Basel, Heidelberg and Aberdeen. After having obtained his doctor of philosophy degree (on a thesis on Thomas G. Masaryk) at the University of Prague, and after a short time in pastoral service, he received a call in 1920 to the chair for systematic theology at the Hussite faculty, founded in the first year of Czechoslovakian liberty (1919). There he soon became facile princeps, undisputedly the leader of Czechoslovakian Protestantism, and remained so until his death.

In the West his name became known when Karl Barth wrote him in September 1938, shortly before the Munich Agreement: "... with the liberty of your people it is to be expected that the liberty of Europe, and possibly more than Europe, will be at stake."

During the war, in which Karl Barth's prophecy was terrifyingly fulfilled, Hromádka was in exile in the United States, where he taught theology at Princeton Theological Seminary (1939-1947). He would have been welcome to stay there, but regarded it as his duty to return to his own country and church, notwithstanding or exactly because of the
Communist take-over in February 1948. Ever since 1918 he had been interested in the Russian revolution, and regarded that several aspects of it were a good and promising experiment, quite the contrary to National Socialism, which in his opinion was "an immeasurable catastrophe, a suppurring wound, a disease at the roots of human life." ¹

It was only half a year later, in August 1948, that Hromádka was a delegate and speaker at the first General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam, where he opposed John Foster Dulles, who wished to make the World Council of Churches an instrument of anti-Communism. In many Western circles this brought upon Hromádka the suspicion of being a fellow-traveller, with the result that he had great difficulty in obtaining an American visa for his participation in the second General Assembly in Evanston (1954). The warning expressed by this Assembly against the "anti-Communist hysteria," the Cold War mentality, and the resolution in which it called the members of all churches towards a common "service of reconciliation in proclaiming Christ as the Hope for the World," certainly reflected his influence. From that time he became one of the most remarkable leading personalities in the World Council of Churches.

It was also in line with the Evanston resolutions that Hromádka together with others founded the Christian Peace Conference in 1958. This conference was to serve as an instrument to mobilize churches and Christian individuals in the service of reconciliation and peace between nations, as a means to better mutual understanding, co-existence and dialogue. Only some years later, the Christian responsibility for the problems of the Third World and neo-colonialism was routinely added to the tasks of the Christian Peace Conference. From the beginning Hromádka was the president and an inspiring leader of this movement.

Hromádka was not only a theologian gifted with great talents and broad insights; he was also a most agreeable personality, with Christian love and sincere humanity. His disciple (and later his colleague), the historian Rudolf Rittan, wrote that after Jan Amos Komenský no other Czechoslovakian theologian has been of such importance for his own church and the church in general, for his people and the cultural world, as this his Moravian compatriot.
Already when he was, as a young man, vicar in Prague, he pleaded for a reunion of the Lutheran and Reformed congregations into the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren, a restoration towards the origins of the Hussite Reformation. This idea was received positively by the people. Membership increased through large transfers (for more details see part II of this article). But unclarity remained about fundamental notions as many adherents understood Protestantism merely as a symbol for religiously colored patriotism and bourgeois mentality.

So Hromádka saw as one of his first tasks explaining to pastors and congregations the difference between this newly arisen patriotism or nationalism and the Christian faith. His first larger publication— in 1919, on Masaryk, the philosopher, politician, and respected first president of the young republic—was especially devoted to this important theme. With increasing conviction and clarity he pointed to the dividing line between human ideals and the belief in the transcendental, holy God and God's loving grace. Thus his theology of revelation became a permanent criticism of ideology, religiosity, church and culture. It developed analogously with the thinking of Karl Barth, but independently from him. In later years this resulted in deep mutual sympathy and understanding between the two.

Such theology did not mean an abnegation, but rather a deeper understanding of real humanism, based on God's descending solidarity with people. God seeks the human being not in human idealism but in corruption, sin, and in all those places and situations which are in direct contradiction with God's holiness, justice and love. God seeks the human being in hopelessness, guilt, blood and tears. God's revelation in Christ is saving solidarity and the gospel is a liberating message of freedom, joy and hope. This is the central theme of Hromádka's dogmatic work, The Gospel on Its Way to Man.²

In this confession of faith in God's saving solidarity, Hromádka stressed consistently the ethical consequences: the Word calls us to service, God's calling concerns the whole person, and this not to be understood as a hard law, but as a promise of grace, in God's free decision. This truth opens our eyes that we may see clearly the reality of our lives, the lives of our neighbors and the whole human community.
The church is on its way to the human being: the people of the new Covenant through the Holy Ghost. The church is not only carrying the message but is also the instrument of God's liberating work in Christ. The church's limitless task is to serve so that people may be helped and the world may become a place of true humanity.

In Hromádka's view the church bears the character of fervent longing for Christ's ultimate victory, an eschatological character. The church is a pilgrim, striving forward, at each step and every moment meeting new tasks and opportunities. Confessing God as a living God, who works, does wonders and creates, we confess implicitly our preparedness for His service. This makes us free from all fear of changes, from all kinds of conservatism, and makes us ready for improving human community, for justice and beauty.

Consequently, Hromádka, in his political engagement, has not been disloyal to his theological convictions. In his younger years he had refused to identify his theology with political ideals, and so he did in later times. The sources of his engagement were neither Czechoslovakian patriotism, nor any philosophy of history, neither nationalism nor historical materialism, but always and consistently in the line of Hussite tradition, its fervent interest in human solidarity and eschatological outlook.

He knew of the mistrust and hard pronouncements of the Lutheran and Calvinist confessions of the 16th century against all kinds of revolutionary changes (clearly as reaction to the Anabaptist and peasant uprisings), and used to say that such pronouncements were directed against what we, in our day, call "the eschatological view of the future." He knew that the history of Christian peoples has been characterized by several radical and creative changes; therefore he saw revolutions not as anti-Christian but as expressions of the deep longing for progress and improvement, breaking out explosively as often as churches or worldly governments tried to suppress them with an appeal to immovable orders in the name of God. This insight was in conformity with the heritage of the Hussites who understood the Christian faith as new expectation, preparedness for God's new and wonderful deeds.
With this line of thinking, Hromádka gave account of what he had said ten years earlier in the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1948) in his opposition to John Foster Dulles: "Communism represents, although under an atheistic form, much of the social impetus of the living church." Those who used to accuse him of a naive or even treacherous adaptation to Communism should be attentive to his sharp criticism, in the same lecture, of the actual developments of Communism (n.b. 30 years before Rudolf Bahro wrote against the "really existing Communism") when he said that Communism had been most unfaithful to its original, humanist intentions, and "carries in itself many perils for the sacredness of human personality and for the majesty of justice and love." Therefore he did not opt in Amsterdam for Communism during the Cold War in the same unequivocal way in which Dulles and many others in the West chose to oppose it. But Hromádka hoped for a real encounter of East and West, in honest dialogue, to overcome the spirit of Cold War, mistrust and hate. He expected a renewal of the social and international structures as a historical necessity, irreversible, for Christians in West and East as a reason for penitence and conversion.

In this spirit Hromádka with several others who had visited the Second WCC Assembly in Evanston founded the Christian Peace Conference [C.P.C. hereafter] in 1958. Of course, the C.P.C. had only restricted possibilities and was hindered by the dominant mutual mistrust between East and West. Again, it was in this same spirit that Hromádka was one of those who welcomed with joy and expectation the "Prague Spring" of 1968, the rapid development of a "socialism with a human face." Afterwards, looking back, he wrote that "a real revolution towards a truly more human and creative socialism came into existence - it was a move forward, not backward." In his opinion the Czechoslovakian people, although not wishing to move over to the other side in the Cold War, saw for themselves and also for the other socialist states as well as for the international relations in general, new, promising possibilities.

This is not the place to give an analysis or judgment of the events following the "Prague Spring." The sad result is well-known: not a fruitful dialogue but a hardening of the controversies. The break
between East and West had among its consequences a break even in the C.P.C. itself. Hromádka considered the August 21, 1968 intervention, and the 14th of November, 1969 (the day when he felt obliged to abdicate as president of the C.P.C.) as the most difficult days of his life. Six weeks later, on the second Christmasday, he died.

In the last weeks of his life Hromádka admonished his friends not to cure the wound quickly. "We have to make a totally new beginning," he said, "and the international situation is more difficult and threatening than ten years ago." But he did also wish that they would not resign themselves. He was, as his friend Heinz Kloppenburg had written on the occasion of Hromádka's eightieth birthday, "one of those people who are persistently, stubbornly hopeful."

In Hromádka the spirit of the Hussite Reformation, once originated in Prague, has received a new impulse, in a people that had to go, through the whole of its history, difficult ways, but also had known of his persistent hope. In one of his last sermons, in Plzen⁴, on September 14, 1969, he said: "The victory of power is only short-lived, the real victory is won only by what is in the depth: going without fear, without cynicism, without pessimism, in the direction shown to us, on the way of Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jesus . . . ."

II. A Visit to Czechoslovakia and Czechoslovakian Churches in 1981

I now wish to invite the reader to join me on a private visit to Czechoslovakia, not just as a tourist for a standardized program, but with the resolute purpose really to meet people, which is not difficult since many Czech and Slovak citizens have a good knowledge of English or German or both of these languages. Once one has obtained a visa, one can go to friends in their hospitable homes, maybe for dinner, maybe just to be their guest for a couple of days, go for a walk through Prague, the old, somewhat fatigued, but still fascinating city in the heart of Europe, visit the Strahov monastery, now a museum, its impressive library and in it an interesting exhibition of ancient and modern books. One can admire the newly built spacious central station and the Metro, after the Russian design, but also the slow but
continuous process of careful restoration of old buildings or even whole streets.

Let our first visit be to the center of Hromádka's church, the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren (Ceskobratraská církev evangelická), situated in the Hus House (Jungmannová 9 in Prague), where not only the central administration (Synodal Board) of this Church, but also the theological faculty, named after Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius), the publishing house and bookshop, Kalich, and the offices of the C.P.C. are housed. Here and afterwards in many other places one would have the opportunity and privilege of discussions with theologians and philosophers, with ministers and members of their congregations, with younger and older people, with Christians and non-Christians, and so gradually come to learn and understand much of their lives and circumstances, often different from ours, but still, in what is most essential, so much that is similar and recognizable.

In many such meetings and conversations it is not only interesting but of existential importance for the Dutch to learn how much analogy there is between the Czechoslovakian people and ourselves, in history an analogous long struggle for freedom of religion and reformation of church and society. The Hussite reformation was a century earlier than ours - but later on everything turned for them for the worst: when we, the Dutch, in 1648 by the Westphalian peace treaty could consolidate our liberties, the same peace treaty took away all their liberties.

It was not until 1918 that they could enjoy having a free democratic state, under the inspiration of their most beloved first president Thomas Masaryk, politician and philosopher. This could only last until 1938. After having been liberated from the German occupation by the Russians and their own nationalist partisans, only a few years later they had to accept again a regime that they would not have chosen in liberty. This is well known.

The short experiment with a "socialism with a human face," which they had tasted with enthusiasm around the year 1968 could not last. Of course, all of this is always in the background and from time to time in the foreground of many conversations.

A good friend explained to me that in 1948, after the Communist
take-over, the intention of those in power was that the Czechoslovakian republic should be developed into a radical Marxist-Leninist society, as a model for other countries. Nowhere, with the exception of the Soviet Union, was the socialization of the means of production, i.e. all kinds of businesses and enterprises from the very small ones to the largest ones, realized so unconditionally. This must have been the very reason why the ideal of a democratic, humanistic socialism could not be appreciated by the other Warsaw Pact leaders as a new, promising experiment, but was regarded a threat and danger.

This is the context in which many Czechoslovakian people look with a kind of astonishment or even jealousy at the way in which in their neighboring country of Hungary was put down after the insurrection of 1956 and has developed, little by little, a certain amount of social liberties. Many, of course, displayed a great interest in the recent development in Poland, which during my visit still looked so very promising. On the other hand, most people do realize that their country is in the heart of Europe, on the dividing line between East and West, and therefore has little chance for change so long as a political and military detente between the Soviet Union and the United States, Warsaw Pact and NATO, fails to make progress.

Often the conversation turns toward the Charter '77 movement, which in our "free Western world" meets with great interest and sympathy. It started in January 1977 as an appeal of people of letters and studies, writers and scholars, who asked the government to realize more of the human rights and freedom, according to the Helsinki Accord of 1975, signed also by the government of CSSR. Its roots lay deeper, at least as far back as the period of the "Prague Spring" around 1968, and thus is an outspoken criticism of the "really existing socialism." The official authorities reacted and still are reacting sharply and nervously—especially those who, after the Prague Spring when they lost their academic and other positions, are victims again. The blow has hit very hard in many cases.

Among the subscribers of Charter '77 are a certain number of theologians, students, and ministers who already some years earlier, under the name of "Nová orientace" [New Orientation], had been raising
objections against the theological faculty, and the Synodal Board of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren because of their too uncritical attitude towards the government. It seems to me that this controversy can be explained with the help of the distinctions made by Paul Mojzes in his article, "Impact of the Eastern European Churches Upon Their Own Societies" (OPREE, Vol. II, No. 7). With the remark that such distinctions cannot be made with sharply dividing lines, it is possible to say that the attitude of most of the leaders of the larger Protestant Churches can be defined as "religion within socialism" and some even with the model of "religion for socialism." I think that in the case of Hromádka there are links with both of these kinds of attitudes, as long as we acknowledge his great interest in the political and social responsibility of the church and that his deepest motives were theological. In the context of contemporary history, his must not be understood as a "path of bold acceptance of socialism with the attempt to gain credence in socialist society." However, this was exactly the reproach of "Nová orientace."

For the most part, the "Nová orientace" group was sympathizing with the Charter movement since 1977. Some of them went so far, and still do, as to proclaim an unmistakable analogy between Charter '77 and the Theses of Barmen (1934) of the Confessing Church in Germany against the so-called "German Christians."

It is a serious question whether this analogy is accurate. I asked this question of several persons including the philosopher-theologian Hejdansék, one of the speakers of Charter '77 who, like so many others, has been dismissed for this reason from his teaching position at the University and at the theological faculty. He answered that this analogy does not hold, that the Charter does not rest on such a profound foundation and that it is not a confession of faith or a creed, but a more practical appeal on humanistic grounds, addressed to the government and the public opinion, protesting against acts of government authorities contrary to the officially accepted declarations of human rights by the United Nations and the Helsinki Final Act.

An older minister, my good friend since our common studies with Emil Brunner in Zürich in 1930, who himself has had his share in
conflict situations with government officials and was suspended for a period from his ministerial work, told me that the essential point concerning "Nová orientace" and Charter '77 is not that Charter '77 is like the Barmen Theses, the confession of "Jesus Christ as the one and only Word of God" but it is a declaration on general humanistic bases. Nevertheless, so he said, their adherents declare and often perform good and significant things and that he can often agree with them. On the other hand, they have a tendency to radicalism, to too elevated standards, platonic-idealistic, not realistic, not socratic-dialogic approaches. Although there is reason to respect their courageous attitude, he did not find it wise for a minister to risk his position, the more because the church has already a shortage of good pastors. This was the opinion of my friend.

Since I myself had the opportunity to know a number of cases personally, I am fully convinced that it is no good to speak of this problem in general terms in indignation or condemnation. The situation of the ministers, their families, their congregations, may be different from case to case in respect to the deepest existential and spiritual motives. Confessing Jesus Christ as the only Word of God and pleading for human rights and liberties may coincide in some cases but fundamentally the two are not the same.

Our conclusion must certainly be that the situation of the Church is by no means comfortable. The number of church-goers is in most cases diminishing and consists predominantly of women and older people. Those of the younger generation who are actively participating in church life encounter for that reason difficulties in their study or work. Still one should not generalize even this statement. There are still congregations with remarkable activities. There are also younger people who take the risk of not being admitted to study, and in several cases find it possible to overcome this difficulty by what one could call "a round about way." Or, they accept a job at a lower level than they really deserve, and then, some years later, having proved themselves to be respectable members of the working class, they can get a good promotion, or be accepted for study.
It may be said that children of ministers, since they more than others stand in the limelight of public opinion and attract the attention of foreign visitors, often seem to meet fewer difficulties than those of "ordinary people." This is not to say that things are always running smoothly, especially the access to leadership positions, which is very difficult. So for confessing Christians it is almost impossible to get a position as a teacher, or for a doctor who is active in a congregation to become a director of a hospital. Apart from or on top of all this it is necessary to remark, however, that so-called dissident Marxists or Charter '77 speakers often face more disagreeable difficulties than confessing Christians and their children.

The general policies of the government are certainly not favorable for the churches. But it can happen that for personal or tactical reasons a change takes place, or a measure is not put into practice. I could tell of conversations and encounters, of a number of characteristic cases, symptomatic but not yielding an overall pattern. The entire situation seems elusive. Decisions are often taken by subordinate government officials, with the effect that one encounters a certain kind of arbitrariness. In addition, inconsistent decisions between the federal, regional, or local level is inevitable.

III. Other Churches

There are other non-Catholic Churches in Czechoslovakia. One of them is The Silesian Evangelical Church AC (of the Augsburg Confession, that is, Lutheran), mainly situated in the Eastern Silesian part of the Republic. It includes those congregations which, after the Tolerance Act of 1781, opted for the Lutheran confession and remained faithful to it after the foundation of the Republic in 1918. It is headed by a Bishop and a Church Council; it has its own theological faculty in Bratislava, and has good relations with the Lutheran Church in Poland and the Lutheran World Federation.

The larger part of its congregations use the Silesian language (which is slightly different from Czech); a smaller part are Polish-speaking. It has close relations with the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren, standing with it in the Hussite tradition. In general,
the problems of being witnesses of the Gospel in a Socialist state and society are the same for both.

The total membership of these two churches, about 4.5% of the population, is almost equal to that of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, which is the largest of the non-Roman Catholic Churches in Czechoslovakia. This church has gone through an interesting development with several changes, beginning soon after the foundation of the new republic in 1918. The Roman Catholic Church, formerly closely connected with the Habsburg monarchy of Austria, meeting with a broad opposition from the awakened national consciousness, lost to this church a large number of its adherents. In addition to this loss there was a movement of modernist priests who had previously expressed wishes for radical ecclesiastical reform. These wishes were altogether rejected by Pope Benedict XV in 1919. The saying of the Mass in the Czech language by these priests on Christmas 1919 was the first signal of the secession which was effected in January 1920 with the foundation of the Czechoslovak Church under the influential leader Karel Farský as its first patriarch. For a short time there was a tendency to unite with the Eastern Orthodox Church, which was, however, counterbalanced by Karel Farský's preference for modernist liberal theology. At the same time the spirituality of the Old Church was preserved by a hymnbook and liturgy, founded on Scripture and tradition. The celebration of Holy Communion each Sunday marks a difference with the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, which concentrates on preaching the Gospel regularly and celebrating Holy Communion only seven times a year.

Under the third patriarch, František Kovař, the modernist line in theology was abandoned and much emphasis was placed on Biblical studies in the training for the ministry. At present this training is done at its own theological school, named after Jan Hus. Since 1971 the Church changed its name to Czechoslovak Hussite Church. The attitude of its leaders toward the government seems to be slightly in the line of the category "Christians for Socialism," according to Paul Mojzes' formula. A number of other non-Catholic churches, most of them very small, have been mentioned in Paul Bock's article (OPREE, Vol. II, No. 2, April 1982). A little additional information may be of interest.
The Orthodox Church in Czechoslovakia has an old history, going back to the Byzantine mission of Cyril and Methodius in the ninth century. It is headed by its own metropolitan in Prague and claims to have 150,000 members in 143 parishes and 4 dioceses.

Of the Hussite churches the oldest is the Jednota bratřská [Unity of Brethren], founded as early as 1457 in Kunvald, Bohemia, by Petr Chelcíchký. From the beginning it was a pacifist church, practicing non-violent Hussitism. Jan Amos Komenský, who died in exile in Amsterdam in 1670, was, after Jan Hus, its most influential theologian. The exile of many of the Brethren, forced by the counter-reformation, led to emigration to Herrnhut (Germany). Since then, through the influence of Nicholas Zinzendorf, the Unity of Brethren, or Unitas Fratrum, has grown to be one of the most international Christian denominations with great missionary activity. Much younger is the Church of Brethren, originating from revivalist movements of American missionaries in the second part of the 19th century.

The United Methodist Church was introduced in Czechoslovakia in 1921; The Baptist Union about the same time.

Apart from these there are smaller groups and movements, such as Pentecostals, Adventists, and others.

The Ecumenical Council in the Czech Socialist Republic has had two forerunners in the Unity of Konstanz [Kosnická Jednota] established in 1905 and the Union of Evangelical Churches in 1927. After World War II a new start was inevitable. This led to the establishment of the Ecumenical Council in 1955, consisting of seven churches, linked together by the basic formula of the World Council of Churches as "a community of Churches who confess our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior." Gradually it came to include practically all Christian communities in the country, with the exception of the Roman Catholic Church.

IV. Bible, Bible Translation and Other Theological Activities

The Bible and Bible translations have, since the beginning of Christianity, occupied the central place in the Czech regions. Already
in the ninth century, the first missionaries, Cyril and Methodius, from Byzantium, translated the whole Bible into Old Slavonic. Later, in the 14th century, the Czechs possessed a translation of the whole Bible in their own vernacular, an accomplishment of which only very few Europeans could boast. In the 15th century the emphasis placed on the Scriptures by the pre-Hussite and Hussite movements, led to wide dissemination of the Bible and its knowledge even among common people. The first printing of the whole Bible in Czech was completed in 1488. A century later a new translation, in six volumes, the so-called Kralice Bible, with annotations, was completed under the supervision of the Unity of Brethren between 1579 and 1594. This Bible, to be followed by many one-volume editions, has remained the most beloved Czech Bible, comparable in its religious and cultural influence to Luther's German translation, until today.

The most recent fruit of Biblical scholarship is a new translation which was initiated by the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren in 1961. Two teams of translators were established: one for the Old Testament, under Professor Bič; one for the New Testament, under Professor Soucek (died 1972). Soon both teams acquired an ecumenical character by participation of specialists from other churches, including some Roman Catholics. The work was completed during the 400th anniversary of the Kralice Bible in 1979. The Old Testament translation gives the text with commentary; the New Testament presents the text with necessary annotations. The first edition, published twice with 60,000 copies in each printing, was soon sold out. It may be followed by others. But first a new edition with the apocrypha is being prepared to serve the Roman Catholics. The new translation has already found its place in the life of the congregations, as a worthy successor of the Kralice Bible, which will also be reprinted.

Some years ago a Biblical concordance in three volumes and a Biblical dictionary were completed and edited. In or about 1981 a new hymnbook for religious services was introduced and has been well received.

All these are monuments to the real Church leadership in
cooperation with the theological faculties, monuments, too, of the importance of theology for the life of the churches, each separately or through their ecumenical cooperation. A little information on the position and work of the theological schools is needed. During the First Republic the theological faculties formed part of the Universities. Since the radical separation between church and state in 1948 they stand independently (although doctoral degrees are still being granted by the authority of the rector of the University). At present there are six theological schools: the Komenský seminary of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren and the Hus seminary of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, both in Prague, the Evangelical Lutheran seminary in Bratislava, an Orthodox school in Prešov, and two Roman Catholic seminaries in Bratislava and Kromerice.

The reader must realize that this record of a personal visit does not give complete information on the work of these faculties, but only some informal impressions, and this mainly about the Comenius theological faculty with which I have more personal association than with the others. The first task of a theological faculty, the training for the ministry, is done with great care and on a respectable academic level. The admission of students is conditioned and restricted by government regulations. Their number might be sufficient for the needs of the churches. But, as everywhere, there are always among the students those who have great hesitations to become pastors. On the other hand, there are also those who once starting out of a general interest for theology become seized by real dedication to the service of the Gospel. In 1981/82 the Comenius seminary enrolled 65 students (48 male, 17 female), most from the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren, some from several of the other Protestant churches, and three foreigners. Six of the students had the opportunity to study abroad (East Germany, West Germany, and Scotland).

The task of the faculties does not include only the training for the ministry but also includes the in-service-training by the way of special courses and conferences for ministers, and provides education for laity. Apart from this, they also perform an ecumenical task, e.g. in preparatory work for the W.C.C. Assembly in Vancouver which is to
take place in 1983, and to provide assistance to study groups of the C.P.C.

As stated earlier, the study of the Old Testament and New Testament has a central place, and is represented in the Comenius and several other faculties by men and women of international reputation. The same can be said of professors of the other subjects, especially systematic theology, church history and practical theology. To the names already mentioned--Hromádka, Bílek, Soček, and Ríčan--I might add J. Heller for O.T., Petr Pokorný for N.T., J. Smolík for practical theology, A. Molnár for church history, Sl. Ondrá for ecumenics--all on the Comenius faculty; Zd. Trtík as systematician, M. Kanač as church historian, J. Mánek for N.T., An. Ebertová for social theology, and M. Salajka for ecumenics, at other seminaries.

Their possibility to publish is restricted, but not totally eliminated. The Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren has its own publishing house and bookshop "Kalich" in Prague. The list of publications here and in other places is longer than one would expect in the given circumstances. Apart from this there are possibilities also to publish in other languages, at home as well as in foreign countries.

Instead of making a vain attempt to provide comprehensive information, I should like to give two or three interesting examples of Biblical theology.

Dr. B.J.S., minister in Vestín in Moravia, received his doctoral degree in 1981 at the Comenius theological school with a N.T. study on the Pastoral Letters from the viewpoint of "the problem of self-censure in the N.T. witness." He is continuing his work with a study on the historiography of Luke from the same point of view. While Dr. S. does not suffer difficulties from the government, the situation is different in the case of J.D., a minister of the same church. He has been publishing for several years about the Ark of the Covenant with some very original, some very risky hypotheses ("Die Wanderung der Lade") and about the theory of O.T. sources. This work has appeared in Czech and in foreign languages. He belongs to the "Nová orientace" and the Charter '77 group, which cost him his government permission to serve as a minister; he therefore had to take a job in a factory. At the time of my
visit he hoped to get a foreign stipend, a hope which has been accomplished in the meantime due to the intervention of Professor P.A.H. de Boer of the Leyden University and the help of a Dutch Church fund. This officially gave him the liberty to be free from his obligatory factory work and to continue his study on a new theory of the history of Israel.

J.A.D., minister in Sternberk in Moravia, has for years devoted his attention to dogmatic studies. I was a guest in his vicarage and had good talks with him and his Roman Catholic colleague. He is fascinated by the problem of how human suffering can be in harmony with God's providence. On this theme he has published several articles and is now planning a book, *Light on Suffering in Judaism and Christianity In Relation to Bonhoeffer's Ideas*, which I hope he is successful in completing and publishing.

In this context one must mention the philosopher Milan Machovec, who entered into the dialogue on Marxism and Christianity with Hromádka and others and wrote several important books on the subject. A kind of summary or crown of all of this was his book, *A Marxist View of Jesus*, originally in Czech (1972), translated in English (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), German and other languages. This book and his part in the Prague Spring cost him his university position and many good personal contacts; some of his friends and former students accepted the opportunity offered to them by officials to emigrate (most likely with no chance of return) but he refused to make use of this possibility. A few years ago he was planning a follow-up to his Jesus book by writing another one, *Marx for Christians*, but it seems now that this may be incorporated into a more extensive book on philosophy of culture and history on which he planning. He wrote about the greatness and distress, the wisdom and errors of antique philosophy of resignation and capitulation, of Epicureanism and Hedonism, developed in Europe, which is nowadays manifested in consumer mentality and egoism, which must lead to a catastrophe. He is opposed to this tendency by pointing to the real dynamic of European history: from Abraham's restlessness to the expectations and visions of the prophets, offering a new type of philosophy of history, concerning greatness and tragedy or humanity's
way to the future. I hope that during my next visit I shall learn that he has finished this book. Even more do I hope that it can be published in Machovec's own language as well as in others, since its content will be important for all who are carrying the burden of heavy responsibilities, Christians and non-Christians, in East and West. It would be a good thing if this hope were not in vain.

Much more of interest and value could be written. Therefore the reader is requested to not take what is written here in any way as sufficient information. I am merely happy to play a modest part in the large orchestra of those who, with their personal knowledge and experience, are trying to contribute to better mutual understanding and so to peaceful coexistence between the peoples in East and West.

Endnotes

1 Evangelium für Atheisten, p. 31 ff.
2 German: Das Evangelium auf dem Wege zum Menschen, 1963.
4 Hebrews 11:24-29.
Appendix I

Article 32 of the Constitution of the C.S.S.R. states:

1. Freedom of confession is guaranteed. Each citizen is free to confess any religious faith or to be without confession, and to exercise religious acts, provided that they are not contradictory to a law.

2. Religious conviction cannot be acknowledged as a reason to refuse the fulfillment of a civilian obligation imposed by law.

It is remarkable that in this manner the State, which claims to be more Orthodox in the Marxist-Leninist line than others, not only guarantees tolerance towards religion, but even takes care of the financial necessities of the churches, especially in paying the salaries of the clergy, the costs of church offices and theological seminaries according to precise regulations.

The ideological background of this astonishing fact is that, although for the Communist ideology religion and churches are essentially undesirable and contradictory remnants of bourgeois mentality, and the state is in favor of atheistic propaganda and teaching, nevertheless it takes into consideration that many citizens, whose cooperation for the building of socialism is indispensable, are still under the spell of religious ideas. Therefore, their religious wants are to be satisfied, under the condition that this is to be seen as an indispensable measure for managing a transitory evil. At the same time, in order to prevent the influence of the churches upon public life, especially in politics and school teaching, their positions and activities are bound by strict limitations under governmental supervision. This supervision is exercised by a ministry for church affairs and a network of regional and local secretariates. It is in this context that, on the one side, each appointment of priests, ministers and higher ecclesiastical officials is conditioned by governmental consent, which can also be and often is being refused or suspended and is the cause of the kind of conflict situations described above while, on the other hand, the government can exert influence upon them by threatening the security of their financial and social position.

The salary of clergy are on the lowest level of governmental salaries. It consists of a basic salary with some increase according to
years of office, positions of higher responsibility, etc., and has
undergone some necessary increase lately. The congregation provides for
the housing but is not allowed to provide for extra allowances. For the
rest the normal social benefits for all citizens are valid also for
ministers and other church officials (e.g. old age pension, extra
allowances for mothers with children, public health care, etc.).

Appendix II

Some literature

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