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THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

by Josef Rabas

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There can be no doubt that there is no Eastern bloc Communist country where the current situation of the Catholic Church is as difficult and severe as it is in Czechoslovakia--with the exception of Lithuania and the outlawed Greek Catholic churches in the Soviet Union and Rumania. In Czechoslovakia, it is quite openly announced, and confirmed by the highest representatives of party and government, that the purpose of the fight against religious faith, against churches and religious communities, against bishops, priests, religious orders and church members is the elimination of every trace of human religiosity. According to this agenda, any faith in God must die out, and in its place everyone is to be taught "belief" in the socialist individual in the communist society. The religious person is to be replaced by the person who thinks and works in terms of socialism. Religious belief is to be replaced by "belief" in Marxism-Leninism, the materialistic, "scientific" world view, which can and must be nothing other than atheistic.

This goal has been pursued in Czechoslovakia since 1948 by every means and with every available human resource. In order to put into perspective the effects of this process upon the situation of the Catholic Church today, it is appropriate to look at the course taken over the last 35 years which has led to such a state of affairs, and then to look at the present with this history in mind.

1. The Way to Oppression

1. First Beginnings

At the collapse of the National Socialist regime in the Spring of 1945, the Czechs and Slovaks had regained their national independence, which they had shared prior to 1939. However, from the very beginning the Communist Party succeeded in seizing hold of the most important positions in the State. Church life, too, was once again free to develop, yet the Christians in the various religious communities, including the Czech Catholics, were not equal to the tactics of the Communist Party, and offered too little resistance to its efforts. The Catholics were too preoccupied with national political and socio-political developments, which to a great extent were steered consciously and cleverly by the Communist Party leadership. In particular, the Catholic Church in Bohemia and Moravia was weakened from within by the forced emigration of more than 3 million Germans, who were for the most part Catholics. This loss was neither compensated for in numbers nor existentially dealt with by the Czech Catholic clergy and membership. Hence the Catholic Church, by failing to resist the forced removal of a part of its population which had settled the country centuries before and made an essential contribution to its culture and economy, was co-responsible for the undermining of the meaning of right and of ethics among its own people. In this way, the fundamental rights of existence of a people were destroyed, and it was this that very soon made it appear easier to undermine the rights of one's own citizens as well.¹ The reign of terror of the Communist Party, especially toward those citizens who stood in its way, was thus given grounding in the consciousness of the people.²

Very soon after the Communist Party had seized total power in the State in February 1948, repressive measures against the Catholic Church began. The Episcopate and the government began conversations, the aim of which was to bring the Catholic Church around to publicly recognize the rule of the Communist Party. However, all the Catholic bishops refused to do this. Yet the discussions were not broken off; the bishops were willing to come to an accord if the Party leadership, for its part, was willing to make certain essential concessions to the Church.

This, then, was the background to the open battle against the Church which began in 1949. The bishops continued to defend the basic rights of the Church and refused to make any political statement. From now on, they met obstacles in carrying out their official responsibilities, particularly in their relationships to the clergy. In addition, the government won over a very few clergy who were willing to collaborate with the Communist Party. With their help and that of several "progressive" Catholic laypeople, the government set about splitting the Church in order to achieve its goal of the complete control of the Church without the bishops. In the summer of 1959 the government proceeded to found, within the bounds of the Church, a "Catholic Action" group pliant to its will. The bishops heard about it in time. In a common pastoral letter to all their parishes, they spoke out openly and clearly against this "Catholic Action" group planned by the Communist Party, and forbade all Catholics to join or participate. The group was founded, nevertheless, in all likelihood with strong support from the Communist Party organization, which included a very few Catholic clergy. But it was an insignificant group, because there was little response from clergy or membership. It soon disappeared quietly from the scene, without having managed to play any significant role.

The Party leadership, however, did not give up the fight. Now they began a campaign against the bishops themselves. They, as well as the Pope, were attacked in radio broadcasts. Archbishop Beran was held hostage by the police in his own home, on the instructions of the Communist Minister of the Interior, and was prevented from carrying out any official activities. Here, as in all other dioceses, such activity was monitored and directed by state inspectors. In so doing, the government was perhaps invoking an old law from the year 1874, but enforcing it much more strictly.³

2. State Laws Against the Church

At this time, following a Soviet Russian model, a system was initiated in Czechoslovakia aiming at total control over the Church by the Communist State. This action had a three-fold purpose:

1. to prevent any contact of the national church with the Holy See.

2. to isolate the bishops from the clergy and believers.
3. to establish an independent apparatus of the state with which to control the churches.

The Prague parliament passed a number of laws which went into effect beginning October 14, 1949, and several related government regulations were passed which gave the Communist State the instrument it needed to monitor the life and work of the churches and of all religious groups, as well as to exploit them at will for its own ends.

Law #217/49 (SB.) of October 14, 1949, established a separate government Office of Church Affairs. Its responsibilities include "all church and religious matters" (Par. 3). Today this office is called the Secretariat for Church Affairs of the Government Presidium in Prague. There, as in the Slovak capital of Bratislava, a Czech and a Slovak regional Church Secretariat were created in each district and county, with subordinate branch offices. These Church Secretariats with their officials are the real lords of the Church. The consequences are very bad. All church life, all activity of the church, of its bishops and priests, are subject to their control and their directives. Everything that goes beyond purely "cultic [worship-related] acts," is prohibited. Only celebrations of mass, baptisms, weddings and church burials do not have to be approved in advance by the authorities. In the view of Communist functionaries, the only responsibility of the churches is to "satisfy the religious needs of citizens who are believers." Church-related associations of any kind, such as fraternal communities, Marian Congregations, Catholic men's or women's associations are prohibited, as well as church or religious youth work of any kind, and all meetings for the purpose of Bible reading, discussions of faith questions, religious education, spiritual reflection and even spiritual exercises. All attempts at religious instruction outside the State-run schools, such as in church buildings or even in family homes, are severely punished. Bishops and vicars are required to obtain permission to administer the sacrament of confirmation in their bishoprics, but this is often not granted. It is not permitted in Czechoslovakia today to establish even voluntary diaconates or church parish boards. The celebration of the Holy

Year 1975 was not permitted to be publicly known; likewise the celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the establishment of the Bishopric of Prague. At the funeral service for the late bishop of Litoměřice, Cardinal Trochta, on the Tuesday after Easter, 1974, the Church Secretariat expressly refused to allow the visiting Cardinals Bengsch of Berlin, König from Vienna, and Wojtyla from Cracow--as well as the special Nuntius of the Holy See Archbishop Poggi--to concelebrate Holy Mass with Bishop Tomášek.

Law #218/49 (SB.) and the accompanying Government Regulation #219/49 (SB), dated October 14, 1949, bear the following titles: Law (and Government Regulation, respectively) to Ensure the Economic Security of Churches and Religious Groups, and Law to Ensure the Economic Security of the Catholic Church. Both serve to limit the activity of priests and bishops, to cut back on pastoral care in the parishes, to provide a means of control over the clergy and of firing them at will. By means of these two regulations, the entire life of the church can be paralyzed. And the Secretaries for Church Affairs are making ample and very arbitrary use of both.

These two legal specifications provide the following: In order to exercise one's pastoral vocation in a parish or in a church office, one must obtain approval by the State, as well as be accepted by election or appointment. Vacated church positions can be filled merely by State appointment if the office in question has not filled it in accordance with this law. A priest may only serve in a parish for which he has obtained approval; this goes for bishops as well, who are only allowed to perform sacraments and other official acts in the diocese for which they are approved. The power of decision inherent in this law is also the "legal" basis even for cases in which clergy are to be assigned purely church-related and religious tasks, within the Church, with the result that in Czechoslovakia today only three of a total of 13 Catholic dioceses have their own diocesan bishop: Prague in Bohemia, and Nitra and Banská Bystrica in Slovakia. Two dioceses are administered by an administrator apostolicus with bishop's rank, namely Olomouc in Moravia and Trnava in Slovakia, while all the other dioceses are controlled by an

"elected" chapter vicar, which in reality means one chosen by the Church Secretariat. The Holy See has often made efforts to give each bishopric its own diocesan bishop, but these attempts failed when the Czechoslovak government set conditions which the Holy See cannot meet.

These specifications have, in addition, proved to serve as a legitimized basis for all measures intended to limit and repress church life. The Law to Ensure the Economic Security of Churches soon became a law to control and monitor the churches. The clergy, according to this law, are paid by the State, since the State has nationalized all material property of the Church. The price for being on the State payroll, however, is being completely at its mercy. Moreover, the Penal Code provides that any pastoral activity carried out without State permission be punished by a court of law. In the Fall of 1981 a priest in the Litoměřice Diocese was given a prison term under this provision, because he had continued to hold services in the parishes assigned to him before a new priest had arrived. Another priest, who had no State license, and was serving as an assistant, received a similar sentence in 1981 in Plsen, because he had allowed two priests from foreign countries to celebrate mass in his apartment, and because he himself had performed the sacrament of anointing of the sick.

Government Regulation #112/50 (SB.), dated July 14, 1950, provided for a "reordering" of Catholic theological study. The Theological Faculty in Olomouc, as well as all theological schools, was dissolved; the Theological Faculties in both Litoměřice and Bratislava were eliminated from the University jurisdiction and placed entirely under the jurisdiction of the Church Secretariat. This body not only appoints the professors on its own accord, but also exerts a great deal of influence on instruction at these institutions. The Secretary of Church Affairs is the one who determines whether a student is admitted to the study of theology, and hence to divinity school, at both Litoměřice and Bratislava. In this way, access to the priestly vocation has been severely cut back since 1950; the shortage of priests is becoming more and more extreme from one year to the next. The following statistics suffice to demonstrate that this has reached catastrophic proportions: In

the Archbishopric of Prague, 227 out of 576 parish congregations are without clergy of their own. In the Archbishopric of Olomouc, which includes 731 parishes, 245 are without clergy. In the Hradec Králové Diocese with its 477 parishes, 245 have no clergyman of their own. For the Litoměřice Diocese, there are only 144 clergy available for 433 parishes. In the Bishopric of České Budejovice, only 213 priests are licensed to provide pastoral care for the 419 existing parishes. Only in the Bishopric of Brno is the number of available priests in excess of the number of congregations; here there are 464 priests for 450 parishes.

3. The Catholic Religious Orders

Since 1950, there have no longer been any established religious communities or monasteries in Czechoslovakia. On the night of April 13-14, 1950, which that year was Maundy Thursday night, all monasteries and other residential communities of male orders were attacked by police and military forces. The buildings and all properties were confiscated and declared State property, and the members of the orders were deported to "concentration monasteries," whose locations were mostly in isolated areas. They were permitted to take along only their personal belongings; everything else fell to the State. In these concentration monasteries they were supposed to be "re-educated"; however, they were also used for heavy labor. They were supervised there by strict Communist guard troops, who quite often mistreated them. After a time, the younger members of the order were drafted into military service or to labor brigades. The others were allowed, after their release, to serve as assistants only; a very few have been permitted to serve as pastors or vicars in parishes.

The Catholic women religious received similar treatment in the months following. Their convents and community residences, too, were expropriated and the sisters deported to concentration convents in for the most part isolated areas, to prevent any contact between the sisters and the population. Here they were used for unaccustomed heavy labor in agriculture or forestry, as well as in factories. Gradually the sisters capable of employment were released, but were not allowed to choose either their place of residence or employment themselves. Then as well as now, these decisions are made by the Church Secretariats. Catholic nuns

are permitted to work only in homes for the elderly and with mentally handicapped children and youth. Their schools, which had been highly respected before, had already been lost prior to 1950; the nuns who had been employed in the schools before had to assume other duties for which they had not been trained.

All monastic orders and communities in Czechoslovakia are strictly forbidden to accept new members; they are sentenced to die out.

4. Open Battle

After the State had attempted and failed, by negotiation, to subjugate the Catholic Church and in particular the Episcopate (but clergy and membership as well) and to force recognition of the new situation, including dominance by the Communist Party over the Church, the party leadership then proceeded to rob the Catholic Church of Czechoslovakia of its leadership. First, it unleashed a campaign in the press and radio to slander the Holy See. This culminated in a declaration by the Ministry of Information against the Church and its Clergy.⁴ In Slovakia a similar pamphlet appeared.⁵

In April, 1949 the government had already demanded that the emissary of the Vatican, Monsignor Verolino, be recalled, but then refused the entry visa to his replacement. Another attack was aimed at the bishops. With the exception of Bishop Eltschkner in Prague, who had been aged and obsequious from the beginning, there remained not a single bishop or suffragan who was unaffected by this campaign. Besides the personal harrassment, and besides being prevented from carrying out their official duties as bishops by the Church Secretariat, the State Police, and the State Commissaries appointed as bishops, several bishops were expelled from their diocese and assigned by force by the police or a court to take up residence outside of their bishopric. The Archbishop of Olomouc remained under house arrest as a prisoner of the police until his death; others were brought to court and given severe prison sentences in show trials exaggerated for propaganda purposes. They had to serve these sentences in the infamous concentration or forced labor camps, where they suffered harsh treatment at the whim of the guards, until they were released in the early sixties; they were, however, not permitted to

return to their dioceses. In this manner, Archbishops Vojtassák, Gojdič, Hopko, Buzálka, Zéla and Trochta were given long sentences. Archbishop Beran remained under police guard until he was permitted to leave for Rome, but never again to return to his native country. Bishops Hlouch and Soukup were also banned. The Suffragan Bishop Dr. Matoušek, who had been ordained prior to the passage of the Law on state licensing of bishops, and who had been intended for the Bishopric of Prague, was allowed only to serve a Prague parish, where he is still located today. The bishops who had been secretly ordained on instructions from Pope Pius XII, Bishops Tomášek, Hlad and Otčenášek, were soon discovered; Hlad and Otčenášek were given prison sentences, Tomášek was sent to be interned in a monastery, but then allowed after all to serve as pastor to a parish in the Olomouc bishopric, and--after the Archbishop and Cardinal of Prague, Beran, had left the country--was approved as administrator apostolicus of the Prague Bishopric until he could be appointed Archbishop, after having become Cardinal in the meantime. The Greek Catholic Bishops, Diocesan Bishop Gojdič and Suffragan Bishop Hopko, were both incarcerated for long periods. Bishop Gojdič died in the concentration camp of Leopoldov; his Suffragan Bishop was released from jail in the early sixties, but then was not permitted to perform his pastoral duties. The Greek Catholic Church in all of Czechoslovakia had been dissolved by force by the State. Only in 1968 did it again receive permission to rebuild its church life.

With the removal of the bishops from the leadership of the diocese, most of their essential staff colleagues had been eliminated as well. Many of these received heavy prison sentences. To replace them, the Church Secretariat appointed priests who were more or less cooperative with the Communist regime, who obsequiously obeyed all instructions of the government's Church Administration, and for the most part still do today.

The priests who are serving as pastors have not been unscathed in this process. As early as the beginning of the year 1950, the police and the Church Secretariat began to monitor them in order to find an excuse for police tactics and even for court sentences.

The legal basis for these measures was found in several provisions

of the new Administrative Penal Code, which made it a crime to exercise any priestly activity without a license from the State.⁶ But laypeople active in church ministries were also persecuted, removed from their professions, and many of them even sentenced to long terms in prison or labor camps. A considerable number of these were forced to serve this time in the notorious uranium mine of Jachimov, at great danger to their life and health, with no protection at all from the deathly uranium radiation.

Hence the Church had become a church without leadership, the clergy had been removed from their parishes in great numbers, serving somewhere or other as an assistant pastor after their release from prison or after being "pardoned." Meanwhile, the church membership had been intimidated and browbeaten. A church gagged and humiliated, a flock scattered and shepherdless!

5. The "Peace Movement" Among the Clergy

The attempt to gain control of the Church with the help of a number of so-called "progressive" Catholics and of some priests who in fact demonstrated their willingness, quite soon after the Communist takeover in February, 1948, to cooperate with the regime, had failed. Nevertheless, the Party leadership did not give up. Their goal was to create an auxiliary force from within the ranks of the Catholic clergy itself, which would carry out a three-fold purpose: to break the unity of the clergy, to separate the clergy from the bishops and to isolate the bishops, then to make the campaign against the "Vatican" appear justified as a campaign against a "center for reaction." This is not to imply that all Catholic clergymen in Czechoslovakia who offered to cooperate with the regime at that time saw through the intentions of the Party. The fact remains, however, that they allowed themselves to be used for these purposes, whether they were conscious of it or not. To a certain extent, they were deceived by other kinds of slogans which served as a propaganda foil for the real program of the regime.

This group, which at the beginning was not all that large, at first called itself the "Peace Committee of the Catholic Clergy in Czechoslovakia." Only at the end of 1966 did the name change to the "Peace

Movement of the Catholic Clergy." The group was headed by the Catholic priest Josef Plojhar, who joined the new Communist-dominated government as Minister of Health as early as 1948, against the explicit instructions of the Prague Archbishop Dr. Beran not to do so. Plojhar remained in this office until 1968, and for this reason had been removed by the Church from the ordained ministry. The Church Secretariat then chose a number of clergymen from among the ranks of those who had joined the peace movement, who then replaced the many leaders who had been driven out of their ecclesiastical positions because of their undivided loyalty to the bishops. The new clergy appointed to their positions then rapidly showed themselves to be pliable instruments of the Church Secretariats in their attempt to steer all church and religious life. These clergy were not at all highly regarded by the Catholic Church membership, yet they were well protected by the power of the Party. At the time of the "Prague Spring," the whole "Peace Movement" was dissolved on its own accord.

In the post-1968 era the new Party leadership, which was totally loyal to Moscow, "normalized" and "consolidated" all areas of life in Party, society and state. It then set out to create a successor to the earlier "Peace Movement" in the Catholic clergy. And for this purpose, too, it found helpers from among the circles of the former "Peace Movement." The new organization is now called the "Union of Catholic Clergy Pacem in Terris of Czechoslovakia." Their program has not changed. It is entirely subordinated to "harmonizing with the program of the National Front," which is a form of subordination to the Communist Party. The new Priests' Union wants to win the church membership over to building up socialist society and to work for "peace." It is an "ideological-political" group, which, willy-nilly, stands in the service of the Communist Party. This Priests' Union is now affected by the ban pronounced and published by the Roman Congregation against such clergy in a "Declaration" of March 6, 1982, on the explicit instructions of the Pope.⁷ It applies to the entire Catholic Church. It is still uncertain how the leadership of the Priests' Union in Czechoslovakia will now act.

6. Forced Atheism

Wherever Communism has obtained power in a country there begins the battle against religion and the propaganda campaign for atheism, which eventually escalates into violent tactics. Methods and degrees of intensity vary, as do concrete secondary goals; but the ultimate goal remains the same: atheism. The same holds true in Czechoslovakia. Here, too, the battle for supremacy of an atheistic approach among all citizens began very soon after the Communist takeover of February 1948. This effort has been greatly intensified since the beginning of the seventies, i.e. after the above-mentioned "normalization" had been carried out by the Husák government. Focus of the intensified campaign for atheism was placed especially on the younger generation. "All education and all instruction is grounded in the scientific view of the world"--such was the provision of the Constitution's Article 24 from the outset. And an ordinance of the Ministry of Education in Prague for the school year 1975/76 declares: "Educating [young people] to the scientific world view and to atheism continues to be the fundamental task in the work of the schools." Concretely, the same ordinance requires that "teachers and others involved in education and upbringing will define the issues or education to the scientific world view and to atheism in their subject planning for all school subjects of instruction, as well as for all activities outside the classroom and outside the schools."⁸

The process of steering children and youth to atheism begins as early as kindergarten. "The Pedagogical Center of the District Office of Preschool Education prepared a seminar on atheistic education for March 25, 1976, in which kindergarten directors from the district of Presov participated." Speaking to more than 200 Catholic clergymen and two Catholic bishops as the Head of State, Dr. G. Husák, the Vice Chairman of the National Front, conceded that the whole task of the schools could be summarized as follows: "We are convinced that the process of education and upbringing must culminate in the formation of the Marxist/Leninist world view."⁹ But outside the classroom, too, the duty of the teachers is to influence pupils in the spirit of atheism; in many schools this takes place in autonomous atheistic discussion groups.¹⁰

One can easily imagine to what extent religious instruction is possible in such a school. And yet such religious classes are the only legal channel for religious training of children in Czechoslovakia. All religious instruction outside the school, e.g. in the churches, is prohibited. Then there are the difficulties that begin already when it is time to register the children for these religion classes. Registration must be completed within a short period of time at the end of each school year for the next year, in writing, and in person, by both parents, at the school itself. At this time, the parents are called upon to refrain from registering their children for religion classes, because in doing so they will merely damage their own as well as their children's chances for advancement on the job and in the educational process, respectively. Hence this one legal channel of religious education is currently in an extremely desperate situation. There are no books; the religion instructors are not permitted to use any curricular materials; even if the minimum required number of pupils is registered, only one hour per week can be scheduled for religion classes outside regular school hours; if there are fewer than the minimum required, then there can be only one single hour class every two, three or even four weeks. In addition to all this, there is the intimidation of the parents and the discrimination against the children. This explains the fact that in all of Czechoslovakia today, only a very small percentage of children are registered even for this minimal religious instruction. In villages that are exclusively Catholic, it might be somewhat better, but there are very many cities which do not have a single hour of religious instruction! Thus the great task of the church remains that of enabling and preparing the parents to serve this function. Experience shows that these efforts have not been entirely successful. To report on other means of overcoming these difficulties, however--and there are such means as well--is not advisable, for understandable reasons!

7. New Beginnings Crushed

Beginning in the mid-sixties, a slight thaw in the behavior of the Party, and therefore an improvement in the situation of the Church, seemed to make itself felt. The bishops, as well as most of the priests

and laypeople, were released from jails, many of them already in 1960 on the basis of a general amnesty. But the administrative fetters binding church life had not yet been loosened. Only after 1967 was there a change for the better here. To be sure, none of the laws hostile to the Church were revoked, but they were no longer enforced so arbitrarily. However, one could not say that substantial improvements took place during this time. Only during the "Prague Spring" was there a marked change for the Church, when Alexander Dubček began to propagate "Socialism with a Human Face." At this time, most clergy and church members thought they had reason to hope once again. The bishops who had been removed from office began to be allowed to return to active service; many trials were re-opened in the course of a large-scale rehabilitation, of clergy and bishops among other people. The courts revoked most sentences previously handed down, and the verdicts were declared invalid. The church membership took heart once again; the churches were full again even in places where they had not been so full before. Laypeople woke up and showed that they were willing to share responsibility for the faith of their people and to share the load of pastoral care. Yet the administrative barriers still existed which prevented a new beginning, even though the Church Secretariats restrained themselves in these few weeks and months. At this time, the Czech and Slovak public learned through the press, radio and television media what crimes had been committed against believers, nuns, priests and monks by the Communists in power, and how cruelly they were often treated in prisons. The Church gained respect in the eyes of public opinion. In individual parishes, too, new life began to stir; youth work was begun; confirmation classes for adults in quite a few cities found solid response.

The Peace Movement of the Catholic Clergy had been forced by the clergy itself to dissolve. In its place, the way was prepared for a new organization called the "Force for Conciliar Renewal," which brought together laypeople and priests, and was intended to provide incentive for cooperation. The guidelines for these cooperative efforts were the resolutions of the Second Vatican Council. This organization was founded on May 5, 1968, in the presence of all Czech and Slovak bishops,

including those secretly ordained and not recognized by the State. The founding took place in Velehrad, the center of rich Moravian tradition and once the focal point of missionary work by Saint Method in Moravia and Slovakia. State recognition, however, was still withheld from the "Force for Conciliar Renewal." It remains a task of future research to discover the reason for this refusal.

In any case, the "Prague Spring" was of too short duration to bring about a lasting improvement of the situation of the Church and of citizens who were church members. With support from Moscow, the invading Warsaw Pact troops, on that fateful day of August 21, 1968, crushed the fragile beginnings of a new, free life and work of the church by soon "normalizing" and "consolidating" things relating to the church after 1969. Like a night frost destroys new blossoms, this "brotherly assistance" from neighboring Communist countries destroyed everything in the realm of church life which was showing promise of regeneration. Soon the Communist authorities began once again, under the leadership of officials loyal to Moscow, to "normalize" church life, i.e. to enforce the old regulations to an extreme as before; to "consolidate" all religious and church life, i.e. to rule and limit it. A great hope was crushed; uncertainty and discouragement set in far and wide, among believers as well, and caused them to conceal their religious beliefs and withdraw from the Church once again.

8. Renewed Attack Against Faith and Church

The battle against the Church and its work began once again, only this time the methods were to be different. To all appearances they seemed less brutal, but they were nevertheless no less severe, perhaps even more relentless, because it had not escaped the notice of the similarly purged and now Moscow-oriented Party leadership that among Alexander Dubček's followers there had been many believers. Thus the targets of the campaign were shifted somewhat. While it had been the Church as an institution into the sixties, presumably as the last organized nest of resistance against Communism, with its leadership the bishops the priests; now the battle is concentrated more than before in the living cells formed in secret by believers who are not satisfied with

the "fulfilment of religious needs" by Church Secretariats, but who want to live and realize their religious faith, and to deepen and to strengthen it. The anti-religious campaign of today is directed systematically against actively practicing Christians, laypeople and clergy, against activists within the parishes and many small groups. Those affected are from all social groupings; youth and students are well represented; academic, but also men and women from the general population. The Party leadership could not overlook the fact that considerable numbers of people were finding their way back to religion, to personal faith and piety, and hence to the church as well, even if this is done in secret. Nor does the Party deny this fact today. These are people who are inwardly unfulfilled by what they are offered by Marxism-Leninism. Party leadership and state police seem to have become insecure and nervous about this recognized development, hence the intensified search for such cells and groups. Wherever they are discovered and tracked down, the police strike brutally.

There is no less effort on the part of the police and the Church Secretariats to prevent the publication of religious writings, which are in very short supply. In order to relieve the shortage, there have been efforts to produce such publications and to distribute them to interested believers, all under cover. The large-scale police action of September 10, 1979, and the court trial that followed later in the Fall of 1981 are clear proofs of the reaction on the part of the State; those responsible for the productions and distribution of such literature were found guilty and sentenced.

9. With Brutal Violence--a "Church in Secret"

The Czechoslovakia State Police and the Party leadership seem worried, as several publications show, about the increasingly frequent discovery of ever more numerous small groups of courageous young people who are not satisfied with the possibilities for religious activity allowed by the Church Secretariats. These groups are gathering, secretly, despite all danger, for Bible reading, discussion of faith questions, prayer and meditation, or just for weekends or whatever other purpose. The Party press talks about a "Secret Church," or an "Underground

Church." This, however, is not the case in reality. These people, mostly young people, do not want to be an alternative or "secret," minority church. It is only because so many administrative barriers are put in the way of the practicing of their faith that they find themselves obliged to so in secret.

Wherever the state police discover such groups, they strike, especially against those who hold leadership positions in the groups. Only very recently have such cases of brutal violence become known. For instance, there was the case of the highly qualified student of architecture at the University of Brno, Pavel Svanda. He was granted a tourist visa to Italy, visited his uncle, a professor at the Papal Oriental Institute in Rome. Back home, he told enthusiastically about his experiences and discussions. One day he disappeared. His body was found in a large cavern near Brno, the Macocha. "Suicide," the state police claimed. Yet all are convinced that it was murder, as the circumstances show. Then there was the case of Diplom-Ingenieur Coufal in Bratislava. He was allowed to go to Austria. After his return, the state police openly expressed interest in him. He later was found dead in his apartment with cuts in his wrists, but with wounds on his head, eyes, nose and half of his face as well. "Suicide," said the state police once again. The coffin was opened secretly shortly before his burial in his hometown of Moravia. No one believed in suicide here either--only the state police know for sure!

To recapitulate briefly the profile of the Catholic Church in present-day Czechoslovakia, we are presented the picture of an oppressed church, but a church that lives out of the power of its faith.

FOOTNOTES

¹The Director of the Secretariat for Church Affairs in the Government Presidium in Prag, Karel Hruza, declared in the Party Organ of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Rudé právo, of February 23, 1977: "Therefore we say quite openly and honestly that, in the interest of the further development of socialism, we cannot do without finding ways to achieve the conscious elimination of the remains of religion."

²Cf. Josef Zvěřina, "Do not live with hate!" In J. Rabas, Zeugnis and Zusage [Witness and Affirmation]--Documents from the Church in Czechoslovakia (Munich: Ackermann Parish, 1981), pp. 126ff.

³Imperial Law of May 7, 1874 . . . Jaroslava Radouchová, "Československý stát a katolická církev po únoru 1948" [The Czech State and the Catholic Church after February 1948]. In Revue dejin socialismu [Review of the History of Socialism] IX, 1969 (Nr.1, p. 47).

⁴Spiknutí proti republice, [Conspiracy against the Republic], (Prague, 1949), Cfr. NCWC, March 6, 1950.

⁵N. M. Segel, Vatikan ve službě americké reakce [The Vatican in the Service of American Reaction] (Bratislava: Tatran, 1949).

⁶The text of this penal code is found in Digest--Index of Eastern Law (Czechoslovakia: Church and Religion; Washington, DC, Library of Congress, 1951).

⁷L'Ossevatore Romano, March 8-9, 1982.

⁸This ordinance is quoted from a copy in possession of the author. It was not included in a published version of the laws.

⁹Professor Tomáš Travníček, "V nejšší jednotě všeho lidu" [In Broadest Unity of the Whole People], in Katolické noviny [Catholic News], November 30, 1975.

¹⁰The Tribuna, the Weekly for Ideology and Politics of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia, reports from the East

Slovakian city of Presov on July 19, 1978: "In these circles more than 800 pupils of the 9-year elementary school of the district participate actively. This fact alone, however, would not suffice. Therefore the school board of the district national committee, together with the Pedagogical Center of the district, prepared 375 evening sessions to educate the parents of these children on the subject of "atheism."

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