

## EXTRACTS

THE Holy Father has asked the faithful again to pray for the Church Suffering. How much our persecuted brethren need our prayers is shown by Fr Alexander Heidler, a Czech priest living now in exile, in the November issue of *New Life* (the Czech exiles' 'LIFE OF THE SPIRIT'). The author sums up the position of the Church in Czechoslovakia in a quotation from a poem by the Czech national poet V. Dyk: '... And the heart is dying, pierced by the pins, not by the sword...' He shows that the Czech Catholics are not spared suffering by the sword, but that it is the pinprick torture which makes their life really hard.

The Government "deposed", arrested and put into prison the Archbishop of Prague Beran, and five other bishops. Their dioceses are ruled by "Vicars Capitular" elected by the chapters under the direction of the State Office For Religious Affairs. It is hard to decide the canonical validity of these elections since they were not free. Even where the election was free, in many cases before the elections the Chapters were "packed" in all sorts of ways. The Catholic Diocese of Presov, which uses the Greek Rite, was completely "liquidated" and handed over to the Russian Orthodox metropolitan Eleferij. As far as I know the other bishops have not yet been arrested. They live in their palaces, but all of them live to a greater or lesser degree as internees. They have no contact with the faithful or their clergy. Their dioceses are run by Vicars General imposed by the Communist Government administration. For instance, one bishop died in 1950. His diocese is ruled by the "Vicar General" Dohet who was excommunicated by the Holy See. None of the heads of the Czech and Slovak dioceses is allowed to have any official and direct contact with the Holy See.

From this review of the state of the dioceses it is clear that there is no clearcut division among the clergy of the Roman rite into those who took some sort of oath of allegiance and those who did not, as was the case during the French revolution. Nor is the clergy divided into the "faithful" and "excommunicated" priests as some people abroad say. Everything is hidden in the thick fog of uncertainty—and that is really the communists' aim. Each priest must judge from day to day according to his conscience what he can still say or do, where to go, and what to sign in order to avoid being sent to gaol and to keep the parish going; he must decide alone how far he may go before he begins to be guilty of betraying the Church. It is no wonder that under these conditions the results of such decision vary from one individual priest to another; much also depends on the way in which the concrete problem is laid before

the priest. It is easy to imagine that the priestly life under such conditions means much suffering, unrest, danger and many temptations. Each priest is constantly surrounded even threatened by government informers and spies (thanks to the State Office for Church Affairs and the State Security Police), and sometimes even those who are supposed to be his Superiors join in with his enemies. . . .

Public worship has been kept up almost everywhere with some measure of regularity; the minimum of pastoral activities has also been maintained. In some towns in the central parts of Czechoslovakia there is outwardly hardly any change. But the rural districts and the borderlands are in a bad situation. The ranks of the clergy have grown thin: individual priests were arrested, the members of religious orders were collectively removed into internment. Old priests die. All diocesan seminaries were abolished in 1950.

The Government dealt very carefully with the problem of religious instruction in schools. Religious instruction was abolished gradually, step by step. First religious instruction became an optional subject merely tolerated, then "a discussion group", lastly it was used as an opportunity for ordering about both the teachers and the children with their parents, It is reported that in the school year 1954-55 even "the discussion groups" were forbidden.

Apart from official anti-religious propaganda, everyone has been put under pressure individually in one way or another so that people would leave the Church. Those who are directly in employment by the Communist government (Police, Army, Teachers, Civil Servants) were often told that their further continuation in employment depended on their leaving the Church. Sometimes tricks were used: if a priest left the Church, the government officials tried to get his parishioners to follow his example. If any one decides to give up his faith and signs the necessary documents, his decision is kept hidden as "a State secret". The parish priest must not find out that any one among his parishioners signed the declaration. It seems that the idea is this: to prepare ground for new statistics which would show that because there is decrease among the registered members of the Church, parishes should be abolished and churches closed down.

A NEW, or rather a restated, review of liturgy for the laity comes from the American Benedictines of Conception Abbey—*Altar and Home* (\$1.00 annually from Conception Abbey Press, Conception, Missouri). The first volume is devoted to 'Christmas Today', and the well-known liturgical writer M. B. Hellriegel writes on 'Christmas at the Altar', a spiritual commentary on Christmas liturgy, while Fr Cleary, O.S.B., takes the reader through the customs of Crib, Christmas

presents, Carols, the Holly and so on. The review is in a small handy format, well-produced, and promises to be of great assistance to the ordinary layman in entering into the spirit of the liturgical year.

*L'Art Sacré* for September and October is entirely dedicated to the question of silence, particularly in the matter of architecture. The editor distinguishes the arid and sterile silence of sheer lack of noise from the pregnant silence of love. This latter he sees expressed in many of the older French churches and cloisters. But he finds Baroque an enemy of silence. This quality certainly does not appear characteristic of Baroque churches, but perhaps the editor is a little unsympathetic to the flamboyant and he chooses his beautiful illustrations craftily so as to reveal the clamour of the triumphal scenes so often depicted on the walls and ceilings of those churches. But the editor certainly has much to say for his view, and it is perhaps creative silence which we need to restore our modern Christian art from its rather defunct state of experiment or copy of the past.



To The Editor, THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

SIR.—Just to keep the record straight: on page 285 of your issue of December, the man who 'turned Orthodox' was Hon. Frederick North, not his father, *the* Lord North. Careless proof-reading by  
YOUR REVIEWER



To the Clients of  
**ST JUDE, APOSTLE AND MARTYR**

**Please help us to build the new shrine of St Jude**

The walls are now up to roof height. The building will include a Shrine and a chapel of the Saint, a Baptistry, a small Sacristy and retiring rooms.

The decoration of the Shrine is in the care of Michael Leigh, Anthony Foster and Adam Kossowski: three top-line Catholic artists.

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