

of investigation but by other reliable international agencies in which we have full confidence....

We hope that an Ad Hoc Committee, similar to that established to deal with the violations of Human Rights in Chile, be proposed to examine cases here presented. If such Committee be approved, we would cooperate fully in providing substantiating data by individuals who, themselves, or whose family members have been subject to "cruel, degrading treatment and torture."

Accurate or exaggerated?

Item C. On March 11, 1977, the International Rescue Committee issued an appeal in behalf of Cuban political prisoners that contained the following paragraphs:

Estimates of the number of political prisoners vary from 5,000 (the figure given by Castro) to more than 50,000. Even if one accepted the Castro figure, there are more political prisoners in Cuba than in the Soviet Union in proportion to their populations.

Fidel Castro has *not given amnesty to a single political prisoner in 16 years* [emphasis in original]. Yet, the right of free expression of thought, assembly and association, freedom of movement and residence, and freedom from arbitrary arrest is guaranteed by the Cuban constitution.

Among the prisoners are thousands of men and women who have been jailed for more than ten years, and some for more than 16 years. Thousands of the prisoners have close relatives in the United States.

The Cuban penal system and treatment of prisoners reflects the structure, organization and institutionalization of the Soviet system: maximum security prisons, regular prisons, work camps, traveling labor brigades, and separate camps for groups such as the military, the peasants, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Sentences are regularly extended for prisoners who will not submit to "reeducation," i.e., those who will not confess their errors and therefore, perhaps, gain transfers from maximum security prisons to labor camps. The deprivation of food, water, medical attention, space and other brutalities is a systematic method of dealing with those—both men and women—who refuse "reeducation."

Accurate or exaggerated?

We could add more statements, but these are enough. It is undoubtedly true that there are some reports about prisoners in Cuba that are exaggerated or incorrect. In an area where hard information is difficult to get, some errors are likely. Further, some groups have a vested interest in presenting the worst possible case for Cuba (and other countries). But before something can be exaggerated it must first exist. The point is to get as accurate

information as possible and to provide support and help for prisoners where possible. If it harms their cause to exaggerate their case, it does little good simply to criticize the exaggerations. It is as easy as it is unpleasant to conjure up a picture of prisoners long interned under harsh conditions hearing, via a grapevine, that visiting dignitaries have said the issue of political prisoners has been exaggerated.

The press release issued by the National Council of Churches stated that the eight Christian leaders, of whom Wipfler was one, went to Cuba on an eleven-day trip "sponsored by the National Council of Churches and the Cuba Resource Center, a nonprofit organization supported primarily by church contributions." The trip was facilitated (which we understand to mean at least partially funded) by the Resource Center and the ICAP (Cuban Institute for Friendship Among Peoples) in Havana.

Under Wipfler's direction the Latin American bureau of the NCC has earned well-deserved respect. Often under trying and even dangerous circumstances it has helped prisoners and exiles. It is upsetting when a church group gives the appearance, however unjustified the charge, that it is biased in favor of a dictatorial regime rather than the prisoners of that regime. It is particularly upsetting when it is a church group as respected as Wipfler's. When the President of the United States, who holds a notably political office, can speak against the violation of human rights in opposition to national leaders who deny or minimize them, it seems passing strange to encounter church leaders who appear to be soft-peddling such criticisms on prudential political grounds. It does bear out de Tocqueville's observation that in America the politicians often sound like preachers, and the preachers like politicians. We note that it is President Carter who often sounds like a preacher. We also note that he has recently effected the release of political prisoners, especially in Latin America.

EXCURSUS II

Thomas C. Franco on Poland's Shield of Faith

The abbey of Pauline Brothers in Czestochowa with its famous Gothic painting, *Our Lady of Czestochowa*, is the most sacred Catholic shrine in Poland. The monastery stands atop a hill called Jasna Gora. Czestochowa was the only city in Poland to withstand the bloody invasion of the Swedes in the seventeenth century. The successful defense of the city by a rabble of townspeople and peasants was attributed to the miraculous power of the painting at Jasna Gora.

S.S. squads mined the monastery church at

Jasna Gora before the German retreat from Poland near the end of World War II. A Russian journalist, Boris Polevoy, writes that the plans of the Germans were "transparently simple: once the town was in the hands of the Red Army, an explosion would blow the church to smithereens and bury the icon. Our men would be held to blame and the anathema of the whole Catholic world would be called down upon them." A Russian demolition expert named Sergeant Korolkov uncovered the bomb in time to save Jasna Gora. Polish Catholics believe the thirty-six bombs were kept from exploding by *Our Lady of Czestochowa*. Tourist books printed by the Government refer to the same incident as the "miracle of Sergeant Korolkov."

Thus the painting of *Our Lady* has become associated with crisis in Poland and is known as "the shield of faith." Recently, a group of Polish bishops gathered at Jasna Gora to celebrate the six hundredth anniversary of the icon, and on the First Sunday of Advent a letter from this episcopal group was read in churches throughout Poland. The letter had all the artistry of a perfectly timed stab in the back. When the church asked the people to support the economic efforts of the Government in September, many observers felt that a new era of cooperation was beginning in Poland. Only a few months ago, in a rather bizarre gesture by political standards here, Communist Party leader Edward Gierek sent a birthday bouquet of flowers to Cardinal Wyszynski. Giving the factory workers at Mielec a more symbolic bouquet, Gierek went so far as to say that "there is no conflict between the State and Church in our country." The letter from Jasna Gora has undermined this spirit of "strange bedfellowship." Polish Catholics have not heard such a sharp attack upon the Government in at least ten years.

The letter outlines the dimensions of the crisis faced by Polish Catholics. It begins by stating that faith strengthens national life and has been the element that has enabled Poland to overcome a thousand years of misfortune. Though the crisis is not as obvious as the Swedish assault of the seventeenth century or the Nazi barbarianism of World War II, the letter appealed to all Catholics to be on guard against the Government's long-term program of "atheization." As one Catholic journalist told me, "We are not being persecuted anymore, but there is pressure." The pressures are subtle, and even in the Jasna Gora letter the bishops admit that an outsider would probably not perceive the ways in which faith is threatened by the Government.

The first example of "atheization" cited is the existence of discriminatory laws against Catholics. New parishes are denied building permits, forcing priests to celebrate masses in private homes or in deserted, ramshackle buildings. The need for churches does not exist in cultural showcases like Krakow or Sandomeirz, but in densely populated factory areas or in outlying rural areas. There are also laws that prevent Catholics from advancing to managerial positions and better paying jobs. Being

an overt Catholic requires choosing a career that does not promise many benefits.

The Jasna Gora letter goes on to detail how the Government has sabotaged religious education in Poland. The Government has tried to break the channels of communication between bishops and the people by making it illegal to publish episcopal letters. Communication with intellectuals is limited by strict censorship and by limiting the number of books and newspapers published by Catholics. Communication between priests and students is frustrated by the removal of religious education from the schools. Although it is illegal in Poland to prevent another person from attending church, the letter shows how the Government can "legally" keep younger students from attending Mass while on *kolonia*. *Kolonia* are excursions for youngsters organized during school vacations. On these trips the children are not allowed to go to Mass, nor are they allowed to possess any medals or religious pictures.

Catholic clubs for university students are harassed by the police. Older students are taken by the authorities for investigation and asked about their club's activities. Seminarians are especially targets of the Government and are often drafted into the army in the middle of their studies. Two years ago twenty seminarians in Krakow were drafted from a class of eighty.

The letter argues that all changes in the social and political life of Poland are inherently antichurch. It quotes one Government official as saying that "changes are made in our system not only for improvement, but for breaking the liturgical calendar and the unity of religious families and religious education." One example of this double-edged aspect of change is the reform being considered in Polish education that would keep children in school until 5:00 P.M. each day. The Government defends this proposed reform on the basis that it would allow parents to work longer and provide a type of day-care service. The church bitterly opposes the plan because it would prevent children from attending religion classes now scheduled in the parishes after school.

Poland is being assaulted on many fronts. There is inflation and a grave housing shortage. The stores are void of consumer goods. There is no meat. And there are still two thousand workers imprisoned in Radom, where the party building was burned last June to protest the price increases ordered by the Government. Against this background of crisis the bishops met at the place of miracles and decried the Government's systematic plan of "atheization." Enumerating an array of examples such as secular marriages, easy divorce, easy abortion, pornography, and antireligious principles popularized by the media, the bishops asked the people to pray to *Our Lady of Czestochowa*—not to make life easier, but to be a "shield of the faith" once more.

Thomas C. Franco is living in Krakow, Poland, and teaching at Jagiellonian University.