

One of the spokesmen for *Charter 77*, Prof. Dr. Jan Patočka, expressed the idea that above the conscience of individuals and above the world of politics there exists a supreme moral and spiritual authority. We understand this in the light of Jesus Christ's witness before the representatives of political power (the conversation with Pontius Pilate) and we emphasize the supremacy of truth over ourselves.

In both past and present, Christians have left political power to its own devices and have not reminded it of the supra-political claims enjoined upon it. We failed to point out to the authorities their mission to serve and the limits of their competence. We have replaced critical responsibility with conformity.

Even though *Charter 77* does not speak about God or God's kingdom, it is fighting for freedom in religious matters, and in this it serves God's purposes. It calls attention to acute problems in our society and sees them in all their breadth and urgency. In this we glimpse the future universality of Christ's kingdom, to which countless people of all generations of the earth shall belong.

We do not see anything exceptional in the fact that we signed *Charter 77*. We believe that it is as much an expression of service to our fellow men as are such activities as responsible Bible work, free preaching, persuasive prayer or help given to the needy both in the fellowship and outside it through the unburdening of oneself in conversation. We rejoice that in the darkness of the present time, we see around us the work of Christ's Spirit.

We would like to assure you that in these days we are thinking deeply about the local church. We believe that Christians in our country and all over the world will support our efforts by prayer and action.

Signed :

MILAN BALABÁN,
ALFRÉD KOČÁB,
MILOŠ REJCHRT,
SVATOPLUK KARÁSEK,
ALEŠ BREZINA,
JAN ŠIMSA,
JAKUB TROJAN

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Churches Under Pressure

The following letter was written by a Czech citizen (the author must remain anonymous) and is dated 24 March 1977. It reveals that pressure has been put on the Protestant and Catholic Churches to publish statements attacking the Charter 77 movement.

As a Czech citizen, now living in Britain, and as a member of one of the Churches in Czechoslovakia, I feel that I must write to share my grave disquiet over recent happenings in the Christian Churches there.

During the last few weeks the Protestant and Catholic Churches have had pressure put on them to publish statements against the *Charter 77* movement. Some of the Churches were forced to re-write their statements several times before these were accepted by the authori-

ties. Some of these statements have maintained a strong Christian witness in their tone, while others have sadly compromised.

Some clergy defend their capitulation by pointing out that they were threatened with having their churches closed if they failed to comply. "We have enough freedom if we use it wisely," they say, "and whatever our personal views on the *Charter*, we have a responsibility to keep the churches open for the souls entrusted to our care."

To people nurtured in the freedom of the West, this double-think may be hard to comprehend, but the Czech people have been trampled upon and forced to live out lies in their secular lives for so long, that some find it hard to distinguish truth from falsehood.

In spite of this, many – perhaps the majority – of ordinary church members, feel ashamed of statements written by their church representatives and published on their behalf in *Kostnické Jiskry* and *Bratrská Rodina*. They would like their Churches to oppose evil and stand up for the truth of Jesus Christ whatever it costs.

Dilemmas of this kind have faced Christians throughout the ages. Christians in Czechoslovakia already suffer many pressures for their faith: denial of access to all key jobs and denial of

higher education for their children are two of the most subtle forms of pressure.

The Church is called to be the salt of the earth and a witness to the living power of our Saviour Jesus Christ. May I ask for your prayers for the Christians in Czechoslovakia, many of whom feel that they have been forced into a position of agonizing compromise; and also for their leaders, that they may be given courage to follow the truth at whatever cost to themselves and their Churches.

Roman Catholic Church Criticized

The following "Open Letter" was written by a 26 year-old worker, Karel Soukup, and addressed to Bishop (now Cardinal) Tomášek and other Roman Catholic priests in Czechoslovakia. The letter criticizes the Roman Catholic Church for its attitude to Charter 77.

In these days you have been deciding how to react publicly to the manifesto, *Charter 77*. As a result of mutual confrontation, you have decided that *Charter 77*, in defending human rights, does not proceed in a manner which is compatible with the love for one's neighbour demanded by the Church.

I no longer expect you to support the text of *Charter 77* and its signatories; you could only choose one alternative – that of denial. After all, the history of the Church is the history of the denial of Jesus. I know that many priests sacrificed everything for justice and love of Christ among the people. This sacrifice, however, as you know, by and large began in diaspora or in complete separation from the Church – in prisons and concentration camps, where many individual priests and Catholic believers bore full testimony to Christ. Did Jesus postpone teaching the Word until he was a social outcast, or does injustice no longer exist in our times? Jesus defended many of those who were reviled by the powerful and the blind hatred of the masses.

You will object that Jesus did not come to carry out social and political reforms. Do not be mistaken: few of us regard ourselves as part of the Body of Christ. But, I think that, by and large, we consider ourselves to be citizens of our socialist society and that our duty is to defend human and social rights. I know my own weaknesses, and my great need of love and help. That small grace which I have received I want to distribute to wherever the truth suffers. I am trying to write this letter in charity. Do try to receive it in the same spirit. The Church today undoubtedly exists in diaspora, and therefore I believe that it will not turn away those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. The Church is what you have in common; it is created by giving yourselves to God; you build it up when you serve God. Let God be your authority, not the Church. Leave your cunning, mystical, bourgeois narrow-mindedness. Do not be afraid of having your car taken away; I too go everywhere on foot.

My love to you in Jesus Christ.

Thanks.

KAREL SOUKUP.

Františkovy Lázně,
30 January 1977

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