

## Reviews

Die Ostpolitik des Vatikans

by Hansjakob Stehle, R. Piper and Co., Verlag Munich and Zurich, 1975, 487 pp., DM 39.50.

There are many myths and misconceptions about the Vatican's Ostpolitik. For example, it is thought that the Vatican abandoned its anti-communism and began to negotiate with the East-European communist governments only under Pope John XXIII in the early 1960s. Mr. Stehle's study, however, shows that the Vatican was in contact with the Bolshevik leaders virtually from the moment they took power in Russia. The Vatican clearly hoped (though in vain as subsequent events proved) that an agreement could be made which would be more favourable for the Catholic Church than the situation before the Revolution. Eugenio Paccelli negotiated with Chicherin, the first Soviet commissar for foreign affairs, in 1921-22. Later Mgr. Paccelli became Pope Pius XII, who is still regarded by many as the embodiment of militant anti-communism.

Mr. Stehle, a West German radio and newspaper correspondent in Rome since 1970, brings excellent qualifications to the study of his subject. He is an historian by training. Before his Rome appointment he was correspondent in Eastern Europe for 15 years. Eight of these he spent in Poland. In the early 1960s he wrote an excellent study called *Poland - the Independent Satellite* and he has worked on unpublished material made available to him in the Vatican and elsewhere. In *Die Ostpolitik des Vatikans* with the help of such material, he recounts the fascinating story of the Vatican's first envoy to Soviet Russia, a Jesuit by the name of Michel d'Herbigny who was even made a bishop secretly. But d'Herbigny, though liked and trusted by Pope Pius XI, who almost made him a cardinal, fell victim to Soviet secret police intrigue and his own poor judgement. He had to resign in 1933.

At the end of the Second World War, the Vatican's attitude towards Eastern Europe was by no means entirely rigid. Fearing the worst, the

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Vatican gave a free hand to the Polish, Hungarian and other Catholic hierarchies to act as they saw fit in the given circumstances. But some were more adroit and, in fairness, also more lucky than others. Cardinal Wyszynski in Poland, for example, faced communist adversaries who were less formidable than those who confronted Cardinal Mindszenty in Hungary. But Cardinal Wyszynski also had more political sense. The understanding which he reached with the Polish regime in 1950, at the height of Stalinism in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe, caused some concern in Rome. At all events, whether adroit or not, all church leaders and their flocks in Eastern Europe suffered in the 1950s, and quite drastically and tragically in places like Czechoslovakia. The communist regimes used the famous papal decree of 1 July 1949 to persecute both priests and faithful as "anti-state" elements. This decree denied the sacraments to Party members and threatened with excommunication those faithful who embraced "materialist and anti-christian communism". But as Mr. Stehle correctly observes, Rome's intention was defensive: i.e. to prevent the movements of collaborating "peace priests" from getting out of hand and to stiffen the stand of the bishops and their flocks.

When the Stalinist Terror had subsided, the Vatican in the late 1950s tried once again to build bridges to Eastern Europe. Mr. Stehle carefully and fairly chronicles the results of that policy to date – its failures but also its modest successes, such as the agreement with Yugoslavia in 1966. He does not pass judgement on the policy – the time is not yet ripe in any case – but his scholarly work helps the reader form his own judgement and contributes to an understanding not only of Eastern Europe's complicated religious situation but also of the ways of Rome. Mr. Stehle should also be praised for his lively and interesting style which helps the reader absorb even the most complicated matters of higher church politics.

CHRISTOPHER CVIIC

## Young Christians in Russia

by Michael Bourdeaux and Katharine Murray, Lakeland, 1976,

156 pp., 75p.

It is a common misconception that the churches in Russia are only full of old women (*babushki*). *Young Christians in Russia* shows that this is not so. The evidence presented indicates that there is a revival (p. 22) as well as a survival of Christianity among the younger generation. This is confirmed obliquely in the official press which naturally does not wish to publicize such a revival. A few years ago it was claimed that most young believers come from believing families. Indeed, Soviet propaganda