

the Dubcek era, was later revised and translated into German, and has only now been translated into English.

Machovec's book is thus the product of a unique period of optimism and open-mindedness, a fact clearly reflected in the opening chapter, where the author states confidently that "there has been a real transformation in the relations between Christianity and Marxism". We have a right, alas, to be sadly sceptical about such honest but sanguine assertions. The period of dialogue in Czechoslovakia was, after all, unfortunately brief.

One wonders, moreover, whether Peter Hebblethwaite is right to call Machovec's book "a minor but indispensable Marxist classic". A minor classic, perhaps; and certainly a very readable and informative book. But there is little which is specifically "Marxist" in his interpretation of the gospel message, which might have been more accurately entitled "A rationalist looks at Jesus", or "An existentialist looks at Jesus" or even "A Bultmannian looks at Jesus". But then Machovec, like so many modern Marxists, reduces Marxism to a methodology, a system of "sober scientific analysis" which rejects fixed dogma.

This easy-going type of Marxism will certainly be much more palatable to the average Christian than the editorials of *Pravda*. And Machovec's "demythologised" Jesus, the man who urges people to totally change their lives, will undoubtedly make sense to many who consider themselves Marxists. So, even though the book is unlikely even to scratch the surface of orthodoxy on both sides, for many it could open new avenues of thought. What a pity it is not for sale in Eastern Europe.

MALCOLM HAZLETT

### White Book on Restrictions of Religion in the USSR

by Michael Bourdeaux, Committee for the Defence of Human Rights  
in the USSR, Brussels, 1976, 66 pp., 65p.

### Religious Liberty in the Soviet Union: WCC and USSR—A Post-Nairobi Documentation

edited by Michael Bourdeaux, Hans Heblly and Eugen Voss,  
Keston College (CSRC), 1976, 96 pp., £1.50.

These two volumes are important reports for all those concerned with an accurate assessment of the limitations on religious liberty in the USSR. The first, slighter book sets out the present state of the law and then, with the support of documents, considers the present limitations

placed on all the main religious groupings in the Soviet Union: Orthodox, Baptist and Roman Catholic Christians, Jews, Muslims and Buddhists.

The *White Book* gives little background information. It does not aim to provide a complete or rounded picture. Nevertheless, it is part of an important on-going documentation of the way in which the Soviet State continues to limit the religious liberty nominally promised to its citizens. There is ample reliable material here on which readers can base both their prayers and action in order to help the Soviet authorities to think again, both in general and in particular.

The second book, a joint production of Keston College and research bodies in Switzerland and Holland, is more significant and goes far beyond the scope of the *White Book*. Inevitably, however, both cover some common ground. The point of departure was the debate on religious liberty in the USSR which surfaced at the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC. After that debate, the WCC was committed to examining this whole subject. This book is a corporate attempt to provide the WCC with some of the necessary information. Its use, however, will go far beyond Geneva.

The first chapter sets out the relationship of the Churches in the USSR to the WCC. Then follows a survey by Hans Hebly of the WCC's long involvement with religious liberty in the USSR. The Church's own record in allowing liberty to others is admitted to be not good. But two wrongs do not make one right. What does emerge is that the WCC's concern is not nearly as new as most people imagine, nor as one-sided as the WCC's opponents allege. Hans Hebly also helps to explain, though not to justify, communist attitudes and policies. The book also contains a chapter which provides a good summary of legislative discrimination. Some excellent documents about the restrictions, deprivations and suffering of many believers form the last chapter. Finally, there are short, helpful descriptions of the institutions which, together, in a brief space of time, produced this volume.

The Soviet authorities clearly resent research and publications of this kind. Soviet church leaders *have* to show comparable annoyance. Whether they really disapprove is not nearly so clear. Nor does it really matter. To discover the truth and to make it known is nearly always right.

But this raises a real problem – a problem for Keston College and all similar bodies. Such studies as these, taken alone, are inevitably one sided. And, although this is certainly not their intention, they can be made to appear as part of anti-communist propaganda. One answer to this is, of course, that the Soviet authorities have only themselves to blame for this situation. It is within their power so to reform their system that Keston College would be able to eat its words. Even so, the

problem remains: how to tell the whole truth. The *Church Times*, in one issue, faced its confused readers with a very positive picture by the Bishop of St. Albans, returning from Moscow, and a very negative one by a Keston news release. They were both telling the truth. The truth is many-sided. Both these important, honest and, given their terms of reference, inevitably negative reports give a one-sided picture which Keston College and other similar institutions must seek to correct if they are not to be used by those who merely wish to fight political crusades which most Christians in Eastern Europe would find quite repugnant. For better or worse, *most* Christians in Eastern Europe are loyal citizens, even though they are often treated as though they were not.

I have used these publications, which I can only commend, to raise an issue which is relevant not only to these reports but also to much else. This issue is equally important in relation to this excellent journal and its policy.

PAUL OESTREICHER

## Exhibition of Unofficial Art from the Soviet Union

Opening on 18 January 1977 at the ICA, London, is a unique exhibition of 'Unofficial Art from the Soviet Union'. Banned from exhibition in the Soviet Union, these paintings have been brought out through a variety of channels and assembled in the West for showing to the British public.

This is the first large representative exhibition of this kind (40 artists showing over 150 works) and the selection will show not only the range of contemporary art in the USSR but also the best works available. The sponsor of the enterprise is the Writers & Scholars Educational Trust; and an illustrated and documented catalogue will be published by Secker & Warburg.

Further details from :

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