

Reviews

The Challenge of Marxism: A Christian Response

by Klaus Bockmuehl, Leicester,

Inter-Varsity Press, paperback, 1980, 187 pp., £1.95.

Many books, beginning with Solzhenitsyn, detail the malpractices of the Soviet Union and illustrate the cataclysmic gap between theory and reality, exploring the inhumanity of a society in which the collective rides roughshod over the rights of the individual and where the end justifies the means. It is quite remarkable, however, how few books give a calm, reasoned Christian answer to Marxist philosophy — and this in the face of the direct pastoral need for such writing for use among students, as well as a pressing general requirement.

To be successful, such a book must not, on the one hand, stridently dismiss communism unheard because of its record; nor must it expound some kind of social gospel or extol Liberation Theology in South America, without listening to what is happening in the countries where communism is actually in power. The author of this book, a professor at Regent College, Vancouver, strides confidently down the fairway without following some mishit ball into the bushes or out-of-bounds. It is a book which we have long awaited, one which can be confidently put into the hands of any enquirer because it takes its subject very seriously indeed.

The first main section of the book is a refreshingly simple re-examination of the historicity of the person of Christ in the light of Marxist strictures. Professor Bockmuehl states:

Yet the Marxist critique is weakest concerning the person of Jesus. The critics are loud and self-assured when attacking the sins of medieval popes and theologians. They are much more subdued when they deal with Paul's letters to the churches, and mostly silent in view of the person of Jesus of Nazareth (p. 79).

Anyone who has visited the Museum of Atheism in Leningrad will see that this critique strikes at the heart of its display.

The next main section is a clear and unemotional study of the ethics of

Marx and Lenin, followed by an essay on the challenge these present to Christianity, in which the author calls on believers to admit, not try to cover over, the past inadequacies of the church.

The final section, "Creating the New Man" in both Marxism and Christianity, is perhaps the most challenging. It is immensely useful to read a context for the contribution which such an original thinker as Josif Ton (recently emigrated from Romania) has made to the debate on the nature of the "new man" and the need for socialism to adopt Christianity and discard atheism in order to get it to work at all (pp. 153-4).

"The Challenge of Marxism" has already been through its first printing at the time of writing. It deserves many more.

MICHAEL BOURDEAUX

Die Kirchen und das religiöse Leben der Russlanddeutschen. Katholischer Teil. Aus Vergangenheit und Gegenwart des Katholizismus in Russland.
(The Churches and the Religious Life of Russian Germans. Catholic Section.
Catholicism in Russia Past and Present)

by Joseph Schnurr, Stuttgart, published by Joseph Schnurr, 1980 (second revised and expanded edition), 416 pp., n.p.

The author sets out the basic aim of his book in his foreword to the second edition. On the one hand he wants to arouse interest in and understanding for the Russian German émigrés in the Federal Republic of Germany and on the other to strengthen the self-confidence of these people with regard to their religion. The Russian Germans constitute a significant part of the Roman Catholic minority in the Soviet Union, which includes Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Latvians and other nationalities, and numbers approximately three million faithful.

Following a short historical introduction to the Catholic Church in Russia which is concerned primarily with the relationship between the Vatican and the Imperial Court, Schnurr comes to the central theme of the book. In 1782 under Catherine II the archdiocese of Mogilev was created from the diocese of Belorussia and it extended over a huge area. Poland, the Caucasus, European and Asiatic Russia belonged to its territory and it formed the largest archdiocese ever created in the history of the Catholic Church. In 1902 there were approximately a thousand parish churches, eighteen hundred priests and four and a half million faithful.

Schnurr pays particular attention to the Tiraspol diocese which was founded in 1847 with a suffragan in Saratov and came under the archdiocese of Mogilev. The Tiraspol diocese had pastoral responsibility for the Catholic Russian German colonies situated on the Volga and in the Black Sea region.

The first population census in 1897 identified approximately 240,000 Russian German Catholics. The documentary evidence compiled here in such detail and richly illustrated with pictures and letters must surely be unique and provides the reader with detailed information about the history of the church and the community in this diocese until its liquidation in 1926.

Schnurr thinks that the present situation of Catholics in Ukraine and the Central Asian republics is relatively favourable. In 1978 the Polish émigré publication, *Kultura*, reported that there were still almost forty registered churches in Ukraine. Similarly, there are "working" churches in the republics of Kazakhstan, Kirghizia and Tadzhikistan. The older priests are mainly Polish and Lithuanian and were forcibly transported to these areas in the post-war years. The younger priests come from the two seminaries in Riga and Kaunas. The believers are mainly of German and Polish nationality. However, the State does everything in its power to make the clergy subservient. The Vatican seems to have abandoned the Catholic Church in the Soviet Union. The calls for an apostolic administrator and direct jurisdiction from Rome have remained unanswered thus far.

The present-day Catholic Church in the Soviet Union is a missionary church. Lenin's decree of 23 January 1918 established the principle of the separation of Church and State and thus the church schools were completely abolished and church property nationalized. Atheist propaganda in the forties led to the closure of all churches. Priests died in exile. A "Catacomb" Church emerged from the internment camps which appears to be only gradually recovering itself following Stalin's death and the subsequent period of relaxation. It is a diaspora church where even today church services are held secretly in private homes and there is an air of conspiracy where pastoral work is concerned. Schnurr documents his work with extracts from the memoirs of the priest Władysław Bukowiński who worked for twenty years in Karaganda until his death in 1974. It is an impressive description of the duties of a priest in the present-day Catholic diaspora in the Soviet Union.

Though much space has been devoted to the Russian German church community, the analysis of the situation will no doubt appeal to those interested in the situation of all Catholics in the Soviet Union.

LESZEK A. WILKIEWICZ

Religione e Spiritualità in URSS

by Giovanni Codevilla, Rome, Città Nova Editrice, 1981, 310 pp., n.p.

In this brilliant and well-documented study, the author draws on his wide knowledge of Russian religious life and thought; I recommend it wholeheartedly.

It is divided into three sections: first, a historical survey of Russian religion, essential to an understanding of the present situation; second, a study of religion in Soviet life, defining limitations on religious liberty, outlining conditions of church life and analysing the current religious renaissance; third, a comprehensive anthology drawn from twenty-two *samizdat* writings, which *Rivista del Centro Studi Russia Christiana* has been foremost in publishing in the West (most are still not available in English). This last section comprises about half the book.

The book is admirably succinct and thought-provoking, with many illuminating quotations, including particularly apposite ones from the Czech Vaclav Havel to show that the same basic moral problems must be faced in all communist societies. Picking out the main strands of Russian religious thought, the author shows how, throughout this century, outstanding original Russian religious thinkers reiterate the same basic need — that of personal repentance, coupled with recognition of the collective responsibility of the whole Russian people for the years of terror. The sanctified wisdom, capacity for self-examination, and complete Christian commitment of the best representatives of today's intelligentsia (as illustrated in the anthology) is very impressive.

Renewal must come through the more perceptive laity and new converts, not from those linked with the structure of the Church. For the clergy are affected by their role since the 18th century as "civil servants", and the laity by the long-standing, theologically-based traditions of submission to authority and retreat from the world. These writers are saying that to be Christ's disciples in the fullest sense demands active love of our neighbour. They reject violence, however, not because it is too radical, but (Havel's point) not radical enough.

Although it is such a conservative Church, the unchanging doctrine, sublime worship and rich spirituality of Orthodoxy has been able to keep the loyalty and respect of new converts, and also to inspire a religious renaissance which is at the roots of the alternative culture in the USSR today. Can this in turn, the author asks, reinvigorate an inhibited, divided and discredited Church in which parish life (in our western sense) does not exist, and in which each parish is treated by the State as a separate, autonomous unit? The author may perhaps be underestimating the strength of the messianic element in present-day religious thought, except where he sees that it has combined with Russian nationalism to produce a communism that is virtually National Socialism, not Marxism.

If he has to concentrate on the Orthodox Church and the intelligentsia at the expense of other religious groups and the grassroots religious tradition, he has made up for it in his wide-ranging anthology. There we find documents from Lithuanian and Moldavian Catholics, Pentecostals, the Ukrainian Fr Romanyuk, Fr Dudko (as spokesman for the parish clergy), war veterans and other simple outspoken laymen, monks, young converts

including former communists, prisoners; and not least, an essay on the life and eucharistically-based teachings of the *starets* Tavrion*, who died as recently as 1978 and to whose funeral believers flocked from all over the USSR, an indication of the continuing power of religion there.

JANICE A. BROWN

New Spring in China? A Christian Appraisal

by Leslie T. Lyall, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1979, 253 pp., £1.40.

It is interesting that the title refers to a quotation from a Taoist poet of the ninth century, who has this mystic certainty: "All roads lead thither — one touch, and you have spring." The present author's question mark, however, is probably justified in the light of China's thirty stormy years of communist rule. He asks: "Is the winter of China's storms now to give place to a new spring of hope and progress?" His answer on the whole is realistic, optimistic — and conditional. "Given stable and wise government, undisturbed by political turmoil, China has great future prospects." So the question mark still stands, but within a conviction that "China's future belongs to God".

The author is not so certain about the hand of God in the experiences of the last thirty years. He accepts that God's "common grace" has been at work in China's liberation from hunger, oppression and superstition, seeing the communists' work as some kind of *praeparatio evangelica*, but his most severe criticisms are reserved for the so-called "Louvain theologians", who saw the "new things" in China as heralding the Kingdom of God.

The book is a good account of the rise of Chinese Communism to power, the struggles within the Party, the trauma of the Cultural Revolution, the effects of the lost years especially on education and technology, and the present directions of China's policies of the Four Modernisations. The life of the Chinese Church, a "tiny persecuted, hard-pressed minority", is set in this whole framework.

Granted that the "Christian appraisal" angle is that of a conservative evangelical, the interpretation is able, honest and knowledgeable, and can be recommended to anyone looking for a simple guide to the Chinese puzzle — with the warning that China does not lend itself to simple outlines!

There are a few minor errors: e.g. K.H. not K.T. Ting. More seriously, the work of Morrison and his colleagues from 1807 on is ignored in the repeated assertion that Christian work began in China only after 1842 and the Treaty of Nanking.

JOHN FLEMING

*See document in *RCL* Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 96-100. — Ed.

Notes from the Other Side of Night

by Juliana Geran Pilon, South Bend, Indiana, Regnery/Gateway Inc.,
1979, 146 + xiii pp., n.p.

When so little is currently available about Romania it is disappointing that this sincere little book does not give more insight into that neglected country. The author was born into a Jewish family in Bucharest in 1947. Her parents were of the Orthodox Jewish faith but — at any rate as their daughter records it — visited the synagogue only once a year on the Feast of the Passover, after which the family held a celebration. For fear of reprisals by the authorities the parents kept their children in ignorance of the faith and Juliana recalls her puzzlement about the meaning of the annual festivity with its unusual food and the mysterious book from which her father read during the meal.

After seven years of annual application (always made on the day of Yom Kippur) her father gained permission for the family to emigrate; Juliana was then fifteen years old. Although she has vivid memories of her childhood they do not add materially to our understanding of Romania; her story is typical of upbringing in almost any East European country. She was perhaps too young when she left the country, and had been too much protected by her parents, to have gained any objective impressions of the régime which she had learnt to take for granted. Sadly, when she returns fifteen years later, now an American citizen, to visit family and friends the danger of compromising them prevents her from going into any useful detail about her new experiences of her homeland.

VICTORIA WATTS

Books Received

Listing of a book here does not necessarily preclude review in a subsequent issue of RCL.

POLAND

Countdown: the Polish upheavals of 1945, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980 . . ., Jakub Karpiński, Karz-Cohl Publishers Inc., New York, 1981, 214 pp.

The Polish Challenge, Kevin Ruane, BBC, London, 1981, 218 pp., £5.95.

Five months with Solidarity: A first-hand report from inside Hotel Morski, Gdańsk, John Taylor, Wildwood House, London, 1981, 123 pp.

Ethik der Solidarität: Prinzipien einer neuen Hoffnung, Józef Tischner, Verlag Styria, Graz, Wien, Köln, 1982, 160 pp.

Polen — Das Ende Erneuerung? Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft und Kultur im Wandel, edited by Alexander Uschakow, Verlag C. H. Beck, München, 1982, 275 pp.

Policy and politics in contemporary Poland: Reform, Failure and Crisis, edited by Jean Woodall, Frances Pinter, London, 1982, 200 pp.

The Book of Lech Wałęsa, introduction by Neil Ascherson, Penguin Books, 1982, 203 pp., £2.50.

Papież i My, Biblioteka "Więzi", Warszawa, 1981, 397 pp.

Pope John Paul II and the Catholic Restoration, Paul Johnson, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1982, 216 pp.

Jan Pawel II na ziemi Polskiej, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979, 286 pp.

Pope John Paul II: his travels and mission, Norman St John-Stewas, Faber and Faber Ltd., 1982, 159 pp., £4.95.

Prymas tysiaclecia, Cardinal Wyszyński, Editions du dialogue, Paris, 1982, 287 pp.

SOVIET UNION

Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights in the USSR: a selection of documents in translation, edited by Alan Scarfe, translated by Maria Belaeffa, Door of Hope Press/SSRC, Glendale/Orange, California, 1982, 152 pp.

Source Book on Soviet Jewry: an annotated bibliography, compiled by Sylvia Orenstein, The American Jewish Committee, New York, 1981, 116 pp. \$3.00.

An Illustrated Sourcebook of Russian Antisemitism, 1881-1978, Vol. 2, Twentieth Century, Zosa Szajkowski, Ktav Publishing House Inc., 1980, 245 pp.

A Soviet Dilema: Soviet Jews: A Study in Jewish Emigration from the Soviet Union, Robert I. Weitzel, Centrum Europeese Veiligheid en Samenwerking, The Hague, 1980, 43 pp.

Regional Development in the USSR: Trends and Prospects: NATO Colloquium, 25-27 April 1979, Brussels, Oriental Research Partners, Newtonville, Massachusetts, 1979, 294 pp.

The Education of a True Believer, Lev Kopelev, translated by Gary Kern, Wildwood House, London, 1981, 328 pp.

Media and the Russian public, Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, Praeger, New York, 1981, 156 pp.

Samosoznanie, Sbornik statei, compiled by P. Litvinov, M. Meerson-Aksyonov and B. Shragin, Khronika, New York, 1976, 320 pp.

EASTERN EUROPE

The history of Albania from its origins to the present day, Arben Puto and Stefanaq Pollo, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981, 322 pp.

Ideological Training in Communist Education: A Case Study of Romania, Martin J. and Penelope P. Croghan, University Press of America, Washington, DC, 1980, 201 pp.

Katoliska cerkev in drzava v Jugoslaviji 1945-1973: Socioloski teoreticni vidiki in raziskovalni model, Zdenko Roter, Cankarjeva Zalozba v Ljubljani, 1976, 310 pp.

GENERAL

From the Center of the Earth: The Search for the Truth about China, Richard Bernstein, Little, Brown and Company, Boston and Toronto, 1982, 260 pp.

The Struggle for Afghanistan, Nancy Peabody Newell and Richard S. Newell, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1981, 236 pp.

The Anatomy of Communist Take-overs, edited by Thomas T. Hammond, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1975, 664 pp., \$7.95.

The Crisis in Historical Materialism: Class, Politics and Culture in Marxist Theory, Stanley Aronowitz, Praeger, New York, 1982, 345 pp.

Czy diabeł może być zbawiony i 27 innych kazań, Leszek Kołakowski, Aneks, London, 1982, 335 pp.