

Reviews

Religion and Atheism in the USSR and Eastern Europe, edited by Bohdan R. Bociurkiw and John W. Strong, Macmillan, 1975, 412 pp. £10.00.

This is an extremely important book, albeit a disturbingly expensive one. It consists of 20 essays on various aspects of religious life in Eastern Europe and is the work of distinguished scholars, most of whom are teaching in North American universities. The bulk of the essays were delivered as papers at an international symposium held at Carleton University, Ottawa, in 1971; the rest were specially commissioned to fill certain gaps in the overall picture.

The book consists of four sections. The first contains two essays on religion and communism—one by a Christian, the other by a Yugoslav Marxist; the second section offers seven essays on different elements in the conflict between religion and atheism in the Soviet Union; the third provides two “across the area” studies of Catholicism and Judaism in Eastern Europe; the last consists of nine essays on the situation in different East European countries. Sir John Lawrence contributes a thoughtful introduction and the essays provide ample backing for Dr. Gerhard Simon’s conclusion :

The Church in a militantly atheistic society is forced to face the unavoidable dilemma between martyrdom and collaboration. This has very often led Western observers to divide Eastern Christians into martyrs and collaborators. Reality is much more complicated, and the church has to find its way somewhere in between the two extremes; either would lead to disaster.

Professor Joseph Bochenski’s contribution on “Marxism-Leninism and Religion” is quite outstanding and, as a brief statement of the basic issues dividing religion and communism, could hardly be bettered. In contrast, the “Reflections on Religion” by the Professor of Philosophy at Zagreb seem rather thin, though it is interesting to have his judgement that “in Marxist philosophy the phenomenon of religion is regarded as being far simpler than it is in fact”.

Michael Bourdeaux and Kathleen Matchett provide the only British contribution with a scholarly assessment of the role of the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church in recent years. Readers of this journal will find nothing new in their material, but it makes an essential contribution

to a volume of this kind. Bohdan Bociurkiw's discussion of "Religious Dissent and the Soviet State" is as well informed and balanced as one has come to expect of the Professor of Political Science at Carleton, and the tragic story of the Uniates of the Ukraine is outlined by Professor Vasyl Markus, who makes an interesting comparison between the present positions of the Uniate and Muslim religions, both of which are without an institutionalised church, yet retain "a psychological attitude and national-cultural identification, with a certain set of customs and practices zealously kept (within the family or among close friends)". Alexandre Bennigsen's article on Islam in the Soviet Union contains information not readily accessible elsewhere and my only regret here is that it is so short.

Ethel and Stephen Dunn's essay on the effect on religious behaviour of socio-cultural change in the USSR contains much fascinating material, based mainly on research carried out by Soviet sociologists, and leads them to conclude that

decline in religious behaviour for the entire Soviet population reflects not so much the secularisation of the countryside as the drain of the population into the cities, with the accompanying exposure of millions of persons reared in a traditional way of life to a mass of new stimuli and experiences.

Support for this conclusion is provided by David Powell who writes about the ineffectiveness of anti-religious propaganda in the USSR.

The essays on Poland, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Albania are, with one exception, packed with carefully researched material, and Peter Prifti's account of the history of recent events in Albania is particularly valuable, not least because of the general lack of information and concern about "the first atheist State in the world". A word of warning does, however, seem to be needed about the final section of the book. For one thing, it is nothing like as comprehensive as the chapter titles and general presentation appear to suggest. The essay on Church-State relations in Hungary, for example, is concerned only with relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Hungarian government. The information it provides is most valuable, but there is no mention of the very different attitudes and positions of the Reformed and Lutheran Churches in Hungary. Again, George Brand's essay on the "Status of Religion in the German Democratic Republic" concentrates on how and to what extent religious institutions may be deliberately used by an authoritarian State in building a new political community. This is an excellent piece of work but the Catholic Church in the GDR is not so much as mentioned, nor is there any reference to the Evangelical Church's position of "critical solidarity" with the State.

For quite different reasons, the essay on Religious Communities in Yugoslavia needs to be treated with considerable reserve. Its author, Manojlo Brocic, is a member of the Yugoslav Institute of Social Sciences where it would appear that political considerations have priority over scientific research. Attention is concentrated almost exclusively on the alleged shortcomings of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In contrast the government is presented as the true guardian of the nation's interests and, so Mr. Brocic would have us believe, only takes action against the Churches when religious leaders behave unreasonably and try to pursue reactionary policies. The inclusion of this essay in a volume of serious studies is a strange editorial lapse, although it certainly provides an example of communist propaganda, with inaccurate statistics to complete the story.

These are, however, relatively small defects in a book which generally maintains the highest standards of scholarship. All serious students of Eastern Europe cannot afford to be without such a volume, and many others ought to persuade their libraries to invest in a book which provides important information on a subject which is of wider interest than its publishers evidently realize.

TREVOR BEESON

The Ethics of Smuggling, by Brother Andrew, Coverdale House Publishers, Eastbourne, 139 pp., 40p.

Czech Mate, by David Hathaway, Lakeland, London, 187 pp., 60p.

The arrest and imprisonment of David Hathaway on a charge of smuggling "subversive" leaflets, as well as Bibles, into Czechoslovakia, highlighted the vexed question of supplies of Bibles to Eastern Europe. Brother Andrew was not happy about the title of his first book, *God's Smuggler*, but the name has stuck to his and other similar organizations. We now have two totally opposed schools of Christian thought: that which approves of "smuggling" and that which condemns it. There must be a *via media*, and any book on taking Bibles eastwards by means calculated to appeal to the general public should as a matter of course acknowledge the existence of legal methods and give a quick summary of the latest picture, which, in some countries, is encouraging (see Walter Sawatsky's article pp. 4-10). The British and Foreign Bible Society has made considerable progress since 1967, with "adequate" supplies in the GDR, Poland and