

Reviews

Memoirs, by Cardinal Mindszenty, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975, 341 pp., £6.

Jozsef, Cardinal Mindszenty was never the easiest of people and his *Memoirs* certainly reflect this. He stood up for what he believed was right, regardless of the cost to himself and was utterly immovable in his faith. Yet in the historical context, it is a moot point whether absolute opposition of his kind was the most appropriate weapon.

Mindszenty's hour came in the aftermath of the Second World War. Hungary was in the grip of major political changes and the process was exploited by the communists to their own advantage. Mindszenty failed to recognize that the great mass of the Hungarian people supported radical changes in 1945 and that there could be no return to the pre-1945 political order. Consequently, his resistance to these changes had a serious impact both on Hungarian politics – it aggravated an already tense situation – and on the position of the Hungarian Roman Catholic Church.

Yet again, perhaps Mindszenty's instinct was right in placing no trust whatever in the communists and in opposing them tooth and nail from the beginning. For it became evident fairly quickly that the communists regarded the post-1945 democratic experiment as an interlude and that they had every intention of establishing their political monopoly by force, if necessary.

In this situation, Mindszenty's determined opposition became an act of courage and he suffered the most appalling tortures for his stand. Yet in the final analysis, he achieved nothing. The Churches, Protestant as well as Roman Catholic, were subjugated and, arguably, as long as he lived, reconciliation of even the most superficial kind between Church and State was extremely difficult. It was not until well after his departure from Budapest and his removal from the archiepiscopal see of Esztergom (see "The Mindszenty Affair" *RCL* Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 10–11) that something like the beginnings of a *détente* could be perceived. Ultimately, history dealt harshly with Cardinal Mindszenty, for he seemed too often to be the wrong person at the wrong time, and his courage had few tangible results. His final humiliation – at the hands of the Vatican in the name of *détente* – was only the final act of Mindszenty's human tragedy. Posterity may well see him in very different terms from his contemporaries.

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