

to Regelson, which might lead him to modify his condemnation, though not, I suppose, to retract it.

It is greatly to be hoped that there will be an English edition of *The Tragedy of the Russian Church*, and I hope that foreign editions will keep the wonderful photographs of Russian church leaders, many of them martyrs or confessors. This book is a history of the episcopate rather than of the life of the faithful in parishes, concentration camps and exile. But the faces of these leaders show the life that upheld them.

JOHN LAWRENCE

Marx and the Bible

by José P. Miranda, SCM Press, 1977, 338 pp., £3.50

It is a sound rule never to review a book which excites one's hostility. Any exceptions must be in a good cause. The denunciation of Miranda is a very good cause.

I started reading his work on Budget Day. It was therefore a little difficult to accept his picture of down-trodden workers who are being systematically robbed and who are obliged to capitulate to Draconian employers. His point is that the worker is not really equal in the contract of employment, only theoretically equal. It is a very 19th century view, and one does not wish to deny that in many parts of the world, including no doubt his own Mexico, the 19th century situation still obtains. But Miranda is not talking about Mexico. He generalizes. He is talking about the whole world.

He says, bold fellow, that he is a "traitor" to the West. Now he defines the "West" solely in terms of capitalism. Time and time again he prompts questions about whether we live in the same world and how accurate is his factual information. Thus he informs us that "the media of social communication which, *as we know*, are controlled by the social classes which are most favoured by the prevailing system: the advertising of the corporation is today an indispensable source of financing the mass media". How indispensable? What about the BBC? It does not depend on advertising revenue.

Miranda is constantly nudging in this way his sympathetic reader. *We all know*, he confidently tells us, that "the educational system is designed to reproduce the prevailing social system" with the result that "people's ideas are fabricated from within and thus there occurs in history the most perfect type of slavery there has ever been: that of not only not knowing one is a slave, but of holding as an ideal of life a situation which objectively is slavery". Let this serve as an example of his style, and of the palpable rubbish of which he is capable.

His stance, to use the modish word, is however more subtle than one might think. He spends his time attacking "the West" without committing himself to defending "the East". He seems thus to be free-floating somewhere over the North Pole. But it is quite clear that he detests "the West". His most venomous attacks are directed against the very notion of the private ownership of property. He describes it as "legalized, institutionalized, civilized robbery". He has no notion that it might provide a bulwark for the individual against the tyranny of the State. Indeed he gives no serious consideration at all to *power*. He seems to have no inkling of how it can be abused, and of how it needs to be checked and controlled. The big bad wicked wolf of the West so fills his horizon that he can see nothing else. Ideological (i.e. *a priori*) thinking obstructs vision.

If Miranda's grasp of the world in which we actually live seems tenuous, his second-hand scriptural scholarship is like a game played with marked cards – bought some 40 years ago in Germany. Take, for example, his discussion of the nature of faith, surely one of the most central Christian concepts. What does faith mean in the New Testament? It cannot mean, asserts Miranda with misplaced confidence, "faith in Jesus", and statements which suggest that Jesus did call for faith on the part of his disciples (such as Matt. 18:6) are dismissed as not authentic sayings of Jesus. Instead of faith in Jesus, Miranda, following the least reliable of German scholars, proposes the "faith that the kingdom of God has arrived".

This shift away from the person of Jesus towards the kingdom (which, incidentally, neatly and exactly reverses the movement of the New Testament tradition) enables Miranda, with a great leap of his seven-league boots, to identify the kingdom as God's definitive intervention in history with the "existential moment" of a faith which consists in believing that "our world is not past recovery" (pp. 216–217). This sleight of hand being accomplished (and exposed), all that remains to add is that if faith is so defined (and emasculated), then Marx is on the same side as the biblical authors. For he too believes that "this world is not past recovery". Indeed.

These disgruntled remarks could – and no doubt will – be construed as a bourgeois reaction from someone who does not wish to be disturbed by awkward truths. However, even Marxists object to the book's method, even if they do so from their own point of view. Reviewing the book in *The Tablet* (30 April, 1977), Fr. Laurence Bright O.P., who has never hesitated to describe himself as a Christian Marxist or a Marxist Christian, dismisses it as academic and – a graver and more technical charge – "idealistic". Miranda, he correctly observes, treats scriptural texts just like any bourgeois or conservative critic. He is concerned with "individual meaning, not with the production of the texts from their socio-economic base". In other words, he is outside of history. Whether the alternative Marxist approach to the Bible implied by Fr. Bright is feasible

or not is another question, but the point here is that Miranda fails to measure up to this basic Marxist requirement.

I conclude that a work which satisfied neither Christians nor Marxists is unlikely to contribute anything useful to the necessary dialogue between the two groups. Miranda makes no contribution to truth, but his contribution to the history of error is valuable and exemplary.

PETER HEBBLETHWAITE

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