

# Reviews

## *The Fulfilled Promise*

by Gjon Sinishta, Santa Clara, California, 1976, 248 pp. Available from author at Xavier Hall, University of San Francisco for \$7.95 plus postage.

The key to this book lies in its title. Sinishta recalls a chilly March night in 1946 when the Jesuit centre at Shkodra was searched by the Albanian security police for the 27th time. While lying on the dormitory floor with a hundred other seminarians, he promised that if, by God's help, he should ever reach the free world, he would tell the story of the sufferings of the Albanian Roman Catholics whom he knew so well. Thirty years passed. Now a married layman resident in the USA, he has fulfilled his promise. Using the memoirs of other free Albanians he has given the first picture of his Church as it was at the time of the communist takeover, and a record of its martyrs.

Sinishta concentrates exclusively on Roman Catholics. Of Muslims and Orthodox he says nothing, apart from a tribute to a young Muslim lawyer martyred for his defence of Catholics. He gives a useful and balanced survey of Albanian history, Christianity and more specifically of Catholicism.

Although a ten per cent minority, the Roman Catholic Church was the chief target of anti-religious oppression because it occupied an ambiguous position. It had close links with Rome and Italy where many Arberesh (people of Albanian origin) live. Paradoxically, it has been more closely identified with Albanian nationalism and culture than the Orthodox Church or the Muslims. It pioneered education and had long shown a remarkable awareness of the need to promote Albanian literature. Catholics were in the mainstream of cultural life as scholars and writers.

Sinishta and his colleagues have compiled an authoritative list of priests and religious who were martyred, and provide many moving and inspiring biographies. Jesuits and Franciscans predominate. A hundred varied photographs alone make the book one of considerable historical value. Bianca Krosaj looks a frail young girl, but she refused to betray

the freedom fighters when she was tortured. Fr Jak Gardin's prison diary (he was freed and left Albania in 1955) suggests that those who were shot in 1945 were more fortunate than those subjected to long imprisonment. He tells how a priest celebrated Mass on his lap and distributed the sacrament to prisoners on their way to and from the bathroom.

Inevitably, contributions vary in quality, and some careful editing would have improved the whole book. The tributes are occasionally marred by an uncritical and hagiographical stance which undermines the vitality of some accounts. A very serious omission is that this book contains neither an overall survey of the general religious situation now, nor any speculation about the future, for neither Hoxha nor Shehu may live much longer. The book, nevertheless, provides additional information on Fr Stepen Kurti, shot in 1972 for baptizing a baby at the request of a fellow prisoner, and Dr Krasnigi has a useful survey which contains information on deaths and imprisonments between 1958 and 1972.

Is there any evidence of a continuing catacomb church? What evidence is there of belief in God? Surprisingly, Sinishta does not attempt to answer these questions. What seems to be at issue is whether the essentials of the faith have survived, or whether a debased semi-paganism has taken their place. The book shows a vibrant, well-informed and deeply devout Church in the 1940s, but also mentions in passing that blood feuds and pagan rituals still made remote mountain areas a challenging mission field.

Be that as it may, Sinishta has drawn attention to a tragic and neglected people and period. He gives Rome a salutary reminder of its duty to provide assistance through religious broadcasts backed by intense prayer.

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*Marxism and Religion in Eastern Europe*

(Papers presented at the Banff International Slavic Conference 1974), Sovietica Series No. 37, edited by Richard T. De George and James P. Scanlan, D. Reidel Publishing Co., Dodrecht, Holland and Boston, 1976, xvi+181 pp., Dfl. 65, \$27.

The title of this excellent volume is misleading. The book does not investigate the complex interrelationship between Marxism and religion in Eastern Europe. The inclusion of the essay on Muslim dissent in the USSR may be slightly inappropriate, since most Soviet Muslims live in Central Asia. Part I, which is analytical and systematic, consists of papers on "Contemporary Marxism". It has no organic link with Part II, which is historical and consists of papers drawn from three sessions devoted to religion: "Church-State Relations in Eastern Europe, 1918-1945", "The