

Reviews

The Great Revival: the Russian Church under German Occupation
by W. Alexeev and T. G. Stavrou, Minneapolis, 1976, xvi + 229 pp.
No price.

Readers of *RCL* will already be familiar with the extracts from German wartime documents on religious life in the Soviet Union which Professor Alexeev (with Dr. Keith Armes) has published in recent issues (see *RCL* Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 31-7 and No. 2, pp. 109-16). This present book is a systematic study of those documents and presents a detailed history of the ecclesiastical life of the Russian Orthodox Church in the occupied areas. Studies of Russia under German occupation have for a long time attracted historians for the obvious reason that the removal of the Stalinist system allowed, for however short a period, some expression of people's true feelings and responses. We have stories from various sources of open hostility towards secret police in Moscow when the Germans were at the gates, and of peasants welcoming the German tanks and supposedly, in some cases, believing that the iron crosses on them were a Christian symbol. Of course, it was not long before they realized that they had only exchanged one tyranny for another. Although some of the more farsighted German commanders on the spot realized that there was tremendous scope for developing local support, the political leadership in Germany demanded the implementation of the full *Mein Kampf* policy of treating the captured population as slaves and *untermenschen*. In one respect, however, a conciliatory policy was adopted. The churches were allowed some measure of open activity, even though within other parts of the Third Reich they were subjected to pressure. It is this nurturing of the Orthodox Church by the Nazis which is the subject of Alexeev and Stavrou's book.

The authors do not explain this anomaly in Nazi policy, though they do suggest that one factor was the suddenness and vigour of the religious revival which occurred "frequently in the first days and sometimes even hours after the advance of the German forces" (p. 62). The examples

given of this revival are perhaps the most interesting parts of this book for the general reader. In Rostov, for example, one church which had suffered war damage and was full of rubbish from its time as a workshop, was restored to working order in two days by hundreds of volunteers. The daily services were attended by thousands of people, young and old (p. 194). The main part of the book, however, is devoted to detailed ecclesiastical history, the relations between various bishops and the authorities. For one not conversant with the protagonists, this presents a bewildering array of names, with little depiction of character. The authors also hardly consider whether the bishops were right to make deals with the Nazis at the cost of promising, for example, to prohibit the baptism of Jews, as happened in Belorussia (p. 120). They also hint at the hierarchs' "political purposes" (p. 188) (presumably nationalist) without giving the question consistent treatment. This does not, however, detract from a very valuable study, which also includes an excellent introductory survey of the history of the Church in the '20s and '30s, and handy census figures of churches closed and the number of clergy. If the authors' picture of the almost total destruction of organized religion in the '30s is an accurate one, then the revival of the Russian Orthodox Church in occupied and Soviet Russia (the latter in order to compete with the nationalist attraction of the former) must be considered one of the major consequences of the Second World War, and an astounding phenomenon in its own right.

CHRISTOPHER J. READ

*The Religious World of Russian Culture. Essays in
Honour of Georges Florovsky,
Vol. II Russia and Orthodoxy*

edited by Andrew Blane, Mouton, The Hague and Paris, 1975,
359 pp. No price.

This is the second of three volumes, which together form a *Festschrift* in honour of Georges Florovsky, one of the patrons of Keston College. It is edited by Dr. Andrew Blane and readers of RCL will not be surprised to learn that his editorship has established a level of lucidity that is indeed rare in learned symposia. The book is primarily for specialists but anyone with a general knowledge of the Russian Church will enjoy dipping into it. That is provided that he is a competent linguist, for these essays are printed in their original language, whether English, Russian, French or German, in order "to preserve a multi-tongued and cosmopolitan flavor in keeping with the life and scholarship of Georges Florovsky," whom RCL is glad to salute on this auspicious occasion.

The book is historical and therefore most of it is outside Keston's