

*The Encounter of the Church
with Marxism in Various Cultural Contexts*

(Papers from a Planning Seminar held in Bossey near Geneva, Switzerland, 21-27 September 1975) Lutheran World Federation Department of Studies, Geneva, 1976, 130 pp. No price.

By its programme of studies in Marxism the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has put in its debt not merely the LWF's Lutheran member churches but the whole *oikoumene*. The Department of Studies issues a valuable bulletin which makes available in English important essays and papers from Eastern Europe or Latin America which would otherwise be hard to obtain; and from time to time adds to these a useful commentary. In recent years the China part of the exercise has been undertaken in double harness with the Roman Catholic research institute Pro Mundi Vita (Brussels), and this joint work has become the nucleus of a worldwide and fully ecumenical effort of study, in which of course the British China Study Project plays a full part.

Among the world confessional families, the LWF is peculiarly well fitted to undertake a project of this kind. There are large Lutheran churches in the USA, West Germany and Scandinavia deeply committed to the West; there are large Lutheran churches in Eastern Europe whose citizens are loyal members of their people's democracies; and there are sizeable Lutheran churches in Tanzania and parts of Latin America. Lutherans thus have a corporate awareness of socialism that is denied to the Anglican Communion or to the World Methodist Council.

The heart of the book under review is a series of essays from Chile (Bishop Helmut Frenz), West Germany (H. J. Benedict), Finland (M. Lundquist), East Germany (H. Wulff-Woesten), Hungary (B. Harmati), India (K. C. Abraham), Mexico (F. van der Hoff), Tanzania (S. K. Luta-hoire) and the USA (one by W. Everett, the other by G. A. Elston). Most of the authors are Lutherans, though not all, and with the exception of the essay on China (written by Arne Sovik of the LWF staff in Geneva), they come from the countries concerned. There is also a penetrating account of the Christian-Marxist dialogue "yesterday and today" by Ans Van Der Bent of the WCC Library.

These essays differ widely in style and content, a sign of their faithfulness to their several situations. An attempt has been made to reduce this diversity to order by the provision of methodological aids to analysis and comparison at the beginning and the end: I am doubtful about their utility. The quality of the "encounter" varies sharply from one cultural context to another; and those of us less directly involved will be well advised to expose ourselves to the specific character of each of a variety of situations before we set out to generalize. The authors are responsibly critical and their contributions are mostly well annotated. They give

the impression of having been involved in the encounter, but, for the most part, more in the role of follower than of pioneering leader.

The Christian-Marxist dialogue may have run out of steam, as Dr Van Der Bent notes; but the encounter will persist. Indeed, it will grow: on the evidence of Eastern Europe, Marxism is not able to extinguish Christianity; and on the evidence of the Third World, more countries with large, growing churches are likely to "go communist". The number of people in Britain who are prepared to respond sensibly to this prospect is frighteningly small. We need all the help we can get to increase our understanding. The volume under review is part of a continuing study, and I hope, for all our sakes, that it will go on and develop.

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Evangelical Christians in Russia and the Soviet Union
Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov (1869-1935) and the Way of the
Evangelical Christians and Baptists

(Evangelische Christen in Rußland und der Sovetunion)

by Wilhelm Kahle, Oncken Verlag, Wuppertal and Kassel, 598 pp., DM 26.

Unless an English translation of this book soon appears, only the lucky ones who read German will have access to the best book about the Evangelical Christians in the Soviet Union for the inter-war period. Kahle is a first-class historian with a growing list of articles contributed to journals and symposia. His book on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Soviet Union (1917-38) was reviewed in this journal earlier (*RCL* Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 38-9).

Kahle's history of the Lutherans was a sad story of the collapse and virtual disappearance of a once thriving Church. In contrast, his new book maintains a surprisingly optimistic tone, even though by 1938 the Evangelical Christians were also in a sadly reduced condition. One source claimed that 60 per cent of the churches had been closed and confiscated, and 40 per cent of the leadership was in prison. Their leader till his death in 1934, Ivan S. Prokhanov, persisted in seeing everything through optimistic eyes. In his youth Prokhanov had contemplated suicide but was stopped. Soon afterwards he was converted, and ever since was driven by the optimism of faith. In his autobiography he stated: "The teachings of Jesus Christ exude a pure, crystal clear optimism. How can his follower be a pessimist?" When he was already abroad permanently, and when the facts of vicious persecution of his Church were overwhelming, Prokhanov persisted in hoping that things would soon change for the better.