Many books, beginning with Solzhenitsyn, detail the malpractices of the Soviet Union and illustrate the cataclysmic gap between theory and reality, exploring the inhumanity of a society in which the collective rides roughshod over the rights of the individual and where the end justifies the means. It is quite remarkable, however, how few books give a calm, reasoned Christian answer to Marxist philosophy — and this in the face of the direct pastoral need for such writing for use among students, as well as a pressing general requirement.

To be successful, such a book must not, on the one hand, stridently dismiss communism unheard because of its record; nor must it expound some kind of social gospel or extol Liberation Theology in South America, without listening to what is happening in the countries where communism is actually in power. The author of this book, a professor at Regent College, Vancouver, strides confidently down the fairway without following some misfit ball into the bushes or out-of-bounds. It is a book which we have long awaited, one which can be confidently put into the hands of any enquirer because it takes its subject very seriously indeed.

The first main section of the book is a refreshingly simple re-examination of the historicity of the person of Christ in the light of Marxist strictures. Professor Bockmuehl states:

Yet the Marxist critique is weakest concerning the person of Jesus. The critics are loud and self-assured when attacking the sins of medieval popes and theologians. They are much more subdued when they deal with Paul's letters to the churches, and mostly silent in view of the person of Jesus of Nazareth (p. 79).

Anyone who has visited the Museum of Atheism in Leningrad will see that this critique strikes at the heart of its display.

The next main section is a clear and unemotional study of the ethics of
Marx and Lenin, followed by an essay on the challenge these present to Christianity, in which the author calls on believers to admit, not try to cover over, the past inadequacies of the church.

The final section, "Creating the New Man" in both Marxism and Christianity, is perhaps the most challenging. It is immensely useful to read a context for the contribution which such an original thinker as Josif Ton (recently emigrated from Romania) has made to the debate on the nature of the "new man" and the need for socialism to adopt Christianity and discard atheism in order to get it to work at all (pp. 153-4).

"The Challenge of Marxism" has already been through its first printing at the time of writing. It deserves many more.

MICHAEL BOURDEAUX

(The Churches and the Religious Life of Russian Germans. Catholic Section. Catholicism in Russia Past and Present)


The author sets out the basic aim of his book in his foreword to the second edition. On the one hand he wants to arouse interest in and understanding for the Russian German émigrés in the Federal Republic of Germany and on the other to strengthen the self-confidence of these people with regard to their religion. The Russian Germans constitute a significant part of the Roman Catholic minority in the Soviet Union, which includes Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Latvians and other nationalities, and numbers approximately three million faithful.

Following a short historical introduction to the Catholic Church in Russia which is concerned primarily with the relationship between the Vatican and the Imperial Court, Schnurr comes to the central theme of the book. In 1782 under Catherine II the archdiocese of Mogilev was created from the diocese of Belorussia and it extended over a huge area. Poland, the Caucasus, European and Asiatic Russia belonged to its territory and it formed the largest archdiocese ever created in the history of the Catholic Church. In 1902 there were approximately a thousand parish churches, eighteen hundred priests and four and a half million faithful.

Schnurr pays particular attention to the Tiraspol diocese which was founded in 1847 with a suffragan in Saratov and came under the archdiocese of Mogilev. The Tiraspol diocese had pastoral responsibility for the Catholic Russian German colonies situated on the Volga and in the Black Sea region.
The first population census in 1897 identified approximately 240,000 Russian German Catholics. The documentary evidence compiled here in such detail and richly illustrated with pictures and letters must surely be unique and provides the reader with detailed information about the history of the church and the community in this diocese until its liquidation in 1926.

Schnurr thinks that the present situation of Catholics in Ukraine and the Central Asian republics is relatively favourable. In 1978 the Polish émigré publication, Kultura, reported that there were still almost forty registered churches in Ukraine. Similarly, there are “working” churches in the republics of Kazakhstan, Kirghizia and Tadzhikistan. The older priests are mainly Polish and Lithuanian and were forcibly transported to these areas in the post-war years. The younger priests come from the two seminaries in Riga and Kaunas. The believers are mainly of German and Polish nationality. However, the State does everything in its power to make the clergy subservient. The Vatican seems to have abandoned the Catholic Church in the Soviet Union. The calls for an apostolic administrator and direct jurisdiction from Rome have remained unanswered thus far.

The present-day Catholic Church in the Soviet Union is a missionary church. Lenin’s decree of 23 January 1918 established the principle of the separation of Church and State and thus the church schools were completely abolished and church property nationalized. Atheist propaganda in the forties led to the closure of all churches. Priests died in exile. A “Catacomb” Church emerged from the internment camps which appears to be only gradually recovering itself following Stalin’s death and the subsequent period of relaxation. It is a diaspora church where even today church services are held secretly in private homes and there is an air of conspiracy where pastoral work is concerned. Schnurr documents his work with extracts from the memoirs of the priest Władysław Bukowiński who worked for twenty years in Karaganda until his death in 1974. It is an impressive description of the duties of a priest in the present-day Catholic diaspora in the Soviet Union.

Though much space has been devoted to the Russian German church community, the analysis of the situation will no doubt appeal to those interested in the situation of all Catholics in the Soviet Union.

LESZEK A. WILKIEWICZ

Religione e Spiritualità in URSS

In this brilliant and well-documented study, the author draws on his wide knowledge of Russian religious life and thought; I recommend it wholeheartedly.
It is divided into three sections: first, a historical survey of Russian religion, essential to an understanding of the present situation; second, a study of religion in Soviet life, defining limitations on religious liberty, outlining conditions of church life and analysing the current religious renaissance; third, a comprehensive anthology drawn from twenty-two samizdat writings, which Rivista del Centro Studi Russia Christiana has been foremost in publishing in the West (most are still not available in English). This last section comprises about half the book.

The book is admirably succinct and thought-provoking, with many illuminating quotations, including particularly apposite ones from the Czech Vaclav Havel to show that the same basic moral problems must be faced in all communist societies. Picking out the main strands of Russian religious thought, the author shows how, throughout this century, outstanding original Russian religious thinkers reiterate the same basic need — that of personal repentance, coupled with recognition of the collective responsibility of the whole Russian people for the years of terror. The sanctified wisdom, capacity for self-examination, and complete Christian commitment of the best representatives of today's intelligentsia (as illustrated in the anthology) is very impressive.

Renewal must come through the more perceptive laity and new converts, not from those linked with the structure of the Church. For the clergy are affected by their role since the 18th century as "civil servants", and the laity by the long-standing, theologically-based traditions of submission to authority and retreat from the world. These writers are saying that to be Christ's disciples in the fullest sense demands active love of our neighbour. They reject violence, however, not because it is too radical, but (Havel's point) not radical enough.

Although it is such a conservative Church, the unchanging doctrine, sublime worship and rich spirituality of Orthodoxy has been able to keep the loyalty and respect of new converts, and also to inspire a religious renaissance which is at the roots of the alternative culture in the USSR today. Can this in turn, the author asks, reinvigorate an inhibited, divided and discredited Church in which parish life (in our western sense) does not exist, and in which each parish is treated by the State as a separate, autonomous unit? The author may perhaps be underestimating the strength of the messianic element in present-day religious thought, except where he sees that it has combined with Russian nationalism to produce a communism that is virtually National Socialism, not Marxism.

If he has to concentrate on the Orthodox Church and the intelligentsia at the expense of other religious groups and the grassroots religious tradition, he has made up for it in his wide-ranging anthology. There we find documents from Lithuanian and Moldavian Catholics, Pentecostals, the Ukrainian Fr Romanyuk, Fr Dudko (as spokesman for the parish clergy), war veterans and other simple outspoken laymen, monks, young converts
including former communists, prisoners; and not least, an essay on the life and eucharistically-based teachings of the starets Tavrion*, who died as recently as 1978 and to whose funeral believers flocked from all over the USSR, an indication of the continuing power of religion there.

JANICE A. BROUN

New Spring in China? A Christian Appraisal

It is interesting that the title refers to a quotation from a Taoist poet of the ninth century, who has this mystic certainty: “All roads lead thither — one touch, and you have spring.” The present author’s question mark, however, is probably justified in the light of China’s thirty stormy years of communist rule. He asks: “Is the winter of China’s storms now to give place to a new spring of hope and progress?” His answer on the whole is realistic, optimistic — and conditional. “Given stable and wise government, undisturbed by political turmoil, China has great future prospects.” So the question mark still stands, but within a conviction that “China’s future belongs to God”.

The author is not so certain about the hand of God in the experiences of the last thirty years. He accepts that God’s “common grace” has been at work in China’s liberation from hunger, oppression and superstition, seeing the communists’ work as some kind of praeparatio evangelica, but his most severe criticisms are reserved for the so-called “Louvain theologians”, who saw the “new things” in China as heralding the Kingdom of God.

The book is a good account of the rise of Chinese Communism to power, the struggles within the Party, the trauma of the Cultural Revolution, the effects of the lost years especially on education and technology, and the present directions of China’s policies of the Four Modernisations. The life of the Chinese Church, a “tiny persecuted, hard-pressed minority”, is set in this whole framework.

Granted that the “Christian appraisal” angle is that of a conservative evangelical, the interpretation is able, honest and knowledgeable, and can be recommended to anyone looking for a simple guide to the Chinese puzzle — with the warning that China does not lend itself to simple outlines!

There are a few minor errors: e.g. K.H. not K.T. Ting. More seriously, the work of Morrison and his colleagues from 1807 on is ignored in the repeated assertion that Christian work began in China only after 1842 and the Treaty of Nanking.

JOHN FLEMING

*See document in RCL Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 96-100. — Ed.
Notes from the Other Side of Night
by Juliana Geran Pilon, South Bend, Indiana, Regnery/Gateway Inc.,
1979, 146 + xiii pp., n.p.

When so little is currently available about Romania it is disappointing that
this sincere little book does not give more insight into that neglected country.
The author was born into a Jewish family in Bucharest in 1947. Her parents
were of the Orthodox Jewish faith but — at any rate as their daughter
records it — visited the synagogue only once a year on the Feast of the Pass-
over, after which the family held a celebration. For fear of reprisals by the
authorities the parents kept their children in ignorance of the faith and
Juliana recalls her puzzlement about the meaning of the annual festivity with
its unusual food and the mysterious book from which her father read during
the meal.

After seven years of annual application (always made on the day of Yom
Kippur) her father gained permission for the family to emigrate; Juliana was
then fifteen years old. Although she has vivid memories of her childhood
they do not add materially to our understanding of Romania; her story is
typical of upbringing in almost any East European country. She was perhaps
too young when she left the country, and had been too much protected by
her parents, to have gained any objective impressions of the régime which
she had learnt to take for granted. Sadly, when she returns fifteen years
later, now an American citizen, to visit family and friends the danger of com-
promising them prevents her from going into any useful detail about her new
experiences of her homeland.

VICTORIA WATTS

Books Received

Listing of a book here does not necessarily preclude review in a subsequent
issue of RCL.

POLAND
Five months with Solidarity: A first-hand report from inside Hotel Morski,
Ethik der Solidarität: Prinzipien einer neuen Hoffnung, Józef Tischner,


Pope John Paul II: his travels and mission, Norman St John-Stevas, Faber and Faber Ltd., 1982, 159 pp., £4.95.


SOVIET UNION


EASTERN EUROPE


GENERAL