

Ten Years of *Religion in Communist Lands*

LEONARD SCHAPIRO

The first number of *Religion in Communist Lands* was published ten years ago. It marked the appearance of the only academic journal of its kind in Britain. This, in itself, was indicative of the increased information which was becoming available and of the fact that scholars had something valuable to add to the study of the course of religious experience and practice in the communist-ruled countries. In the ten years which have elapsed, the file of the journal has reflected the greatly improved knowledge of the subject which has taken place, to which Keston College has made a notable contribution. Students of communism have recognised that an understanding of the life of the religious communities in the Soviet Union and the countries of the Eastern bloc is an important question for political scientists as well as for those whose primary interest in the question stems from concern for the spiritual life.

In the first issue of the journal the Director of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism (as Keston still was in 1973), the Rev. Michael Bourdeaux, emphasised that it was not the intention that the journal should become a record of persecutions. The aim was to look at all aspects of the question, and to pay particular attention to the spiritual rebirth which was taking place in countries where the official doctrine was militant atheism, and where restrictions of various kinds were faced by believers.

It was made plain from the first that the journal was going to follow strictly academic principles — avoiding bids for popularity, let alone sensationalism or propaganda. The first editor, Miss Xenia Howard-Johnston (now Mrs Lyle Dennen) in the Editorial, which was to become a regular, and admirable, feature of every issue, made it plain that she regarded the main value of the journal to be educational. Miss Howard-Johnston's distinguished career at Oxford and London Universities was sufficient guarantee that this aim would be maintained — and the contents of the ten years' issues fully bears out the editor's intention. Very sadly, Miss Howard-Johnston had to leave us in February 1981. The Council of Management of Keston College is immensely grateful to her for the skill and devotion with which she developed and inspired the journal. It is a matter for great satisfaction to all of us con-

cerned for the welfare of Keston that she has been worthily succeeded by Miss Jane Ellis, who has for long been closely connected with the College.

The first number established the general shape of the journal: the Editorial (which became over the years a model of wise reflection) followed by several articles and a number of reviews. Two most valuable features completed the issues: a section of documents and a full bibliography of relevant publications. There have recently been some changes — apart from the fact that it has been possible to allow more space for important articles. The bibliography has been replaced by a more general account of recent literature (entitled *Sources*), though a full list is still available to interested readers on application. A new section, entitled *Chronicle*, provides in summary form items of religious news from the communist world.

The journal, though primarily concerned with the various Christian denominations, also deals with Judaism, Islam and Buddhism. The area covered is predominantly the USSR, the countries of the Soviet bloc and Yugoslavia, but there has been occasional treatment of China and Vietnam.

It is, of course, impossible to summarise with any fairness the great wealth of scholarship which has graced the pages of *Religion in Communist Lands* over the years. Learned articles apart, each issue normally includes photographs — even colour photographs have appeared, to illustrate a study of a religious painter. There have also been occasional “scoops” — such as a moving poem to Solzhenitsyn by Elizabeth Jennings, or a short article by Sinyavsky. The documents sections have, perhaps, most often provided scholars with materials of permanent value, not easily obtainable elsewhere. In 1977, for example, two issues carried intelligence reports of the revival of religion in German-occupied Russia during the last war. In 1979, there appeared a hitherto unknown letter by Lenin on matters connected with religious policy, secretly circulated to Politburo members. This document had originally appeared in the Soviet emigré press, where evidence for its authenticity could be found. The abundance of first-class articles which the journal has been able to publish over the years offers clear proof of the extent to which this field has attracted scholars new and old. It is, after all, only by asking the right questions that one can hope to find the answers. I believe Keston College can feel justly proud of having stimulated the academic world to pursue a line of enquiry which had hitherto been neglected.