

Reviews

Gorbachev, Glasnost and The Gospel by Michael Bourdeaux.
Hodder and Stoughton, 1990. 226 pp. Hardback, £13.95.
Paperback, £8.99.

Michael Bourdeaux's impressive list of publications has a recent addition. It is the fruit of a Leverhulme Trust sabbatical in Oxford and was written at a time of unprecedented religious revival in the USSR by a man of enormous experience and profound, long-term knowledge of Russian and Soviet affairs. It is of course well known that from the Soviet point of view, Bourdeaux is definitely not 'one of us', as they say. This has not been a methodological disadvantage, however, since Bourdeaux was able to travel and see much during the brief period of *glasnost*', despite the usual attempts to prevent him doing so.

The chapters are well arranged with a predominant focus on the Russian Orthodox Church, but including chapters on Protestants, the Baltic Churches, and the Uniates of Ukraine. As the title suggests, Bourdeaux establishes the secular context of Soviet religious life first, and demonstrates both his scholarship and his skill in organising his material by the clarity and accuracy of his exposition. But there is more. Excellent photographs, anecdotes and exciting reportage adorn this publication, which is moderately priced. The photographs of many brave spirits such as the recently murdered Fr Aleksandr Men', the departed Boris Talantov, Aleksandr Ogorodnikov and many others and official pictures from the 1988 Millennium celebrations are well chosen, arranged and reproduced.

The author argues persuasively that Gorbachev came to his 'momentous decision' to abandon the old dogma that religion was a retrogressive force in early 1988; but that he still had to sell the deal in terms of new legislation to both party conservatives *and* believers. Although the magnificence of the 1988 celebrations at first concealed this dilemma, its consequences, one feels, have yet to be resolved.

The saga of the Millennium celebrations (which the author nearly missed owing to unexplained visa restrictions) is an eye-witness account conveyed with sometimes breathless excitement, and it never lacks interest especially in the detailed account of the new draft legislation and the debates which accompanied it.

The chapter on 'New Laws and Old Institutions' is particularly good. It shows that the old (1929) laws relating to registration of congregations and so on must be anachronistic in the face of the present grass-roots changes in parish life. Bourdeaux offers some hope that able churchmen such as Archbishop Kirill of Smolensk will be able to influence the new order if and when it becomes reality. On the other hand, Bourdeaux suggests that the appointment of Khristoradnov as Chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs and the election of Patriarch Aleksii are unadventurous. Here I would disagree with the author: I feel that he sometimes oversimplifies the forces for change and preservation within the hierarchy. Patriarch Aleksii is not a voluble man, but his Baltic origins and his knowledge of church-state relations might well stand him — and the church — in good stead.

In 1989 and 1990 a number of disturbing events occurred which suggest that KGB illegality can still cast its shadow. These are documented in part by Bourdeaux and give cause for deep concern. Other infinitely more disturbing episodes have been the (so far unexplained) murders of Fr Aleksandr Men' in 1990 and of two more priests since, one of whom was apparently involved in investigating Fr Aleksandr's murder. These killings all occurred after the publication of this book. As Bourdeaux points out, there are many people in the USSR today, and particularly in Russia, who seek to appropriate the newly emergent Orthodox Church for their own purposes. There is a movement which sees the church as a kind of 'ethnographic myth' which is associated with Russian nationalism. This might not be significant in a normal society, but Russians suffer from a serious lack of religious knowledge, literature, and spiritual teaching in Soviet conditions. Thus there would appear to be a kind of ideological struggle going on within the Orthodox Church which has a profound bearing on the struggle for democratisation within society.

The role of churches in the struggle for democracy is also part of the theme of the aptly-named chapter 'The Baltic on Fire', dealing with the resurrection of the Catholic Church in Lithuania and other churches in the Baltic states. The recent events of January 1991 confirm the importance of this chapter and make its message even more poignant.

One of the most valuable chapters deals with the Ukrainian Catholics. This complex situation, apparently consciously muddled by

KGB disinformation to concerned Orthodox Churches in the West, is documented by Bourdeaux within its historical context. I suspect, *pace* Bourdeaux, that there has been some violence between congregations in the Ukraine in disputes over churches: ecumenism is a rare thing in the Ukraine at all levels, and Christians need to remember the old adage that violence breeds violence.

Michael Bourdeaux's final task is to explain the crucial practical role of the churches within the profoundly sick and impoverished society which is the USSR today. '*Miloserdiye*', that lovely Russian word which conveys connotations of 'kindness of heart', is the watchword (and now the name of an organisation) for Christian action. For many among the old and the sick, this has become the only small hope in the context of a spiritually and financially bankrupt state. Even if, as now seems likely, the USSR moves into a new phase of attempted repression and probably fragmentation, the West must not turn its back on this work. And this is where the new Keston College, from its new Oxford base, has a role to play.

Bourdeaux has created a deep, clear, excitingly written book. It will find a permanent place on relevant booklists, despite the already rather unhappily dated look of the catchy title.

STEPHEN K. CARTER

*The Lutheran Church and the East German State:
Political Conflict and Change under Ulbricht and Honecker*
by Robert F. Goeckel. Cornell University Press, 1990. 328 pp.

The author evidently had a problem in choosing a title for this book. 'The Lutheran Church' is misleading, as the author does not confine himself to the Evangelical-Lutheran provincial churches of Mecklenburg, Thuringia, and the erstwhile Kingdom of Saxony. He is concerned with all eight Protestant provincial churches. But perhaps the title 'the Protestant Churches' would also have been misleading, as the free churches and communities do not come into the picture.

An immense amount of painstaking research has gone into the writing of this book. Particularly impressive is the massive list of documents, mainly covering the years 1968 to 1974, taken from the archives of the CDU. It is no accident that these years play so large a part, as the central part of the book covers the period just before and just after 1969, when the *Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen* was formed

in the GDR. This was no doubt a time of great importance, both for church and state. The long list of other sources, from the West and from the GDR, published and unpublished, reveals the careful efforts of the author.

Another striking feature is the list of over sixty personal interviews carried out in 1979 — mostly with East German church leaders, but also with CDU members, academics, and representatives of both the party and the state. No doubt a good deal of material from these interviews is used to support statements made in the book. All the same, the reader feels somewhat cheated here. There is so little flesh on the bones. Could not some of the words have been quoted — even tiny extracts from the many conversations? This kind of thing might have given more of a human quality to the book. After all, the author is so often writing of relationships between people. Occasionally a corner of the curtain is lifted. On page 245, for example, ‘Honecker confided to Schönherr’ that fine agreements might be concluded between church and state, but that he (Honecker) was not always in a position to control his local bureaucrats. Clearly, the author did not think it right to give away details of confidential talks. Perhaps he has been over-delicate. Too often the narrative is unduly bald and colourless. Too often the church leaders fail to emerge as people, but rather as spokesmen of particular, unduly simplified, viewpoints. The present reviewer, for instance, heard the ‘conservative Leich’ give a hefty and outspoken dressing-down to the state’s representative (Dr Löffler) during a church event at Buchenwald concentration camp. The portrayal of the state leaders is even more lacking in subtlety. Too often we read statements like ‘the state interpreted this shift’; ‘the state moved to defuse the protests’; ‘the state sent a signal of goodwill’. The impression remains of a monolithic SED leadership, one in faith and hope and doctrine. The author probably did not think it his task to reflect tensions among political leaders, as secure evidence was hard to find.

There are but two or three references to the vastly important part played by the Federal German media, and they might escape the less careful reader. On many occasions awkward pronouncements or incidents were duly ignored by the GDR media, only to be seen by millions of GDR citizens as they tuned in — as almost everybody did — to West German television stations. This fact of life must have had an immense influence on state policy vis-à-vis the churches, but is largely neglected by the author.

Some 40 pages are allotted to a brief introduction. This section covers the National Socialist period, the ideology of the Socialist Unity Party, the status of the churches and the legal framework as it affected them. Given that there is only this much space available, the

introduction is very helpful. As the 1968-74 period represents the heart of the book, it is not surprising that over 150 pages are devoted to these years. It is therefore understandable that only a comparatively short space is devoted to the stirring events of the 1980s. Though so sketchy, this section is helpful. The 'argument from silence' shows that the book was completed well before the 'bloodless revolution' of October-November 1989; only a brief sentence here and there — presumably afterthoughts — can be found to show that the author knew of the collapse of the regime. The fact that the book was completed while the GDR was still a going concern is a real advantage. Now that the regime has disappeared like dew in the morning sun, leaving scarcely a wrack behind, it is easy enough to write historical wisdom. Now it is well known that the SED regime was little more than a power system, based on illusory foundations, and that its collapse lay in the logic of history. Nevertheless, it was surely a mistake for the author to wade into the high-flown political theories that grace the later stages of his book.

The language of the book is sometimes opaque. We read for instance on page 281 that 'the elite-level rapprochement was predicated upon the credibility of the respective elites with their mass base'. Might it not have been possible to say this in more straightforward English? Not all would agree that scholars are bound to use such esoteric language.

Up to this point the criticism has, in the main, been negative. It is only right to stress the great merits of the book. Anyone needing information about church-state relations in the GDR, particularly in the years 1968-74, will find Robert Goeckel a most reliable guide. The number of documents consulted and the wide range of people interviewed give great authority to the author's conclusions. Facts which have come to light since 1989 make it clear that the Ministry of State Security had its list of 'favourably disposed' organisations, through which they hoped to influence church policy. The Christian Peace Conference, the Weissensee Study Group, the Church Brotherhood of Saxony and the Gossner Mission all belonged to this category. Goeckel, writing well before the collapse of the regime, was evidently well informed about the work of such groups. The difficult and complicated situation which led up to the formation of the GDR 'Kirchenbund' is well explained. It becomes clear that state policy towards the churches was never easy or clear-cut; so often the decision to attack a particular bishop, say, or to encourage the independent attitude of a certain provincial church might bring both good and ill to the cause of the SED. It was a matter so often of striking a balance. Despite the dangers, mentioned above, of over-simplifying the situation, there is a great deal of helpful information about the

personal qualities of various church leaders.

There are several useful tables of statistics in the early part of the book. There is an adequate index.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that Robert Goeckel is not one of those scholars who studied the GDR at a distance. He has an excellent knowledge both of the country and of the German language. He has written a valuable work, which should not be neglected.

ARVAN GORDON

With God, For the People by Laszlo Tokes with David Porter.
London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990. Paperback, 226 pp., £3.50.

In the Eye of the Romanian Storm by Felix Corley and John Eibner.
Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1990.
Paperback, 272 pp., \$6.95.

The priest who sparked the Romanian revolution in December 1989, László Tőkés, is the subject of two books published last year. *In the Eye of the Romanian Storm*, by Felix Corley and John Eibner, and *With God, For the People*, by David Porter, relate 38-year-old Tőkés' life in Northern Transylvania, an area where Hungarians have lived alongside Romanians, not too peaceably, for almost ten centuries. Tőkés' story is one of a man whose mission was to revive both his church and his national culture. Both were being stifled by the repressive regime of Nicolae Ceausescu. Together with a few fellow theology students from the Protestant Theological Institute in Cluj, Tőkés began a dangerous battle against the conformity of church leaders and clergy to free his church from the stranglehold of the state, whose aim was to destroy it. It was this very battle which led Tőkés and his Reformed church congregation of Timisoara to spark the revolt against Ceausescu in December 1989.

With God, For The People is the authorised autobiography of László Tőkés with David Porter acting as a ghost writer. It portrays the events of Tőkés' life as if through the protagonists' own eyes. Because of the subjective form in which the book is written, it naturally presents events and issues from a personal standpoint, and this is often a specifically Hungarian standpoint.

The book leaves huge gaps in its brief account of the historical

events whereby a province which was ruled predominantly by a minority of ethnic Hungarians became part of the Kingdom of Romania in 1918, was partially regained by the Hungarians in 1940, when Hitler split the province between Romania and Hungary, and was finally awarded to Romania in 1944. The book entirely omits any explanation of what the Romanian claim to Transylvania was. The author mentions several times that the number of ethnic Hungarians has shrunk so that they are now a minority rather than a majority in some areas of Transylvania. He attributes this to Ceausescu's policy of forcibly moving large numbers of Romanians into Transylvania. However, he fails to state anywhere in the book that even before Ceausescu's migration policy in the 1970s and 1980s, Hungarians were an overall minority in the province and Romanians the overall majority.

The introduction to *With God, For the People* epitomises how many Hungarians feel about losing Transylvania to Romania: 'If you want to understand best the story that is told in this book, take a map of the country in which you live, tear off two-thirds of it and give those two-thirds to a neighbouring country.' It is sentiments such as these, portraying Romania's acquisition of Transylvania as unjust and arbitrary, which fuel Romanian fears that Hungarians will one day seriously argue for Transylvania's return to Hungary — absurd as this might be now that the Hungarians are a much reduced minority.

The book has predictably caused tremendous controversy in Romania. Bishop Tőkés is already a public enemy for most Romanians, and this book has deprived him of any remaining support he enjoyed among Romanian intellectuals in the opposition. The national opposition daily *Romania Libera*, one of the few newspapers to show support for Tőkés in the past, has published two open letters to the Bishop which are scathingly critical of him and the book. The Romanian writer Gabriel Gafita, author of the letters, argues that Tőkés' one-sided presentation of Transylvanian history is tantamount to calling for the redrawing of the present borders — a call which Tőkés has never made publicly, but which he is continually accused of. Gafita attacks Tőkés for expressing views in his book which contradict those expressed by him in his official capacity as honorary President of the Hungarian Democratic Union — the political party of ethnic Hungarians in Romania, who now number two million.

I remind you, Mr Tőkés, that you are honorary president of the HDU and this official position should constrain you at least not to make statements which flagrantly contradict the principles announced by your political organisation. You are putting your party in an extremely delicate position vis-à-vis Romanians, on an

issue as sensitive as that of the state borders and Romania's ownership of Transylvania. Words such as you use in your introduction do not contribute in the least to the dissipation of the tense climate of adversity and suspicion between Hungarians and Romanians.

Gafita's bitter attack, which is also personal, and his interpretation of Tőkés' views as a claim for Transylvania's return to Hungary, will certainly not contribute to easing tensions either.

Prior to Gafita's open letters, *Romania Libera* published an interview with Tőkés in which he defends himself against criticism of *With God, For the People* by saying that he did not read the book before it was printed. He states that he regrets that the question of Romania's acquisition of Transylvania was raised, particularly in the introduction, which he says he did not write. However, Gafita rejects this defence, arguing that Tőkés cannot avoid responsibility for a book which has his authorisation and on which he owns joint copyright with David Porter.

As an insight into the state of the Reformed Church in Ceausescu's Romania, the book is extremely valuable. Through the first-hand accounts of all Tőkés' confrontations with the authorities of church and state it shows how tight the state's grip on the church was. In a country in which very few dissidents survived, it is fascinating to enter the mind of one who dared to resist the most feared secret police in Eastern Europe, and discover what motivated this courageous and earnest man.

Both the books which we are reviewing demonstrate that Tőkés was motivated by his firm belief that to compromise and conform with the system would mean disaster, for his church, his people and his country. This belief, as well as a practical and Biblically-based Christian faith, drove him to protest when others considered it madness to do so. However, it is also clear, especially from the account by Corley and Eibner, that without the network of support he had from members of his family both abroad and inside Romania and from other dissident clergy, and without the very dangerous links he had with Hungary, Tőkés' resistance would have had less strength. In his autobiography he tells us that the role of western charities, in particular of Keston College, in publicising his case was crucial.

From Tőkés' own account, it is clear that his parents greatly influenced the development of his Christian faith and love of his national culture and people. Corley and Eibner throw interesting light on the part that László's father, Professor István Tőkés, played in forming his son's dissident attitude. Tőkés senior, now retired, though still an active writer and preacher, held the position of Deputy Bishop

of the Reformed Church, as well as Deputy Director of the Protestant Theological Institute. *In the Eye of the Romanian Storm* reveals an important precedent for László Tóké's public opposition to religious and cultural repression. This is the contact István Tóké had, in his youth, with the Swiss theologian who dared to oppose Nazism publicly, Karl Barth. The young István Tóké studied under Barth's guidance for several months in Switzerland. István Tóké did not actively carry out all of the ideas he picked up from Barth until many years after his contact with him. But he unconsciously passed them on to his son who began acting on them before his father did. István Tóké initially opposed László's involvement with the circle of dissident students at the Protestant Theological Institute. He began to act against communist repression of the church only in his later years.

In the Eye of the Romanian Storm lacks the interesting detail of some of Tóké's experiences found in his autobiography, such as his impressions of his experience as a captive of the Securitate in Mineu in December 1989; but it contains the same basic information regarding his life story and the events leading up to the Romanian revolution. Corley and Eibner personally followed these events as they happened while employed at Keston College. Their book gives additional information on the dissident movement among ethnic Hungarians in Romania, and particularly within the Reformed Church. It also gives a historical background which is infinitely sounder than that provided in *With God, For the People* (Eibner is an expert on the history of the Habsburg Empire).

The two books are thus complementary in many respects. It is a disappointment, however, that the autobiography of a churchman who has shown such a desire to promote understanding and integration between Hungarians and Romanians should succeed only in highlighting the differences between two perceptions of Transylvanian history.

FIONA TUPPER-CAREY

Contributors

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Fr Constantin Galeriu has served prison sentences for his religious education work as a Romanian Orthodox priest. He is a member of the Group for Reflection and Renewal in his church and in 1991 joined the Brotherhood, which aims to stimulate academic theological activity.

Arvan Gordon is a specialist on the religious situation in the GDR and China, and until his recent retirement was a member of the research team at Keston College. He is currently working on a book about religion in East Germany.

Rev. Dr Tomáš Halík was secretly ordained a priest in 1978 and served 12 years in the 'underground' church in Czechoslovakia. In 1990 he became a lecturer at the Catholic Theological Faculty of the Charles University in Prague and Secretary of the Czech Bishops' Conference.

Cardinal Basil Hume is Archbishop of Westminster.

Prof. Dr Peter Hünermann is President of the European Society of Catholic Theology.

Rev. László Lukács has been editor of the Catholic monthly journal *Vigilia* since 1984, and director of the press centre for the Hungarian Bishops' Conference since 1989.

Dr Oto Mádr was arrested in 1951 because of his work as a priest with university students, and spent 15 years in labour camps. As a Catholic theologian he has written in Czech *samizdat*, and is now editor of the journal *Teologické texty*.

Prof. Dr Hans Joachim Meyer was Professor of Applied Linguistics at Humboldt University, Berlin, and chairman of the Joint Action Committee of Catholic Christians in East Germany. He became Minister of Education and Science in the last East German government, and since November 1990 has been Minister of Science and the Arts in Saxony.

Rev. Géza Németh was dismissed from the Ministry by the leadership of the Hungarian Reformed Church in 1971 and subsequently became Leader of the Community of Reconciliation, an ecumenical basis community. He was rehabilitated by his church in 1988 and is now a missionary pastor.

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Keston College

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