

Book Reviews

Stasiland by Anna Funder. London: Granta Books, 2003. 288 pp., £12.99.

Many assessments of various aspects of the one-time German Democratic Republic have appeared – both in German and in English – in recent years. This book is noteworthy in that it was written by a Australian woman, born in 1966, who had almost no first-hand experience of the GDR. Her comparative ignorance may have proved an asset, since she seems to have brought little in the way of prejudice to her task. She has brought with her other considerable assets as well: an excellent knowledge of German; experience in broadcasting; legal training; journalistic skills; and a considerable talent for listening and observation.

The evidence of some private ex-citizens of the GDR, well remembered by Funder, have helped her to portray ordinary life very convincingly indeed. Moreover, her ‘notes on sources’ and acknowledgments make it clear that her researches were carried out with thoroughness and care. The ‘feel’ of life in the GDR, as portrayed in many passages, is strikingly authentic; it gives the impression that she had spent years in the country, and knew it well.

However, no claim is made in the book that the reminiscences of the *Stasi* men interviewed are wholly truthful. The author reported what she heard. Some statements, no doubt, are reliable. Others (for example, those of ‘Herr Bock’) surely contain a strong tinge of self-justification; perhaps, the wish to suggest that the *Stasi* had been far more effective than in fact it was. Let the reader beware!

Funder’s plan was to gain an insight into the work and policies of the *Stasi* (the GDR secret police) by the simple expedient of interviewing former members of that force at that time living in the Federal Republic. Her method of placing advertisements in the Berlin press produced striking results: several former *Stasi* officers, including some notorious characters, came forward. One-time GDR citizens, who – having suffered terribly at the hands of authority – became friends of the author, gave remarkable evidence of the ruthless brutality of the secret police.

Funder began her labours in and around Berlin late in the twentieth century. There emerges a vivid picture of the work of the *Stasi* in what has been called, probably with justice, the ‘most perfected surveillance state of all time’. The situation of religious believers is not central to the book. However, the interview with the abovementioned ‘Herr Bock’ gives a compelling glimpse into the *Stasi* department that dealt with the church (probably, in this context, the Protestant churches). Bock confirms a generally recognised fact: that the churches constituted the only area of GDR society in which oppositional thought could find an organised structure. In order to gain entrance to theological colleges and infiltrate them, designated *Stasi* members had to have theological training themselves and understand Christian thinking. By the last days of the GDR, Bock maintains, 65 per cent of the church leaders were ‘*inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*’ (*Stasi* informers), and all the rest were under surveillance anyhow.

Such a picture simply does not accord with the situation as seen by those who knew the GDR well, however. For one thing, the state of religious bodies in the GDR was a

most complicated one; any black and white picture of some for and some against 'socialism' is totally misleading. There were, indeed, one or two Christian bodies on which the state media bestowed the highest praise. The most obvious example is that of the new Apostolic Church – the third largest religious community in the GDR. This church's credal statements contain a clause (see Rom. 13:1–7) that lays heavy stress on the Christian's duty to obey the civil authorities. It is reported that New Apostolic members showed far more than a mere token commitment to 'socialism'. Yet it is no coincidence that the New Apostolic Church has enjoyed cordial relations with the German state under so many regimes – under the monarchy, during the Weimar Republic, under Hitler and in the time of the GDR.

There were certainly collaborators in the ranks of both the Protestant and the Roman Catholic Churches. A number of informers, who had for some years occupied leading positions in the mainstream churches, came to light in 1989. Informers made up only a tiny minority among ministers and priests, however. For much of the lifetime of the GDR, indeed, believers proved grievous thorns in the side of the socialist body politic. No doubt much of the detail given to the author by former *Stasi* officers is authentic. Yet they must often have exaggerated the effectiveness of their work; like the political leaders, they came to live in an Alice in Wonderland world, in which realities were inextricably mixed with fantasy.

Anna Funder gives, it cannot be denied, a vivid and partially convincing account of the work of the *Stasi*, their methods of surveillance, and their tactics in dealing with troublesome bodies (including the churches). Relying on the life-stories of some of her contacts, she describes most tellingly the brutal methods used by the authorities to hunt down and punish the slightest signs of 'sedition'. *Stasiland* is a worthwhile addition to the list of books written in English about the GDR.

ARVAN GORDON

Religion in China edited by Daniel L. Overmyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. viii + 214 pp. ISBN 0-521-53823-8.

This volume is a compilation of 11 articles published in *The China Quarterly* (no. 174, June 2003). The editor tells us that the project originated in 2001; well-known scholars highly regarded as 'among the best in the world on their topics' and who had done field work studying religion in China were invited to contribute their research findings (p. 1). In 2001 I met Dr Louis Edmonds, the then editor of *The China Quarterly*, who said that he intended to compile an impressive volume dealing with every aspect of the religious question in China and making a very important contribution to the study of religious issues in the age of modernisation. The book covers every branch of the five government-recognised religions (Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism), a very salient component (*qigong*) of the Falun Gong religion, the regulation of religion in China, and folk cults such as 'Silkworm Mother'.

Local (folk) religions receive special attention in this volume, with three articles dealing with them in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan as well as in Baoding in Hebei. In Hong Kong, since its reversion to Chinese rule in 1997, Catholicism has however been making a much greater impact on socio-political life than any local religions, but this development is not noted or discussed in this volume. Hong Kong Catholic Bishop Joseph Zen's defiance of the government on the proposed legislation on Article 23 of the Basic Law

captured international attention. Under colonial rule the Catholic and Protestant churches in Hong Kong had a record of playing a contractual role by providing education, social and medical services for the government. Since 1997, however, the Catholic Church in Hong Kong has been developing a dissent role, siding with democrats and legal professionals in conflicts with the government on human rights issues. (See Beatrice Leung and Chan Shun Hing, *Changing Church and State Relations in Hong Kong 1950–2000* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2003). See also Lap-yan Kung, 'Politics and religions in Hong Kong after 1997: whether tension or equilibrium is needed', *RSS*, 32, 1, March 2004 – *Ed.*)

Richard Madsen has enjoyed a high reputation as an expert on the Catholic Church in China since the publication of his masterpiece *China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998). In his article in the volume under review, however, 'Catholic revival during the reform era', some important issues in the Chinese Catholic Church escape his attention. In fact, since 1999 tension between Beijing and the Vatican has been growing after the Vatican refused to transfer local bishops' administrative powers to the civil authorities as requested by Beijing. This development has drastically changed the landscape of the relations between the state and the Catholic Church in China. Underground church personnel have been arrested, while the canonisation of 102 saints in China turned into a political dispute between Beijing and the Vatican, with Hong Kong Bishop Joseph Zen sandwiched in between. State control of religion in general and Catholicism in particular has been intensified since the banning of Falun Gong in 1998. While mainstream social science researchers have not paid much attention to this issue, a low-profile church journal devoted a special issue to the discussion of these phenomena, which might change the path of development of the Chinese Catholic Church. (See *Tripod*, 130, Autumn 2003. The whole issue is devoted to the legal/canonical question. Anthony Lam's article 'Commentary on "A Management System for Catholic Dioceses in China"' (pp. 42–53) compares Chinese legal provisions with the corresponding codes of Canon Law. *Tripod* is published by the Holy Spirit Study Centre in the Hong Kong Catholic diocese.)

Pitman Potter studies state control of religion from a legal perspective. His is a very important and timely study indeed. Legal reform was launched in 1979 at the Third Plenary Session of the Central Committee in order to sustain the process of modernisation. Stanley Lubman, however, has humorously compared China's limited legal reform with a bird in a cage. The reform was launched with the intention of promoting the 'rule of law', but the result turned out to be 'rule by law' (Stanley Lubman, *Bird in A Cage: Legal Reform in China After Mao* (Stanford University Press, 1999).) Potter's macro approach does not allow him to paint a clearer picture than Lubman of how Beijing has employed sophisticated methods to intensify its control in religion in the name of managing religious affairs by means of the law. In 1990 the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference set up a committee to draft laws to deal with religious questions. After working for a couple of years, the committee was unable produce a religious law for political reasons (as revealed by Bishop Louis Jin, bishop of Shanghai, who was a member of that drafting committee). Two documents were subsequently issued by the Council of State to manage religious affairs: Document 144 (1994) *Guowuyuen guanyu zhongjiao huodong changsuo guanli tiaoli* (*Regulations from the Council of State on Managing Religious Activities*) and Document 145 (1994) *Guowuyuen guanyu zhonghua renmin gongwuguo jinnei weiguoren zhongjiao huodong guanli kuiding* (*The Council of State's Management of Foreigners Staying in the People's Republic of China*) (to be found in Documentation Centre of Party Central and Policy Section of Religious Affairs Bureau (ed.), *Xinsichi zhongjiao gongzuo wensin xuanbiam* (*Selected Documents on*

Religious Work in the New Age), pp. 273–77). These became the cornerstone of the provincial and municipal regulations that were drawn up by the order of the central government according to the special situation in each location to regulate the management of religious organisations, religious activities and places of worship. (See: Executive Yuen Mainland Committee (ed.), *Dailu diqu zhongjiao fagui weibian (Compilation of Religious Rules and Laws on the Mainland)* (Taiwan, Executive Yuen Mainland Committee, 1995)). Yunnan Province compiled a comprehensive collection of national and provincial regulations and laws for internal use by religious cadres. (See: Religious Affairs Bureau of Yunnan Province (ed.), *Zhongjiao fagai zhengce zhongjiao tuanti zhangcheng weibian (Collection of Religious Regulations and Constitutions of Religious Organisations)* (Yunnan, Religious Affairs Bureau of the People's Government (no date)).

There are new developments in the religious arena in China which are perplexing Beijing. The American Jews who are doing business in Shanghai have established a synagogue in a private building. Recently Patriarch Aleksii of the Russian Orthodox Church has expressed to the top Chinese leaders, via President Putin, his church's wish to reactivate Orthodox life in the three dioceses in Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang and Manchuria, which functioned until 1949. It will be very interesting to see how Beijing deals with these questions given that neither Judaism nor Orthodoxy are officially recognised religions in China. These issues do not receive sufficient discussion in the book under review. It is to be hoped that a second edition will deal with these thorny problems.

All the above-mentioned defects are relatively minor, however. Many of the articles deserve special commendation. The study of Buddhism by Raoul Birnbaum is of high quality and discusses a very profound question that is relevant to the experience of every religion in China: the Buddhist monastic vocation in a society where economic materialism prevails. Daniel Bays contributes an authoritative, well-written and comprehensive study of every aspect of Protestant life. All in all this volume is one of the most comprehensive discussions on religious affairs in contemporary China.

BEATRICE LEUNG

Die Wiederkehr der Religion: Lage und Schicksal in der säkularen Moderne by Gottfried Küenzlen. Munich: Olzog Verlag, 2003. 207 pp.

This book deals with the perceived worldwide 'return of religions as life-guiding powers, as guarantors of cultural identity and as constructive religio-political forces' (p. 9). It covers a wide range of themes and issues connected with the changing place and role of religion in the contemporary world. The first chapter deals, on the one hand, with the disempowerment of European Christianity, and, on the other, with the global return of religion. The second deals with religious movements in secular modernity and treats particularly the problems of religious fundamentalism (interpreted as 'modern antimodernism') and of the New Age phenomenon (critically analysed in the perspective of the Christian understanding of the relation between God and the human person). It also includes reflections on pluralism, tolerance and truth and usefully reminds us that 'the constitutional conditions (*Grundrechtsvoraussetzungen*) of the liberal-democratic state are dependent on the ethical culture of its citizens' (p. 100). The third chapter, 'Religion, politics and ethics in the liberal constitutional state' considers the questions of totalitarianism and political religion, of religious liberty, and of the unique role of religion in the USA. It also touches some basic problems of bioethics. The fourth chapter discusses

critically the functionalist theory of religion, and juxtaposes the sociology of Max Weber and of Emile Durkheim. The concluding chapter ('Perspectives') presents the author's thinking about the future of Christianity as a question of the future of Europe and about the growing Muslim presence in the old continent. The author expresses his concerns that Western European Christianity will not take part in the worldwide 'return of religion' and that the 'cultural intelligentsia' ('*Kulturintelligenz*') seems to remain completely unmoved by the 'erosion of Christianity' in Western Europe (pp. 181–82). Küenzlen captures popular frustrations about the growing presence of Islam in Western Europe and reproves the 'cultural intelligentsia' for its insouciance in the face of the 'impending partial islamisation of Europe, and also of Germany' (p. 188). The concluding remarks point to the lack of receptiveness, and even opposition, to Huntington's thesis about the 'clash of civilisations' among the '*Deutungseliten*' in Germany (p. 201), to the need for the rediscovery and protection of the 'spiritual-cultural roots' of the 'open liberal societies in the West' (p. 202), and to the uncertainty about the answers that contemporary culture, divided as it is between secularism and religion, will find to the question of human existence (p. 205).

Undoubtedly, the book stimulates thought about the important and multifaceted issues it touches upon. While readers may find certain statements about Islam controversial and unnuanced, this very fact exposes the enormous complexity of the questions that recent developments in the religious and political scene have posed. Highly contextualised explorations of the religious dimension, in its close interrelatedness with other dimensions of societal life – economic, cultural and political – provide a more theoretically promising way of conceiving the renewed salience of religious identities. Whether one will agree with Küenzlen's major argument about the 'return of religion', or will seek to contest it, his book makes a contribution to the contemporary discussions about religion, fundamentalism and the inherent predicaments of secular modernity.

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