

Vatican gave a free hand to the Polish, Hungarian and other Catholic hierarchies to act as they saw fit in the given circumstances. But some were more adroit and, in fairness, also more lucky than others. Cardinal Wyszynski in Poland, for example, faced communist adversaries who were less formidable than those who confronted Cardinal Mindszenty in Hungary. But Cardinal Wyszynski also had more political sense. The understanding which he reached with the Polish regime in 1950, at the height of Stalinism in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe, caused some concern in Rome. At all events, whether adroit or not, all church leaders and their flocks in Eastern Europe suffered in the 1950s, and quite drastically and tragically in places like Czechoslovakia. The communist regimes used the famous papal decree of 1 July 1949 to persecute both priests and faithful as "anti-state" elements. This decree denied the sacraments to Party members and threatened with excommunication those faithful who embraced "materialist and anti-christian communism". But as Mr. Stehle correctly observes, Rome's intention was defensive: i.e. to prevent the movements of collaborating "peace priests" from getting out of hand and to stiffen the stand of the bishops and their flocks.

When the Stalinist Terror had subsided, the Vatican in the late 1950s tried once again to build bridges to Eastern Europe. Mr. Stehle carefully and fairly chronicles the results of that policy to date – its failures but also its modest successes, such as the agreement with Yugoslavia in 1966. He does not pass judgement on the policy – the time is not yet ripe in any case – but his scholarly work helps the reader form his own judgement and contributes to an understanding not only of Eastern Europe's complicated religious situation but also of the ways of Rome. Mr. Stehle should also be praised for his lively and interesting style which helps the reader absorb even the most complicated matters of higher church politics.

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Young Christians in Russia

by Michael Bourdeaux and Katharine Murray, Lakeland, 1976,

156 pp., 75p.

It is a common misconception that the churches in Russia are only full of old women (*babushki*). *Young Christians in Russia* shows that this is not so. The evidence presented indicates that there is a revival (p. 22) as well as a survival of Christianity among the younger generation. This is confirmed obliquely in the official press which naturally does not wish to publicize such a revival. A few years ago it was claimed that most young believers come from believing families. Indeed, Soviet propaganda

claims that this is true of 85–90% of young Baptists (p. 89). But even in the early 1960s this writer met young atheist Russians in a major Soviet city who not only gladly discussed the reality of faith in Christ, but who also came to church with him.

The battle for the minds and hearts of the young is unceasing. The Kiseleva case (p. 146) illustrates the success of Soviet atheism in combating religion: kindness and interest were used rather than crude propaganda. And yet the authors of this book claim that the majority of believing children maintain their faith in the face of cruel abuse at school.

The family as a whole has come under great pressure. Easy divorce and cramped living conditions are only two of the contributory factors. *Young Christians in Russia* considers the laws which allow parents to be deprived of their parental rights for “exerting a harmful influence on their children by immoral or anti-social behaviour” (p. 132). The book documents some cases of families torn apart because of religion. The Sloboda family is mentioned as well as others.

The Reform Baptists, the book claims, have been adept at attracting young people “in search of a simple, life-sustaining faith” (p. 73). We are updated on the harassment and the protests of several young believers. Vanya Peters, a Volga German, is able to praise God as he tells others about Jesus Christ. Part of the Ivan Moiseev story is recounted. A story of endurance, heavenly visions coupled with torture may seem too fantastic to Western readers, unaccustomed to such simple faith in God, but this story sounds like something from the New Testament. Ivan is surely one of today’s Christian martyrs. Other young Baptists, however, (Maria Braun is mentioned) have not stood firm in their faith.

The contribution of an Orthodox layman to this book should be noted: Mikhail Meerson-Aksyonov contributes an article, “The People of God and the Pastors”. In it he discusses developments in the Orthodox Church, pointing particularly to an increasing polarization between clergy and laity. He stresses the importance of lay involvement and of a committed Christian participation in everyday life. There is also a chapter in this book on the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania with useful extracts about the life of young Catholics taken from the *samizdat* journal, the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*.

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