The Russian Phoenix by Francis House. London: SPCK, 1988. Paperback, 133 pp., £7.95.

Francis House set himself the well-nigh impossible task of presenting 1,000 years of Christianity in Russia in little over a 100 pages of text. But he has managed with wide sweeps of his brush to paint an authentic picture of the church's experience over the centuries and particularly of the difficulties and dilemmas which have faced it in the 20th century. His book is an excellent introduction for the non-specialist.

The author approaches his subject with respect, admitting that his main theme — why the church in the Soviet Union has survived in such a remarkable way — is at heart a mystery: 'It is not for mortals to know the whole secret of the resistance and renaissance of the faithful in the USSR' (p. 120). Nevertheless his sympathetic understanding for the inner life of the Russian Orthodox believer enables him to offer a spiritual explanation over and above his historical and sociological explanations for the survival of the church (chapter 11). Ultimately it has been the Christian's faith and participation in worship that has led to this survival. In secret, the leadership of the startsy has continued behind the visible structures of the Russian Orthodox Church: with their spiritual gifts (the author unfortunately translates prosorlivost as 'clairvoyance' not 'discernment', p. 27) these holy men have kept alive to this day a powerful life of prayer and faith in the Soviet Union.

Francis House divides his study into two parts, the first covering the Russian churches (nonconformists as well as Russian Orthodox) before the revolution, and the second the post-revolutionary period. Inevitably the reader is given a cursory survey of some of the main periods in Russian history — the Kievan period, the Tatar domination, the rise of Muscovy, the church schism of the 17th century, the period of Peter the Great's reforms — but his choice of detail often helps the reader understand certain basic patterns of Russian church life. The conflict between Nil Sorsky and Joseph of

Volokolamsk illustrates well the continuing conflict between those Christians who emphasise the inner life and withdrawal from contact with external social and political structures as opposed to a more worldly view which sees the need for maintaining relations with the state and society. The author makes a link between Bolshevik anti-religious policy and the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia of the 19th century. The majority of educated Russians had been alienated from the Russian Orthodox Church since the time of Peter the Great when the church became tightly controlled by the state. The intelligentsia, a specific group from amongst the educated in Russia, were fundamentally anti-religious as demonstrated in the essays of the Vekhi collection. But Francis House manages to redress the balance and also shows how the intellectual history of the 19th century and early 20th century included men of religious faith, the Slavophiles — Kireyevsky, Khomyakov and Vladimir Solov'ev — and the religious thinkers of Russia's Silver Age, Berdyayev, Bulgakov, Frank and Struve whose essays in Vekhi had proved such a bombshell in 1909.

The second part of *The Russian Phoenix* covers three periods, 1917-41, 1941-59 and 1959-88. Again, in a limited space the author covers a myriad subjects. Occasionally the reader is irritated by the lack of references in the text (a bibliography for each chapter is given at the end) and would like to know who is meant in the phrase 'as someone realistically observed' (p. 86) and 'according to an experienced Western observer. . .' (p. 85). The author's approach is consistently balanced: he appreciates the position of the dissidents and those Christians who refuse any dealings with the state, but also understands those church leaders who, to preserve a visible structure, had to come to an agreement with the political authorities.

The English reader will appreciate the links frequently made with events in English history and particularly with the Anglican Church. Appendix I 'The Russian Orthodox Church and the Church of England' is a brief but fascinating account of relations between these two churches but, unfortunately, there is no explanation about this document. Who wrote it and when?

In addition to sketching in some of the links between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Anglican Communion, the author places the Russian Christian experience in the wider context of Christendom as a whole. Soviet Christians are now the church's experts on how to survive in a secular and often militantly anti-religious environment. Lessons vital to the survival of the church worldwide could be learnt from the Russian experience.

Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev by Frederick C. Copleston. Tunbridge Wells: Search Press and Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986. 445 pp.

This book covers Russian philosophy from the late 18th century (though the first extended treatment in the book is actually of Chaadayev rather than Herzen) through its bifurcation in the early 20th century into the parallel branches of dialectical materialism in the Soviet Union (the book in fact goes beyond Lenin, through Stalin, to selected philosophical developments as late as the 1960s) and Russian religious philosophy as developed abroad after the Revolution (here Berdyayev actually is the final major figure considered). Professor Copleston acknowledges the contributions of distinguished predecessors (the histories of Russian philosophy by N. O. Lossky (1951), V. V. Zenkovsky (1953) and A. Walicki (1979)) and says that his aim is to complement rather than to replace these works. What he has succeeded in providing is a sober, sensible and clearly-written study which will orientate the English-speaking non-specialist in a field where the familiar and the exotic blend in a disconcerting manner.

Copleston knows what specific problems Russian philosophy presents to the western reader, and addresses these directly. Discussing the post-revolutionary religious philosophers in exile, for example, he writes that they

probably tend to give the impression of pursuing metaphysical speculation in which appeal is made to intuitive knowledge rather than to closely reasoned argument. To put the matter bluntly, they may seem to make assertions about what is the case without giving any convincing reasons for believing that reality actually is what they claim it to be. (p. 354).

In another place he warns the western reader against leaping to the conclusion that any Russian philosopher who appeals to 'faith' is a Christian theologian in disguise. 'The word "faith", says Copleston, 'may be used to mean not assent to a set of propositions formulated by the Church but rather an intuitive apprehension of oneness or spiritual reality.' (p. 405). In these and similar ways he tries to remove some of the major obstacles which might put off a potential student of Russian philosophy.

Too often the works of Russian philosophers are analysed by enthusiasts or disciples who allow their own preferences to colour what purport to be objective accounts. Professor Copleston's book is refreshingly different: he is a professional philosopher and his approach remains coolly objective and impartial. Recognising that Russian philosophy has often merged into, or been subsumed by,

socio-political considerations, he determines to 'take a broad view' and 'not to worry much about distinctions between the history of philosophy, the history of ideas, the history of social theory and religious thought'. At the same time, however, his own professional philosophical equipment enables him time and again to pinpoint the precise issues on which particular Russian thinkers agree or disagree, and to show how many a heated argument over the significance of this or that philosopher can be sensibly resolved.

After analysing Lenin's ideas, for example, he writes as follows:

He was a revolutionary leader, and it is absurd to complain that he did not measure up to the standards of an academic philosopher. He never claimed to be one. . . If he had not been turned into an authority, even in the philosophical area, it would be unnecessary to dwell on his shortcomings as a philosopher. After all, they are sufficiently obvious. But as he was elevated to the rank of an authority, a measure of iconoclasm is desirable. . . He was not a great philosopher. And the official belief that he was has been of no benefit to the development of philosophy in the Soviet Union. (p. 312).

In another place, he offers a succint one-page summary of the similarities and differences amongst the early 20th century religious philosophers, and indicates which of them can properly be described as disciples of Solov'ev (p. 352).

Professor Copleston's style throughout is clear and simple, and his exposition of complex issues is correspondingly clear and concise. At one point, in the course of two pages (pp. 326-28) he explains how Stalin developed Marxist theory to justify the useful political concepts of 'socialism in one country', 'revolution from above' and the strengthening rather than the withering away of the state, and concludes: 'It is difficult to avoid a sneaking admiration for the brazen way in which Stalin was able to take a downright lie as the basis for an argument leading to the conclusion at which he wished to arrive.'

After examining what exactly a philosopher has said, Copleston does not shrink from down-to-earth summaries. He speaks of Chernyshevsky's 'no-nonsense theory' which appealed to young radicals of the 1860s; in another place he writes that some of Lossky's ideas 'may seem silly at first'. No doubt some of these throw-away generalisations will seem irresponsible to specialists on particular writers or thinkers — for example, Copleston's comment that we can 'reasonably' see Prince Myshkin's outburst aginst Catholicism as 'representing substantially [Dostoyevsky's] own prejudiced outlook' — but in their total effect they enhance the clarity of the book and

help to make it a very accessible work for the non-specialist reader.

Copleston is able to help the reader in another way. He puts everything into its proper historical perspective. Of Solov'ev, for example, he writes:

... any Christian can admire the way in which Solovyev rises above nationalistic and ecclesiastical narrowness and prejudice. Today, of course, we are accustomed to 'ecumenical' ideas. But in the nineteenth century the situation was different. (p. 240).

This kind of perspective no doubt influences his conclusion, where he speculates briefly about the future of philosophy in the Soviet Union and about whether there will be a significant revival of religious philosophy in that country. His own view, with which many observers would agree only with considerable reservations, is that the views of Solov'ev and of religious philosophers in exile are likely to be listened to with interest in the Soviet Union, but that any real revival of religious philosophy will have to spring anew from indigenous roots.

PHILIP WALTERS

A Megbékélés Etikája (The Ethics of Reconciliation) by Géza Németh. Unpublished. Written in Budapest in 1987. 62 pp.\*

For the last 1,000 years, the peoples of East Central Europe — Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, Croats — have clung with great tenacity to their sense of belonging to the Europe of the West. Forty-odd years of Soviet rule could not extinguish this consciousness — indeed, today we can see its reappearance with fresh vigour.

Nevertheless, there are quite a few features distinguishing the 'core' countries of the West from the nations of this frontier region. These small nations had to pursue the politics of survival throughout their troubled history, not the politics of progress. Whilst fundamentally they adopted the essentials of the western value-system, in some of its aspects this adoption was rather selective.

One of the basic distinguishing features has been a sad lack of philosophical culture in these countries, in sharp contrast to the 'core', where Aquinas and Vico, Descartes and the Enlightenment, Bacon and Hume, Kant and Hegel have belonged to the solid

<sup>\*</sup>A Mégbékélés Etikája is available from Keston College in photocopied form for £6.50 plus 60p postage and packing within the UK and 90p overseas.

foundations of cultural life. In those frontier countries, there have been philosophers — mostly lonely and isolated figures — but no school of philosophy, no general acceptance of the underlying importance of the spirit of philosophy in cultural life.

This may have been one cause for a general shallownesss of political culture too, characterised by unrealistic illusions, groundless ambitions and blindness towards the power relations of the wider world. (The Czechs have been, to some extent, an exception to this.) It is well known that poets and writers have always played a leading role in the political life of these countries, filling, as it were, a political vacuum (not the true vocation of literature). The great revolutionary poet of Hungary, Petőfi, declared that poets are the 'pillar of fire' leading the nations on the road to freedom and greatness. Alas, this road usually led to catastrophe.

If for no other reason than this, it is noteworthy to encounter a philosophical treatise by a Hungarian author, especially one that attempts — boldly and not without originality — to tackle the fundamental problems of mankind in general and those of Hungary in particular. Even more worthy of attention is his approach: he deals with his subject by applying the principles of the philosophy of ethics (perhaps the most difficult and controversial part of philosophy).

The author, Géza Németh, has long been a voice in the wilderness. Ordained a Reformed pastor, Németh came under the influence of Martin Luther King Jr in the 1960s. He saw in the teachings of the black American a way forward for the Hungarian nation in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of 1956. In 1975 he was dismissed from the ministry by the leadership of the Hungarian Reformed Church for failing to accept state imposed restrictions on the ministry and for his refusal to conform to the church leadership's pro-communist Theology of Service. Since then he has been the leader of the Community of Reconciliation, an ecumenical basis community. The community has a high profile in Budapest for its social work amongst the city's down and out youth and refugees from Transvlvania. It undertook such work well before the churches were permitted to do so. In recent years Németh has been allowed to conduct his work in association with the Reformed Church as an unpaid volunteer. Last January the 1975 judgement against him was overturned by the synod of the Reformed Church. The 55-year-old Németh is now awaiting full rehabilitation.

In an Ethic of Reconciliation Németh seeks to provide a Christian response to the fundamental problems of Hungary and her East European neighbours — a response that is free from the influence of the Theology of Service. Thus it remains unpublished and read only by a handful of Christian intellectuals, who for political reasons have

long had to remain on the periphery of official church life.

Németh's starting point is the general despair facing humanity today: faith and ideology are bankrupt, naked power rules, the horsemen of the Apocalypse — war, hunger, pestilence and envy (plus two modern ones: the degradation of the environment and the nuclear threat) — are on the rampage; the individual, stripped of all dignity, stares at the Void.

Not all is lost, however, according to the author. In every human being there is an indestructible core of 'existential trust' in transcendental values; as he says, 'The Universe shows goodwill towards humanity.'

The long conflict between religion and atheism has resulted in, on the one hand, the churches becoming more and more divorced from the teachings of Christ; on the other, the proud secular ideologies have failed in their promise. All that is left is the naked struggle for world dominion — and even that has led to hollow victories, as the costs of conquest prove to be higher than the material gains.

The only way forward seems to be to harness this inner source of strength that imbues each individual soul and to recreate a living relationship between transcendental values and day-to-day life. The only means capable of achieving this is a return to the teaching of Jesus: instead of power-craving, force and fear, we should practise service, trust and sharing — in one word: Love.

In the author's view, there is a 'reality' in these transcendental values. This requires action, not withdrawal or contemplation. As he writes, 'Love is not only the sole possible norm for human actions but it is also the ultimate personal secret of the Universe. Ethics binds the individual to the community.'

In an interesting aside, the author admits that the pursuit of power and the struggle for world conquest has not been wholly without beneficial effects: civilising values and a broad unification of mankind have perhaps been a result on the plus side. But we must face the fact that, with the means of destruction available, any victory by one of the great powers may lead only to the enslavement of the whole word, or. . . annihilation.

What are, therefore, the options of ethical action, once we accept that it is the Word and not the Sword that we have to wield? Withdrawal, neutrality, even the praiseworthy actions of civil disobedience or those of the various peace movements, the maintenance of an unstable status quo, are not enough. Whilst the secular powers are here to stay, our task is to de-mythologise the secular ideologies and to utter a clarion call for the only valid mode of survival: Reconciliation. Not an easy programme: reconciliation demands the refusal of Force, perseverance in the cause of the Good

and an insistence on Justice. We must reject resignation and strive for a reinterpretation of the world.

In the view of the writer, the Hungarian people may play a pivotal role in this universal reconciliation. At first, this may seem a little odd: Hungary was the loser in two world wars, more than one quarter of the nation was torn away and forced to live under oppressive regimes. Another quarter is scattered in exile over five continents. It has been subjected to communist rule for the last 40 years; in 1956, its revolt against despotism was crushed by Soviet tanks — what other nation has greater claims for justice and a place in the sun? In Németh's view, it is just this situation — moral and spiritual, as much as geographical — that might uniquely predispose the Hungarian nation for the role of a 'bridge' between opposing forces and ideologies.

He argues that throughout the decades of communist oppression, there has existed a 'secret league of guardians of values in Hungary', and, significantly, this league included many who have been part and parcel of the ruling elite. Some of the demands of the '56 revolution have (almost on the sly) been put into practice; for 20 years some sort of reform has been on the agenda; small, vigorous religious communities kept the flame alive, in spite of persecution.

'Pay back Caesar's things to Caesar, but God's things to God. . .' The fact that Hungary is part of the Eastern bloc cannot be gainsaid. But — in the view of the writer — as long as the strategic interests of the Soviet Union are not threatened, the chances for an internal relaxation are quite bright (the essay was written in 1987; since then, many unexpected things have happened, confirming Németh's assessment). In fact, there has been a steady growth of autonomous groupings in Hungary, with mixed aims and ideals, not all of them inimical to the ruling party, but largely independent of it. In the spirit of 'small is beautiful', there are quite a few flourishing religious basis communities. In passing, he makes a somewhat curious suggestion: if the Soviet Union would accept its guilt for the tragedy of 1956, it could gain thereby the respect of the Hungarian people and that of their neighbours. (Knowing the usual behaviour of great powers, this hardly seems likely.) Whether this happens or not, the Hungarian people is in the best position to set up the model of reconciliation, between individuals and within the family of nations. He also suggests that a model of this nature, if successful, would burnish the image of communist societies in general.

Next he turns to some practical proposals for the achievement of his ambitious ideas — and immediately gets into self-contradiction. He correctly recognises the greatest cancer eating away the life and soul of this area, when he says 'We have to destroy the Devil of East Central European chauvinism', and, in the next breath, calls upon all of us to

keep alive the protest against the oppression of Hungarian minorities in Romania and Slovakia, carrying our remonstrances to Moscow as much as to the UN, or, indeed, to any world forum that is willing to listen to our justified complaints.

His further ideas are a mixture of idealistic and realistic propositions. He points out the undeniable symptoms of moral decline in Hungary: corruption, self-seeking, petty wrangling, the social ills of divorce, alcoholism, suicide and the growing gap between the affluent and the poor. His remedies: strengthening of family life. 'caring' churches, honour to those who have been suffering for their beliefs (e.g. conscientious objectors). This would require, first and foremost, the rebuilding of all those autonomous or semi-autonomous social institutions that had been gradually destroyed in the despotic phase of communist rule. 'Reform' — that most shopworn expression current in Hungary — can work only if the linkage between political, economic and social progress is fully recognised and kept in balance. He proves to be a severe realist in stating that, Hungary being a poor country, a welfare state upon the western model is simply not on; he suggests forcing into productive work those who do not contribute to the wealth of the nation (probably thinking of the vast army of overweening bureaucracy).

In general terms, Németh postulates the parallel existence of 'prophetic ethics' and of 'diplomatic ethics'. The former is the moral stance of those who stand up for their beliefs, are prepared to take risks and, if need be, accept martyrdom; the other one is the behaviour of those who may be persons of goodwill but are prepared to make compromises, whose principles are somewhat flexible, who cooperate with the regime but 'do good' whenever they can. Németh proposes that henceforward the representatives of diplomatic ethics should support by their actions the chances for expression of the prophets of unbending principles.

In conclusion — and rightly so — he puts his faith in Youth. It is the young people of communist countries who are questioning their elders about the truth, about their nations' history, if need be, demonstrating for their beliefs, filling anew long neglected churches, and who are busy building their own institutions. It seems that, for once, it is literally true that the future belongs to them.

This significant contribution to the discourse — and dispute — going on in East and West alike is a sometimes uplifting, at other times disconcerting — but always thought-provoking — mixture of the realistic and the utopian. Where Németh outlines his philosophy, the internal logic of his argumentation is faultless. But, in declaring that Reconciliation is the universal remedy, he seems to disregard certain fundamental aspects of human nature. It is true (if we can

believe Richard Leakey) that sharing is the dominant characteristic of humankind from its earliest beginnings, but we must also admit that conflict is just as much inherent in our natures. Indeed, it is one of the moving forces of our progress. It is the task of civilisation to resolve conflicts and, so far, we have not been very successful in this.

Németh is a realist in quite a few of his practical proposals. He recognises the strengths and weaknesses of Hungarian society; he is quite right in admonishing Hungarians about their failure in getting to know their neighbours better; he is correct in pointing out the window of opportunity opened up by the changing relationship between the Soviet Union and its subject countries. Although he does not seem to have a great trust in the chances for renewal in the established churches, he rightly sees hope in the more informal religious groupings (this might be a peculiarity of Hungarian religious life; looking elsewhere, one cannot deny the vigour of the Polish Church, the turmoil in Latin America, or — for that matter — what goes on in the Near East).

Alas, he seems to me rather utopian when he argues that the Hungarian nation, in the spirit of reconciliation, might serve as a model for the other countries in the Eastern bloc. Knowing the history, traditions and malign myths of this unhappy region, it is more than likely that Hungary's neighbours would look at such a 'model' with mistrust, suspicion or, at best, with envy. For the foreseeable future, it will be Power and not Ethics that will settle the problems of this region — as well as those of the whole world. Let us hope, with Németh, that Ethics may somehow civilise Power.

Since 1987, there have certainly been events warranting a cautious optimism. Reform, not revolution, seems to be the commanding idea in the communist world; changes for the better seem to be accelerating. Whilst no one can expect miracles to happen, a bold and uncompromising moral stand, as argued so convincingly (at least in his hard-thought-out philosophy) by Géza Németh, may contribute to a modest accrual of the Good and the Just, in the mysterious ways of ideas.

JULIAN SCHOPFLIN

#### **Book Notes**

This section includes notes on books that, whilst not dealing directly with religion in communist lands, may be of interest to readers of RCL.

Chekisty: A History of the KGB by John Dziak. Lexington, Lexington Books, 1988. 234 pp.

In this history of the Soviet secret police John Dziak argues that the USSR is dominated by the party and the security services who together constitute a permanent counter-intelligence enterprise whose aim is self-perpetuation. Concerned with rooting out 'enemies' at home and abroad, the KGB and its predecessors differ fundamentally from the security organs of the Western democracies. The book provides a thorough description of the varying structural and personnel changes undergone by the secret police over the least seven decades. Useful in reminding us that even under Lenin the level of political terror far surpassed that of the Tsarist regime, the book fails to meet the need for a study of the way the KGB operates within Soviet society. There is no mention of the police section to be found in every large Soviet institution and no discussion of the Fifth Directorate set up under Brezhnev to deal with dissent. It also fails to come to grips with the way in which the party has managed to retain control over the political police in recent decades.

A Short History of Modern Bulgaria by R.J. Crampton. Cambridge University Press, 1987. 221pp.

This work, described by its author as 'a first step towards a closer acquaintance' with a land 'from which we have been long estranged', is mainly concerned with the period from 1878 to the present day. A brief survey of the more distant past, including the five centuries of Turkish occupation, is followed by a section covering the evolution of liberated Bulgaria through periods of crisis, unrest and struggle to her participation, on the side of the Germans, in the first world war. The remaining two sections deal respectively with the turbulent decades ending with World War II and Bulgaria under Communism. In Dr Crampton's words, this work is 'overwhelmingly political', although economic and social issues are given consideration. Some mention of cultural and religious trends and events is made, largely within the relevant political context.

The Chernobyl Disaster by Viktor Haynes and Marko Bojcun. London: The Hogarth Press, 1988. Paperback, 233 pp, £7.95.

A broad overview of the 1986 disaster in northern Ukraine, this book focuses on the people directly involved in and affected by the accident and its consequences. Their experiences, culled from Soviet press. television and radio reports, are conveyed by the authors in a chronological account spanning the experiment that led to the explosions within Chernobyl station's No. 4 reactor, the ensuing firefight, release of radioactive contamination, the evacuations and the long term medical, ecological, economic and political repercussions. The book is fiercely critical of Soviet officialdom and carefully documents what is perhaps its central thesis: that the authorities have covered up the full extent of the disaster and their own incompetence. even from the International Atomic Energy Agency to which the Soviet investigating commission submitted a detailed report in August 1986. For its part the Agency went along with the cover-up so as not to damage any further the Western public's confidence in their own nuclear power utilities.

### **Books Received**

Listing of a book here neither implies nor precludes review in a subsequent issue of RCL.

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# Irina Ratushinskaya

#### Ya dozhivu

This exclusive collection, no longer in print, features the poems in Russian of Irina Ratushinskaya. It includes poems written before arrest and in labour camp, and some of the poet's drawings and photographs.

Ya dozhivu is available in limited numbers from Keston College for £10 plus £1 postage and packing within the UK and £1.50 postage overseas.



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