

THE WEST IN RUSSIA AND CHINA: RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR THOUGHT IN MODERN TIMES. By *Donald W. Treadgold*. New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1973. Vol. 1: RUSSIA, 1472–1917. xl, 324 pp. \$12.95, cloth. \$5.95, paper. Vol. 2: CHINA, 1582–1949. xxii, 251 pp. \$11.95, cloth. \$4.95, paper.

This is a big book in the sense that it seeks to understand one of the central phenomena of our time: the establishment of Communist ideologies in Russia and China. It is big in another sense too, for Professor Treadgold does not content himself with recent phases of the intellectual transformation that brought communism to power, but surveys the centuries-long impact of Western ideas and ideals upon the two great peoples who, in the twentieth century, rejected their respective cultural traditions and went over in revolutionary fashion to Marxist (or Marxist-Leninist) doctrines.

The most interesting feature of this book, at least from this reviewer's standpoint, is the weight and attention Treadgold gives to religious encounters in the deeper past, and the common typology he finds in successive phases of the West's intellectual invasion of both Russia and China. He distinguishes four phases, common to both countries. An initial Roman Catholic humanist encounter was followed by the impact of Protestant ideas in scholastic, pietist, and modernist forms; then came the reception in quick succession of a series of secular ideologies—liberal, socialist, communist. It seems pretty clear that this sequence derives principally from the facts of Chinese history; and in applying the pattern to Russian history Treadgold modifies and elaborates a good deal to make room for German idealism, freemasonry, and the like.

In assessing Roman Catholic influence in Russia, Treadgold makes no distinction between direct encounters with Italian and other Latin agents of the papal cause and Greek Orthodox prelates who had been variously influenced and enlightened by studies in Italy, especially at Padua, without losing their Orthodox identity. Yet from the point of view of the Russian churchmen, surely it was vastly easier to accept ideas from a professed exponent of Orthodoxy than from an out-and-out Latinist. This is an example of a larger defect in the work, for in most cases Treadgold treats the "West" as a single entity, and makes little effort to distinguish Italian from German, French from English variants upon the Western theme. Yet clearly the "West" is a fiction of modern historians. What impinged on Russian and Chinese consciousness were ideological bits, fragments, and pieces variously chipped out of their original contexts in West European life.

Nevertheless, the weight Treadgold assigns to religious ideas and debates is especially valuable when applied to Russia's experience. Traditional explanations of Russian communism have emphasized disproportionately the post-Christian, overtly revolutionary ideological developments among Russia's nineteenth-century intelligentsia. But Treadgold is quite convincing when he argues: "Before Peter I the social group from which the most influential Russian (and Ukrainian) intellectuals (even those to some extent concerned with socio-political problems) came was the clergy, and the clergy-staffed ecclesiastical schools maintained an important role in Russian thought well into the nineteenth century. The ascendancy of the gentry intellectual was in fact rather short-lived. But in the 1860's the sons of the clergy reasserted themselves dramatically—often as atheists; but even some of the atheists were still very much affected by their earlier religious outlook" (1:184–85).

The same point of view, applied to Chinese reality, yields its most striking result in Treadgold's appraisal of Sun Yat-sen as a paladin of Protestant modernism: "He [Sun Yat-sen] kept in touch with liberal Protestants through the Chinese YMCA, Christian colleges, and other channels right up to his death. Many of the theological liberals, having cast away the anchor of Scripture and never having had any in Tradition, were floating freely in an atmosphere in which they competed feverishly with one another to out-modernize the modernizers and to show that they were not 'old-fashioned.' No idea seemed too outlandish to be denied a hearing, few ideas seemed worthy of the exhaustive analysis which might divert them from catching other new ones as they came along. . . . To be sure, he caricatured the mental processes of liberal Protestants in many of his speeches and writings and indeed his actions, as the T'ai-p'ings had caricatured the fundamentalists" (2:89-90).

Other readers will find other arresting characterizations and judgments in Treadgold's work, for he has not hesitated to make his own value judgments clear. He prefers pluralism to any monolithic, authoritarian truth; he believes cultural syncretism is preferable to wholesale rejection of old patterns of thought in favor of new-sprung doctrines brought in from afar. In this, and much else, the book strikes me as wise and judicious, informed and in a true sense humane.

Yet there are faults. First of all, the book is not easy reading. Sentences are often long, and I had to reread some of them to follow the grammar. Second, Treadgold does not really confront the question that seems critical to any deep understanding of the intellectual encounters he chronicles. For it is obviously true that sometimes intellectual encounters remain barren and unimportant, whereas at other times even slight brushes with new ideas lead men to change accustomed patterns of belief and behavior profoundly. Why? Treadgold here has little to say. Indeed he by-passes the entire issue in silence, though in some passages he seems to imply that there is something unique and universal in Western thought that allows the West always to prevail in encounters with other intellectual traditions. This seems dubious; indeed, for many generations Confucianism and Orthodoxy resisted the blandishments of Western Europe's high culture very successfully, only to collapse as autonomous going concerns with startling suddenness.

Treadgold does not really try to explain what happened. Presumably to do so to his own satisfaction would have taken him beyond his self-imposed limits of intellectual history, since political, military, and economic factors would have to come into consideration. But in the absence of an attempt to explain why some ideas "take" and others do not, intellectual history is liable to become a series of *précis* of what unusually sensitive or anguished individuals happened to put into print and thus make accessible to the historian. Some of Treadgold's pages descend to this level: useful as a record of things written, but not in themselves enlarging the reader's understanding.

Yet it would be unjust to end on such a negative note. The scope of Treadgold's reading and the sweep of his investigations are thoroughly admirable. His emphasis on the religious phase of intellectual encounter is a useful corrective to more narrowly secularist perspectives. And the data he has assembled can provoke the reader to reflect upon aspects of his theme that Treadgold has chosen to pass over in silence. As such it is a great achievement.

(This review was commissioned by
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