

OPIMUM OF THE PEOPLE: The Christian religion in the U.S.S.R. by Michael Bourdeaux. *Faber and Faber*. 30s.

Recently two Russian sociologists, A. A. Zemtsov and A. S. Duchal, published a survey, remarkable for its frankness, on how the working man in Russia spends his spare time. Of some 152 homes visited, 64 contained ikons, and this after nearly fifty years of virulent anti-religious campaigning. As Mr Bourdeaux writes, 'the Communists completely failed to understand the true nature of religion. They simply did not see that to allow Christians to continue celebrating the liturgy together was to spare their lifeline'. Conversely, we in the West have completely failed to understand the religious persecution in the U.S.S.R. – not the violent persecution of the early soviets, but that which is going on at this moment, after the famous 'concord' between the Orthodox church and Stalin in 1942, which has lulled the consciences of many. Restriction of our personal liberty is so remote from our experience that we look upon reports from visitors to the Soviet Union as emotional exaggerations. But who, if he had any religious feelings at all, would remain unaffected by the sight of so many churches converted into garages and ware-houses? Or by the loneliness and isolation that surrounds the Orthodox liturgy celebrated in what the soviets call, with their religion of work, a 'working' church? Or by the fact that the synagogue in Moscow cannot be repaired for want of a licence?

Mr Bourdeaux does not permit his feelings however to interfere with his appraisal, and he is anxious to give the soviet authorities the benefit of the doubt. His impassioned book does not conceal his emotions, as he reviews the new wave of persecution initiated by

Khrushchev in 1959. The manipulation of people's minds – whether lay or clerical – is a horrible spectacle. Mr Bourdeaux relates how he was present at a public lecture by Osipov, the notorious ex-priest turned communist, a magnificent orator who dismissed the existence of Christ by a reference to the Dead Sea Scrolls, with 'impossible logic and intellectual dishonesty'. The Russian audience had no access to these documents – and the author was begged for copies of them. And how many of the Orthodox bishops, especially those in contact with the outside world, are actuated by soviet strings? They sometimes paint a very rosy picture of Orthodox Christianity within the Soviet Union, but they still have not satisfactorily refuted the accusation that Patriarch Nikolai was murdered in 1961.

Mr Bourdeaux, an Anglican priest, lived in Moscow for a year, and other long visits have provided extra material for his work. It is readable and exciting, but it is not a pleasant book to read. He was subject to the frustrations of all visitors to the soviet union, and he describes how his wish to visit Riga, where there is a Roman Catholic seminary, was frustrated by the authorities. But his frustrations are more telling because of the object of his visit. It is not only the Orthodox church that is persecuted; the Lutherans, Evangelicals, and especially the Baptists are under attack. In Leningrad, Mr Bourdeaux met the impressive Baptist Andrei, besides whom he confesses to feeling a very second-class Christian. And so would we all.

BENEDICT SKETCHLEY, A.A

AKAN RELIGION AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH by Sidney George Williamson. *Ghana University Press*. 30s.

A book such as this might have been written about a hundred tribes in Africa, 10-50 per cent Christian, now in a state of social and mental turmoil. The same sort of matter is appearing in reviews with reference to peoples from the Sudan to the Cape, and from the horn of Africa to Senegal, marking the fundamental unity of the African peoples south of the Sahara. Almost all of what is said here might refer to Zululand or the Witwatersrand. The

author has chosen a single tribal unit, not Ghana but the Akan. Yet nearly everything appears much the same in mixed tribal and new urban areas.

For this reason this particular study, which has the advantage of a close study of a limited area, and also the advantage that some of the ground has been covered by anthropologically and sociologically trained Africans such as Drs Busia and Danquah, makes an excellent