

## Reviews

**RELIGION AND REVOLUTION** by Guenter Lewy. *Oxford University Press*, New York, 1974. 694 pp. £10.

As Aristotle realised, revolution is the outcome of different evaluations of justice and justice in itself is a concept which, as a rule, is connected with the religious position (even in Lewy's sense) of the contestants. The laws of dialectical materialism too are, in a way, superhuman powers.

Professor Lewy presents us with a collection of seventeen interesting and well-written case studies arranged in four sections according to four criteria: millenarian revolts, the involvement of religion in anti-colonial strife, the position of the Church in revolution and, lastly, the role of religion in the legitimation of revolutionary change. The choice of cases under discussion is significant. The section on the millenarian revolts deals with Taoist and Buddhist influenced rebellions in China, from the Yellow Turbans in the Second Century A.D. to the White Lotus Society rebellion at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. A special chapter covers the T'ai ping rebellion in the mid-19th century and is a particularly well-presented case. Then there is an apposite review of Jewish Messianism from the Maccabees until the eschatological wars against Rome. Protestant Christianity is represented by Thomas Müntzer, the millenarian kingdom of the Anabaptists at Münster and the Fifth Monarchy Men during the Puritan Revolution in England. Last in this section are accounts of the Mahdia of the Sudan, the millenarian movements and religious separatism in 20th century Africa and the Cargo Cults of Melanesia. Next, the link between religion and anti-colonial strife is shown in the influence of Hinduism on the rise of Indian nationalism and in Ghandi's special contribution to the development in India, and in militant Buddhist nationalism in modern Burma. In the third section Lewy examines the Catholic Church's position in the French and Mexican Revolutions and in the Spanish Civil War. Finally, the

legitimation of revolutionary change is exemplified by Nasserism in Egypt, Buddhist modernism in Sri Lanka (Lewy considers the development of 1956-59 as a revolution) and the Catholic Left in Latin America.

Dealing with such a wide range of cases implies, of course, certain risks. The author could not undertake the primary research work; everything depends on his choice of 'strategic' specialist literature. This was unavoidable, and specialists in the respective fields may easily discover some inaccuracies (for instance, the one-sided evaluation of the Taborites as merely Chiliasts). This, however, within the context of the problem setting, appears a negligible shortcoming. The author's main question is whether it is justified or not to consider religion as a force upholding the status quo, reinforcing the stability of society and enhancing political quietism. His seventeen cases indicate that this supposition is not always true. Consequently Lewy has to ask further questions, namely: 'Under what conditions does religion become a force for revolt rather than social integration? Can certain religious concepts and attitudes be singled out as promotive or inhibitive of revolutionary sentiments and activity? How relevant is the organisational structure of religion and how decisive is the role of charismatic prophet figures?' (p. 3). His answers to these questions, however, are not worth all the effort he has put into the historical enquiry.

The results of the analyses of the seventeen cases are uneven. Millenarian revolts, which are best represented in the selection, provide the author with adequate material for the following conclusions: 'Millenarian revolts occur (a) when situations of distress or disorientation develop, and the causes are not clearly perceived or appear insoluble by ordinary and available remedies, (b) when a society or group is deeply attached to religious ways of thinking about the world

and when the religion of that society attaches importance to millenarian ideas, and (c) when an individual or group of individuals obsessed with salvationist fantasies succeeds in establishing charismatic leadership over a social movement' (p. 585). This is a fair statement; although it might have been expected on the strength of general knowledge of the subject, factual demonstration proved most useful.

The conclusions of other cases under study are, however, rather disappointing; the fact that religion may supply a sense of national identity, that it becomes a symbol of self-assertion against the colonial regime, is a home truth to anyone who has some rudimentary knowledge of European history. Ireland, Poland and the Balkans are well-known examples. Similarly, the further conclusion, that leaders of religious bodies with a developed ecclesiastical organisation support a revolutionary upheaval because either they are sympathetic with the aims of the revolution or because they are protecting the interests of the religious institution is no revelation. The question *why* they may be sympathetic with the aim of revolution is answered in the fourth point of Professor Lewy's conclusions, i.e. that individual theologians or laymen support a revolutionary movement to give a concrete social and political meaning to the transcendental elements of their faith. Here, and only here, Professor Lewy almost touches the nerve of the issue. However, he stops short before tackling it fully.

It seems that the reason for his stopping short is not so much his scholarly inhibition in dealing with the essence of transcendental questions as his definition of revolution and consequently his selection of the cases under study. Lewy conceives revolution in political terms, i.e. as an abrupt, though not necessarily violent, change in the poli-

tical system, including change in the nature of rulership or constitution and the principles of legitimacy upon which these rest (p. 6). Although this definition might have been helpful in limiting the problem to a manageable size, it prevents the author from fully evaluating the possibly revolutionary role of religion. Lyford Evans, considering both the rise of Christianity and Reformation in his *Natural History of Revolution*, opened a more relevant field of enquiry.

Almost all Professor Lewy's examples deal either with marginal cases (such as Anabaptists, Fifth Monarchy Men, African Sects and Cargo Cults) or with instances when the particular religion was, in view of its integrative role in the society, already on the decline and consequently on the defensive (all examples concerning the Catholic Church, Buddhism and Islam). Only militant Jewish Messianism and Taoist revolutionary involvement are instances given where the respective religions were in their prime. The case can best be illustrated by the Catholic Left in Latin America. Here, as Lewy rightly points out, 'emphasis on changing the structure of society, while drawing much of its impetus from a radical Christian message, logically leads to a secular outlook on politics. Instead of promoting change through clerical or lay groups that are consciously Christian, the Catholic Left works in and through secular organisations and seeks a genuinely humanistic society rather than a revived Christian civilisation' (p. 535). In neglecting the great breakthroughs in world history such as the rise of Buddhism in India, of Christianity in the Graeco-Roman world and of Islam in the Arabic world, Professor Lewy fails to use the best testing ground for studying the innovating role of religion with revolutionary consequences.

JAROSLAV KREJCI

**SILENT MUSIC, the science of meditation, by William Johnston. Collins, London, 1974. 190 pp. £2.50. Fontana edition 1976, £1.50.**

This book (now in paperback) will be welcomed by those who know *The Still Point*, which I found very useful, and *Christian Zen*, but it addresses a wider readership—namely all concerned with scientific enquiry into conditions of consciousness. The author's experience of Buddhist meditation has been gained not in America, but in Japan, where he has spent most of his

adult working life. In the Japanese universities the matter is of interest not only to monks or to Buddhists, but to all concerned with the methods whereby Samurai maintained their concentration and skill in combat. Business tycoons hope to use these not for prestige but for success, and doctors and psychiatrists for healing. The possibilities of debasement through the