

JONATHAN LUXMOORE AND JOLANTA BABIUCH,  
*The Vatican and the Red Flag: The Struggle for the Soul of Eastern Europe.*  
 London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999.  
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This is a fascinating addition to the history of the papacy this century, shedding new light on the background to papal and Catholic responses to communism in its various forms. The authors are experienced and knowledgeable about Eastern Europe. Jonathan Luxmoore is a correspondent for various Christian publications, including the *London Tablet*. Jolanta Babiuch lectures in the Institute of Sociology at Warsaw University. Eminently readable, the book necessarily highlights the politics and social thought in the Vatican, showing how they changed with events and personalities, especially as more recent popes mobilised a mass constituency of popular political support over the heads of political leaders and regimes.

Our authors lead us competently through the period of the Second World War and the increasing tensions between the Church and the communist regimes in the post-war era. The text throws new light on this process on Eastern Europe, especially as seen from a Polish perspective.

The originality of this work stems from its exploration of fresh sources, both from the Catholic side and from recently accessible files of the former communist regimes. Introduced throughout the text are insightful sketches of the development of the young Karol Wojtyla, later Pope John Paul II. We find Wojtyla engaging in surprisingly progressive positions in his youth. He met Canon Cardijn, and admired the Worker Priest movement when he visited France and Belgium. His studies on St John of the Cross also convinced him of the possibilities of combining deep contemplation with activism. Many readers will be intrigued how the ambience of Mounier's personalism and Marxism shaped the thought of Wojtyla, foreshadowing later social encyclicals.

We hear of complaints about the Lublin Catholic University lecturer Wojtyla and a group of students visiting a church in their swimsuits, and of him recommending women to lecture priests (p. 86-7). His textbook, *Catholic Social Ethics*, traced Marxist categories back into Aquinas' philosophy, and justified a notion of class struggle, even to the point of "active resistance" to unjust violence, though not through violent revolution. Wojtyla wrote: "In the contemporary communist movement, the Church sees and acknowledges an expression of largely ethical goals" (p. 89). Again, the principles and ideals in Marxist analysis "are those of Christian ethics, minus the reference to God which gives Christian ethics a religious character". Further, says Wojtyla,

Christian ethics cannot be based on class, since it must be universal. But it understands the struggle for justice. Without exaggeration,

we can say that Jesus Christ engaged in this struggle himself – but within a dimension greater than that of those who wish to see Him only as a "first socialist" (p. 90).

Luxmoore and Babiuch contest the view that the Vatican and the USA were in a strong anti-communist alliance, pointing out how critical the Vatican was of western materialism. Nevertheless, Pius XII believed no compromise with the communist regimes was possible. When Poland's Cardinal Wyszynski reached a fragile accommodation with the communist regime in the mid-1950s, the Pope was outraged, but the Cardinal maintained his position (p. 106).

Wojtyla's *Love and Responsibility* in 1959 caused some outrage in Poland because of its explicitness about sexual matters. Wojtyla defended his views, including those on social issues, insisting on the importance of a critical faith: "a thinking person has a right to ask questions. Ethical attitudes anchored in conviction are what promote human maturity" (p. 132).

The authors outline the changes during the pontificates of John XXIII and Paul VI but are strongly critical of Cardinal Casaroli and the *Ostpolitik*. In their view, Paul VI's cautious attempts at persuasion of the communist regimes "produced no dependable results" (p. 173). It is difficult to evaluate this assessment. At what point would Church pressure for concessions from communist regimes have provoked a reaction against Catholics in the eastern bloc?

At the Vatican Council, Wojtyla worked with other leading theologians, and opposed any condemnation of communism as counter-productive. He had difficulty in transposing the experience of the Council back into a conservative and isolated Polish Church, but he undertook major educational initiatives. Wojtyla's 1969 book, *The Acting Person*, critiqued Marxism while appropriating many of its key concepts within a Christian framework. It insisted on social activism as essential to Christian witness and fidelity to the Gospel.

Not until the killing of striking shipyard workers in December 1970 was Wojtyla drawn directly into Polish politics, and he emerged as a leading force in Poland, concentrating the forces of opposition against the ideology and socio-economic failures of communism. Curiously Wojtyla, for all his analysis of communism, had not attacked the Polish Communist Party or its institutions.

As Pope John Paul II, Wojtyla played a major role in the disintegration of the Polish regime. *The Vatican and the Red Flag* offers a very different view on this process than that given in *His Holiness: John Paul II and the Hidden History of our Time* by Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi in 1996, and disputes claims of intelligence-sharing and secret accords between the Vatican and the CIA (p. 246). Luxmoore and Babiuch offer an invaluable account of these critical years. As Mikhail

Gorbachev admitted in 1992, he now agreed with many elements of the Pope's thinking. "I believe he is the world's most left-wing leader", attested the ex-Soviet leader (p. 296). Indeed, especially with the Jubilee 2000, our authors argue that the Pope has grown more critical of capitalism since his 1991 encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*.

A work of such enormous scope, touching on many of the key political disputes in recent decades, can hardly fail to be uneven. One of the less satisfactory parts of this book is its treatment of the liberation theology debate. It makes no mention of the Pope endorsing liberation theology in his address to the Brazilian bishops on 9 April 1986: "the theology of liberation is not only timely but useful and necessary". Moreover, his encyclical, *On Social Concerns*, can be seen as an attempt to articulate a liberation theology for the world. Indeed, the Pope's developing social thinking can also be interpreted in this perspective. Are there not profound links between the Pope's critique of Marxism and liberation theology?

The authors fall into some sweeping statements which are directly contrary to their main thesis: "No one bothered to come to grips with their [socialists'] ideas, since no one saw them, at that stage [1869], as posing a coherent challenge to the established order" (p. 3).

Remarkably, our writers claim that *Rerum Novarum* exhorted Catholics "to improve the social order, [but] they were not expected to change it" (p. 6). What can this mean? Was not Pope Leo's support for social reformism, trade unions, and the intervention of the state to protect the rights of workers all of some importance? One would also have liked a more incisive treatment of the Church's conflict with Nazism in Germany, and Hitler's pose at the time as a moderate. The rhetoric of the first chapter fails to do justice to the historic dilemmas faced by the Church.

Some minor errors bother this work; *Action Francaise* was condemned in 1926, not 1927 (p. 12); and *Laborem Exercens*' "indirect employer" (par. 17) was not the "State" (p. 238) but the whole complex of factors and institutions bearing on employment.

Despite these blemishes, the work as a whole makes a valuable contribution to the growing literature on Pope John Paul II and the Church's painful struggle with Marxism-Leninism.

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