

Recent Books

Poland's Troubled History Outlined

The Real Poland, an Anthology of National Self-Perception, edited by Alfred Bloch, Continuum (New York, 1982). 201pp., \$14.95.

By Father Denis Dirschel, SJ

This is an ambitious book; even the title suggests that it is so. It is also timely, since Poland has been in the lime-light for the past two years. But if the pattern of history presented in this book holds true, the nation's place in the sun will surely fade, though certainly not while Pope John Paul II occupies his position in Rome.

Bloch has divided the volume into two major portions. The first is a lengthy essay on the history of Poland, recurrent themes, and the various influences that have shaped the nation over the centuries.

The second portion consists of a number of literary and political selections from some of Poland's greatest thinkers. Except for the selection entitled "The Police" by Slawomir Mrozek, which could be entertaining in any era, the selections are so short as to lack much punch

or point.

The value or merit of the book rests in the long essay, which Bloch himself wrote, and his introductions to the works of the various authors. The approach of the editor's 70-page essay is always straightforward, full of wallop and punctuated with hyperbole.

One of the themes he treats is the tragic nature of Poland's history. The country has served as the "crossroads of Europe," often a war zone for other "masters" who cared nothing about Poland. In truth, the Nazis and the Soviets are only the successors of earlier hordes. The disdain with which other powers have treated Poland today echoes currents of earlier centuries.

The Jewish problem, another theme, is not unique to Poland. Its roots run all the way through Eastern and Western Europe, most especially in the Germany of the past and in both the old and new Russia.

Poland enjoyed the support of the Polish Jews during World War II: "and there were more of them

than the current literature attests to," for "they had to fight four enemies: the Nazis; the ultra-nationalist units of the Polish Home Army, which the Polish government in exile in London could not restrain; Polish city hoodlums; and wealthy Polish Jews who believed they could buy their way to survival."

There is no question about Bloch's stand regarding the forces of the counter-Reformation in the country. He refers to the Jesuits as a "black tidal wave" which has fostered "obscurantism and intolerance." Further, he writes, the Jesuits destroyed the "open, tolerant Polish Catholicism of the 15th and 16th centuries."

Poles have much to consider when they ponder what has been done by their own hands. This is another red thread running through their troubled history. The nation has enjoyed some great periods of prominence, but they often ended in shambles because of internal problems and lack of harmony. Yet it is no secret that Poland has always had a threatening, external villain prowling just beyond its eastern borders.

Bloch does not keep any arrows in his quiver. They are all out in the open, often on-target, sometimes missing the mark entirely. But this book serves as a nice "opener." Careful consideration of it will certainly provide the reader with a

critical basis to stay abreast of the Polish situation for the years ahead.

(Jesuit Father Dirschel, who has a doctorate in Russian studies, is a U.S. Air Force chaplain.)

Business in Diocese



SUTER

John L. Suter, a parishioner at St. Thomas the Apostle Church, and president of the parish's board of education, has been named manager of Medical Claims Assistants, a new business specializing in medical claims reimbursement for individual clients, 1295 Portland Ave. The company, for an annual fee, prepares billings or claim forms for Medicare or individual insurance carriers. Suter is a graduate of Aquinas Institute and Holy Cross College. He and his wife, Anne, have four children and reside in Irondequoit.

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Film Offered

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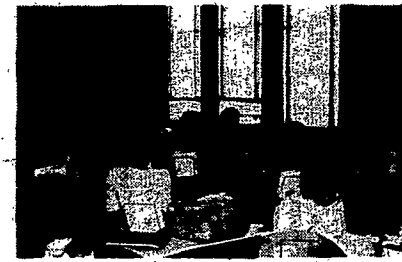
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The Open Window

Was Jesus Pacifist?

Was Jesus Christ a pacifist? Did He denounce war as a legitimate solution to human problems?

In our time there are many people who are convinced that one can be a good Christian and at the same time be in favor of a defensive war. We have a real problem here because there are many areas in which the teaching of Christ and the accepted practice of the vast majority of Christians are in no way ready to turn the other cheek. Jesus told us to forgive our enemies and yet there seemingly is a majority of Christians who are perfectly willing to exercise the death penalty as punishment for the taking of a human life. Jesus said that when we lend we should do so freely without expecting a return. The vast majority of Christians not only want a return but want a very substantial return of interest which sometimes borders on usury.

Getting back to the question of whether or not Jesus accepted the idea of war, it seems to me that personally He in no way accepted war as a solution to problems. The reason I give is this: He would not save the most precious life that ever lived on the face of this earth, His own (the life of the Son of God), by violence. He indicated very definitely that His father could supply Him with a more than adequate army (12 legions of angels) but He absolutely refused to accept that military help in terms of

overcoming His problems with the leaders of the people. On another occasion He also indicated that He believed that those who lived by the sword, perished by the sword.

So this is simply one more area in which there is a huge gap between the actual teaching of Jesus Christ and the practice of the vast majority of Christians. To say that Jesus didn't mean the things which He said is to be an insult. He not only meant them but He personally lived by them — turning the other cheek, rejecting war as a solution to problems, giving away His own cloak, as well as His other garments, and forgiving His enemies without any prior condition on their part. The solution to this dilemma which theologians offer (which I personally like best) is the solution that Jesus presented to us the way of Godliness; and since we are on a journey we are only on the way to godliness. While we fall short of the goal it is important that we do not simply write off what He said but rather keep reaching toward it as best we can.

I think that this is the area in which Christianity fails, and the reason people get very upset with the prophets of our time who proclaim the unacceptability of war and the death penalty and usury. They are the people who believe that what Jesus called for is unrealistic and therefore we should respect what He said but in no way try to implement it in our lives. The fate of Christianity in the next several decades may rest entirely on how we deal with that dilemma.

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