

# Reviews

**He Leadeth Me** by Walter J. Ciszek, S.J., with Daniel Flaherty, S.J. Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1974. 216 pp., £2.50.

Father Walter Ciszek is an American Jesuit priest, who has spent 23 years in the Soviet Union (1940-1963). For fifteen years he was a prisoner. Five years were spent in the notorious Lubyanka prison, now well known through Solzhenitsyn's *First Circle*, and ten more in the unspeakably harsh conditions of the labour camps in the Arctic Circle. The remainder of his time in the USSR was spent in Siberia under fairly close supervision, until he was finally returned to the USA in exchange for a convicted spy.

The book is a sequel to *With God in Russia*, which gives a fuller account of the same story and resembles a diary. A comparison of the two books is instructive. *He Leadeth Me* is a spiritual autobiography, in which Father Ciszek, writing with a literary partner, has rigorously restricted himself to those parts of the story which contributed to his spiritual growth. As a tale it hangs together well, and, from a literary point of view, is an improvement on the "blow by blow" style of the previous book.

*He Leadeth Me* is Father Ciszek's reply to the question so frequently put to him since his return, "how did you survive?" His answer is substantially the same as that which St. Paul would have given: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." During his time in the Lubyanka, mostly spent in solitary confinement, he underwent a great spiritual crisis. After twelve months of relentless interrogation and brain washing, he signed a "confession", and admitted that he had been a spy, although there was not a grain of truth in the charge. Back in his cell after interrogation, he realized that he had come to the place where St. Peter had denied Christ:

As I signed the pages, largely without reading them, I began to burn with shame and guilt. I was totally broken, totally humiliated. It was a moment of agony I'll never forget as long as I live. I was full of fear, yet tormented by conscience. After signing the first hundred pages, I stopped even the pretence of reading the rest. I just wanted to finish signing them as quickly as possible and get out of the interrogator's office. My aversion to the whole thing was overwhelming; I condemned myself before anybody else could do the same. I was despicable in my own eyes, no less than I must appear to others. My will had failed; I had proved to be nowhere near the man I thought I was. I had yielded, in that one

sickening split second, to fear, to threats, to the thought of death. When the last page was finished I literally wanted to run from the interrogator's office.

Back in his cell, he reflected on his humiliation :

Slowly, reluctantly, under the gentle proddings of grace, I faced the truth that was at the root of my problem and my shame. The answer was a single word: I. I was ashamed because I knew in my heart that I had tried to do too much on my own, and I had failed. I felt guilty because I realized, finally, that I had asked for God's help but had really believed in my own ability to avoid evil and to meet every challenge.

Like St. Peter, and countless disciples since, he found in prayer the healing and restoration that he needed to face the years ahead.

The man who emerged from this ordeal, broken and restored by God's grace, was now equipped to bear the ordeal of a decade in the Arctic labour camps. How does a Christian endure when every prop is taken away? Father Cizek gives an answer in the language and terms of the twentieth century. The remainder of the story, as we go with him to meet each new ordeal, is a restatement of the great doctrines of the Christian faith as he came to see them in his trials – The Incarnation, Death and Resurrection, Faith, Man, the Kingdom of God. The things he had learned from a text book in the Seminary came vividly to life.

This would be an excellent book to give any Christian worker who has become stale or discouraged, for the root of Father Cizek's theology is faith, an unshakeable faith that God is sovereign everywhere and in all the circumstances of life, however terrible they may appear to be.

KENNETH PREBBLE

**Miracle in Moscow** by David Benson, Miracle Publications, Santa Barbara, 1973. 290 pp.

**Vanya** by Myrna Grant, Creation House, Illinois, 1974. 222 pp. \$4.95.

Two books appeared in the United States within months of each other, each very different, but both witnessing to the intense and virile life of Soviet Christians. The first, *Miracle in Moscow*, is written by Rev. David Benson, president of the Californian missionary organization "Russia for Christ". In this autobiographical book he tells how the organization grew from a tiny radio ministry by a young man who at first had no connection with Russia, but came to love this country and its people.