

Not everyone will buy into Blake's thesis, however well documented, about the significance of the 'Mad Men' (to borrow a term from the popular television series) and their public relations strategies. Many political historians reading this book will query its apparent downplaying of historical context to explain electoral outcomes. The Eisenhower victory in 1952 is surely explicable as an expression of popular concern about the Korean War stalemate, related inflation and the fact that Eisenhower offered the promise of change after twenty years of Democratic presidential governance. In 1956, the incumbent was virtually assured of re-election based on his record of peace and prosperity. Some scholars will also question just how much voters are moved by imagery. Roosevelt's four election wins rested on the New Deal's creation of an electoral coalition based on group interest that would underwrite Democratic majority status (the Ike era excepted) until the late 1960s. Finally, the ad men selling Eisenhower sought to create a consensus among political consumers in favour of their man, but consensus is a term frowned upon in American historiography that conventionally places conflicts concerning class, race, gender and region as the driving force of political developments.

Whatever disagreements one may have with its overall thesis, this book is very deserving of attention from modern political historians, and not only those focused on the United States. The civic use of celebrity and the publicity it generates has permeated the modern body politic. The process may be most advanced in the United States but is not confined to that country. Historians would do well to consider Blake's analysis of its genesis in the America of the 1950s and its attendant effort to use fame as a shroud to hide ideas and issues.

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doi:10.1093/ehr/cex408

*The Vatican 'Ostpolitik' 1958–1978: Responsibility and Witness during John XXIII and Paul VI*, ed. András Fejérdy (Rome: Viella, 2015; pp. 271. €32).

This book, edited by András Fejérdy, is a collection of twelve papers presented on the occasion of a conference that commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the 'first and most visible manifestation' (p. 20) of the Vatican's *Ostpolitik*: the partial agreement between the Holy See and the communist Hungarian People's Republic, signed in Budapest on 15 September 1964. The volume approaches three major themes, is divided into three sections and aims to provide the reader with a better understanding of the main events and developments that characterised the Eastern policy of the Vatican, as well as with the essential tools for obtaining 'new perspectives for a balanced assessment of it' (p. 11).

The first four essays examine both the Holy See's Eastern policy and the Soviet bloc's Vatican policy in an international context, from the perspective of continuity and discontinuity, and suggests, among other things, that 'the political and intellectual dialogue between East and West [fits] into processes that started earlier' than the 1960s (p. 13). More specifically, in his contribution discussing the cultural and social background of the Vatican's *Ostpolitik*, Hungarian historian Pál Hatos points out that, 'in many respects' (p. 13), *Ostpolitik* can be read and truly comprehended 'if it is viewed not exclusively

*EHR*, CXXXIII, 560 (February, 2018)

as a series of events in diplomatic or Church history' (p. 13), but rather as the result of cultural and intellectual changes that reshaped West European society and Christianity after the Second World War. Indeed, as Roberto Morozzo della Rocca argues, *Ostpolitik* 'was a new policy because it answered to a new historical context, but it had roots in the Vatican diplomatic tradition'. In this sense, Vatican's Eastern policy 'was no improvisation', in that it was 'grafted in the usual policy of the Holy See, driven, by virtue of its universality and its responsibility to individual Churches, to dialogue with any country regardless of the ideology professed' (p. 51).

Always in terms of continuity and discontinuity, the essays of Adriano Rocucci and Thomas Gronier analyse, respectively, the position of the USSR in regard to *Ostpolitik* and the unique role played by neutral Austria in fostering the communications between East and West.

Rocucci, in particular, maintains that the Soviet Union regarded *Ostpolitik* 'as substantially dangerous', and demonstrates that 'dialogue and antagonism [remained] the key components of Moscow's attitude' (p. 83) until the last years of the *perestroika* and despite the presence, within the Communist leadership, of a more conciliatory faction. Gronier's work, instead, emphasises how the role of Catholic Austria 'continuously changed and expanded following the settling of [its] international status' (p. 13) in 1955 and depending on the policy line pursued by each pope. Besides, while Rocucci proposes an interesting and informative excursus on the topic of 'religion and the Cold War', Gronier has the merit of exploring a new research field and introducing new archival sources. With specific reference to these last two points, the second and the third parts of this volume are particularly revealing and enlightening.

The essays reviewing the documents of the party–state organs of the Soviet Union (Nadezhda Belyakova), the diplomatic sources preserved in the archives of the United States (Adam Somorjai, OSB), the diary of the Latvian prelate Julijans Vaivodos (Inese Runce) and the files of the Czechoslovak Secret Service (Pavol Jakubčín) bridge a historiographical gap and prove the need to go beyond the traditional dichotomy between local and international sources. As the editor himself notes in his Introduction, 'a unified examination of the various source types' and the interaction between different research trends is essential 'in order for us to overcome the peculiar duality' (p. 11) that characterises the scholarly literature on the Vatican's Eastern policy as well as its main interpretations. Comparing 'the results of Western historiography with those of research from Central Europe' helps us to capture all the nuances of *Ostpolitik*, in that the former tends to emphasise the pastoral nature of the Vatican's Eastern policy 'relying in the first place on diplomatic documents, and it positively appraises [*Ostpolitik*] in the dimension of world politics', while Central European historiography uses the sources of the party–state and the recollections of the members of the so-called 'Church of Silence', it observes local aspects and takes into account the national situations of the various countries involved. It also stresses the deficiencies and limits of *Ostpolitik*, 'viewing critically the results of the dialogue' (p. 12) between the Catholic Church and the Soviet satellites. Such a comparative approach, in addition to 'incorporating an ever wider circle of sources into the research', helps scholars 'to move beyond the paradigm of national historiographies' (p. 14) and assigns the proper weight to the varied local realities.

Although it is difficult to establish unitary criteria valid for every country, given the diversity of national traditions, cultures and historical experiences characteristic of Central and Eastern Europe, the application of a comparative method makes it possible to uncover parallels, common features and mutual influences, and encourages the developments of new interpretational frameworks. As Fejérdy's study on the Holy See's negotiations with Czechoslovakia and Hungary demonstrates, for example, the two countries' cases show 'surprising similarities' (p. 15) not only in terms of the topics on the agenda, but also in the actual results achieved during the final deliberations. At the same time, the cases of Czechoslovakia (Emilia Hrabovec), Poland (Krzysztof Strzałka) and the German Democratic Republic (Roland Cerny-Werner) are particularly emblematic of the impact exerted by nationalistic tensions, national episcopacies and local governments on the dialogue between the Vatican and the Communist regimes beyond the Iron Curtain.

By comparing analogies and differences, taking into account domestic and international factors and relying on a plurality of primary and secondary sources, the twelve essays assembled in this book enrich the results of earlier historiography and outline new important research perspectives. Above all, the volume confirms that 'a black-and-white reading ... of *Ostpolitik*' is misleading, if not even 'incorrect' and definitely contributes to the scholarly debate stating that the Eastern policy of the Vatican 'can be assessed only as a "limited success"' (p. 16) even though, as it should always be remembered, the Catholic Church ultimately witnessed—and of course survived—the collapse of the Soviet empire.

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doi:10.1093/ehr/cex417

*The Afterlife of Idealism: The Impact of New Idealism on British Historical and Political Thought, 1945–1980*, by Admir Skodo (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016; pp. 301. £74.50).

Cultural distance sometimes enables a scholar to detect environments missed by those enveloped in them. Sometimes it raises barriers to understanding by leaving an observer outside the loop of familiarity with how people work, how they conceive their world, what makes them tick. On the most optimistic reading, it will prove hard, sadly, to rescue this misguided monograph from that second category. Conceived in Fiesole and nurtured in California, the perceptions offered here by the author, Admir Skodo, will feel, to those who knew some of the historians under review here, like a tumble into a parallel universe.

The central argument has three components. First, philosophical Idealism is taken to have shifted from the 1930s from an 'old' form associated with well-known nineteenth-century figures in the generations of Green and Caird and Bosanquet to a 'new' configuration derived from Croce and popularised in Britain by Collingwood. Second, post-war British (actually English) historiography, mostly of the 1950s and 1960s, is depicted as a genre universally affected by a 'revisionism' of which previous generations had shown themselves incapable. Third, and the contention by which the book

*EHR*, CXXXIII, 560 (February, 2018)