

And they are adept at using the military, the police, the bureaucracy, and the media to accomplish their goals—including, notably, the repression of religious zealots. One Syrian Islamic writer summed up the fundamentalists' view of secular military juntas: "the most depraved social group . . . full of traitors, drunkards, fornicators, non-Muslims, and heretics."

Sivan notes a change in the attitudes of radical Muslims, marked by growing self-confidence and uncompromising defiance. The change came sometime around the mid-1960s, when Sunni fundamentalists stopped going along with Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism. During the 1956 Arab-Israeli war, imprisoned members of the dissident Muslim Brotherhood volunteered to fight on the front and to return to prison afterwards. By contrast, during the 1967 war, political prisoners in Nasser's jails refused to volunteer. "Israel and Nasser [are] both . . . but two variants of tyranny," they said, "both totally inimical to Islam."

Similarly, Islamic ideologues no longer feel any pressure to show that their faith is compatible with democracy. "The state in Islam obeys the law, not the people," says one. They are also openly contemptuous of such notions as equal treatment of religious minorities and women's liberation.

Sivan notes that Sunni radicals, though critical of governments and modern influences, have no qualms about seizing and using the modern instruments of the state for their own purposes. Even that great tool of Western devilry, the television set, can be put to orthodox ends. And although Sivan's subjects are ultimately critical of Iran's Shi'ite leader Khomeini, they grudgingly admire what he accomplished. Indeed, the Sunni radicals hope to do the same—crush the secular state and establish Islamic governments subject to Allah's law.

—Sbaul Bakhash '85

**NICARAGUA: Revolution
in the Family**

by Shirley Christian
Random, 1985
338 pp. \$19.95

In this measured study of the tangled and bloody affairs of Nicaragua since 1970, Shirley Christian, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, exposes many of the myths that have bedeviled the American public debate over U.S. policy toward the troubled Central American nation.

Among those myths: that the shortsightedness of U.S. policy toward Nicaragua during the 1920s and '30s precluded a useful

American role during the 1970s and '80s; that Latin American leaders wished only to be left alone by the *yanquis*; that the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) was an ideologically mixed force, turned toward Leninism by the Carter and Reagan administrations; that opposition to the FSLN regime in Nicaragua is primarily led by ex-Somocista figures who hope to return their country to its authoritarian and oligarchic past.

Perhaps the most striking part of Christian's book is her description of the vacillation of the Carter administration in 1978 and 1979. The tale

approaches tragedy. Nicaraguan opposition to Anastasio Somoza Debayle was, as Christian makes clear, unusually broad-based. It included the Catholic Church, the business community, trade unions, many politicians, and the newspaper *La Prensa*, as well as the guerilla forces of the FSLN. The goal of most Somoza foes—a pluralistic, democratic society—was not, Christian emphasizes, that of the Sandinistas. Yet the democratic opposition believed that it lacked the muscle to topple the Somoza dynasty. So it joined forces with the Sandinistas. The Sandinistas willingly went along with the united-front strategy, encouraged by no less a figure than Fidel Castro.

The dangers of such an alliance soon surfaced. The democratic opposition, enlisting the aid of other Latin American leaders, urged Carter to pressure Somoza to step down so that they, the moderates, could retain control of the revolution. Carter hesitated, fearing charges of U.S. intervention. The result was an unnecessarily bloody war and the emergence of a Marxist-Leninist "vanguard" with a military grip on the nation's future.

Nicaragua is, in many ways, a test case of U.S. policy toward its traditionally authoritarian allies throughout the Third World. Considered in light of Christian's analysis, the principle of "nonintervention," on which such high value has been placed in the postcolonial world, appears particularly deficient. For over two decades, the United States had nurtured political alternatives in Nicaragua. It supported independent labor groups, aided a range of nongovernmental institutions, and maintained regular contact with opposition politicians. But at the critical moment, writes Christian, "because of its desire to adhere to the nonintervention principle, the Carter administration could not make Somoza go."

The post-Vietnam curse that hangs over the word "intervention"—and particularly the assumption that intervention must be equated with military force—clearly shaped the outcome of the Nicaraguan revolution. The lesson that emerges from Christian's analysis is that there is no escape from responsibility for the United States. Nicaragua, for all its particularities, is still a sobering example of what could happen tomorrow in Chile, the Philippines, or South Korea.

—George Weigel '85

**MEDIEVAL RUSSIAN
CULTURE**

edited by Henrik Birnbaum
and Michael S. Flier
Univ. of Calif., 1985
395 pp. \$35

Of all subjects pertaining to Russia, no two have been more widely neglected than its medieval history (prior to Peter the Great) and its cultural heritage (prior to the great 19th-century novels). The vast pre-Petrine expanse is generally regarded as a period of darkness and Mongol influence; in fact it was a time of considerable artistic accomplishment. One, therefore, welcomes a volume that provides some of the best scholarship in

the East and the West on the medieval culture of the Eastern Slavs.

Early Russia was shaped not just by Byzantium but by the forgotten