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RELIGION, STATE and SOCIETY

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Editorial

During the Second World War the Czech Protestant theologian Josef Hromádka perceived that the initiative for world renewal had passed out of the hands of the European nations. He saw future primacy in world affairs as residing in Moscow and Washington. Karl Barth thought the same thing, as Eberhard Jüngel points out in his article in this issue of *RSS*. Jüngel goes on to argue, however, that after the end of communism Europe is now beginning to regard itself once again as a 'superior *orbis terrarum*'. And this, he warns, constitutes a temptation for the churches. 'By 1992', he writes, '... Europe seems to be in the process of rising anew from its self-induced collapse. And the churches could well be enticed to set up house in the renovated European home and "Christianise" it anew.' On the face of it, this seems a laudable aim for the churches. It becomes clear, however, that what Jüngel has in mind is the danger that Christianity will become simply a 'civic religion' and cease to bear prophetic witness. 'Protestant self-realisation', he writes, 'is a fundamental contradiction in terms. A Protestant church that is realising itself would cease to be rooted in the gospel'. God's grace, he argues, 'leads the church away from itself' — to Jesus Christ.

Certainly it is vital that the churches should not allow the gospel to be obscured by the agenda of the nation, the market or the political party, particularly at times of traumatic upheaval. One of the images used by Hromádka was that of the volcanic eruption and subsequent avalanche producing new formations and configurations of power in the massif of history. Hromádka experienced the convulsions of the Nazi rise to power, the Second World War and the communisation of Eastern Europe, and in this issue of *RSS* Jakub Trojan describes him attempting at all points to discern what the Christian response to events should be. Today we are living in a similar time of upheaval. Power structures in Europe and beyond are unstable. Christians and the churches are having to work out their response to rapidly changing circumstances.

For the churches of formerly communist countries, this task has a particular context. Under atheist rule they had to live a dual existence in order to ensure survival. Officially tolerated church structures coexisted with grassroots, unofficial or dissident religious activity. In the new conditions of freedom all kinds of questions are arising as to the new relationship between base and superstructure within the churches themselves. In this issue of *RSS*, Tom Keppeler looks at the Lord's Army renewal movement in the Romanian Orthodox Church and its relationship with the church leadership in the post-Ceauşescu era, Felix Corley examines the implications for the Catholic Church of the *ad hoc* ordination arrangements adopted by Catholics under persecution in Czechoslovakia, and Janice Broun chronicles the effort at self-renewal within the Bulgarian Orthodox Church which despite the noble motives of many of those involved has produced schism and even physical violence.

Both sides in the Bulgarian dispute suspect the other of seeking to seize or return to power rather than pursuing the fulfilment of the gospel. At times of flux the question of the exercise of power and the temptations it presents to the churches becomes a very lively one. Orthodox churches know the temptation of caesaropapism within a particular nation state; the Catholic Church the temptation of universalist triumph-

lism; and the Protestant churches the temptation, a legacy of Luther's doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, to support and justify the secular power which may or may not be pursuing policies acceptable to Christians, while limiting their own responsibility to care for the souls of the faithful. According to Trojan, Hromádka was very aware of the danger of this temptation for Protestants. He produced a profound analysis of the errors of the German Christians who from 1933 adapted their theology to the prevailing demands of Nazi ideology. Hromádka, says Trojan, 'is concerned with the sovereignty of the gospel . . . with the liberation of the church from intervention by state, nation, tribe or family. He knows that the church must never become the servant of worldly interests.' Nevertheless, as Trojan shows, Hromádka was unable to maintain the clarity of his insight. During the 1960s he came to believe that the communist system in Czechoslovakia, with all its faults, was capable of evolution into a system in which human rights and values would be guaranteed and realised, and that the current communist leaders would be susceptible to the arguments of Christians. He accordingly devoted all his energy to a dialogue with those in power, ignoring other sources of renewal in society. His efforts were to prove fruitless; and this was Hromádka's tragedy.

Hromádka's story shows how misapprehensions about the true nature of the secular power one is dealing with can compromise or neutralise the truth the Christian stands for. While it is clear that Jüngel is right to warn that the churches must avoid 'self-realisation' if this means simply becoming a 'civic religion' with no prophetic role, it is equally clear that the churches have a duty to 'Christianise' the society live in to the extent of ensuring that fundamental moral norms are recognised and respected by the secular powers. As Trojan puts it,

Voluntarily maintaining silence in the face of developments in society is unwise. The essential values of moral, civic and human rights cannot be put off until later. It is no good clutching at the hope that it will be possible to bring them into the house once it is built, like furniture when you move. It is the foundations, not the furnishings, which structure the house.

Please note

The next issue of *RSS*, Nos 3–4, 1993, will be a double issue devoted mainly to the themes of repentance and reconciliation in Eastern Europe.

Notes on contributors

Janice Broun, a graduate of Oxford University, is a freelance journalist specialising in religion in communist and former communist countries. She is the author of *Conscience and Captivity: Religion in Eastern Europe* (1988).

Felix Corley is a writer and broadcaster on religious affairs in Eastern Europe, specialising in the Catholic Church. He has appeared on the BBC and Vatican Radio, and has contributed to *The Economist*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Month*, *Catholic World Report* and *Index on Censorship*.

Grace Davie teaches sociology at the University of Exeter. She is co-director of the organisation 'Christianity and the Future of Europe' (CAFE) and is involved in a European research project concerned with the significance of the religious factor in the construction of a new Europe.

Eberhard Jüngel is Professor of Systematic Theology and the Philosophy of Religion and Director of the Hermeneutics Institute of the Protestant Theological Faculty at the University of Tübingen. Since 1971 he has been a member of the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). His most important publications are in the field of dogmatics.

Tom Keppeler has a BSc from the University of Wisconsin and an MA in intercultural studies from Wheaton Graduate School. For the past eight years he and his family have lived in Cluj, Romania, where he has been working with Lord's Army lay leadership in the area of non-formal theological education. He is currently pursuing doctoral studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the USA.

Jonathan Sutton studied Russian at Durham University. He is the author of *The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov: Towards a Reassessment* (Macmillan, 1988), and convened an international seminar on Russian religious philosophy in 1991. From 1986 to 1989 he was active in the campaign on behalf of Jews seeking to emigrate from the Soviet Union. Since the beginning of 1993 he has been conducting a research project on religious education in Eastern Europe at the University of Leeds.

Jakub S. Trojan, a pastor of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, was a disciple of Josef Hromádka and in the 1960s a member of the group known as 'New Orientation'. In 1974 he lost his state licence to practise as a clergyman, and in 1977 he was one of six ECCB pastors who signed Charter 77. He is now Dean of the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, Prague.