

# Editorial

Victor Hayward, in his review (see p. 10) states that there has never been a Christian civilization in China, where Christianity was imported from the West and where the Christians formed a minute proportion of the population. He therefore warns against comparing China with any other communist country, with, for example, Russia. For the latter has a long Christian tradition. Besides the Russian Orthodox Church, numerically always the strongest denomination, many sects came into existence. The evangelical movement of the 19th century, fed from Western sources, was by no means the only sectarian plant to burgeon on Russian soil; many indigenous sects, some with similar characteristics, others of a fanatical kind, sprouted from ground, ploughed up since the 17th century by dissension within the Russian Orthodox Church. Bishop Dmitry of Rostov, in the 18th century, counted 200 sects. Russia was in fact a good breeding ground for sectarianism: the causes are complex and cannot be explained simply by the climate, as suggested by the delightfully funny narrator in Rose Macaulay's *Towers of Trebizond*, who thought that "when sects arrive in America they multiply, like rabbits in Australia"; she blamed the encouraging climate, which is "most encouraging of all in the deep south, in California, where sects breed best".

The schism of 1667 in the Russian Orthodox Church produced two shoots from the dissenting branch of Old Believers, who refused to accept the reforms of Patriarch Nikon. These two shoots, the *Popovtsy* and the *Bespopovtsy*, are interesting examples of indigenous Russian sects. The *Popovtsy* preserved the priesthood, accepted all the sacraments, but allowed considerable authority to the laity in the choice of their priests. They depended on runaway Orthodox priests for their sacramental life until the 1860s, when Metropolitan Ambrose of the Church of Bosnia consecrated three Old Believer bishops at Bela Krinica (on Austrian territory) and thus a hierarchy and church organization were established. The *Bespopovtsy* rejected the priesthood and sacraments (except for baptism). Elders read and expounded the scriptures and strict simplicity was maintained at their services. Their attitude to the state, society and marriage was in many cases anarchic: some rejected the authority of the monarch, preferring to burn themselves alive than accept any authority save that of God; some, having rejected the sacraments, concluded that marriage should be abolished altogether, though others permitted at least a

civil ceremony. An extreme form of *bespopovshchina* arose in the late 18th century: the wanderers or *Stranniki*, rejecting all contact with the civil authorities and civilization, abandoned their families and villages, destroyed their official identification documents and retired to the forests.

The evangelical movement of the 19th century, from which the contemporary Evangelical Christian and Baptist Church in the USSR grew, developed in two areas—in the Ukraine and amongst the aristocratic circles of St. Petersburg. The *Shtundists* in the Ukraine, led by the Lutheran and Mennonite pastors of German colonists, held meetings in the 1860s at which the Bible was studied and to which the local inhabitants were invited. During the following decade in the capital, the English evangelical, Lord Radstock, preached in numerous aristocratic drawing-rooms: the Shuvalovs, Pahlens, Golitsyns and Chicherins were among Lord Radstock's supporters. By 1878 Lord Radstock was banned from Russia, but his work was continued by Colonel Pashkov. The movement spread beyond aristocratic circles to the peasantry and working class. The Pashkovites set up eating houses in the Vyborg region of St. Petersburg, organized sewing shops, laundries, rehabilitation homes and workshops for the poor, helped impoverished university students and published quantities of religious literature. Pashkov, however, like his mentor Lord Radstock, was expelled from Russia in 1884. Only in 1905 were sectarians (excluding "dangerous fanatics") finally permitted to exist legally.

It is interesting to compare the problems and solutions faced by evangelicals in the 19th century with those they face in the Soviet Union today aspects of the contemporary situation are presented in the section entitled *Letters and Documents*. In future issues, this section will be devoted to other religious groups.

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