

Early Twentieth Century Russia: Church and State

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Archpriest Vladimir Rozhkov of the Russian Orthodox Church is a Soviet citizen who presented a doctoral thesis at the Oriental Institute in Rome. This thesis has now been published in Rome in the series "Opere Religiose Russe" (1975). Copies can be obtained from Keston College.

Ecclesiastical Questions in the State Duma

(*Tserkovnye Voprosy v Gosudarstvennoi Dume*)

by Archpriest Vladimir Rozhkov, Rome, 1975, 453 pp.

The religious history of Russia in the years immediately preceding the revolution of 1917 contains many perplexing contradictions. There was, among intellectuals, a revival of religious thought, while at the other extreme members of the clergy were closely involved with the proto-fascist, anti-semitic Black Hundreds. These two aspects are perhaps the best known, particularly through the books and articles of Nicholas Zernov, George Kline and others who have dealt with the vigorous philosophical and religious debates of the period. But although there was a revival of religious thought this did not develop into anything like a *ralliement* to the Church, and formal religious practice was seldom a part of the revival. One of the central figures, Nicholas Berdyaev, tells us in his memoirs that no one trusted the priest who regularly attended the informal religious discussions in which he was involved in Moscow. The priest was suspected of being a government spy. There are also stories that the content of confessions were reported to the police authorities.

One cannot explain these phenomena without reference to the peculiar relationship between Church and State which had developed since Peter the Great. From Peter's time in the early eighteenth century, the Church had lost its independence and had become subjected to the State to the extent that, in non-doctrinal matters, it was headed by a lay bureaucrat appointed by the government. In the early nineteenth century this relationship had been reinforced. In an attempt to give the autocracy some intellectual support and credibility in the face of the small, but growing

tide of liberal and eventually revolutionary ideas, the government proclaimed the triple formula of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality" as a counter to "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity". As political tension grew, threatening to split the Empire into fragments, the government increasingly turned to these principles to provide its only sound base, using the Orthodox Church as the foundation of a political alliance between autocrat, landowner and Russian peasant against the non-Russian nationalities. After the crisis of 1881, when Alexander II was assassinated, "Russification" became the chief response of the government to the nationalist and revolutionary movements, a policy pursued most intensely by Pobedonostsev who was the bureaucratic head of the Church. The policy fell heavily on Catholics and Protestants but above all on Jews who began to suffer severe persecution. Popular anti-semitism was fanned by the Imperial government and its legacy is still visible in the contemporary Soviet Union.

One of the most critical points for the autocracy was the revolution of 1905 when, to all intents and purposes, the Empire did fall apart. The Duma, a kind of quasi-parliament, set up to appease some of the discontent, helped the government to restore order, but in addition it fell back on its old policy of using the Church as a political weapon. It is this critical point and this critical relationship which is the subject of Rozhkov's book. He does not himself indulge in speculation or large-scale analysis of the role of the Church in Russia at the time. His aim is to present a factual account of the arguments and policies surrounding the question of Church and State as they were faced in the practical everyday to and fro of political activity, within the narrow limits of late Imperial Russia. In this respect, as a compendium and summary of Duma debates on the Church, Rozhkov's book is an indispensable reference for any scholar (though the absence of an index is lamentable from this point of view). He does not project his own views onto the material but, in so far as it is humanly possible, he allows the evidence to speak for itself. And speak it certainly does. His description of the struggle over the principle of freedom of conscience found the Church firmly against any weakening of its privileged position. Similarly, popular education brought a major conflict, not between Church and State, but between the alliance of Church and State on the one hand and the nationalist, liberal and socialist opposition on the other. The proposals of these latter were bitterly attacked by the spokesmen of the Church in the Duma. Bishop Yevlogi, for example, argued that in his opposition to Polish nationalists he was defending the interests of "our, poor, benighted, downtrodden peasants" against an army of Roman Catholic clergy, Polish landlords and the whole intelligentsia - lawyers, doctors and urban artisans - "who under the guise of culture are foci of the most irrepressible political proselytism".

The cause of this tirade had been a debate over the government's pro-

posal to create a new province, Kholm (Chelm) from parts of two Polish provinces, its objective being to reduce the size of the territory within the Grand Duchy of Warsaw by slicing off the more Russian eastern regions. The feelings of the population had made themselves felt in 1905 when, the authority's grip being weak as a result of the revolution, and the normal prohibition on conversion being in abeyance, about 150,000 people joined the Roman Catholic Church in the space of two or three weeks (p. 101). This only made the Orthodox Church more determined to defend its position with the help of the State. The conversions had come about, said Yevlogi, because the population felt that Russia's power was collapsing and its Church was finished, that even the Tsar and Tsaritsa and John of Kronstadt had become Catholics (pp. 101-102). The implication was clear, Church and State had to stand together against dissolution.

The Prime Minister, Stolypin, was already aware of the problem. Speaking on 22 May 1909 on the question of freedom of conscience, he said, "Our task is not to accommodate Orthodoxy to the abstract theory of freedom of conscience but to kindle the lamp of religion in the free consciences within the boundaries of our Russian Orthodox State. . . . Remember that religious laws exist in the Russian State and that there is the Russian Tsar to enforce them, who, for some hundred million of his subjects was is and will be the Orthodox Tsar." (p. 100). In the fact of this intransigence, the ins and outs of the debates described by Rozhkov pale into irrelevancies in that the government had the will, the authority and the power to carry out its policies irrespective of the wishes of the truncated opposition within the Duma and the hostility it faced outside, particularly among the non-Russian nationalities.

The intertwining of Orthodoxy, nationalism and autocracy proved fatal to Church and State. Rozhkov concludes with a vignette of the Church Council of 1917-18 when the Church was faced with the problem of adjusting to a world where the State could not protect it, a world in which it had independence forcibly thrust upon it, against the wishes of most of its leaders. The Church clung to its old principles of demanding a special place in the State, control over education, a veto on laws affecting its status, and that only Orthodox should be chosen for leading positions in State and society. In a rare value judgment, Rozhkov points out, "Of course, this programme was very far from the realities of political life in Russia at that time." (p. 359). Its intransigent attitude to reformers within and opponents without is perhaps too little taken into account as a factor explaining (though of course in no way justifying) the intense hatred many people felt for the Church, which came to the surface in the period of severe persecution after 1917.

Rozhkov says there are two ways for a scholar to deal with the question of the Church and Duma. He can examine the influence of the Church on the Duma as a whole or he can examine the way in which the

Duma dealt with ecclesiastical problems. He chose the latter and has provided us with a definitive account from the Duma records, backed up with many useful appendices giving the names of those involved in various Duma committees dealing with the Church, and an excellent bibliography. Let us hope that the other alternative is soon taken up and that we are presented with a general account of the Church's influences in these years to correspond with Rozhkov's scrupulous study of his subject and with the more numerous studies of the spiritual and intellectual life of the period.

KESTON BOOKS

Available

1. FAITH ON TRIAL IN RUSSIA, Michael Bourdeaux, Hodder & Stoughton, 1971, reprinted 1975, 192 pp., paperback, 60p, (15p P&P).
2. PATRIARCH AND PROPHETS, Michael Bourdeaux, Mowbrays, reprinted 1975, 360 pp., paperback, £2.50 (50p P&P).
3. THREE GENERATIONS OF SUFFERING, Georgi Vins, translated by Jane Ellis, Hodder & Stoughton, 1976, 222pp., paperback, 85p (15p P&P).

Forthcoming

4. AIDA OF LENINGRAD, Michael Bourdeaux and Xenia Howard-Johnston, Mowbrays, 1976, paperback (reprint).
5. YOUNG CHRISTIANS IN THE SOVIET UNION, Michael Bourdeaux and Katharine Murray, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1976.
6. AN EARLY SOVIET SAINT: THE LIFE OF FATHER ZACHARIAH OF ZAGORSK, anonymous, translated by Jane Ellis, Mowbrays, 1976.
7. ANATOLI LEVITIN, Michael Bourdeaux, Jane Ellis and Mikhail Meerson-Aksyonov.