

Three Generations of Suffering

by Georgi Vins, Hodder and Stoughton, 1976, 222 pp., 85p.

For your happiness I am ready to give up
My whole life and my young strength;
To say with joy as I die :
"My love and my song is Russia !"

These are the closing lines of a poem written by Georgi Vins early in 1968, while serving his first sentence in labour camp. These are no idle words: just over a year ago, Vins was sentenced for the second time, because he would not cease his labour for Christ in the land he loved.

These verses are the more moving when one recalls that Vins is actually descended from a Mennonite family (Wiens) which first emigrated to Russia many years ago. Some Russian Mennonites still preserve their historic and national identity very strongly. Others, like Georgi Vins, have identified with and completely dedicated themselves to their adopted homeland. In another poem, *The Messiah*, written in prison while awaiting sentence in the summer of 1966, Vins spoke of the suffering of Christ and exclaimed:

Is it not for this that in the songs of Russia
A smouldering melancholy lives?

Sentiments like this are surprisingly close to some of the ideas expressed by Orthodox-oriented slavophil groups in the last century. Here is a man who has accepted persecution simply because he loves Russia and desires above all else to be a pure channel through which the love of Christ can pour into the hearts of those around him.

Georgi Vins represents one link in a chain of Christian witnesses – and martyrs – in Russia which stretches back many years and defies denominational barriers. The specifically evangelical tradition in which Vins stands also forms a part of this book, which includes both Vins's account of his own family's sufferings for their Christian witness, and his sketches of earlier Russian evangelical leaders. (A more formal study of the growth of evangelicalism in Russia can be found in the book by Brandenburg reviewed in the last issue of *RCL*, and soon to appear in English).

It could be said that the divergence of the material detracts from the unity of the book. Nevertheless it is essential reading for anyone who desires to know more about Russian Christians. Best of all, it is an "inside" view, written by one who has taken an active part and has suffered accordingly. As such, this book is almost unique on the contemporary market. It is to be hoped that it will soon be followed by many other

parallel publications – the actual writings of those about whom so much is now known, and on whom too many superficial and premature judgments have been passed.

KATHLEEN MATCHETT

The Invocation

directed by Tenghiz Abuladze, Gruzia Film, Georgia, 1968.

Molba (*The Invocation* or *The Prayer*), is a black and white film from Georgia, made by Tenghiz Abuladze, a Georgian born in 1924. It was shown at the nineteenth London Film Festival on 3 and 4 December at the National Film Theatre. Abuladze has also produced the following films: *Magdana's Donkey* (1956) co-directed with Revaz Chkheidze, *Someone Else's Children* (1958) co-directed with Djaparidze, and *Grandmother, Iliko, Illarion and Me* (1963). *The Invocation* was first seen outside the USSR at the San Remo Film Festival in 1974 where it was awarded the Grand Prize.

The screenplay is based on the classical poems, *Aluda Ketelauri* and *Guest and Host* by the Georgian poet, Vazha Pshavella (1861-1915) known for his heroic verse. His poetry calls man to fight against evil. Abuladze uses two symbols to express this struggle: the Maiden – a girl in a white dress who personifies love, and the man Matzil, who represents all that is evil. These two incompatible powers, one divine and the other earthly, are allegorically married. Love is thus destroyed – the girl in white is ritually hanged. Mindy is the central figure who recognizes the two qualities in life and acts as the vehicle for Pshavella's philosophy. He stands for human values in an evil world. The continuous but solitary call for friendship and love throughout the film is punished by murder – the right of the majority based on the cruel ancient law. The individual's question – “what is life's meaning?” – remains a scream in the dark as death and violence win the battle. Yet the film closes, as it began, with the image of the Maiden in white crossing a field, and Mindy lamenting before God for the spreading hatred and turmoil, but these words of lamentation are an affirmation of faith in God, of faith in the Light.

The Invocation deserves to be compared with two other excellent Soviet films which have been shown in Britain: Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* completed early in 1967 and Georgi Shengelaya's *Pirosmani* made in 1971. *Andrei Rublev* is not an historical film nor an art documentary but a dramatic interpretation of medieval Russia through a portrayal of the life and work of Russia's greatest icon painter, Andrei Rublev. We are offered his vision of Russia: a crucifixion, the image of the risen Christ, scenes of desolation, and his vision of communion, the icon of The Holy