

describes in its proper context. She listened and asked questions but was never intrusive, and she accepted the boundless Serbian hospitality in the spirit in which it was offered. The book is furnished with a detailed map and index and would make an excellent companion to a more conventional guide-book. What a pity it costs so much.

STELLA ALEXANDER

An Early Soviet Saint - The Life of Father Zachariah

Anonymous. Translated by Jane Ellis.

Mowbrays (Keston Books No. 6), 1976, 111 pp., £4.25.

In the West, people are only now realizing how the tradition of Russian spirituality is not only continuing but flourishing, in spite of Soviet rule. Books of great spiritual depth are being circulated in typed or manuscript form, and *An Early Soviet Saint* is a translation of one such piece of *samizdat*. Although this book is the biography of a modern Orthodox monk and spiritual guide (*starets*), it evokes the medieval world of fantastic miracles and deep devotion, of spiritual insight and authority. While it is not concerned with any explicit political comment, the reader is made aware of the inherent conflict between the way of life of this holy man and Soviet ideology. This conflict is dramatically enacted when the NKVD come to arrest Fr. Zachariah, who is gravely ill by this time. Fr. Zachariah draws a circle around his room and says that anyone who crosses the line shall die. The secret police neither cross the line nor arrest him.

This biography, written by one of his spiritual daughters, is concerned above all with the monk's growth in holiness, his knowledge of God, and teaching on prayer. He is sometimes called Zosima, a name which links him in the reader's mind with the *starets* of Dostoevsky's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Fr. Zachariah's parents were peasants, and even as a child he was a fervent believer and graced by visions of the Mother of God. With great difficulty he obtained his father's permission to enter a monastery and once clothed as a novice he was abused and harassed by the other monks because of the intensity of his zeal. He became an elder and confessor who exercised powerfully the gift of spiritual discernment. Fr. Zachariah was able to see deeply into the hearts of men and women; he could see their past and future, and he gave them the spiritual counsel and guidance for which they craved. In sharp contrast to religious leaders in the West, he speaks with extraordinary authority and powerful direction.

His teaching is grounded in the Russian spiritual tradition of St. Seraphim and Macarius of Optina: "Learn, my children, learn from St. Sergius and St. Seraphim, learn from them constant prayer and humble, Orthodox love to God and to your neighbour". Fr. Zachariah knows that the power of God can defeat all evil and he teaches that quality of insight

which discovers God's presence in all experience. The great enemy is depression: "This passion, depression, kills everything holy, everything living and human". But prayer, Fr. Zachariah teaches, is the beginning of eternal life, the door through which we enter the Kingdom of Heaven, "... a road which leads us to the Lord and unites us with him". In the life and teaching of Fr. Zachariah we have a witness to the continuing existence of Holy Russia.

LYLE DENNEN

The Religion of the Russian People

by Pierre Pascal. Translated by Rowan Williams.

Mowbrays, London and Oxford, 1976, 130 pp. + ix, £2.95.

This book reminds me of Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* for two reasons. Firstly, within the compass of quite a short work, several different literary genres are held together by an underlying unity. Secondly, "the religion of the Russian people" – rather than any particular named individual – is a hero of our time; and the veteran French slavonic scholar Pierre Pascal is here paying homage to that heroism. He is well served by a clear and accurate translation by Rowan Williams who also supplies a foreword and a helpful glossary. He is less well served by the proof-reader and by the fact that no indication is given of the date of the original. This makes it difficult to assess for example the claim that "at the present time it is still prohibiting to bring a copy of the Gospel into the USSR", (p. 97).

The work consists of three main parts. The first is an extended essay on the religion of the Russian people, full of lightly carried learning, illuminating flashes of insight and challenges to superficial received opinions. M. Pascal is concerned not only to explain Russian popular religion but also to defend it against detractors in the West. Much of what he says suggests common factors – an underlying sympathy – between Russian and English folk-religion as compared with "continental" Catholicism and Protestantism. Perhaps his apologia succeeds too well, for in his account there is really no darkness at all. The most convincing portraits usually contain at least a little shadow; and without some depiction and analysis of the failings of popular religion it is difficult for the reader to see why everything in the garden not only is not – but was not – lovely. He does give, however, one clue to the tragic side of Russian history. "Humility is so characteristic, so marked, and so consistent a feature of the Russian Christian that no other nation has taken so small a part in its own government" (p. 32). It is not only the Russians who have suffered involuntarily from the politico-military outworking of that abnegation.

It is the third section, entitled "The Resistance of the Russian People