

# RELIGION, STATE and SOCIETY

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## Editorial

The year 1992 sees significant moves towards closer European unity. It is also the five hundredth anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain by the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella. Some are suggesting that 1492 should be commemorated not exclusively as a disaster, but more positively, by celebrating the centuries during which Spanish Jewry, far from being confined to a ghetto, produced a culture which still enriches not only Jews but Spain and the whole western world. 'How much longer are we going to teach our children only the dark side of our history?' asks Professor Maurice Roumani of Ben-Gurion University (*The Jerusalem Report*, 23 January 1992). 'It's time we looked at the positive aspects of our life among non-Jews.'

Much of this issue of *Religion, State and Society* is devoted to the subject of Jewish-Christian relations. Religious believers in Europe today arguably have the best opportunity since immediately after the First World War to take a fresh look at long-standing contentious issues and to start trying to find new ways of resolving them. Jonathan Webber's article is called 'The Future of Auschwitz' — 'a curious and perhaps provocative turn of phrase'. He maintains that Auschwitz does indeed have a future, which needs to be worked out as a cooperative effort by all those involved, Jews and Gentiles alike. It is not only the Jews, he argues, who have had their own particular understanding of Auschwitz. The Poles, on whose territory Auschwitz is situated, have been brought up during the communist period with a particular interpretation of its significance. This is an interpretation which has run parallel to the interpretations placed on Auschwitz by the Jews and other national and religious groups, without ever intersecting with or interacting with them. Now there is an opportunity for this state of affairs to change.

One consequence of communist power in the various countries of Central and Eastern Europe has been that certain distinctive patterns of behaviour and certain types of self-image have established themselves both within the religious communities in particular and also more generally within society. These patterns and images are, in important ways, different from those established within western societies, and the identification of the differences and the overcoming of the consequences of ingrained patterns of behaviour on both sides is going to be part of the agenda for future debate.

The Polish Catholic lay worker Halina Bortnowska has written of the 'victim mentality' of her fellow-countrymen and women. 'The "victim" is not responsible, the "victim" is excused from participation: and so complicity with evil is seen as the fault of others, of the oppressors — "we are not guilty".' In post-communist Poland, as throughout Central and Eastern Europe, citizens are now learning to take responsibility for change within societies which have stagnated for so long.

An analogous phenomenon to the 'victim' mentality is observable within those religious communities in many formerly communist countries which have not involved themselves in internal debate on matters of contemporary social and political concern. In many of the countries of Eastern Europe, and particularly in the Soviet

Union, they have been prevented from doing so by law and administrative practice. At the same time, they have had very little exposure to new theological and philosophical developments in the West. An added disincentive has been the fact that the secular authorities have always been vigilant to exploit any signs of internal debate as an opportunity to promote schism within the churches and to exercise the policy of 'divide and rule'. A fourth factor has been that many of the churches in Eastern Europe have perceived themselves as standing for unchanging truth in a world of immorality, fear and corruption: their role has been quite simply to provide a place where the believer can worship God.

The articles by Lezov and Khrakhmal'nikova in this issue of *RSS* examine to what extent the Russian Orthodox Church in the twentieth century has been able to develop its ideas on the Jewish question in particular and, more generally, on the question of national identity — obviously a topic of the highest importance now nationalism is burgeoning in the wake of communist collapse. Lezov offers a challenge to the churches. He contends that 'religious pluralism' is 'a value proper to Christianity'. He goes so far as to argue that, far from being a symptom of weakness, 'doubt' as an essential element in faith guarantees that it is genuine. 'Faith deprived of the elements of risk and courage loses the character of faith and acquires the features of an ideology of unique truth. There occurs here a diminishing of God that is far from devout, bringing him down to the level of an idol.'

Religious communities East and West are thus challenged in 1992 to engage in creative dialogue. As Webber says, '... the Auschwitz symbolism of the future may well be less concerned with national or nationalist representations of history, than... with wider universalistic issues concerning the nature of evil, i.e. the moral, spiritual and educational problems as they affect humanity in general.' 'The model... is that of inter-faith dialogue: each should remain honest unto itself, conscious of preserving its own tradition, but nevertheless enhanced, enriched and deepened through contact with the other and awareness of it.'

The year 1992 is a very appropriate year for the relaunch of the Keston College journal. Religious believers from East and West are from now on going to be able to tackle social, cultural, ethnic, political and ecclesiological problems in a substantive and cooperative manner which has hitherto been very difficult if not impossible. *Religion, State and Society* intends to provide a forum for the multiform debate that is now beginning.

## Notes on contributors

**Mikhail Agursky** was a practising Jew with a close association with Christianity, and was the author of many works on aspects of religion and nationality. He emigrated from the USSR in 1975. Until his tragically early death in 1991 he was Associate Professor and Researcher at the Marjorie Mayrock Center for Soviet and East European Research at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

**Jolanta Babiuch** is a lecturer in Sociology at the University of Warsaw, specialising in East European intellectual traditions, and a Council-member of the Polish Sociological Association. She is the author of *Portrety i Autoportrety Inteligencji Polskiej* (Warsaw, 1989), and has written on East European religious questions for *The World Today*, *The Tablet*, *Twin Circle*, and *Contemporary Review*.

**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.

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**Zoya Krakhmal'nikova** was born in 1929. She graduated from the Gor'ky Institute of Literature in 1954, and then worked as a journalist on *Molodaya gvardiya* and *Literaturnaya gazeta*. In 1968 she completed a thesis at the Institute of World Literature attached to the Soviet Academy of Sciences. She became a member of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1971 and in 1975 began producing *Nadezhda*, a periodical anthology of Christian reading. In 1982 she was arrested and sentenced to labour camp, from which she was released in 1987. She now lives in Moscow.

**Sergei Lezov** was born in 1954. He studied Slavistics and Classics at Moscow University, graduating in 1981. He then moved to the study of German theology and New Testament interpretation. In 1990 with a number of colleagues he set up a Bible study college in Moscow, independent of both church and state, with the aim of introducing students to western Biblical criticism. He works as a researcher at the Institute for Information on the Social Sciences (Academy of Sciences of Russia) in Moscow.

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*Poland and the USSR 1939–1941* (Macmillan, 1991), and is now working on a *History of Poland from 1764 to the Present Day* for the ‘Oxford History of Europe’ series.

**Gerd Stricker** is a member of the research staff of the Swiss-based institute ‘Glaube in der zweiten Welt’ and editor of the monthly journal of the same name. He is the author of numerous articles on the history of Germans in Russia, and of the books *Orthodoxe Kirche in Russland: Dokumente ihrer Geschichte (860–1980)* (Göttingen, 1989) and *Religionen in der UdSSR — Unbekannte Vielfalt in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Zollikon, 1989).

**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.

**Jonathan Webber** trained as a social anthropologist first in London University and then, for his doctorate, at Oxford. He is currently Fellow in Jewish Social Studies at the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies and Hebrew Centre Lecturer in Social Anthropology, Oxford University. He is a founder member of the International Auschwitz Council appointed by the Polish Minister of Culture, and chairman of its standing committee on education.

**Rowan Williams** is currently Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford University. In May 1992 he becomes Anglican Bishop of Monmouth.