

## Book Reviews

*A Fragrance of Oppression: the Church and Its Persecutors* by Herbert Schlossberg.  
Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991. viii + 252pp. Paperback.

Though written in a popular style, this book is unlikely to be widely read for the very reason it needed to be written. The subject of persecution is of marginal interest to most Christians in Western Europe and North America. Centuries of power and privilege have led western churches to lose their focus on persecution. The collapse of the militantly atheistic Soviet bloc may make the persecution of the church seem still more remote from the western perspective. In his new book, Herbert Schlossberg has made a valiant effort to bring the theme of persecution closer to the centre of church life in the western world and motivate it to act in solidarity with persecuted Christians.

Schlossberg's starting point is the gospel: the Christian church has been persecuted since its foundation. Jesus promised that his followers would be persecuted. The New Testament portrays persecution of the church as a permanent feature of the cosmic struggle between good and evil.

*A Fragrance of Oppression* is far from an arid chronicle of two millennia of trial and tribulation. It is a lively and lucid analysis of persecution of the church, including an abundance of cases in support of the author's conclusions. Writing before the complete collapse of the Soviet Union, Mr Schlossberg focuses his attention primarily on repression of the church under communism and the lamentably inadequate response from western Christendom. Here he adeptly covers ground that will be largely familiar to readers of this journal and its predecessor, *Religion in Communist Lands*.

The great strength of this book is its global perspective. It reveals a pattern of systematic persecution of the church in virtually all parts of the non-Christian world. An entire chapter is devoted to increasing signs of state hostility towards religion in the United States. This chapter focuses mainly on court cases, which have had the effect of restricting the freedom of Christians to express their faith and religiously based values in important spheres of the public sector, especially in state schools, while leaving the field open to views and values that are inimical to the Christian faith.

Had Mr Schlossberg written his book with a European readership in mind he would undoubtedly have documented this same tendency on the continent. For example, the Education Authority of the Canton of Zurich has recently cosponsored three editions of a book – complete with illustrations reminiscent of primitive Soviet antireligious propaganda – which accuses mainstream evangelical Christianity of being a dangerous 'totalitarian tendency' in society, and has accordingly taken steps to prevent evangelicals and other 'totalitarian-minded' people from teaching inter-confessional religious instruction in state schools. This is but one highly publicised symptom of the declining influence of Christianity in western European society and the accompanying long-term danger to religious freedom.

It is Schlossberg's exposé of persecution of the church under Islam that may be most instructive to those with an interest in the role of religion in the evolution of the

'new Europe', including the Asiatic parts of the former Soviet Union. In the post-Cold War era, Islam in Europe can no longer be regarded as a non-issue. The author's findings make uncomfortable reading for those who have placed high hopes on interfaith dialogue for the reconciliation of Islam with Christianity. He concludes that the institutionalised persecution of Christianity that has been found in varying degrees throughout the Islamic world since the time of Muhammad is rooted in the precepts of Islam. Here the author goes to the heart of the problem, focusing on *jihad*, the *dhimmi* doctrine and the apostasy law.

According to the traditional Muslim view as reflected in Islamic law, the world is divided between two spheres which are in perpetual conflict: the Abode of Peace (*Dar al-Islam*) and the Abode of War (*Dar al-Harb*). *Dar al-Islam* is where Islam rules. *Dar al-Harb* is the non-Muslim world – a world destined to be conquered by Islam. The body politic within *Dar al-Islam* is the *umma*, which is made up of the ascendant Muslim community and those subjugated Christians and Jews – i.e. *dhimmis* – with whom the ascendant Muslim community has entered into contractual agreement.

In return for the right to practise limited self-administration and to worship according to their traditions, *dhimmis* have an obligation to accept the political supremacy of Islam, a second-class legal status and the payment of a special tax, the *jizya*. Religious freedom for *dhimmis* is limited to the right to worship inconspicuously within the four walls of a licensed building. The effect of Islam's *dhimmi* doctrine has been to create closed communities that are denied the freedom publicly to practise and express their faith. Islamic law militates further against the potential growth of *dhimmi* communities by prescribing the death penalty for converts from Islam to any other faith.

The Muslim community in *Dar al-Islam* has an obligation to undertake *jihad* against the *Dar al-Harb* when called to do so by the Islamic state. While *jihad* is often loosely translated as 'Holy War' in western literature, it literally means 'striving' for the cause of Islam. *Jihad* may take the form of spiritual struggle or non-violent political action. But the practice of Muhammad and his successors have given the term *jihad* a largely military connotation. The evidence the author provides of the modern outworking of the Islamic worldview on the lives of Christians is compelling.

If religion is the primary source of social, economic and political institutions, the increasing vibrancy of Islam throughout the world is bound to have great implications for the 'new Europe'. The historic conflict between *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb* has already taken the form of brutal warfare within the CSCE region in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, in particular in Bosnia, the Caucasus and Tajikistan.

*A Fragrance of Oppression* will be a useful primer for all who wish to view the relationship between Christianity, on the one hand, and Islam, communism and secularism, on the other, from a Christian perspective.

JOHN EIBNER

*Awake to Life! The Easter Cycle* by Fr Alexander Men. London: The Bowerdean Press, 1991. 92pp. ISBN 0-906097-13-4. Paperpack, £4.99.

Fr Aleksandr Men' deserves to be better known outside the borders of the former Soviet Union. So far *Awake to Life! The Easter Cycle*, a series of sermons given during Lent and leading on to Easter and Pentecost (published in Moscow, 1991) is one of the few examples of his work to have been translated into English. Fr Aleksandr was a luminous figure, handsome, charismatic, with a mind which found sustenance through friendship with some of the most brilliant figures of his time,

including the philosopher Mamardashvili. His series of books on world religions, crowned by his book on Christianity *The Son of Man*, his numerous articles, lectures, talks and sermons, some of which have been preserved on tape, should be better known by non-Russian-speaking readers. He had the capacity to communicate with people who had had no contact with the church; he could keep an audience hanging on his every word as he spoke in some large secular auditorium during the days of *perestroika*, after 1988 when the state relaxed its control over the church. There is as yet no biography in English of this remarkable man although numerous reminiscences about him have already appeared in print in Russia.

Mysteriously aware of his pending fate, Fr Aleksandr worked feverishly during the last months of his life, writing, speaking in public, preaching, caring for the sick and looking after his vast number of spiritual children. He always had exactly the right word for those who came to him for counsel and confession. Murdered with an axe, on 9 September 1990, Fr Aleksandr died on his knees: a martyr's death, many would claim; his influence in consequence is possibly greater now than during his lifetime.

Fr Aleksandr continues to be a controversial figure, with articles attacking and others defending him appearing quite frequently still in the Russian press. Although representing an open attitude to non-Russian Orthodox traditions as opposed to the narrow, nationalistic, antisemitic and antiwestern trend within much of the Russian Orthodox Church today, Fr Aleksandr was nurtured within the most profound spiritual tradition of his church, that of the *startsy*. The account by Vera Yakovlevna Vasilevskaya, Fr Aleksandr's aunt, of her upbringing of 'Alik' in her book *Katakomby XXogo veka* (still not published in English and only partially published in Russian) shows how the *starets* Father Serafim watched over Fr Aleksandr as a child, as he guided Vera Yakovlevna, herself a child psychiatrist. As Fr Aleksandr himself wrote, 'Father Serafim was a genuine descendant of the *startsy* tradition', guided as he was by Fr Nektari of Optina Pustyn' and by Fr Zakhariya from the Trinity-St Sergius Monastery.

*Awake to Life! The Easter Cycle* reveals Fr Aleksandr's capacity to touch the heart: these sermons are direct, simple, based on personal experience of that about which he preaches. His words from the sermon for Pentecost Sunday could be applied to him as a preacher: 'a true witness speaks only the truth – and not just the truth, but a truth that he knows well personally. So the power of Christian witness lies in what we say about the Lord whom we know, about the grace we have experienced' (p. 91). The voice behind the words is that of a pastor – compassionate, caring, gentle, challenging but constantly encouraging. As he speaks of the dead Christ in his sermon for Holy Saturday, his words describe uncannily the view of many who still grieve for him today: 'He who should have been reigning and rejoicing with us lies lifeless today, murdered by our sins and our wickedness' (p. 58). Fr Aleksandr, however, would be the first to see beyond the immediate tragedy, to the broad sweep of Christian history: his life may yet be more fruitful after death.

XENIA DENNEN

*Fatima, Russia and Pope John Paul II* by Timothy Tindal-Robertson. Chulmleigh, Devon: Augustine Publishing Company, 1992. xiii + 117pp., £3.25.

In autumn 1981 Pope John Paul II was convalescing at Castelgandolfo after Mehmet Ali Agca's bungled assassination attempt on 13 May. Pavel Hnilica, secretly consecrated bishop in Slovakia in the 1950s, brought him a statue of Our Lady of Fatima,

the Portuguese shrine where the Blessed Virgin Mary had allegedly appeared in 1917 to three peasant children. A photograph depicts the pope apparently in conversation with the statue. But he did not hold on to it. According to Hnilica, 'He had a small church consecrated in Poland, in a forest on the border with the Soviet Union, to house that statue. It is there now, in the exact position John Paul II wanted it: with its gaze directed towards Russia.'

This little episode introduces the reader to a by-way of the Roman Catholic world little known outside it. It combines many of the features which other Christians find baffling and most difficult to swallow: 'private' revelations accompanied by startling phenomena (the sun dancing in the sky); an emphasis on mariology which positively relishes new doctrinal titles such as the Immaculate Heart of Mary; statues; the idea of 'consecration', a prayer by which the world or Russia is 'entrusted' to the protection of Christ and his Mother; attention to the personal opinions of the 'Holy Father' (as he is always known in this context).

Whatever one makes of all this, one can hardly say that it observes the solid ecumenical principle of 'stressing what unites rather than what divides'. On the contrary, the emphasis falls on the Catholic difference in all its craggy awkwardness.

However, the central core of the Fatima myth (if I may so call it without prejudging the question of 'what happened') goes further still. It involves an interpretation, or rather a detailed knowledge, of the workings of Divine Providence. The subtitle of Tindal-Robertson's book is astonishing in its precision: 'How Mary intervened to deliver Russia from Marxist atheism, 13 May 1981–25 December 1992'. Or in the slightly more nuanced phrase of the blurb, the book 'tells for the first time how the demise of the former Soviet Union is attributable to the hand of God, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary.'

How this same school of thought used to pour scorn on the Marxist claim to possess knowledge of 'the laws of history'. Yet here a series of coincidences of dates is used to press home a contrary but equal certainty: 13 May 1981, the day of the attempted papal assassination, was the feast of Our Lady of Fatima; 22 August 1991, when Gorbachev returned to Moscow after the collapse of the coup, was the feast of Mary Queen of Heaven and Earth. It was no accident, therefore, that Gorbachev should choose Christmas Day 1991 to resign the presidency and confess the bankruptcy of Marxism. Providence evidently sticks closely to the western and Catholic calendar.

Chapter 3 of the book is called 'The Rise and Fall of Mikhail Gorbachev'. It makes extensive use of the work of Michael Bourdeaux, preferring his US title, *The Gospel's Triumph over Communism*, to the more neutral British title, *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel*. Yet there is a world of difference between saying that 'God was mightily at work in the Soviet Union' and linking this divine action with particular Roman events, such as the consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on 25 March 1984.

Among Fatima adepts, this consecration had been a matter of great controversy. Responding to the solicitations of Sister Lucia, the Fatima seer who became a nun, Pope Pius XII consecrated 'the world' to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in 1942 and again in 1952. (By another remarkable coincidence, Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pius XII, had been ordained bishop on 13 May 1917, the very day of the first apparitions). However, these consecrations, according to Sr Lucia, didn't quite 'take', for in these instances the pope acted alone while Our Lady had assured her that it had to be done *collegially*. Pope John Paul met these requirements by inviting the world's bishops to join him in March 1984; though how many did so with enthusiasm, if at all, is not revealed. But it was enough for Sr Lucia, whom Tindal-Robertson describes as 'as

eminent a seer as any other in this century, if not higher' (p. 19). The nuncio to Portugal asked her after the event: 'Is Russia now consecrated?' 'Yes, now it is', replied Sr Lucia, thus implicitly criticising previous pontiffs. The nuncio piously remarked: 'Now we wait for the miracle'. Sr Lucia answered: 'God will keep his word'. And so, QED, it came to pass. Communism collapsed.

How much of all this does Pope John Paul II really believe? He does appear to endorse the main outline of the Tindal-Robertson book. He returned to Fatima on 13 May 1991, 'to give thanks for saving the pope's life' (like de Gaulle he often speaks of himself on solemn occasions in the third person). Back in Rome, he remarked: 'I consider this entire decade to be a free gift, given to me in a special way by Divine Providence' (p. 47). The most recent evidence suggests that the 13 May 1981 assassination attempt was not the result of a KGB plot, exploiting the Bulgarian secret service. Rather, the CIA successfully pinned the freelance efforts of a lapsed Muslim on the Bulgarians and therefore the KGB. But that would spoil the story.

So it remains to ask: what, if any, is the political and ecumenical importance of the Fatima story in Russia today? When Tindal-Robertson completed his book early in 1992 it was possible to claim that the Fatima message was finding a positive response in Russia. The radio station belonging to Fr Werenfried van Straaten's movement Aid to the Church in Need certainly proved useful to Boris Yel'tsin when he found himself holed up in the White House. It was rewarded with a 75-minute programme on Russian TV on 13 October 1991. This programme, in the view of its adepts, represented the high point of the Fatima influence on Russia. Father Werenfried concluded the programme by linking Fatima with Our Lady of Kazan' in the hope of making it palatable to the Russian Orthodox Church: 'Mary said at Fatima: "If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted. If not, it will spread its errors through the whole world."' . . . The miracle of Fatima did not convince the world. Will the miracles which God has performed in your country convince the unfaithful West?

Fr Werenfried boldly went on to exploit Russian worries about the 'West': 'For the West has not been converted. That is why communism is not dead. It is in hiding. It is waiting for its hour to come. The hour of the putsch in Moscow. Or the hour to attack in Croatia. Where will it strike tomorrow? In East and West many people live in fear.'

Nothing that has happened since the Fatima TV programme in October 1991 suggests that the Russian Orthodox Church finds this a helpful or a friendly message. For there remains an ambiguity at the heart of the Fatima myth about what 'the conversion of Russia' really means. Hnilica, Tindal-Robertson explains, believes that this 'triumph' will come about only 'if the Catholic and Orthodox Churches are reconciled' (p. 75). The 'triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary' will be possible 'only if the two Churches become one'. Hnilica then waxes eloquent about 'the dialogue of charity' as the ecumenical way forward. The Russian Orthodox might be forgiven for suspecting that 'reconciliation' here means their submission to papal primacy.

But if that is what Our Lady of Fatima – the language is catching – had in mind, then it is unlikely to be fulfilled in the short term. At this point, Tindal-Robertson builds a saving clause into the Fatima predictions: by the 'conversion of Russia, Mary surely means a general turning towards and acceptance of God by the peoples of Russia, and it is hardly surprising, given the appalling legacy of suffering and chaos bequeathed by the previous regime, that this is not yet taking place' (p. 92). It will take time. We in Rome think in centuries.

It is time to show my hand. I ardently desire that the Roman Catholic and the

Orthodox Churches should build on the dialogue of charity launched by Pope Paul VI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in the 1960s. But then the Russian Orthodox Church was not free. After the collapse of communism, the situation in Russia has changed. The Roman Catholic Church could be a good ally of the Russian Orthodox Church in its competition with well-heeled sects from North America. It could help both theologically and financially on condition that it accepts that the 'conversion of Russia' is in the first place a task for the Russian Orthodox Church. That involves the further condition that the two churches acknowledge each other as 'sister churches' who start from a position of equality. Andrew was the brother of Peter. But Peter, celebrated in the Orthodox liturgy as the 'chorus-leader of the Apostles', must not claim too much.

The Fatima myth offends against this principle by dwelling too insistently on Roman claims and Roman ways of understanding Divine Providence. Therefore it will not and cannot 'work'. Tindal-Robertson tries hard to persuade us that Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, the Belorussian who since 1991 has been apostolic administrator of Moscow, believes in the Fatima myth. On 12 October 1991 he went to Fatima, where he declared that 'the victory of Mary and democratic freedom were due to Mary and Archangel Michael. Mary had broken the power of the evil serpent and Archangel Michael had won justice' (pp. 65–6). But that had not much directly to do with the Fatima revelations. Unlike Father Werenfried, he has to live in Moscow. Perhaps he can produce a modified version of the Fatima myth which the Orthodox could find if not acceptable then at least not to be rejected out of hand.

There is one presupposition which Catholics and Russian Orthodox might be willing to share. It is that Marxism was not a native Russian product but was smuggled in from Western Europe. On 13 October 1991, Portuguese Bishop Manuel Trindade preached a homily at Fatima with Kondrusiewicz concelebrating in which he said: 'Russia, the holy Russia of Orthodoxy, did not invent these [Marxist] expressions. They were imported from the West. Karl Marx – it is as well not to forget this circumstance – was a Jew, born in Trier, Germany. And all that Marx learned and later spread with the ardour of an apostle was taught to him by the philosophers and ideologists who dominated the culture of Central Europe' (p. 67).

One may find that more alarming than the Fatima myth.

PETER HEBBLETHWAITE

*Religious Policy in the Soviet Union* edited by Sabrina Petra Ramet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. xix + 361pp.

This book provides a detailed analysis of some key aspects of Soviet religious life up to early 1991 by some of the leading experts in the field. Most chapters provide a useful historical section, followed by analysis of a particular issue or denomination. Philip Walters sets the scene with an introductory chapter reviewing the evolution of Soviet religious policy, focusing on the institutional and ideological basis of shifts in detailed policy within the framework of a consistently hostile overall attitude. He notes the relationship between foreign policy developments and Soviet religious policy, and the divisions at the top level of the Communist Party. Developments in the era of *perestroika* are analysed by Sabrina Petra Ramet. Policy evolved from the hesitant beginnings in 1985–6, when Gorbachev himself was not sure of the direction to take and appeared to endorse the continued onslaught against religion, to the relatively liberal law of late 1990 on religious organisations. By the end of his term in

power, when Soviet ideology had manifestly collapsed as an organised force, Gorbachev hoped to re-legitimise the Soviet regime by rooting it in the national community. Rather than granting the old regime a new lease of life, however, liberalisation of religious policy only rendered the communist system even more superfluous.

The organisational basis of Soviet religious policy is examined in the next three chapters. Otto Luchterhandt examines the notorious Council for Religious Affairs (CRA), stressing that the edict of 23 January 1918 on the separation of church and state was never implemented except as a way of undermining the church. Jane Ellis examines the CRA under the leadership of Konstantin Kharchev in the Gorbachev years, stressing the institutional rivalry within the Soviet state between bodies concerned with religious policy. However, rather than denoting a type of institutional pluralism, as suggested by Jerry Hough in the 1970s, this simply reflected the traditional shapelessness of the Soviet government. A final organisational chapter by J. A. Hebly looks at the Russian Orthodox Church and the World Council of Churches (WCC) from 1948 to 1985, insisting that the WCC was not quite the dupe of Soviet propaganda as is sometimes suggested but that its policies were more influenced by western and Third World delegations.

Several chapters look at education, socialisation and values, followed by detailed articles on religion and atheism in the Yakut-Sakha Republic and on the spread of modern cults in the USSR. A final section examines some of the problems faced by Christianity in the Soviet period, with a discussion of the Russian Orthodox Renovatoinist Movement and its historiography, a description of the reemergence of the Ukrainian (Greek) Catholic Church, and a description of Protestantism in the USSR. A final few pages by Ramet briefly discuss the challenge facing religion following the disintegration of the USSR, above all the need to find a new balance between religion and nationalism.

This collection provides a valuable contribution to the study of religion under communism. It presents, however, only a partial view and its title is somewhat misleading. There is no discussion of Islam, even though Muslims make up the second largest group after Christians and comprise the majority of the population in Central Asia and the middle Volga. Some of the theoretical questions are often blurred, coming as asides in rather traditional discussions of other issues.

The intellectual sources of bolshevik policy are left vague, and this appears to reflect the reality. The central question from the Marxist perspective was to explain the persistence of religion, and from the evidence of these chapters official Soviet thinking never really came near to answering the question. What in Poland and elsewhere was called the Christian–Marxist dialogue was notable by its absence in the Soviet context, reflecting the extraordinary intellectual poverty of the Marxism imposed by Lenin after October 1917. Bolshevism appears quite simply as a theory of power maintained by exclusive intellectual, institutional and social claims. Bolshevism had no institutional space for dialogue, in contrast to the so-called ‘national communism’ dominant in Poland after 1956, where a genuinely interesting, albeit now reviled, dialogue occurred. At the same time, the intellectual tradition of Russian Orthodoxy made such a dialogue implausible, and attitudes in the church were polarised between total obeisance and total rejection, with little space for dialogue in between.

While the Russian Orthodox Church has survived a persecution almost unprecedented in the annals of Christianity, it remains profoundly affected by the experience and has still to come to terms with the legacy of collaboration with the

Soviet regime, with its new freedoms, its role in the post-communist Russian state and its relationship with believers in the newly independent post-Soviet states. Its leadership has stressed civic peace, but too often rather than taking the lead on social issues, and in moments of crisis it has slipped back into habits of servility. On a more profound level, too, the church still has to formulate its message for the post-communist world and to come to terms with the challenge of liberalism. It might have survived communism, but will it survive capitalism?

RICHARD SAKWA