

RELIGION, STATE and SOCIETY

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Editorial

Marxist ideology was widely discredited amongst intellectuals in Eastern Europe in the 1970s. Some former Marxists, like the Pole Jacek Kuron, 'having made the grave error of surrendering their personality and conscience to the Communist Party in their youth, were determined never again to place their free will in someone else's hands.' Other members of the ex-Marxist Polish intelligentsia, however, experiencing a total ideological vacuum, were quick to embrace Roman Catholicism; in so doing, as Jonathan Luxmoore and Jolanta Babiuch explain in their article in this issue of *RSS*, they 'appeared to have switched sides relatively easily to a new system of religious and moral thought which also demanded absolute allegiance, in which the language and concepts seemed to confer, in their own way, a kind of spiritual and cultural power ...'

Writing about the religious renaissance of the 1970s in Russia, in which he was involved, Yevgeni Pazukhin observes a similar phenomenon, in perhaps a more extreme form. The 'renaissance' mainly involved members of the creative intelligentsia, who had not of course been brought up in an organic Orthodox tradition. 'This resulted in a kind of tension and hysteria in our relationship with church reality – or rather, two types of hysteria: the 'hysteria of alienation' and the 'hysteria of accepting everything'. Those suffering from the former rejected everything in the church that did not conform to their own individual ideals; those suffering from the latter accepted everything indiscriminately.

The series of articles on Russian Orthodoxy and the Jews in this issue of *RSS* starts with a *samizdat* article from the early 1970s by an author using the pseudonym Aleksei Rudnev. He distinguishes two ways in which Christianity has historically become perverted. As he describes them they are the same as the two distinct approaches to religious reality already identified as characteristic of Eastern European intellectuals in the 1970s.

The first, argues Rudnev, involves the over-rationalisation of the faith. Free-thinking individuals worry at the task of discovering the 'historical Jesus', trying to interpret what 'he was really trying to say', in the spirit of the intellectual climate current at any given time. This approach can mark a falling away; but it can also be the context in which real faith is reborn. The second perversion is more dangerous. It involves the subjection of man wholly to the omnipotence, judgment and lordship of God, and thus deprives him of his freedom. This type of faith succeeds only in reinforcing itself; and its most pernicious consequence is that

it is unable to identify or interpret what is genuinely human; it confuses it hopelessly with what is divine and thus gives the highest sanction to what is unenlightened and partial in man. It sees divinity reflected in both good and evil feelings (for example, in love of one's country and of its ancient beauty and spirituality, but also in a blind hatred of strangers).

Pazukhin notes that since the onset of *glasnost* in the Soviet Union and the arrival of real religious freedom in the second half of the 1980s the polarisation between these two attitudes to the church amongst the Russian intelligentsia has become even more distinct. The 'liberals' have tended to become ever more critical of the whole church tradition; the 'conservatives' have tended to become even more zealous than before. Perhaps sensing, like Rudnev, that the latter tendency is potentially more dangerous than the former, he sounds a warning for the future: 'Regrettably, our history has repeatedly shown that we assimilate pseudomessianic doctrines more easily than the ideals of the Gospel. We have been tempted by the false soteriology of bolshevism; may God protect us from the false soteriology of nationalist religion.'

In his contribution to the series on Russian Orthodoxy and the Jews written in April 1993, the theologian Aleksandr Kyrlezhev argues that it is precisely here that the Jews are of importance for the future of Christianity itself.

Jews remind Christians above all that any national form of Christianity is not enough in itself, that in the final analysis the Church of Christ is not confined to any local, concrete, cultural forms. Along with this it must be remembered that a 'civilised', 'democratic', exclusively 'spiritual' or even 'ethical' Christianity is not Christianity in its fullest sense; that it is precisely the flesh which must display the spirit and reality of the Kingdom of God, not exhausting itself as a phenomenon of 'bodies', which are naturally at war with one another, but being a manifestation of 'Biblical man' who does not have his home on this earth, but whose home is all around him because he is 'with God'.

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PHILIP WALTERS

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Yevgeni Barabanov is a lay Russian Orthodox theologian and church historian.

Fr Aleksandr Borisov is priest in charge of the church of SS Kosma and Damian in Moscow and a spiritual son of Fr Aleksandr Men'.

Vladimir Borzenko is a sociologist specialising in the development of religious consciousness in contemporary Russia.

Aleksandr Gurevich works in the religious department of the Rudomino Library for Foreign Literature in Moscow.

Serge Keleher, a Greek-Catholic priest, graduated in political science from Michigan State University and has an MA in theology from the University of Toronto. A research fellow of the University of Toronto's Chair of Ukrainian Studies, he has been associated with Keston Institute since 1988.

Andrei Kurayev is a deacon of the Russian Orthodox Church, a writer on church affairs and dean of the Philosophy and Theology Faculty of the St John the Theologian Russian Orthodox University in Moscow.

Aleksandr Kyrlezhev is a leading contemporary Orthodox theologian and director of the Centre for the Study of Religions in Moscow.

Jonathan Luxmoore, based in Warsaw, is the Eastern Europe correspondent of the *National Catholic Register*, and covers church affairs in the region for various European and American newspapers and news agencies.

Fr Aleksandr Men', murdered in 1990, was an outstanding Russian Orthodox theologian, preacher and parish priest, and his many spiritual children continue his work for reconciliation in Russia today.

Yevgeni Pazukhin, a poet and specialist in Slav culture, was involved in the religious renaissance in Leningrad in the 1970s and 1980s. During *perestroika* he founded the 'Society for Christian Enlightenment'. He emigrated in 1988 and now lives in Germany where he lectures on religion.

Aleksei Rudnev is the pseudonym of a *samizdat* writer on religion in the 1970s.