

Book Reviews

Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States by John Anderson. Cambridge: CUP, 1994, xi + 236 pp.

Religion in the Soviet Union: an Archival Reader by Felix Corley. London: Macmillan, 1996, xiv + 402 pp.

These two books, although quite different in structure, share a common subject and area of study. But whereas Corley's span is from the first days of the communist takeover to the collapse of the Soviet system in August 1991, Anderson deals only with the post-Stalin religious policies of the Soviet and post-Soviet states. The two volumes thus complement each other, and each is a valuable contribution to the field of study.

At the very beginning of his book Anderson makes its scope and focus clear, delineating a threefold purpose: to provide 'a general overview of religious policy in the post-Stalin years', and 'a detailed study of policy making in the religious sphere'; and to demonstrate 'continuity and change in the religious policy of the Soviet state and its successors'. The volume achieves this three-fold aim on the whole. As he claims, he focuses on Soviet policies and institutions set up to combat religion, whereas most other authors have focused on the religions themselves, their history and policies under Soviet rule. However, Anderson's is hardly a pioneering work: Thrower and Powell, for example, have thoroughly researched the subject of Soviet religious policies as well.

Anderson makes the valid point that the reasons for the renewed intensive persecution of religion under Khrushchev and, less vigorously, under his heirs are to be found in Khrushchev's declared aim of constructing communism within two decades, and in the sociological studies of his era indicating ideological disarray and a growing interest in religion among young people in the Soviet Union. What Anderson fails to mention is that the axiom of the incompatibility of any faith in God with communism goes back to the very founding fathers of Marxism. To this reviewer's surprise Karl Marx's name and his militant pronouncements against religion are mentioned neither in the text nor in the bibliography.

A western reader, used to the foreign correspondents' reports of the time about the persecution of the Evangelicals in the USSR, will be surprised to discover that between 1958 and 1964, the period of the most severe persecution, the Orthodox lost 43 per cent of their churches as against 16 per cent lost by the Roman Catholics and 22 per cent by the Baptists. 'The primary target [of the persecutions] appears to have been the Orthodox Church', Anderson concludes; but he does not say why this is the case. The logic behind the attack (both in the 1920s and in the period from the 1960s to the 1980s) was that in order to build a wholly atheist society it was necessary first to annihilate the national church, the one that was organically interwoven with the

whole national history, its culture and traditions. For the same reason, as soon as the atheistic onslaught was abandoned, the first church to draw the establishment's positive attention was naturally the Orthodox. Anderson does not mention the fact that Kharchev, the CRA chairman, unveiled a plan in his March 1988 speech at the Higher Party School to create communist priests as agents of the official ideology. Soon, however, Kharchev was gone, and in 1990 new state legislation freed all religions from any form of subordination to the state.

In my view Anderson's most important contribution is in his insights regarding the problems faced by the Orthodox Church in postcommunist society. As soon as the country opened its borders it was flooded by thousands of missionaries from abroad, mostly representing obscure but wealthy sects and cults. The impoverished Orthodox Church, bled white by seven decades of persecution and isolation from the rest of the Christendom and deprived of theological schools, proved to be unequal to the challenge. The patriarch, who as Anderson notes had at first warned against any reincarnation of the traditional state–church symphony, eventually gave in and requested revisions in the legislation introducing restrictions for so-called non-traditional religions – Protestants, Catholics and all New Age sects. Although this legislation was not yet in force as Anderson's volume went to press, he correctly anticipated what would happen, sensing the danger of a degeneration of the Orthodox Church into a state ideology. Alas, that danger is today even more real than at the time of the book's publication.

It is not easy to review a collection of documents. Corley has 199 of them, each preceded by an introductory note of between a few lines and four pages in length setting the document in its proper historical and thematic context. A reader unfamiliar with recent publications of documents on the 1921–22 famine, the campaign to confiscate church valuables and the Renovatianist schism (for example, Professor Nikolai Pokrovsky's 'Politbyuro i Tserkov', 1922–1923' (*Novy mir*, no. 8, 1990) and his *Politbyuro i Tserkov', 1922–1923* (Novosibirsk, 1997), or my own article 'The Renovatianist movement in the Orthodox Church in the light of archival documents' (*Journal of Church and State*, vol. 39, winter 1997)) will probably find the documents related to these subjects particularly shocking: Lenin, Trotsky, Zinov'yev in particular (not to mention Stalin) displayed naked cynicism and sheer bloodthirstiness, invariably confirming death sentences for priests and lay believers tried and sentenced on fabricated charges. No less revealing to the western reader will be the fact that the Renovatianist schism was actually initiated by Trotsky, launched by the Politburo and administered by the secret police, contrary to the opinions of most earlier western scholars, including the late John Curtiss, who denied any Renovatianist–GPU connection. It is a pity that because the book is confined to archival documents found personally by Corley there is no mention of Lenin's secret letter to Molotov of 19 March 1922 with instructions to execute as many priests and 'other reactionaries' as possible and to foment a split in the church, although the minutes of the 20 March follow-up meeting of the Politburo are there. Another group of documents of particular interest in this book will probably be those related to the liquidation of the Catholic Church of the Eastern Rite (the so-called Uniates) in western Ukraine after the Second World War. Here again no reference is made to such important documents as letters of Fr Havrylo Kostel'nyk, the leader of the pro-Orthodox movement among the Uniates, to Patriarch Aleksii warning him that a terror-supported 'reunification' with the Orthodox would compromise the Orthodox Church and would fall apart at the first opportunity.

These observations lead us to a discussion of the merits and demerits of Corley's

volume. The documents are undoubtedly interesting, revealing and valuable as a source of quick references for a writer or lecturer trying to find documentary illustrations to confirm a point he wants to make. But as the two examples above illustrate it is impossible to include all important documents on as broad a subject as suggested by the book's title, not only because it would require a whole staff of highly qualified personnel to comb through all central and provincial archives of the Soviet era, but also because by no means all Soviet archival collections have been made accessible to scholars; hence Corley as a researcher has been at the mercy of the state's archival policies. What is more, in practical terms he managed to visit archives only in Moscow, in a couple of Russian provincial cities, and in Armenia and Lithuania. Thus the volume is to a large extent an accidental collection, although systematised as far as possible by the compiler. A helpful element in Corley's work is a key to all the abbreviations used in the text, lacking in Anderson's study.

There are some problems with Corley's introductory notes. Although very knowledgeable and erudite, Corley can be rather careless about details. For example, he refers to Flagellants and Molokans as fringe Orthodox groups, which is as accurate as calling, say, the Quakers a fringe Roman Catholic group; for some reason he speaks of the Old Believers only in the past tense in the general introduction to the religions mentioned in the book; he claims that Patriarch Tikhon anathematised the Soviet government, whereas anathema can only be personal and may be pronounced only on members of a given church, as indeed was clearly stated in Tikhon's encyclical; the protests of the believers were not against giving up church valuables in order to provide food for the starving, but against confiscation of the sacred vessels used in the Eucharist. As far as style is concerned, I am flabbergasted by Corley's rejection of capital letters in the designation of religions and in adjectival identifications of nationalities; this is not merely grammatically wrong, but highly confusing. Thus 'orthodox' can mean many more things than 'Orthodox'. Neither is Anderson particularly scrupulous regarding details. The name of his deceased teacher is misspelled (Shapiro instead of Schapiro). The Council for Religious Affairs is mentioned five years earlier than a body appeared under that name. Uncritically the author repeats a Soviet cliché that churches were reopened by the Nazi occupiers during the Second World War: in fact they were reopened by the local population.

Despite these various problems, however, each of these books is a valuable source of information within its particular context.

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