

Book Reviews

Religion et Nationalisme: l'Idéologie de l'Eglise Orthodoxe Roumaine sous le Régime Communiste by Olivier Gillet, preface by Hervé Hasquin. Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1997. 189 pp.

This book is essential reading for anyone studying relations between the Orthodox Church and communist states, since in Romania the issues it tackles – phyletism and the extent of cooperation and collaboration between church and state – are still largely taboo topics. Gillet maintains that we will never know the full truth, because key sources remain unavailable, or have been destroyed. He points out that because of Romania's marginal position on the fringe of the Byzantine Empire sources are lacking and that this hampers our understanding of its earlier history. However, in contrast with the situation in most other Soviet-bloc states, Orthodox publications were relatively plentiful in communist Romania. Gillet makes good use of them and discovers many elements of continuity in church-state life.

While there is little to fault in the book, it is a demanding read, thanks to the nature and content of its innumerable quotations from time-serving writers. Under Ceaușescu's regime eulogies of the state and its leader were obligatory elements in the church press, but not all churches cooperated, as Gillet claims (pp. 14 and 125): I was told by a Bucharest Catholic priest in 1989 that his bishops preferred not to publish church journals rather than let their integrity be undermined among the faithful, and that the latter approved and accepted their position. Gillet might profitably have drawn parallels with Diakonia Theology in the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in neighbouring Hungary and its obligatory enforcement on their clergy. The book also requires a grasp of advanced French and theology.

Gillet is able to demonstrate, conclusively, that most of the declarations of loyalty to the state accurately represent the church's own long-term position, and particularly with regard to its relations with the Greek Catholic Church: the Orthodox regarded it as Vatican encroachment on their territory, and Greek Catholic Romanians as the victims. The sections on relations with the Greek Catholics (especially Chapter 4) are particularly relevant in view of the long-running dispute over the restitution of church property and current conversations between the two churches to try to resolve the problem. Gillet emphasises that for the Orthodox church hierarchy the suppression of the Greek Catholic Church in 1948 spelt a triumphant conclusion to an era of perceived injustice. Such issues as the preferential treatment the Catholic Church received in the 1929 Concordat when it became, in Orthodox eyes, virtually a state within a state, and the relative poverty of the Orthodox Church at that time, still rankle today. It is not generally recognised that the precommunist Greek Catholic Church, with only eight per cent of the population, owned over 62,000 hectares as compared with 42,000 owned by the Orthodox: 14 or 15 times the amount of land for

each church member.

It can be argued that the Orthodox Church made the most of the congruence of church–state interests so as to preserve its national status. Gillet makes no attempt to examine the negative effects of the ‘church–state symphony’ on Orthodox life, and how it has fatally compromised the Orthodox Church in the eyes of many thinking Romanians even today – hence the success of resurgent Greek Catholic communities and Orthodox denunciation of proselytism.

The parallels between church–state convergence and communist legislation on religion on the one hand and the postcommunist church’s proposals for a new law (passed in 1999) are obvious – for example (p. 30) the requirement that all church leaders be Romanian citizens. Under communism church ideologues appear to have surrendered any pretence that their church was autonomous and independent, as they searched far and wide to produce arguments to justify the loyalty of their church and believers to the new regime. They resorted to devious manoeuvres and dialectic to affirm the nomocanonical tradition, dating back to the codices of Theodosius and Justinian, which demonstrated the conformity of state laws and ecclesiastical canons. They made use of these to justify state intrusion into church affairs. Another Byzantine ecclesiastical tradition which ideologues reaffirmed was that of *‘ekonomia’*, to justify, for example, wholehearted Orthodox church support for Soviet-bloc denunciation of (western) nuclear armaments. They mined respected Church Fathers – John Chrysostom, Isidore, Ephraim the Syrian (p. 58) – for quotations to reinforce the idea of Christian loyalty to a state whose overriding concern was the wellbeing of those who obeyed its laws, even though this was patently not the case in communist Romania. They quoted St Augustine to argue that crimes against one’s native land override all others. In consequence, according to N. Dura (p. 59), ‘every person who insults the head of state, foments conspiracy or betrays state interests will be punished according to the disciplinary canons of the church in conformity with Article 3 concerning plotting to undermine the state and betraying the interests of the Romanian Socialist Republic.’

This doctrine of the church’s complete submission to the state, as equivalent to submission to the Divine Will, has been carried over into the last decade. In view of its consistent denunciation of papal authority and the Catholic Church, the Bucharest Patriarchate’s initial reluctance to countenance a papal visit was hardly surprising. When the visit finally took place, however, what was revealing was the spontaneous real enthusiasm among Orthodox layfolk who turned out in their thousands to welcome a bishop whom they could revere as a person of complete integrity. Dumitru Stăniloae’s defence of church policy (pp. 37–38) makes some valid points, but the long-term results were a servile church which forfeited its claims to represent the people, as witness its silence during the destruction of dozens of churches in Ceaușescu’s Bucharest in the late 1980s. As Gillet says, in many cases its clergy became ‘a spiritual police force in the service of the regime’.

Patriarch Justinian and his fellow-ideologues argued that since Christianity was intimately linked to man’s earthly life and the society in which he lived it could not remain passive in its attitude towards secular society and in particular the new social order. Since communism realised the ideals of equality, liberty and social justice, there was nothing in it to which the Christian could be opposed. Thus the duties of the believer became complementary to those of the citizen. Gospel texts were quoted to endorse collectivism and the sacrifice of the individual for the sake of the community, thus effectively ruling out any opposition to the dictatorship. This involved, of course, joining the struggle for peace and support for Soviet policy. Ancient

Orthodox ecclesiology was adapted without any apparent difficulty to the new Marxist doctrine of the nation, or fatherland, respect for which was based on a 'socialisation' or rather 'communisation' of New Testament texts. Their meaning was shifted from their eschatological perspective so as to produce a correlation between communist and Orthodox ideals. Service to the state followed on naturally from this.

Gillet scrupulously avoids a judgmental attitude towards the Orthodox hierarchy's stance and provides some quotations in which they justify their behaviour, for example 'total opposition would have resulted in the complete liquidation of all the hierarchy and most of the clergy, putting us in a similar plight to the church in Albania', and 'we have had the courage not to make ourselves martyrs' (p. 102).

In Chapter 2, 'L'Eglise Orthodoxe at la "Patrie"', Gillet examines the contortions of theologians to accommodate themselves to Marxist demands which, initially, involved a complete *volte-face* towards accepted prewar Romanian conceptions of ethnicity. Cosmopolitanism, as represented by Vatican hegemony, was out; internationalism in. Nationalism was condemned as a bourgeois survival. In the Ceaușescu epoch, however, the inclusive Marxist concept of a 'nation' as comprising all the population living within the boundaries of a given state was narrowed to the limited ethnic concept of '*neamul românesc*' ('the Romanian people').

In 1948 the theologians approved the Communist Party Central Committee's resolution which guaranteed equality in economic, cultural, political and confessional fields for all Romania's cohabiting nationalities, while turning a blind eye to Greek Catholics and Evangelicals. They condemned national chauvinism as a western capitalist perversion, which denied Christianity, while lauding socialist regimes which guaranteed the integrity of religion. They condemned the Catholic Church as antichristian because of its failure to respect national and ethnic particularities and reaffirmed Orthodox autocephaly. Patriotism involved the defence of the country against external attack and thus became complementary to the antic cosmopolitan theory; this, Gillet points out, fitted in perfectly with the church's prewar stance.

In Chapter 3, 'L'Orthodoxie et la nation', Gillet brilliantly analyses the key role of the Daco-Roman continuity theory in contemporary Romanian historiography and Orthodoxy. This theory asserts that the Romanians are direct descendants of the Dacians who occupied the territory during the Roman Empire. Any attack on it would be seen as jeopardising the foundations of society and have far-reaching consequences in all areas, whether political, strategic or religious. It has been especially relevant in the case of Transylvania, where Hungarian ideologists have taken advantage of the thousand-year blank in Romanian records to claim that the Magyars occupied the territory first and that the Romanians arrived later as pastoral nomads from the mountains south of the Danube.

Since the collapse of communism Marxist-Leninist doctrines have evaporated rapidly but the Daco-Romanian continuity theory has become more important than ever. Gillet puts the dogma in its overall Balkan context, noting similar Albanian and Macedonian continuity theories; in the case of Macedonia the theory is extended to the ecclesiastical field too.

Gillet notes the persistence of the belief propounded by the Legionary movement's journal *Gândirea* in the fascist atmosphere of the inter-war period equating '*românismul*' (being Romanian) with being Romanian Orthodox. One of its foremost exponents, the internationally respected theologian Stăniloae, was still writing during the last twenty years of the communist period and into the 1990s. Links between ethnicity and Romanian Orthodox autocephaly, suppressed during the initial Marxist

phase, resurfaced during the isolationist Ceaușescu phase. The Orthodox application of the Daco-Romanian theory excludes Greek Catholics and condemns them as betrayers of national purity, and regards all ethnic and confessional minorities as second-class citizens. Gillet provides a thorough and devastating critique of 'phyletism'.

Chapter 4 is the one explicitly devoted to a quite detailed survey of relations with the Greek Catholic Church, other minorities and western churches. I have touched on what is in this chapter under other heads.

In Chapter 5, 'L'Attitude actuelle de l'Eglise Orthodoxe', Gillet points out that since 1989 the church has lost its monolithic character but still reflects the image of society and the political scene, with all their diverse tendencies which have surfaced since the collapse of communism. Historical and political revisionism is the fashion as various groups try to reestablish the 'truth' of a history which was falsified and conditioned by communist ideology. Thus there has been a tendency to regard the period immediately before the Second World War through rose-tinted spectacles, involving a rehabilitation of the prewar Legionary movement and the dictator Antonescu. 'Nationalism draws on an extensive social basis and brings together different political strands in a general consensus' (p. 134). Respected priests and theologians now write for the neolegionary press. Primitive and vituperative anti-semitic, antimasonic, anti-Vatican, anti-western, anti-Hungarian, anti-King Michael, anticommunist and antisectarian literature is widely disseminated, especially from the monasteries. Since the Orthodox Church, despite its acknowledged collaboration with communism, still constitutes the major source of moral authority, the circulation of such literature is potentially very dangerous.

I found the brief Chapter 6, 'D'autres pistes de recherche', the most rewarding and heartening in the book. The Romanians could regenerate their own deeply-rooted spiritual tradition, based on their monastic heritage with its stress on hesychasm. In Moldavia and Wallachia there was a spontaneous interpenetration of the sacramental and everyday peasant life. Peasants believed that God was ever-present in the world and could not envisage a way of thinking which excluded God from life. As Fr Gheorghe Calciu points out in his book *Christ is Calling You*, throughout the communist era tens of thousands of believers showed right judgment as pilgrims seeking God within the monasteries rather than in the pronouncements of their hierarchs. If on the one hand this tradition, combined with a belief in Romanian continuity, enabled theorists to adapt and absorb Dialectical Materialism, on the other hand it enabled the Romanians to emerge from communism with considerable resources, ready to combat fresh assaults against their faith – now in the shape of western 'cults'. Gillet here leaves the way open for further research into how far the local spiritual tradition has survived the industrialisation, urbanisation and displacement which inevitably arrived with communism.

Gillet is encouraged to note the reappearance since 1989, in new translations, of the works of major Orthodox theologians who are bound to set some readers thinking along new creative lines. In a brilliant chapter in his book *The Orthodox Church*, for example, Sergei Bulgakov subjects the dogma of predetermined connections between church and state to a thoroughgoing critique. Gillet also emphasises that political theology was secondary for Staniloae, whose primary vocation was translating the *Philokalia* and expounding his central thesis that deification was ultimately the only way towards the humanisation of life and culture.

In his concluding chapter, 'L'"Ethique" Orthodoxe, un frein au pluralisme démocratique?', Gillet criticises the church's self-justifying pseudotheology of a

'fusion, or rather confusion, between national identity and belief', and notes that even leading apologists such as Ion Bria admit that there was a lack of balance in the symphony between church and state in communist times.

This is a very important book, though it requires concentration and perseverance. It opens up possible lines of research which could be followed with regard to other Balkan Orthodox churches or the Russian Orthodox Church itself. Will any western scholars or, more importantly, any local Orthodox scholars, be brave enough to take up that challenge and face the implications? No doubt some Orthodox, particularly Romanians, might complain that Gillet's approach is determined by his Catholic background and western European assumptions, but they could hardly deny that he poses fundamental questions about the extent to which a church is entitled to compromise with an ungodly state, or to regard non-Orthodox who do not belong to a particular ethnic group as outsiders.

Gillet points out that while other churches – the Catholic Church included – have made compromises, the distinctive feature of contemporary Romanian Orthodoxy lies in the infusion of nationalism into its ecclesiology: it assimilated nationalist theses in the nineteenth century and conserves them up to the present day. He asks whether the church is capable even today of facing up to the implications of religious and ethnic pluralism in national life or the possibility of adjusting to a secularised state. He contends that Greek Catholics, by contrast, have been able to combine traditional belief in a Daco-Romanian past with readiness to accept other elements in Romanian society.

Perhaps Gillet relies overmuch on the written and published word. It would have been helpful to have had some information about the repression of refractory clergy and the transformation of the flourishing monasteries – hotbeds of opposition – into workers' cooperatives in the 1950s, together with statistics on monastic closures and the expulsion of religious at that time. Despite impeccable notes and documentation of sources there is no index – a curious omission in such a thoroughly researched book.

JANICE BROWN

Christ is Calling You! A Course in Catacomb Pastorship by Fr George Calciu, edited by Nun Nina. Platina, California: St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1997. 222 pp.

This is the ideal book to read after Olivier Gillet's *Religion et Nationalisme: l'Idéologie de l'Eglise Orthodoxe Roumaine sous le Régime Communiste* (reviewed above) although it is written on a completely different plane. It is apologetic in aim, directed in particular at an Orthodox American readership at a popular level, with a good selection of photographs. It is not a work of systematic scholarship but of assorted interviews, sermons and writings, impelled by a blazing conviction about the struggle between good and evil which by the end challenges the reader at the most profound level.

The main constituents are the seven homilies to young people which Fr Gheorghe delivered in Radu Voda Church, Bucharest, in 1978, and Sister Nina's long interview with him in her abbey. Although the homilies were immediately published in full in

the French journal *Catacombes* this is the first time they have appeared in English in their entirety. They still represent the highpoint of preaching under communism. The intellectual Sorin Dumitrescu referred to them as 'incendiary and suicidal' and they did indeed precipitate Calciu's second spell of incarceration. As one who had suffered the degradation of that ultimate blasphemy, the Pitești prison experiment, and recovered, he was then prepared for martyrdom.

If some of Calciu's opinions, on the heresy of ecumenism and on papal pronouncements on evolution, seem simplistic, we must look at them from the viewpoint of a man deprived of any contact with the outside world of formal education for 21 years. His condemnation of ecumenism is in fact a condemnation of a WCC leader who took the criticism of Fr Gheorghe Calciu by Metropolitan Anton Plămădeală for the truth without bothering to do any further homework on Fr Gheorghe's case. It comes as no surprise that in 1990 on Fr Gheorghe's return to Romania neither patriarch nor bishops dared meet him. Significantly, in view of Gillet's study, the sin he accuses them of is the sin of intellectualism, of forgetting the soul and the heart.

Fr Gheorghe throws fascinating sidelights on Patriarch Justinian Marina's readiness to flout the rules in admitting him to the priesthood and appointing him a professor in the seminary; on the schism within the Lord's Army; and on the high spiritual calibre of participants in the prewar Legionary movement.

The book is dedicated to the Legionary leader Constantin Opreșan, one of the handful who survived Pitești spiritually unscathed, but physically helpless, dying of tuberculosis. For a year Calciu and his fellow-prisoners ministered to his every need in a windowless, airless, stinking, humid underground cell, as Opreșan started their healing process, and his spirituality penetrated their souls, teaching them how to live, love and forgive again. A particularly valuable aspect of this book is its coverage of Pitești and the current debate about it, including a list of relevant publications.

JANICE BROWN

Croix de Barreaux (Poèmes du Goulag Roumain) by Ioan Ploscaru, translated by Raymond Lamarque. Troyes: Librairie Bleue-Croyants, 1995. 75 pp., 70 fr. (Romanian original published by Helicon, Timișoara, 1992.)

This worthy addition to the elite library of classics describing survival in the hell of communist prisons had to wait until after the rehabilitation of Romania's Greek Catholic Church and the emergence into ecclesiastical and public life of its surviving confessors in 1989–90. In his introductory summary of the history of the Greek Catholic Church, Lamarque provides a salutary reminder that its members are still, in most places, unable to regain their confiscated churches and forced to worship in the open air, whatever the weather.

After the arrest of all the church's six bishops for refusing to collaborate with the regime in 1948 Ioan Ploscaru was secretly consecrated by Vatican nuncio Mgr O'Hara along with five others in case the leaders did not survive, which they did not. Not one of the twelve apostasised, and Ploscaru was released during the amnesty of 1964.

The Orthodox Metropolitan of the Banat, Nicolae Corneanu, caused a sensation

and aroused denials within his own church when in 1996, at the consecration of Ploscaru's successor as Bishop of Lugoj, he apologised for Orthodox compliance in the destruction of its sister church and paid a moving tribute to the Calvary endured by its martyrs and confessors, including Ploscaaru, who was present.

Croix de Barreaux ... is unique: it is the only prison classic in verse. Ploscaru composed these poems originally as a means of maintaining his sanity during the years spent in solitary confinement in a damp unheated cell under the eerie glare of a light bulb never turned off. The book is as harrowing in its different way as the accounts of such confessors as Richard Wurmbrand or Haralan Popov. Ploscaru's only furniture was an iron bedstead, and the single semi-opaque window did not allow even a glimpse of the sky, let alone of the birds, whose annual flight over the Romanian countryside and whose unique liberty to cross frontiers constitute the subject of many of these poems. The shape of the cross which was always before him in the grilles on his window (see poem no. 5, 'Cinq croix sur le ciel') and which he recalled in the flight of cranes (no. 7, 'Les grues s'en vont') left an indelible imprint on his meditations. In his despair, he is ruthlessly honest: 'il resterait assez de place entre les grilles/pour qu'aisément – libérée de son corps – /puisse se glisser mon âme.' (no. 13, 'Pour toi, Seigneur') In no. 19, 'Abandon', he rails against God's lack of response to his agonised pleas – until he realises that Christ was himself in an identical position and that he is by his side, carrying his cross. In no. 9, 'Nous t'avons choisi', the bishop unreservedly identifies himself and the martyrs of his church with Christ in his passion: 'Quand on nous a promis dignités, argent et liberté/si nous acceptions la rupture entamée par Byzance, /nous avons choisi la faim, le froid et la nudité/ainsi que la prison infernale et les fers!' He compares them to the apostles – except, he says, that there was no Judas among them.

Although Ploscaru repeatedly bemoans, with vivid imagery, how the beauty of his native land and the soul of his people have been defaced by communism, the most tragic element in these poems remains the lasting bitterness resulting from the betrayal of the Greek Catholics by the Orthodox.

JANICE BROWN

Solovki, le Isole del Martirio: da Monastero a Primo Lager Sovietico by Jurij Brodskij, translated by Mara Dell'Asta and Anna Vicini. Edizioni La Casa di Matrona, 1998. 260 pp., 28,000 lire.

According to ancient beliefs and legends, the forces of evil prefer to inhabit abandoned churches no longer used for worship, ruins of ancient monasteries, roofless chapels, to manifest their powers to the full. As if to confirm popular beliefs, the Bolsheviks chose the blessed Solovki Islands in the White Sea as base for their diabolical designs, and profaned the churches and chapels of the monastery of Saints Zosima and Savvati.

So wrote agronomist Mikhail Nikonov. Paradoxically, the unspeakably terrible conditions of life in the former monastery of Solovki inspired many records, some of which are outstanding in quality of writing. In a 20-year labour of love Yuri Brodsky, as researcher, historian and professional photographer, has assembled a unique

record. Stunning scenes of lakes, forest, skies, monastery buildings, season by season, are juxtaposed with old photographs of camp commanders and prisoners, including bishops and clergy, *in situ* and in their former lives, and many other witnesses whose testimonies constitute much of the text. The book is worth buying for the photographs alone.

Most of the testimonies are from well-qualified professional people who survived, among them Academician Dmitri Likhachev – who called Solovki his ‘second university’! The bibliography records no fewer than 18 memoirs on Solovki published in the West, by those fortunate enough to have survived and emigrated from the USSR. Extracts from officials in the prison service provide ample corroboration. This unique record is all the more invaluable because Brodsky has not yet found a publisher in Russia itself. Indeed the bibliography lists as published in Russia only four books, four magazine articles and one film, though Brodsky utilises extracts from many unpublished manuscripts, some of which are available in archives there. The experiences of women, unfortunately, remain underreported, considering that 15–18 per cent of Solovki inmates were women. The format’s use of insets with white type on black or coloured backgrounds is occasionally difficult to decipher, and an index would have been welcome. Despite these minor criticisms this is a book to read, if you read Italian. Even for those who do not, but know something about Soviet prison camps, this book will make a deep impression, as it did on the residents in an old people’s home in London where the widow of one of the witnesses, Yuri Bessonov, died recently. Bessonov was an Orthodox Christian and the inspiring account of his escape is available in English.

‘A drop of water mirrors the ocean’, writes teacher Boris Siryayev (p. 61); ‘Solovki reflected all the fundamental elements of the Soviet system, where, sorrowfully, people were distanced from the old social system and started little by little to become accustomed to the new, horrific way of life.’ No aspect of life is left untouched, from the hell of arrival at the transit port at Kem, and the random, routine shooting of a new arrival by commandant Nostev, which left in the prisoners an ineradicable sense of their impotence, of their state of abject servitude and of rampant evil. The descriptions of the prisoners in the Trinity Cathedral where bunks were crammed together in their hundreds have a nightmare quality worthy of Dostoyevsky’s *House of the Dead*: ‘In the light of day the disproportion between the vast space beneath the vaults and the overcrowded bunks was only too clear. By night, the feeble illumination was swallowed up in the darkness, creating the impression of a vast unconfined space.’ (Nikolai Zotov, surgeon, p. 70).

The chapter ‘Per motivi religiosi’ contains part of the famous Bishops’ Memorandum, which originated in the camp store, the clergy being the only group who could be trusted to run it honestly! There are descriptions of how and where clandestine worship was held and the extreme punishments meted out to those discovered taking part in it, especially Catholics after a clampdown in 1929. There are invaluable testimonies to believers who left an indelible impression on other prisoners. Among these are Archbishop Petr of Voronezh, Bishop Viktor Ostrovidov, Bishop Manuil Lemishevsky and priests like the Catholic Leonid Fedorov and Vladimir Konstantinovich Lozina-Lozinsky, and the professor of medicine Mikhail Aleksandrovich Zhizhilenko, alias Bishop Maksim of Serpukhov, much consulted by the camp staff, who ministered tirelessly and heroically during a typhus epidemic. Father Nikodim – whose surname is unknown – was nicknamed ‘the consoler’. His mission to confess, communicate and comfort the penitent, sick and dying ended one freezing Easter night in the punishment zone of the church at Sekira, where he suffo-

cated in the pile of logs prisoners constructed there so as to get some warmth for sleep. One prisoner named Epshtein, reared as an aggressively antireligious young communist, had all his preconceptions of priests overturned when he saw Bishop Serafim, son of a Cossack general, trying to protect fellow-prisoners lying exhausted on the bridge in a searing icy wind with his overcoat. 'He seemed the only person who was glad to go to Solovki, of which it used to be said that it was a fortunate place to die ... he ended up in a subterranean isolation cell, from which he had to be carried out and died soon after' (p. 260).

The contrast between what had for centuries been a place sanctified by the prayer of the just who sought salvation and what it had now become is monstrous for anyone who still has a living faith or at least some respect for our past. This contrast didn't appear to be accidental, but full of profound significance, as if it was a symbol of our spiritual decadence and complete lack of morality, a cry, an invocation for redemption, for salvation, which bursts from the lips of our entire suffering Russian nation. Once they were called a 'godbearing' people, but they are now sunk so low, dishonoured and profaned.

Ol'ga Yafa, who wrote these words (p. 155), did not know what in the long term would contribute most to the history of Solovki: the monastic period when its Kremlin seemed so picturesque and flourishing, or her own time when it stood bereft of its cupolas and crosses, but crowned with martyrdom, a silent testimony to all that was about to take place.

The chapter on the intelligentsia in chains provides a bizarre picture of the rich cultural life which was permitted and flourished there under the direction of prisoners: theatre, sport, painting, meteorology, publishing, biology and rearing of animals for fur, as well as the unofficial intellectual life centred around various experts. We learn how the intelligentsia salvaged priceless religious and cultural relics from the underground vaults by persuading camp superiors of the propaganda value of a museum of atheism! Professor Aleksandr Anisimov, the icon restorer who had worked on the Virgin of Vladimir, told Dmitri Likhachev how concerned he was about the despoliation of icons and stressed that those exported should be sold only to well-known collections and museums and that their provenance should be noted. To emphasise the purpose of Solovki, an officially-sanctioned journal entitled *The Voice of Reeducation* was published, but as the then teenage prisoner Yuri Chirkov pointed out, its editor ran into problems since 80 per cent of the prisoners had a higher cultural level than the educators. The 'heroes of labour' were normally those sentenced under Article 58, to whom it did not suit the administration to give too much publicity.

As a pioneer Arctic outpost Solovki Monastery had been very much a going concern, but barely a decade of use as a prototype labour camp wrecked not just its unique buildings but its entire economy and viability. The administration's attempt to utilise its non-politicals to run various sectors was disastrous and forced it to turn to its 'politically unreliable' elements. The research of its most famous religious-scientific inmate, Fr Pavel Florensky, into the extraction of iodine from seaweed and his laboratory are described and illustrated (p. 256). By the mid-1930s Solovki was being gradually run down, with massive transfers of prisoners to excavate the equally notorious White Sea-Baltic canal. Ol'ga Mane was marooned with the other kelp-gatherers on Anzer Island until the pack-ice started to melt the following spring. She records how the women were forced to board their boat on a plank made treacherous

by hoar frost and how the aged Ol'ga Nikolayevna Rimskaya-Korsakova and her friend Ol'ga Kramerova, who spoke eight languages and whom she tried vainly to assist, disappeared into the iceberg-strewn sea, while the guards stood by and laughed (p. 270).

Brodsky notes how the character of Solovki changed as it was transformed into an isolation centre for political offenders and prisoners who had committed serious crimes while in gaol. To a certain extent this brought some improvement in the overall atmosphere for intellectuals and politicals, with the removal of most of the criminal class, but this was counterbalanced by the escalation in mass shootings, especially in autumn 1937 when the priests Florensky and Anatoli Zhurakovsky (subjects of one of the same publisher's new series of short biographies of martyrs) were among 1825 victims. One contributor records that prisoners got to know when mass shootings took place: they were ordered to stoke up the staff's steam baths for extra nights so as to allow the assassins to wash the blood off their hands. Prisoners found themselves, to their horror, involved even more in the burial of corpses in wells, ditches and bogs, where they would not sink. Finally, in May 1939, as Solovki prison was finally closed down and transformed into a naval base, they had the gruesome task of levelling the monastic cemetery for the airport.

One of the chief witnesses, the writer Oleg Volkov, refused to revisit Solovki with his friends when it was reopened to tourists. 'It is an island one should visit only as a pilgrim. ... as one visits Auschwitz and Buchenwald.'

JANICE BROWN