

Book Reviews

Why Angels Fall: a Journey through Orthodox Europe from Byzantium to Kosovo by Victoria Clark. London: Macmillan, 2000. 460 pp., £18.99.

As a journalist who already knew the area and its peoples well, Clark became intrigued both by the role of the Orthodox Church in recent conflicts and by its rich spirituality. Backed by wide-ranging study of the area's history she investigates several key themes, some of them at odds with one another, like phyletism and hesychasm. Rampant nationalism, sympathy for a besieged Serbia, antisemitism and obsession with 666, the number of the Beast, she finds endemic. She covers the churches in Russia, Romania, former Yugoslavia, Greece, Cyprus and Istanbul but for space reasons omits several other Orthodox countries (Bulgaria, Ukraine, Belarus', Moldova and the Caucasus; also significant Orthodox minorities in Slovakia and Poland).

She examines how the Orthodox concept of time as spiral rather than as linear affects memories and mentalities so that people readily accept distorted myths and the seeming recurrence of certain events and situations and are thus susceptible to ruthless exploitation by leaders of church and state, as in the former Yugoslavia. She finds ample support for Samuel Huntington's theories of a fault line across Europe and the clash of civilisations. We learn of the reactions of bishops, priests and monks when confronted by a westerner – even worse, a feminist – from a Catholic background plying them with audacious leading questions. She has to cope with endemic misogyny – remember that Orthodox women are regarded as effectively excommunicated for a quarter of their lives – and mistrust, often receiving far too brief and confrontational reactions. She has to base her conclusions on these. As a lapsed Christian, she longs passionately to encounter true and shining representatives of holiness – and is frequently unnerved by what she finds.

What is lacking in this traveller's account is any long-term experience of exposure to the regular round of church life at its humbler level, the indifference of the majority of Orthodox peoples and the tepidity of so much parish life outside special saints' days, major festivals and pilgrimage centres. In Greece, a brief meeting with a couple of Romanian nuns deeply disillusioned by religious life there provides her with a clue to this aspect, which she neglects in favour of more lurid episodes and characters. She does not bring out clearly enough how unfavourably Orthodox church attendance compares with Catholic in the region. She is particularly well informed (from her past contacts and work with Romanians in Britain) on Orthodox–Greek Catholic tensions, but could have developed this topic further.

Her travels are interspersed with rather long sections of racily-told potted ecclesiastical history with too much emphasis on the more colourful and lurid episodes, but she draws on a mine of contemporary observations which should send the enquiring reader back to some of the original sources in the wide-ranging bibliography. Brails-

ford's comment on bishops in Macedonia a century ago is still all too relevant – 'their trade is intolerance and their business propaganda'. This is not a book for the scholar, while the author's irreverent approach will antagonise Orthodox converts in the West who tend to see the Orthodox world through rose-tinted spectacles, though the book contains much they ought to know. Occasionally there are misleading omissions. When describing the Serb 'myth' of Prince Lazar and the Battle of Kosovo, she fails to mention the ambiguity of contemporary records of the battle and its participants. On p. 114 she gives the impression that it was Moravia's local Roman Catholic clergy, not the jealous Bavarian clergy, who successfully blocked and expelled the enlightened mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius.

Clark's observation is unfailingly keen, often humorous. One of her choicest finds was in the office of the late Archbishop Mihail of Ohrid and Macedonia:

a wall clock set in a chunk of unvarnished wood, roughly carved in the instantly recognisable shape of Greater Macedonia, comprising the FYROM, a slice of Bulgaria, another of Albania and, of course, the northern Greek province of Macedonia. Any Greek, noting its extension to the shores of the Aegean and the three crooked fingers, with Mount Athos on the easternmost, would have blanched at the sight and found confirmation of his worst nightmare. 'That was probably just a gift', said Ljupco [her interpreter] hurriedly, gently taking my elbow and steering me away from the wall. (p. 117)

On her return visit to Russia, where she had already spent three years, her search reached a deeper dimension as she found herself emotionally engaged to a degree she had not expected. Her vignettes of brief encounters with priests – including Fr Dmitri Dudko, whom she found sympathetic, despite his blinkered antisemitism – make one wish she could return specifically to visit many more. There and in Romania she compares the opulence of restored or new churches and monasteries with the pitiful absence of the most basic facilities for life. In Transylvania the many new foundations – 17 in Mureş county alone – represent an unmistakable reaffirmation of Romanian presence, to replace the 150 destroyed by the Habsburgs in Transylvania 200 years ago. She is not over-impressed by the calibre of all the new monks.

At the end of her travels Clark hands over a list of questions on vital issues to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios, who provides characteristically diplomatic answers. Her queries and his answers deserve the sympathetic and serious attention of western readers. The depth of hatred of the West she encountered on her journeys should prompt us to examine ourselves over our past involvement in the area and the motives behind our conduct there.

Clark obviously prepared herself conscientiously for her encounter with Orthodoxy, but she still comes to it with a number of western preconceptions. She gives the impression that the Orthodox Church has always been inextricably linked with the state – a belief which some Russian Orthodox theologians like Sergei Bulgakov have done their best to correct – though she recounts with relish such conflicts as that between Ivan the Terrible and Metropolitan Filipp. It is a pity she did not come across the Bulgarian Maria Todorova's brilliant *Imagining the Balkans* in her reading, since it provides a salutary corrective to generalised western perceptions of the Balkans as an exotic region and as a convenient repository for negative aspects of western life – some of which perceptions Clark too readily shares.

Stato e chiesa nella Federazione Russa: La nuova normativa nella Russia post-comunista by Giovanni Codevilla, with a foreword by Anatoli Krasikov. Bergamo: Edizioni Russia Cristiana, La Casa di Matriona, 1998. 185 pp., 25,000 lire.

Codevilla, who teaches Comparative Ecclesiastical Law and Law in Socialist Countries at the University of Trieste, is the author of several books on religion, church–state relations and legislation in the Soviet Union since 1971 (including *Religione e spiritualità in URSS* (Rome, Città Nuova, 1981)) and is thus well qualified to tackle the minefield of inconsistencies which is the Russian law of September 1997. Its provisions, first published in Britain in the *Keston News Service*, are here in book form, with an analysis and annotations which exceed in length the actual text of the law. The book also contains a succinct, provocative and hard-hitting foreword, ‘La Chiesa al Rubicone’, by Anatoli Krasikov, formerly a member of President Yel’tsin’s staff and now director of a centre for religious studies in Moscow, which has the virtue of providing the view of an insider and Russian Orthodox believer.

In his essay Krasikov reminds us that the Russian Orthodox Church made ecumenical overtures during the last century. He lays much of the blame for the current Orthodox defensive stance on the KGB. Over 30 years ago the KGB sent the political leadership a report in which they accused the Vatican and WCC of plotting to spread their ideology among the Soviet people. Soviet clergy representatives sent abroad to participate in the ecumenical movement were continuously subjected to negative conditioning. Krasikov quotes (p. 16) a curious, and in the light of later developments, ominous passage from this report: ‘One of the main tendencies ... of members of sects is that they demand changes in legislation in order to obtain greater freedom to undertake proselytism, missionary activities and preaching.’ After this comes their assurance that ‘the eyes of the godfather’ (that is, the organs of the Committee for State Security) never close. They are ‘taking countermeasures to stem the ideological sabotage mounted by our enemies, to undermine hostile manoeuvres by headquarters of foreign religions, to unmask antisoviet elements among the clergy, laity and members of sects, and to block their hostile tactics’.

As a former employee of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, Krasikov was responsible for sending a note to Yel’tsin informing him of the plans of the group working for a more repressive law on religion. He laments the downstaging of the Consultative Council for cooperation with religious associations of 1995 by a body dominated by state functionaries in March 1996. He notes how, in presenting the final draft of the new law on religion to the Duma, Viktor Zorkalt’sev, a communist, followed the old party line on hostile foreign powers: ‘All the confessions whose spokesmen withdrew their signatures from the declaration ... are directed from headquarters outside Russia. ... I’d like to pose you a question: who are you for, dear colleagues?’

Krasikov describes the law as a Pyrrhic victory for the Russian Orthodox Church. He believes, for one thing, that it was very dangerous to transform the Orthodox Church into a new department of ideology, which forms a protective zone between those who govern it and the body of the faithful. Instead of launching positive efforts to rediscover Orthodox spirituality it is encouraging the suppression of dissidents, and this leads many, including Orthodox, to ask themselves whether they too are becoming a totalitarian sect. A witchhunt, on the lines of those which used to be a monopoly of the Communist Party, has been set into action within the Orthodox Church. He also points out that the law puts at risk almost half the parishes of the

Russian Orthodox Church in now-independent former republics of the USSR, whose governments might now define these dioceses as 'representatives of a foreign religious organisation' and curtail their freedom.

Codevilla's perceptive introductory chapter is entitled, significantly, 'Stato e chiesa in Russia: un ritorno al passato': for the new law, despite its modern terminology, embodies the hallowed principle of 'cuius regio, eius religio'. He not only indicates its dangers and contradictions, but also suggests possibilities of development towards greater openness. He does, however, fear that some religious groups which showed great resilience under communism might be forced to return to what would be virtually a catacomb existence.

A lengthy appendix contains statistics on religious communities; the text of the law of 25 October 1990; Boris Yel'tsin's letter to Seleznev, president of the Duma, of 25 July 1997, which precisely and succinctly identified the illiberal, unconstitutional and inconsistent provisions in the new draft law; and the 23 June 1997 text of the law and suggested amendments in August, printed in capitals. This publication could well be translated into other languages to furnish a much-needed reference book for universities, religious institutes and missions. A reprint with additional comments on the application of the law would also now be timely.

JANICE BROWN

Religion During and After Communism edited by Miklós Tomka and Paul M. Zulehner. London: Concilium, SCM Press, 2000. 128 pp., £9.00.

This slim paperback, the third in a series of special Concilium 2000 issues, provides a welcome insight into the problems believers faced under communism in Central Europe and critical assessments of how far the churches and believers have adapted to freedom, written after a sufficient interval, a decade. Contributions come mainly from insiders, from Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovenia, several of them academics who managed to pursue careers and establish links with German universities under communism. Czech philosopher Jan Sokol spells out the limitations: 'those who have lived under communism lack the necessary detachment and those who have not can only have the palest of ideas' (p. 12).

It is a pity that Croatia and Slovakia, both with distinctive complex church structures of their own in the aftermath of communism, are not specifically covered, though many of the criticisms voiced are common to all the countries covered. John Bowden has done sterling work as a translator, but in places it seems that the original German text may have been over-abbreviated. The chapter by the Slovene Vinko Potoknik, 'Priests and religious orders', may suffer from this: strangely, he does not mention the tensions between them in, for instance, the Czech Republic, where newer religious object to being used as parish priests to the detriment of their specific apostolates.

The title of the final chapter by Paul Zulehner is somewhat misleading. 'Encounters between East and West in the renewal of pastoral work' concentrates on Catholic meetings such as those of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE), whose recommendations, however commendable, do not appear to have been widely implemented, if my observations during visits to Slovakia, for instance, are anything to go by. Contributors are predominantly Roman Catholic, and though

much of what they write is applicable to the historic well-established Protestant churches the book would have gained considerably by including at least three or four chapters by leading Protestant theologians like Jakub Trojan.

The book asks questions such as the following. How have church people responded to modernisation and pluralism? To what extent are churches themselves to blame for the drop in general public sympathy towards them in the last few years? Can the effects of a system inculcating class hatred and deceit be eradicated in a mere decade? How far are theological faculties and seminaries, now free from state control, really preparing clergy and layfolk to meet the new challenges? Sokol is not the only contributor who suggests that they are not: 'The Prague theological faculty, now again part of the university, has skilfully outmanoeuvred all the new teachers and maintained its encapsulation.' (p. 19).

How far have believers managed to free themselves from the 'persecution syndrome'? As Hungarian historian László Lukács writes,

... the oppressors were blamed for all the failures and mistakes in the churches. A system of self-control; an examination of conscience for the past; strategic planning; a realistic analysis of the situation; a feasibility study for the future – all these were replaced by the heroism and faithfulness of the victims. The time of oppression was a favourable time for charismatic personalities and private adventures, but destroyed the need for co-operation, organized structures, flexible adjustment to the external situation. The outstanding partisans of the past often could not be enrolled into a regular army. As a result many people in the churches thought they had the right to unlimited subsidy, without a realistic budget and regular control. (pp. 98–99)

Czech veteran priest theologian Dr Oto Mádr, in 'Underground church: participation of the laity or sectarianism?', compares the cases of two of these charismatic personalities who for different reasons fell foul of their hierarchies, Felix Davidek and György Bulányi. He emphasises the vital contribution of committed laypeople like the Kaplan couple. Tomka believes that it was through such laypeople, not through its priests, far less its bishops, that the church in many places gained a respect it had not had before.

In a key essay Tomka movingly surveys the marginalisation of Christians under communism: 'Traditionalism has become rigid. The Christians successfully defended themselves. They preserved their tradition and handed it on. No more and no less.' (p. 66). Social isolation 'was forced on them. But once it was affirmed, the Christian community lost any sense of the seismic tremors in society, ... lost contact with society and history. And they are not blameless here.' The churches now find it almost impossible to engage with young people, or with the most topical issues in society, science and culture, or with postmodernism. The vast majority who are loyal to the churches are found in the 'premodern countries' and in the older, rural, less educated and lower strata of society. Despite this fact, Tomka believes the churches can overcome these handicaps, and he provides positive and challenging suggestions for their reintegration into the mainstream of society – including, crucially, a fresh conception of the relative roles and responsibilities of priests and people.

András Máté-Tóth writes of the problems of creating a Second World theology. Albert Franz, in a demanding essay, confirms the rise in atheism especially in the former German Democratic Republic and pleads for a theology which will avoid setting 'pseudo-theological pseudo-solutions to the problem of God' and yet also for

one which will ensure that God is accepted, not ruled out from the start or trivialised in a pseudocritical way, since, as he pertinently points out, the age of dangerous ideological thinking is not yet at an end. The Slovene Stanko Gerjolj makes the perceptive point that in Slovenia behind the state's concept of ideologically neutral education in religion and ethics in schools lies the old materialist view which used to be called 'scientific', from which references to transcendence remain excluded. Cardinal Miloslav Vlk and Lukács both deal, from different angles, with the problems of communication within the churches. Vlk writes:

We do not manage to engage with and have a dialogue with those of other opinions. Personal opinions are often turned into ideologies and the art of mutually respectful dialogue is very rare. We have no practice in dialogue, because this is also completely lacking in Communism – in both society and the church. This mentality is even stronger among the bishops, who for forty years were compelled to rely on themselves... (p. 48).

Lukács, covering 'Religion and the media', stresses that in many churches there was hardly any experience of social communication. Because of the acute need for secrecy, the underground was fragmented, with no communication between different groups – or with the church as a whole. He describes how hesitantly churches recovered and reconstructed social communication, and how far short they fall in their approach to the newly-expanded media field. What is urgently needed is a pastoral plan in all the churches on a country and regional basis.

This book provides an indispensable tool for churches and individuals trying to establish closer contact with postcommunist Europe.

JANICE BROWN

God in Russia: the Challenge of Freedom edited by Sharon Linzey and Ken Kaisch. Lanham, NY: University Press of America, 1999. 456 pp., hb \$64.00, pb \$44.50.

As will be obvious to readers of *Keston News Service* materials, this book deals with a question of some urgency: what is the role of western missionaries in the social and religious world of the former USSR? The editors (drawing on articles of the period 1992–98) have confined themselves largely to Christian Protestant missions with an evangelical commitment. This is fair enough for a book of this size. Nevertheless it might have been useful to include a chapter on nonchristian religions. That in turn could have led to a consideration of reactions by local traditional religions other than the Russian Orthodox Church. Even more useful might have been full-blooded treatment of movements characterised as 'harmful' or even as 'totalitarian' (including Mormons, Scientologists and Jehovah's Witnesses). Analytical treatment of their outreach and impact could well have displaced the five chapters on Balkan parallels. Several of the latter (such as Luke Veronis' on Albania) are serious treatments in their field, but should they have been included at the expense of more material on Russia itself?

It may have been the editors' hope that the volume would speak of some potential for Orthodox–Protestant cooperation. As it is, most contributors allow for restricted recognition of the other's worth, rather than wholehearted sharing in each other's life

and work. Even then, the Orthodox who are prepared to countenance such things (Yakunin, Kochetkov) are hardly typical of their church and, hence, the admission of the carping Kurayev to these pages. At least he does not plead for the integrity and security of 'our canonical territory', which in Moscow Patriarchate parlance equals all of Russia, if not more.

But there is one Orthodox contribution, Innokenti Pavlov's, which reaches out beyond factional divisions and raises a problem for each and every one to ponder. A fresh evangelisation of Russia cannot but depend on scripture, in other words free access to well-edited and well-translated texts. Only gradually is Russian biblical scholarship rising to the task. Meanwhile, western missionary agencies have produced various inadequate translations of paraphrased materials. Pavlov questions the scholarly worth and pastoral effectiveness of such publications. Russians should be encouraged by western scholarship to shoulder translations for themselves. Only to this end would Pavlov argue for support from sources in the West.

SERGEI HACKEL

Eastern Orthodox Christianity: a Western Perspective by Daniel B. Clendenin. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994. 176 pp.

Eastern Orthodox Theology: a Contemporary Reader by Daniel B. Clendenin. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995. 224 pp.

Russian Religious Thought edited by Judith Deutsch Kornblatt and Richard F. Gustafson. University of Wisconsin Press, 1996. x + 266 pp.

Several books have been published in recent years endeavouring to explain Eastern Orthodoxy to western (especially American) Protestants, the most original and distinguished probably being Anthony Ugolnik's *The Illuminating Icon*. Clendenin writes as an American evangelical who has taught theology in Moscow and been fired by the need to perform this task of explanation for those who share his background and assumptions. His overview of Orthodox theology suggests that he has caught some real sense of what Eastern Christianity is all about: he writes sympathetically about the tradition of negative theology and its experiential core, and offers essentially reliable accounts of the cult of holy images and the Orthodox view of tradition. But the concluding chapter, intended as a gentle critique from a Protestant point of view, seems to revert to some rather wooden attitudes at times: apophaticism is acknowledged as compatible with scripture, but what is said particularly about icons and about the concept of *theosis* reads as though the author has not entirely absorbed the nuances of the theology he has been summarising. His doubts about the biblical grounds for a theology of deification ignore almost entirely the full range of meaning in St Paul's doctrine of being in Christ, the theme of adoptive sonship in the New Testament and the Fathers, the implications of the Farewell Discourses and a good deal else.

The book is indeed a *western* perspective. It is extraordinary that almost no attention is given to the theology of the Church and that the Eucharist is mentioned only a couple of times in the entire work. The agenda is, it seems (and the author

implies that this is not an unfair observation), still that of the Protestant observer. This makes the book a useful tool for encouraging a more sympathetic understanding of Orthodoxy among evangelicals, but a very limited resource for a full and accurate induction into Orthodoxy as the Orthodox see it. The accompanying anthology edited by Clendenin rectifies this a little (though ecclesiology is still underrepresented). The extracts generally come from dependably mainstream writers (Lossky, Florovsky, Ware, Schmemmann), though this also means that there is not a great deal here that is not fairly easily available elsewhere in English.

There are curious gaps in both books as regards more recent theological writing. Aleksandr Men' is mentioned in passing, but you would probably not gain much sense of his significance as a theological teacher and populariser from this glancing allusion. John Zizioulas, possibly the single most influential Orthodox presence on the ecumenical scene, is entirely absent, as are two other very important Greek writers, Nellas and Yannaras. Staniloae appears in a bibliography, but might be thought to deserve more attention and perhaps an extract in the anthology. Nothing is said about theologians outside the 'Byzantine' world, though this may be a deliberate restriction (even though it robs us of Paulos Gregorios in India). Occasionally there are some bizarre slips in detail: the reference to 'Nikolai' Lenin raises an eyebrow.

Inevitably Clendenin's books do not give much feeling of how Orthodoxy has at times genuinely engaged with modernity (reference to, say, Yannaras or Olivier Clément would have reinforced such a feeling). To turn to the Kornblatt–Gustafson collection is to be reminded of how Russian religious philosophy in its golden age undertook this engagement in a variety of extraordinary ways. These essays are generally of an excellent standard, representing some of the best of the 'new wave' of scholarship in this field, which has been swelling during the 1990s. Solov'yev, Florensky, Bulgakov and Frank are the writers under review (it is a bit of a relief not to find Berdyayev; an implicit recognition that he is at the end of the day something of a cuckoo in this particular nest?), and all are treated with sympathy and seriousness. Kornblatt on Solov'yev's 'Tale of Antichrist' is outstandingly interesting, challenging the conventional interpretation of this text very persuasively. Bernice Rosenthal's piece on the earlier Bulgakov will stand (with other essays of hers in this area) as a benchmark of clarity and good sense on a prohibitively difficult subject, and Paul Vallière's further discussion of sophiology, while I would want to quarrel with some of its premises, does a great deal to put Solov'yev and Bulgakov in the widest cultural context. The final essay by James Scanlan on the contemporary situation is a little disappointing, as it does not examine any specific contemporary Russian writers; much could have been said about recent debates over Bakhtin and Losev, the revival of interest in phenomenology among Russian intellectuals and the new role – disturbing to some in the Russian hierarchy – of lay-led institutions and courses. What Scanlan says is sensible, but would have benefited from more particularisation. Overall, however, this is a collection to welcome with enthusiasm; it is certainly one of the best volumes in English in this area in the last decade and witnesses to the steadily improving quality of scholarship on the 'religious renaissance'.

ROWAN WILLIAMS

Windows to Eternity: a Personal Exploration of Russian Orthodoxy by Jenny Robertson. Oxford: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 1999. Paperback, 200 pp., £6.99.

Reading Jenny Robertson's book reminded me of my own first encounter with Russian Orthodoxy. Unlike hers, mine took place – inevitably at the time – outside Russia. My first contacts were with the Russian Orthodox Church in London, hers were in Russia itself – where her husband, an Anglican priest, was working – both before and after the collapse of communism. My background was the catholic tradition within Anglicanism, hers the evangelical – her earlier background was Presbyterian. For both of us, the discovery of Orthodoxy in its Russian form was the discovery of a new religious and spiritual world, capable of deepening and enriching our understanding and practice of the Christian faith. She shares the enthusiasm I myself felt for this hitherto unknown form of Christianity.

This book is what its title says it is: a personal exploration of Russian Orthodoxy. Much in Orthodoxy is not only very different from evangelical Anglicanism, but apparently contrary to some of its basic tenets. Yet Jenny Robertson was fascinated by what she experienced in Russian churches and deeply impressed by the persisting faith and practice of Russian Christians under persecution. She writes about Orthodox worship, Russian churches, icons, the use of the body and the bodily senses in worship, prayer, the place of Mary, the communion of saints, the Bible in Russia and the Orthodox liturgical year. There are some references to history and to significant historical figures. There is much more about contemporary Russian Christians and a whole chapter is devoted to Fr Alexander Men'.

Jenny Robertson writes warmly about Russian Orthodoxy. Yet she is not uncritical of some traditional Russian Orthodox attitudes, among them the complete certainty that Orthodoxy is right and western churches wrong. She is saddened by the reluctance of the hierarchy to engage in ecumenical dialogue, though she is critical, too, of some western Protestant missionary activity in Russia in the past decade.

A personal exploration does not claim to be a full or systematic account. This book deals with those aspects of Russian Orthodoxy which have particularly impressed the author. For a fuller picture, they sometimes need complementing by others. So to the meaning of Orthodoxy as 'true praise' (p. 8) there needs to be added its no less important meaning of 'true belief'. For Orthodoxy, true worship and prayer must be informed by true doctrine. Other impressions need elucidating by history. So the vestments of an Orthodox bishop do not, historically, resemble those of the Jewish high priest (p. 55): they are those of the Byzantine emperor. Nor, historically, is the Jerusalem temple the model for Orthodox churches, even if subsequent interpretation may have made that comparison.

Nevertheless, Jenny Robertson's clear and enthusiastic account of her experience of Russian Orthodoxy should encourage those previously unaware of it to explore a Christian tradition which has much to teach western Christians, even if it has itself something to learn from their very different, but no less Christian, experience.

HUGH WYBREW