

Editorial

In her article in this issue of *Religion, State & Society* Natalia Shlikhta discusses problems of identity facing Orthodox and Greek Catholics in Soviet Ukraine. She examines the difficulties inherent in trying to combine political and social loyalties with religious identity in an environment of militant atheism and of an aspiration on the part of the regime to achieve total control over its citizens, blurring the boundaries between the 'private' and the 'public'.

Arguably it is harder for Orthodox churches than for churches of the Western Christian tradition to resist such pressures. In his article Silviu Rogobete looks at some basic features that distinguish Western Christianity from Orthodoxy. He finds while the Western Christian tradition places primacy on the individual, Orthodoxy places its first emphasis on the relationship between persons. Since the nineteenth century the political and national environment and the unprecedented experience of communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have combined to mean that this feature of Orthodoxy has had unfortunate negative consequences: Rogobete identifies 'the issue of surrender to political powers, and the even more dangerous organic connection established between religion and nationalism, between faith and ethnicity'.

Rogobete's article is specifically concerned with human rights. He finds that the modern understanding of human rights is rooted in the Western Christian tradition, but that the prevailing assumption is that this understanding of human rights is of universal application. He questions whether this assumption is true, finding that in Europe human rights are weakly defended in predominantly Orthodox countries, and particularly in those which experienced a high level of political, social and ideological engineering in the communist period. If the Western Christian tradition tends to sacrifice the 'Many' for the sake of the 'One', 'contemporary Orthodox anthropology is in danger of sacrificing the "One" for the sake of the "Many" '.

What are the prospects for the future? This is a particularly lively question in view of the recent and envisaged continuing expansion of the European Union (EU). One predominantly Orthodox country, Greece, was already a member of the EU; the recent expansion has brought in Cyprus, as well as the Baltic states, where there are substantial Orthodox minorities; and there is a real prospect that Romania and Bulgaria will soon be eligible for EU membership.

The largest Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), is also affected. In the Russian Empire, and to a lesser extent in the Soviet Union, the ROC could with some justification regard itself as largely located within one nation-state. Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, however, it has become a truly international organisation. Its centre remains in Moscow, but more than half of its parishes and clergy are now in newly independent states. What is more, there is of course a worldwide Russian Orthodox diaspora. At the same time, there is continuing fruitful mutual East–West support, contact and dialogue in the realm of religious education for laypeople, as Wil van den Bercken shows in his study in this issue of the eleven most important lay theological educational institutes in Russia, Belarus' and Ukraine.

A prevalent assumption in ROC discourse is that Russian history and culture have been shaped exclusively by Orthodoxy. The reality is rather more complex: one has only to recall, for example, the role of Lutherans and Lutheranism in Russian public life since the sixteenth century. (The article by Gerd Stricker in this issue is one of number we have published recently that touch on this subject.) Indisputably the Russian religious landscape today is becoming increasingly pluralistic. To highlight just one development, in Siberia and the Far East Protestant denominations are proliferating. The outlook for the future must surely be one of increasing pluralism in Russia.

Rogobete concedes that the negative features of Orthodoxy in several European countries 'are likely to have damaging effects on the future of countries like Romania which are enrolled in the process of European and Euroatlantic integration while at the same time experiencing a massive return to religiosity'. Nevertheless he is hopeful:

Albeit rather isolated and often ostracised, there are Orthodox clergy and lay intellectuals who develop a different, positive attitude towards human rights, pluralism and democracy. Most notable is Metropolitan Nicolae of Banat (the western part of Romania), who cultivates an excellent atmosphere of cooperation with other religious groups, as well as fruitful relations with secular society, culture and politics.

He goes on to argue that

Orthodox religiosity and tradition can indeed play a constructive role in the process of European integration with its associated implementation of a thorough human rights regime; and, moreover, that it can provide a significant complementary response to some of the possible dead-ends into which questions of individual rights and morality can lead.

He sees much potential in a constructive encounter between the best features of the Western and Eastern European Christian understandings of the nature of the individual. In the desired anthropology, on the one hand

the individual in his uniqueness as a rational and responsible agent is affirmed, while on the other, such rationality is embedded in the larger context of interpersonal relationships. It is thus an anthropology that would not indulge in self-fulfilment and self-sufficiency (ethnic or religious), but would rather invite to an opening up (in a sacrificial way?) in order to meet the 'Other', regardless of religion or ethnicity.

In her survey of the continuing tribulations of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in this issue of *RSS*, Janice Broun draws attention to the view of Bulgarian barrister and theologian Peter Petkov that the Balkan Orthodox churches need to enter into a process of dialogue and exchange with their western counterparts specifically in the realm of legislation on religion: 'Potentially they could make a contribution to Europe through a law that genuinely reflected the Orthodox sense of community, based on Orthodox Trinitarian personalism rather than on nationalism.'

In many countries dioceses or parishes of the MP have had decades of experience of living in a pluralist religious environment. In such circumstances the challenge is surely not just to survive, but to work creatively within such an environment. The Russian Orthodox Diocese of Sourozh is located in Great Britain. In a study of the experience of this diocese in an earlier issue of *RSS* (27, 1, 1999, pp. 59–71), Aleksandr Filonenko wrote as follows of its strategy of 'openness':

It is a strategy that has steered away from self-isolation based on national and ethnic identity and from extreme forms of proselytism. The strategy amounts to more than simply a means of survival. It is indeed far more than that, for it has been defined by a profound understanding of the relations between Tradition and the Culture born within it. In order to proclaim the very *universality* of Orthodoxy, its openness to *all* peoples and cultures, it was necessary to weaken or at least downplay the established and much-cherished link between Russian Orthodox tradition and Russian culture, and this was made one of the most creative operating principles in the Diocese of Sourozh.

Filonenko quoted Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, the head of the diocese;

From the very outset, for forty years and more, and looking at matters in a positive light, we Russians have considered that we have been *sent* to this country to bring Orthodoxy here, that is, to share the most valuable thing we ourselves possess, to give it to anyone at all who feels a need for it. This we have done not violently, nor by proselytism, but by proclaiming it for anyone to hear and by sharing it.

Filonenko went on to identify the existential position of those who would be involved in 'openness': a position of 'vulnerability'. This recalls Rogobete's suggestion, noted above, that 'an opening up' in order to meet the 'Other', will need to be done in a sacrificial way. 'Is it not the case, though', asked Filonenko, 'that we often tend to associate the religious quest with the aspiration to achieve *invulnerability*? I myself would suggest that this very identification of the religious quest with *invulnerability* may be the most unhealthy manifestation of postsoviet religiosity.' Referring to the strategy of openness adopted by the Diocese of Sourozh, Filonenko concluded that its 'value is every bit as great now for the task of solving problems *within* Orthodoxy in the postsoviet context. I end by stating my firm belief that postsoviet society now urgently needs to do away with "exotic" self-seclusion in the name of the open and fully reinstated witness of Orthodoxy.'

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Notes on Contributors

Wil van den Bercken is lecturer in the history of the Orthodox Church at the University of Utrecht and professor of Christianity in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus' at the University of Nijmegen. His latest book is *Holy Russia and Christian Europe: East and West in the Religious Ideology of Russia* (London 1999) and he is coeditor (with Evert van der Zweerde and Manon de Courten) of *Vladimir Solov'ëv: Reconciler and Polemicist* (Leuven 2000) and (with Jonathan Sutton) of *Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Europe* (Leuven 2003).

Janice Broun, an Oxford graduate, is a specialist writer on religion in communist and postcommunist societies. She has had several articles published on Bulgarian religious affairs since the early 1980s, and book reviews on a wide variety of aspects of religious life in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly on martyrs and confessors in the former Soviet Union. She is the author of *Conscience and Captivity: Religion in Eastern Europe* (1988) and of six contributions to *Censorship: an International Encyclopedia* (London, Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001).

Silviu Rogobete was born in 1962. During the 1990s he studied theology at Brunel University in London and received his PhD from Brunel in 1998. In 2001–02 he was a postdoctoral student at St Hugh's College Oxford, specialising in human rights. From 1998 he has been a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Political Sciences and Communication at the West University of Timișoara, Romania and is head of the Department of Political Studies there. In 2001 he was one of the founders of the international journal *Political Science Forum: Perspectives on Central and Eastern Europe* and is one of its editors. His academic interests are human rights, epistemology and the philosophy of the self, theological and political anthropology, political ethics and the sociology and psychology of religion. He is the author of many articles and chapters and of the book *O ontologie a iubirii (An Ontology of Love)* (Iași, 2001).

Natalia Shlikhta received an MA in history from the Central European University, Budapest, in 1999 and from the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Ukraine, in 2000. In the academic year 2002–03 she was a visiting student in the Faculty of Divinity of Cambridge University. She is now working on a PhD at the Central European University on the Ukrainian Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church between 1945 and 1971. She has written articles and delivered papers on a range of topics in the church history of postwar Soviet Ukraine, including Khrushchev's antireligious campaign, the role of atheist propaganda, the forms of believers' protest against state antireligious policies, the role of the CROCA/CRA, the experiences of the Western Ukrainian 'converted' community and western historiography on church history in the Soviet state.

Gerd Stricker is the head of research at the institute Glaube in der Zweiten Welt in Switzerland and editor of the publication of the same name. He lectures and publishes prolifically on many aspects of church life in communist and postcommunist countries and on the history of denominations in those areas. His main fields of research are the history and contemporary situation of Orthodoxy and Lutheranism in the Russian Empire, the USSR and the CIS.