

Book Reviews

Crkva i društvo (The Church and Society) by Radovan Bigović. Belgrade: Chilandar Fund at the Theological Faculty of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and Paris: St Nicholas Community, 2000. Paperback, 332 pp., 250 Yugoslav Dinars (US \$4.20).

The Orthodox Church in Serbia today has freedom of action only within church buildings and grounds. Any influence on everyday life is ruled out: the church has no input in education, health issues, social ethics and public morality, culture or even social policies, because in one way or another it has been distanced from all social structures. This is the main argument of *Crkva i društvo* by the dean of the Theological Faculty of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade, a book aimed at readers in Serbia with theological, sociological, pedagogical and historical perspectives.

In more than twenty theological treatises and social and philosophical essays, divided into five chapters, Dr Bigović examines various aspects of life in Serbia today, including: Christianity without Christ, the Orthodox identity, freedom and authority, religion and young people, Orthodoxy and religious tolerance, the church and politics, the church and society in transition, and the church, politics and democracy. Most of the texts have not been published before, but some of them were originally papers presented by the author at various international symposia, lectures, articles in journals or talks on Serbian radio and television.

Published just before the great changes in Yugoslav society of October 2000, the book also argues that the growing rift between the church and society today is leading to fanaticism of various kinds. Violence, corruption, public immorality, murder, drug abuse, alcoholism and despair have reached horrifying proportions. Every individual feels that today is worse than yesterday and the only response to this state of affairs, says Bigović, is a vision, uniting the people and the church, that the 'whole universe become a cosmic liturgy'.

The book offers a serious critique of the secularised religiosity of our times, of hyperindividualism and egoism, petrified traditionalism, pagan nationalism and the consumer mentality. 'Man who is alienated from the face of God is weak, fragile and impotent. With Him he is always joyful and able, despite the circumstances of history and everyday life.' (p. 330) Bigović believes that the church today should raise its voice in a prophetic manner, to help to recognise, discover and communicate the will of God to a world living in overwhelming fear. Apart from several essays written mainly for a local audience, the subjects covered and the ideas developed in *Crkva i društvo* are relevant to most postmodern societies today.

BRANKO BJELAJAC

Teodor Romža by László Puskás, translated by Mara dell'Asta. Milan: La Casa di Matriona, 2000. Paperback, 189 pp., 16,000 lire.

Russia Cristiana's latest paperback series, partially financed by Aid to the Church in Need, draws welcome attention to the lives of carefully selected modern martyrs. It is in cheap but attractive format, with some photographs. None of those martyrs so far selected, except Josyf Slipyi, is well known in the West. This series ought to be translated into other languages to give it the wider readership it deserves.

Teodor Romža provides a straightforward case-history of the relentless Soviet suppression of the Greek Catholic diocese of Mukachevo from 1945, when what is now Ukrainian Transcarpathia was annexed from Hungary, and of the heroic resistance of its young, resolute, wise and apparently uncomplicated bishop, Teodor Romža. His various names reflect the convoluted border changes his region experienced. Georgij Teodor Romža, bilingual in Ruthenian and Hungarian, appeared in Hungarian documents as György Tivadar; in military records as plain György; in Czechoslovak as Jur Tividar and Jiří Teodor; in his school records as Jurij Fedor; in the Gregorian University records in Rome as Theodorus; as a bishop Teodor. His only weaknesses seem to have been chain-smoking and attachment to his beard – which, however, he was prepared to shave off at the time when it might have given his flock the impression that he had converted to the Orthodox. A letter to his seminary, the Russicum, in 1937, gives some idea of the backwoods mentality of his future diocese:

People are more attached to their own local usages – often superstitious – than to the teachings of our church. Black magic is rife. They write letters to the Virgin in Heaven. ... They maintain that the Catholic Church and the Orthodox are the same thing – only the priests are different. ... They abandon our church without any regret, go over to the Orthodox, then, when it suits them, they come back. For most the main concern is to celebrate 13 days before and after festivals.

So much, as far as the peasantry was concerned, for Roman Catholic claims of their undying loyalty to Rome. Their confused identity was confirmed to me by a Ruthenian Orthodox priest in Eastern Slovakia. Unfortunately Puskás does not elaborate on the background, landscape and culture of this region. Despite Romža's reservations, the Greek Catholic Church had been relatively favoured under Hungarian rule and could depend on a devout nucleus of well trained, committed clergy – 252 in 1947 – supported by loyal wives and families and some educated laypeople. In comparison the clergy of the local Orthodox diocese reflected the lamentable neglect and impoverishment of its population under Hungarian rule, which led to the emigration of so many Ruthenians; only two out of its 135 priests had a university education and 90 had only elementary schooling.

Puskás, son of one of Romža's most loyal priests, now a priest himself, adds his own childhood memories to those of many of Romža's contemporaries, in particular Mgr Alexander Chira, theology professor at Uzhgorod, clandestinely consecrated by Romža, who played a key role in Catholic survival in the region and in Kazakhstan, where he died in 1989. He admits that he found it difficult to provide a more personal picture of the bishop's dealings with his flock, given the fact that the bishop eventually had to give most of his directives orally. Nevertheless his original sources include diocesan records and Soviet documents only recently revealed, in particular *Razvedka i Kreml'* by General P. Sudoplatov, published in Moscow in 1996, which

shows how the policy of repressing Greek Catholic identity in Transcarpathia was tied in with the repression of Greek Catholic dioceses in Galicia. Khrushchev asked Stalin for permission to liquidate Romža on the grounds that he had collaborated with the Ukrainian resistance under Bandera! Certainly the bishop was well informed about events in Ukraine and had channels to reach the Vatican. Subsequently Khrushchev tried to ensure that any documents proving his involvement were destroyed, but General Sudoplatov's memoirs leave no doubt about the matter.

Romža had to resort to various subterfuges to maintain the moral, spiritual and educational calibre of his seminarians as the communist net closed in and all institutions not approved by the Party were shut down. His priests were even forbidden to move about without prior government permission. By 1947 he was aware that premature death awaited him. Puskás believes that he may have undertaken the pastoral visit to reconsecrate the village church at Lavka in October to precipitate the event before his nerve broke. The initial road 'accident' was badly botched. The coachman died; Romža suffered only a broken jaw. The account of his eventual martyrdom relies largely on the testimony of his 'guardian angel' Sister Teofila, the nurse who would not leave the bishop alone with Dr Bergman, the head of the hospital, or Odarka, his sinister accessory 'nurse' who arrived from Moscow. It is one of the most gripping stories I have read, as the tragedy moves to its inevitable end. How ironic that it was the order of the then recovering bishop to Teofila, to obey her newly-arrived and unwitting superior and withdraw, which left him exposed to Bergman, Odarka and a dose of arsenic.

The whole episode proved a gross mistake as far as its perpetrators were concerned. Horrified by the impact of Romža's murder on his flock, the Soviet authorities made sure that in future such bishops were left to rot and die forgotten in the Gulag.

JANICE BROWN

La Croix et la faucille: la religion à l'épreuve du postsoviétisme by Laurence Beauvisage. Paris: Bayard, 1998. 265 pp.

In his stimulating introduction, Beauvisage, researcher in France's National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilisations, poses key questions on the nature of the resurgence of religion in Russia. Does it represent the victorious rebirth of faith from the ruins of atheism, a major phase in the long process of the rechristianisation of Eastern Europe? Or is it indicative of the establishment of liberation of conscience and democratisation in Russia – or, conversely, of the slide towards a new authoritarianism? The return of religion as a major factor raises many questions about the nature, role and future of religions in modern societies. Beauvisage examines the links between Orthodoxy and certain manifestations of authoritarianism and nationalism as well as the confrontation between tradition and innovation in post-soviet society. The variety and rapidity of the development of new religious movements make Russia a laboratory where researchers can examine and analyse the role of religion in the formation of society and its influence on politics. Russia also provides a propitious field for reexamining the significance of secularisation and uncovering some of the mechanisms which underlie contemporary changes in types of belief. Beauvisage places his discussion in the context of the fact that, generally speaking, religious faith in today's Europe seems to have come to a standstill, both in

countries where persecution has forced religion into clandestinity – he queries what future a religion in the catacombs has – and in those where unimpeded secularisation has edged it out of every public sphere so that it is withering away. He points out how in Russia the quest for identity often ends in religion, the church, the priest and every sort of spirituality. He regards claims about the rebirth of the Russian Orthodox Church as a myth and sets out to prove this. He questions how far religious bodies are capable of controlling and regulating the individual and collective attitudes which beliefs induce; overemphasis on the dimensions of identity, culture, emotion and political commitment connected with religion often works to the detriment of its faith component. He distinguishes between ephemeral manifestations and profounder movements within Russian society. He believes that religious renewal could well represent a final stand against the process of political secularisation. In stressing an exclusively Orthodox tradition in Russia, not that of its religious diversity, current political leaders are delaying general acceptance of plurality in other spheres of life.

In the chapter 'Une religion refuge' Beauvisage lucidly analyses the social composition of believers in the Soviet period and the reasons behind the modest resurgence of faith towards the end of the Soviet era. Among other things he notes how church closures led to an almost complete collapse of parish life in rural areas; the majority of regular attenders, elderly and female, understood little beyond the bare mechanics of how to behave in church. Nevertheless, it was clear by 1988 that at least ten per cent of the population retained religious belief, a fact which indicated the extent of the failure of the Soviet project of homogenisation, given the range of measures which the authorities had employed to eradicate religion. Despite its limitations, by its very survival faith attested to the pluralism of society. Beauvisage charts the development of the subsequent alliance of church and state, a result of the convergence of their concerns during *perestroika*, but stresses that the state needed more moral support than the churches could muster.

In the chapter 'Le postcommunisme – l'espoir de renouveau' Beauvisage sympathetically surveys the reconstruction of official church and lay organisations concerned with publishing, education and catechisation, charitable work and outreach to the cast-offs of society. As far as the Orthodox are concerned he is stronger on Moscow-based institutions than those elsewhere; St Petersburg hardly gets a mention. It would have been interesting to learn what has happened to Orthodox and Baptist communes established in the 1980s, to which Beauvisage makes passing reference: are they still going concerns? He asks whether the undoubted renaissance and commitment of church organisations corresponded to a real renewal in the sense of a Christianity deeply implanted in public consciousness. Although postcommunist modernisation has allowed churches to reconstitute their structures, it has also generated challenges for them and for the CIS as a whole, comparable to those we see already far advanced in our secularised western societies: a redefinition of religion's social role, loss of plausibility of major traditional church systems, and the proliferation of small religious groups. Postcommunism perhaps represents the first period in Russian history when widespread secularisation can really make headway.

Beauvisage argues that Marxism represented a symbolically religious world from whose control, as communism collapsed, the spheres of knowledge, power and social action were removed. He examines how when religious institutions had to face up to their Soviet past, whether they had been victims or accomplices, they became splintered by schisms. On the relationship of the Moscow Patriarchate with the Russian Orthodox Church in Exile and the True Orthodox Church, he notes that the

extreme politicisation of priests in the smaller churches has led to a number of parishes returning to the Moscow Patriarchate. While the Ukrainian schism is relegated to a mere paragraph – his coverage of Ukraine is cursory, given the strength of its churches – he deals well with the problems which the Russian Orthodox Church has had to face in coming to terms with modernism. Compared with Protestants, well funded from abroad and technically equipped to evangelise, and Catholics, well armed intellectually, the Orthodox Church is in desperate need of well trained cadres and specialists in politics, international relations, science and finance; it is also at a considerable disadvantage economically and culturally. It is partly in reaction to the greater impact of other churches that it has taken its aggressive line towards them.

Beauvisage notes the paradox that for many Orthodox believers apparently fervent ritual practices coexist with a minimal or impoverished faith. He quotes Alain Besançon (p. 104): ‘The Russian people have been liturgised, rather than catechised’. He finds among the young an upsurge of a Russian variant of a widespread western phenomenon: people who believe without belonging to any specific religious group.

In neopagan and utopian movements he sees a response to ecological disaster and disillusionment with politics as a solution for the crisis; oddly, he does not mention the flourishing *Rerikh* movement.

In the chapter ‘Une religion de patriotisme’ Beauvisage skilfully follows the various Slavophile tendencies as they developed before and during communism. He believes that the ambiguity of the official church response to nationalist currents proves how difficult it is for the Russian Orthodox Church to redefine its role and how easy for it to succumb to the temptation to reap the benefits of a privileged place alongside the state: hence a fundamental move away from the principle of a lay state affirmed in the 1990 law on religion and the 1993 Constitution.

In the chapter ‘Les acquis fragiles de laïcité’ Beauvisage examines the dubious nature of the benefits which links with the state have brought to the church. For instance, as Fr Gleb Yakunin protested, the Holy Synod reserved the right to take possession of estates, properties and treasures in museums confiscated from private individuals by the Soviet authorities. Beauvisage points out that the defection of disillusioned democratically-minded intellectuals has destroyed the balance between liberals and traditionalists, the latter generally being in favour of forces seeking to make Orthodoxy a substitute for Marxism and the trademark of Russianness. The church lacks the experience of partnering the state in a democracy and thus finds it very hard to renounce the centralising tendencies imposed by its former communist tutors.

Beauvisage does see some glimmers of hope: the church’s development of a social doctrine, for instance, is a necessary step on its way to independence; and he sees little likelihood at present of the mainstream believing community backing ecclesiastical authoritarianism in its alliance with power structures.

Though at times his conclusions on the interrelationship between Soviet and post-soviet trends and secularisation seem contradictory, this thought-provoking book, intended for the intelligent general reader rather than the specialist, provides a first-rate contribution to the assessment of religion and especially Orthodoxy in post-communist Russia. Its strength lies in its application of sociological surveys, theories and analysis, many of them from Russian sources, and extensive reference to Keston Institute as well as to French scholarship on the subject. Unfortunately there is no index, though texts of relevant laws are provided in the appendix.

China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future edited by Stephen Uhalley, Jr and Xiaoxin Wu. New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2000. 520 pp., US \$79.95.

This book consists of a selection of papers which were presented at the international conference 'China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future: Reflections for the New Millennium' sponsored by the Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History and the Center for the Pacific Rim of the University of San Francisco and held in San Francisco in October 1999.

The papers range across a wide variety of topics, from detailed historical analysis to reflections on the contemporary situation of Christianity in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. On the historical side, a number of papers focus on aspects of the Jesuit mission in Ming and early Qing China – not surprising given that the Ricci Institute was cosponsor of the conference. While these are certainly interesting they are likely to appeal to a more specialist audience. So too are the valuable papers dealing with two much-neglected areas of study: the Russian Orthodox Church in China and Hungarian missionaries in China. It is interesting to note that the study of the Jesuit mission has advanced considerably in recent years and is helping to enrich our understanding of the interaction between China and early modern Europe. Moreover, study of the interaction between Chinese culture and the West in this period is a helpful basis for discussing issues of inculturation in contemporary China.

It is, however, the papers dealing with modern and contemporary history which will be of most interest to the nonspecialist. Two excellent papers give an overview of Christianity in China today. Ryan Dunch's paper 'Protestant Christianity in China today: fragile, fragmented, flourishing' is a balanced and judicious survey of a controversial subject. Richard Madsen's 'Beyond orthodoxy: Catholicism as a folk religion' is full of insight and offers new ways of looking at the Catholic Church in China today. It is encouraging to find that the discussion is moving away from unhelpful and simplistic stereotypes which draw rigid lines of demarcation between 'official' and 'underground' Christians, whether Catholic or Protestant. Both these papers begin to explore the nature of Chinese Christianity in terms of its social impact and the nature of its particular appeal to different groups within Chinese society. This is a project which has been explored in greater depth by Madsen in his significant book *China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society* published in 1998. We can look forward to further insights emerging from the methodology employed by Madsen and others in their continuing study of Christianity in China.

Other papers give helpful surveys of Christianity and minority nationalities and of the Catholic Church in Hong Kong since 1997, and there is an excellent study of Christianity in modern Taiwan by Peter Chen-Main Wang. Professor Zhuo Xinping of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences provides a helpful perspective on the so-called 'cultural Christians' in China today. Finally Philip Wickeri suggests some further ideas for future discussion.

The study of Chinese Christianity remains the preserve of a small number of scholars. Of the few books published over the past few years the most important have been highly priced and difficult to obtain. The Bibliography of the present work is instructive inasmuch as it reveals how limited is the material available for study. No doubt there are important archives in China itself, but to date these are not easily accessed by scholars outside China. This points to the urgent need to develop collaborative work with the academic community in China and it is reassuring that several of the contributors to this conference were from China. At present it is very

difficult to engage in fieldwork in China, with the result that our conclusions about Christian life there are based on very partial information.

No doubt general readers will find some of the historical material of limited interest. Moreover, the book is episodic in its treatment with a diversity of material that will be somewhat daunting to the nonspecialist. Few will feel able to purchase the book, but it is well worth obtaining a library copy and first reading a selection of the papers. However, anyone looking for a serious study of Christianity in China will find this volume of great value and for China specialists it is to be highly recommended.

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