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RELIGION, STATE & SOCIETY

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Editorial

In 1994 the Russian Orthodox Church convened a conference on Christian Faith and Human Enmity in Moscow and invited the Roman Catholic apostolic administrator in Moscow, Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, and the head of the Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, Petr Konoval'chik, to cochair it. Introducing papers from the conference in this issue of *RSS* Oliver McTernan welcomes the event as a 'genuine gesture to forge closer ties between the churches and to look for ways in which they can cooperate in addressing the problems of civil unrest, ethnic tension and economic hardship that beset the whole region.'

In his opening address to the conference Metropolitan Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church calls for the creation of a 'permanent forum of the Christian churches and religious groups in our region to coordinate peacemaking and other social initiatives and to solve problems arising between denominations.' He quotes the concluding document of a meeting in 1989 between religious leaders and representatives in the USSR: 'Adherence to a church or a religious group shows up chauvinism and national exclusiveness for what it is – a sin which contradicts everything that constitutes the dignity of a nation.'

Setting the context in which this conference is for him such a welcome event Oliver McTernan warns: 'I fear that we may have overlooked too readily the fact that 70 years of religious oppression may have done more to entrench than to eradicate the nineteenth-century tensions within the Russian Orthodox Church between the Slavophiles and the Westernisers.' On the basis of similar misgivings, other contributors to this issue of *RSS* express some doubts about the capacity of Orthodoxy to make a positive contribution to current political developments.

In his article on whether a Russian form of Christian Democracy is possible Michael Hughes comments that 'it is clear that the Orthodox Church in Russia has not ... developed to the same extent as the Catholic Church a tradition of theorising about social and political life', and that this fact causes problems for the development of Christian Democracy in Russia to the extent that the postcommunist Christian Democratic movement has involved mainly Orthodox believers. He goes on to argue that one of the main reasons why the Russian Christian Democratic movement fell apart after 1991 was disagreement over the attitude to be taken to the territorial integrity of the former USSR, with the leader of the Russian Christian Democratic Movement, Viktor Aksyuchits, adopting an increasingly nationalist position. Hughes refers to evidence from recent surveys which he says 'implies that the relationship between nationalism and Christian belief remains quite strong in contemporary Russia'; to Hughes this fact suggests that 'it may be difficult for any future Russian Christian Democratic Party to imitate its western counterparts' strong commitment to the principle of international reconciliation and cooperation.'

Recourse to a nationalist protectionism in Orthodox circles can indeed be interpreted as a consequence of just that lack of formation in contemporary social and

political theory which Hughes identifies. In his article on religious aspects of the war in former Yugoslavia Geert van Dartel is very critical of the Serbian Orthodox Church for what he sees as its intransigent nationalist stance, which he sets in the context of the Church's ambiguous attitude to the modernisation process. During the last two centuries the Serbian Church has given full support to the liberation struggle of the Serbian nation but has failed to see this struggle as part of a political modernisation process involving the whole of Europe. It has turned out that the Church is now strongly opposed to the outcome of that modernisation process 'inasmuch as it involved both a modern way of life with a loss of traditional national and religious values and also the emergence of new national groups with their own political demands and their own national identities, which could not be integrated into the Serbian national-religious corpus.'

While looking at contemporary problems, we ought however always to be ready to widen our focus to achieve the broader context. It is salutary to recall the tremendous spiritual achievement of the Russian Orthodox Church during those seven decades of this century while it stubbornly resisted the power of an atheist state bent on achieving totalitarian control. Reminiscences of the 1960s by Fr Aleksandr Men' include stories of attempts by his colleagues to protest against both persecution by the state and the unwillingness of the Church to defend itself. While agreeing in principle with their stand Fr Aleksandr often found himself unable to commend their tactics.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this story of an attempt to form a church opposition. The first conclusion is that opposition is possible only when there is something to lean on ... There was only a very thin layer of active priests and laymen ... It was all too early ... Church life was broken down and destroyed over decades; for centuries all kinds of distortions had been introduced into it. In order to bring about rebirth what was needed was cooperative, persistent, patient and peaceful work at local level in the parish and among the people – Christian labour.

Emma Watkins writes of Fr Aleksandr Men' that his significance lies in the fact that in circumstances of official atheist oppression 'he sought to be a parish priest serving his parishioners ... While not seeking to be a dissident, he was, for the communist state of the time, the most subversive kind of opponent – an unassuming Christian, one who just got on with the daily business of serving Christ.'

July 1995

PHILIP WALTERS

Notes on Contributors

Janice Broun, a graduate of Oxford University, is a freelance journalist specialising in religion in communist and former communist countries. She is the author of *Conscience and Captivity: Religion in Eastern Europe* (1988).

Geert van Dartel graduated from the Catholic Theological Faculty in Nijmegen, and from 1978 to 1983 studied ecumenical theology and economics in Zagreb. As study secretary of the foundation 'Communicantes' he has been active in church contacts with Central and Eastern Europe.

Michael Hughes is a lecturer in the Department of Government, Brunel University, London. He received his PhD from the London School of Economics, where his research focused on nineteenth-century Slavophilism.

Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad is chairman of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz is apostolic administrator for Roman Catholics of the Latin Rite in the European part of Russia.

Petr Konoval'chik is head of the Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in Russia.

Jonathan Luxmoore, based in Warsaw, is the Eastern Europe correspondent of the *National Catholic Register*, and covers church affairs in the region for various European and American newspapers and news agencies.

Fr Aleksandr Men', murdered in 1990, was an outstanding Russian Orthodox theologian, preacher and parish priest, and his many spiritual children continue his work throughout Russia today.

Fr Oliver McTernan is a Roman Catholic parish priest in London. He is a member of the international executive of Pax Christi, with special responsibility for contacts with churches in the former Soviet Union.

Freda Ross recently graduated in Religious Studies from Wolverhampton University.

Jonathan Sutton is a specialist in Russian religious philosophy and author of a book on Vladimir Solov'yev. He has organised international seminars on aspects of Russian social and political thought. He is currently conducting a research project on religious education in Eastern Europe at the University of Leeds.

Emma Watkins, a graduate in Russian and German, is a research assistant at Keston Institute.