

Atheist propaganda, Dr. Powell believes, is misconceived, misdirected and ineffective. But in order to retain credibility as a revolutionary organization the Party must be seen to be actively engaging with an enemy. To feed the myth of revolution is especially necessary in these days of post-Khrushchev stagnation and post-Stalin ideological disillusionment. Nevertheless, success in the ideological battle has eluded the atheists. A factor which has contributed to this failure, according to Dr. Powell, is the lack of Bibles and other religious texts in the USSR. As these are virtually unobtainable atheist agitators can never acquire a true understanding of their enemy. They rely on second-hand prejudiced notions and propaganda slogans. True believers remain untouched by their arguments.

PHILIP WALTERS

The Spiritual Basis of Solzhenitsyn's Creative Work (*Dukhovnye Osnovy Tvorchestva Solzhenitsyna*)

by Tatyana Lopukhina-Rodzyanko, Posev 1974, 178 pp., No price.

Solzhenitsyn's Religion

by Niels C. Nielsen Jr., Mowbrays, 1976, 164 pp., £4.95.

The Spiritual Basis of Solzhenitsyn's Creative Work is a promising subject for a book, and it will be useful to those who read Russian, but it is not likely to be translated. In modern Russian the word "spiritual" has a wider meaning than our "spirituality" and connotes morality, aesthetics and almost all intellectual effort, as well as religion. So this book is primarily about Solzhenitsyn's ethical assumptions. His concept of the *pravednik* – the just man or woman, such as Matryona – by whom a village, a country and the world itself stand, is analysed by reference to a number of characters in Solzhenitsyn's books. This is interesting and it leads naturally to a similar analysis of how he understands conscience – for which it is better to die than to lose. Finally, why do some people lose their consciences when put to the test, while other people's consciences survive every ordeal of life in concentration camps?

The *pravednik* and his or her conscience always depend on religious tradition and in Solzhenitsyn this is often a specifically religious tradition. Alyosha, the Baptist in *Ivan Denisovich*, is a central figure in this analysis, but otherwise religion plays a surprisingly small part in this book, sensitive and perceptive as it is. I should have liked, for instance, a consideration of General Samsonov's agony of prayer in *August 1914*.

Dr. Lopukhina-Rodzyanko does not touch on *The Gulag Archipelago* in her book. Presumably she had completed her text before its publication, and it would be a hopeless task to try and revize books about Solzhenitsyn as fast as he writes them. But the second volume of *Gulag* says much about religion which enriches one's understanding of Solzhenitsyn's ethical values. Yet, on balance, this book gives a pretty fair picture.

Solzhenitsyn is now a Christian believer who goes to communion, makes his confession and has shown his devotion to the Church in various practical ways, though he seems to have been a non-communicant believer for a considerable time. I have, however, heard him criticized in Russia for having a too "horizontal" approach, namely a this-worldly religion almost entirely lacking in the "vertical" or transcendental dimension of faith. On the whole this book justifies that criticism, but these things are never simple; and surely it is going too far to write about Solzhenitsyn's spiritual values without once referring to his prayer :

"How easy it is for me to live with You Lord? How easy it is for me to believe in You! When my thoughts get stuck or my mind collapses, when the cleverest people don't see further than this evening and do not know what must be done tomorrow, You send down to me clear confidence that You exist and that You will see to it that not all the ways of goodness are blocked . . ."

Mr. Nielsen's book, *Solzhenitsyn's Religion*, will be useful to those who do not read Russian, but in spite of its title it shares the limitations of Dr. Lopukhina-Rodzyanko's book, being concerned with Solzhenitsyn's ideology rather than his religion. Moreover he wastes time speculating on what Solzhenitsyn's views on various subjects might be, when there is no evidence about what they are. He has evidently read *From Under the Rubble*, but unaccountably makes no use of it to analyse Solzhenitsyn's view on religion. It is a pity that neither of these books do justice to Solzhenitsyn's later works which show his religious view more clearly and in particular the influence of *Vekhi*, the famous pre-revolutionary collection of essays.

JOHN LAWRENCE