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RELIGION, STATE & SOCIETY

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Editorial

The postcommunist transition in Eastern Europe has included the revival of right-wing political extremism and the resurfacing of racist and antisemitic ideas, and has involved efforts to rehabilitate contentious historical figures. In his article in this issue of *Religion, State & Society* Jovan Byford examines attempts in Serbia since the late 1980s to rehabilitate Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović (1880–1956), who was canonised in 2003.

In the early stages of his career Velimirović was widely known as a progressive young theologian and a liberal force within the Serbian Orthodox Church. He was a champion of ecumenical dialogue and maintained close links with Protestant churches in the UK and the United States, among whom he is still very highly regarded. However, in the 1930s his outlook underwent a fundamental transformation and was henceforth characterised by clerical nationalism and populism, including antiwesternism and antisemitism. During the communist period he was vilified as an antisemite, a traitor and a fascist.

Byford notes that the relevant 'memory-makers' today have to work in compliance with the rules that govern contemporary interethnic and interfaith relations: the post-Holocaust context makes any modern apologia for antisemitism problematic. They are also working within the context of the fact that, unlike the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, the Orthodox churches have not yet formally addressed the question of Christian antisemitism from a doctrinal or ecclesiological perspective. Byford notes that

> The presence of Christian antisemitism in the teachings of the Serbian Orthodox Church imposes significant rhetorical demands on Velimirović's followers. Justifications and denials of antisemitism must be constructed in such a way that they present the bishop's views as consistent with the prevailing secular norms of ethnic tolerance, without at the same time undermining the church's traditionalist position on the Jews.

Byford discusses their strategy for dealing with this 'ideological dilemma': renegotiating the boundaries of the term 'antisemitism' and maintaining a semantic distinction between, on the one hand, the arguably unobjectionable creed of Christian anti-Judaism – said to be rooted in the Holy Scriptures and motivated by the divine love for the Jews – and, on the other, the unacceptable ideology of secular (post-Nazi) antisemitism. He notes, however, that the boundary between the two is in fact rather porous, and that a 'purely' biblical antisemitism can be shown historically to have

provided a conducive climate for the production of more recent ideological aberrations.

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How many religious believers are there in Russia today? The usual initial response to this frequently-asked question is 'it depends what you mean by "religious believer"'. In their article in this issue of *RSS* Sergei Filatov and Roman Lunkin tackle what they call the 'figures fetish' about religious adherence. They identify four main criteria, each of which produces different answers.

The first is the ethnic principle: people of a particular nationality are said to be natural members of a particular faith. In the view of Filatov and Lunkin, the only thing that figures derived according to this principle indicate is 'the scale of the aspirations of religious activists, politicians and national leaders who proclaim the principle of "one people, one faith" and aim to make it one of the basic elements in structuring the state'.

The second criterion is that of religious self-identification, which the authors regard as producing more substantive results in that they identify 'cultural' religiosity.

> Someone who says he or she belongs to a particular religious tradition may not necessarily subscribe to its doctrines, participate in its rituals or sacraments or be a member of one of its communities. Nevertheless the very fact that a person claims this identity says something important about his or her moral, cultural and political outlook.

The third criterion is that of actual religious observance. Here the main problem is deciding 'what is the minimum level of religious observance and practice which qualifies a "believer" to count as an active and committed member of a faith'.

The fourth criterion is the number of registered religious organisations belonging to each denomination. This criterion also has its problems: 'If all religions had the same relationship to their churches, communities or parishes it would be a simple matter of arithmetic to correlate the number of practising believers with the number of registered organisations. However, this is not the case.' Moreover, 'the various religions have varying attitudes to the registration of their local organisations; and the secular authorities register some without difficulty while placing obstacles in the way of others'.

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In the summer of 2005 the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (ROC) and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) came to historic agreements marking the closing of a bitter conflict which had lasted nearly 80 years. Central to the disagreement between the two churches lay in their attitude towards the Soviet state. The ROCOR regarded any compromise with the Soviet government as anathema, while the ROC understood accommodation with the regime as essential if the church were to survive.

The immediate cause of the split between the two churches was the publication in 1927 by Metropolitan Sergi (Stragorodsky), the *de facto* head of the ROC, of his

'Declaration of Loyalty'. In her article in this issue of *RSS* Ann Shukman surveys recent scholarship on Metropolitan Sergi in an up-to-date assessment of 'this central personality in the twentieth-century history of the Orthodox Church, a bridge figure whose career spanned the old regime and the Soviet years and culminated in his election as patriarch under Stalin in 1943', and whose destiny it was to lead the ROC at a time 'when the church and all forms of organised religion were being destroyed before his eyes'.

The Soviet authorities attempted to compromise and undermine religious institutions throughout the USSR. Arguably they were least successful in Lithuania. In his article in this issue of *RSS* Arūnas Streikus uses archival material to examine how the MGB/KGB went about recruiting agents and informers among Lithuanian Catholic clergy.

The first aim was to neutralise the church leadership. Streikus shows how the Soviet authorities successfully installed Juozapas Stankevičius as effective head of the Catholic Church in Lithuania, but notes that the security services never had full confidence in him. 'In March 1949 secret microphones were installed in his office, and they revealed that Stankevičius told two people about his meetings with MGB officers, and that he often voiced antisoviet sentiments.'

The secret services also worked with ordinary priests. They paid particular attention to the only functioning seminary in Lithuania. In 1956, out of a total of about 900 priests working in Lithuania, 60 had been recruited as agents. Comparable figures for other denominations at that time were 4 agents out of 22 Lutheran clergy and 4 out of 52 Orthodox clergy. In 1970 there were over 100 recruited Catholic priests, but Streikus observes that 'this is not in fact such a large number given that virtually all priests were subjected to attempts to recruit them'.

> It is clear from various KGB notes and reports that a considerable percentage of the recruited priests were not useful: some of them avoided passing on the more important information, some deliberately passed on disinformation, and some would coordinate their reports with the individuals on whom they were to inform.

Streikus notes that much attention was devoted to shortcomings in the practice of priest recruitment at a meeting of the Lithuanian KGB leadership on 27 February 1961.

During the 1970s criticism of Soviet church policy in Lithuania was voiced ever more strongly by Catholic believers and clergy, particularly through the *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*. It was increasingly difficult for the KGB to find new collaborators among the clergy, and during the last decade of the Soviet regime the possibilities for interference in the internal life of the Catholic Church in Lithuania and control over it were substantially diminished. 'However', notes Streikus,

> the legacy of infiltration continued to cause problems for the church after the end of the Soviet regime. When a law on lustration was adopted in 1999 ... the bishops urged clergy who had collaborated with the KGB to give full details to a special commission which was set up. It is not clear, however, how many responded to this call. The archbishop of Kaunas, Sigitas Tamkevičius, the former leader of Catholic opposition to the Soviet regime in Lithuania, has expressed the opinion that priests who were formerly KGB

agents may continue their pastoral work if they did not harm anyone and have not concealed the fact of their collaboration. In his view only a small proportion of the priests who collaborated with the KGB were in a position to harm others. So far the archbishop has not seen the need to suspend any clergyman who has told him about his ties with the KGB. The other bishops have taken a similar position on this issue.

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Notes on Contributors

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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).

Jovan Byford is a lecturer in social psychology at the Department of Social Sciences, Open University. He recently completed a study on the postcommunist rehabilitation of the Serbian Orthodox Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović (1880–1956) which looked at the implications of this development for the persistence of antisemitism in Serbian Orthodox Christian culture. This project was funded by the Sassoon International Centre for the Study of Antisemitism, Hebrew University, Jerusalem. He has also published on the topics of Serbian conspiracy culture and the emergence of the Christian Right in Serbia in recent years.

Sergei Filatov was born in Moscow in 1951. He studied in the Faculty of Psychology and then the Faculty of History at Moscow University. He has worked in the Institute of Sociology and the Central Institute of Economics and Mathematics at the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and in the Institute on the USA and Canada at the Russian Academy of Sciences. From 1992 to 2002 he was director of the Sociological Centre at the Moscow Social Science Foundation. Since 1997 he has been a senior fellow of the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences. From 1990 to 1992 he directed a research project on the religious views of the Russian population for the Analytical Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Since 1994 he has been coordinating the Keston Institute research project to compile an encyclopedia on religious life throughout the Russian Federation. He is the author of over 100 articles, and the editor of several collective works, including several volumes in collaboration with Keston Institute: *Religiya i obshchestvo: ocherki religioznoi zhizni sovremennoi Rossii* (2002); *Sovremennaya religioznaya zhizn' Rossii: opyt sistematcheskogo*

opisaniya (volume 1, 2004; volume 2, 2003; volume 3, 2005); and *Atlas sovremennoi religioznoi zhizni Rossii* (volume 1, 2005).

Roman Lunkin was born in 1976. He graduated from the History Faculty of Moscow University in 1998 and in 2005 defended a doctoral dissertation on the theology and social activity of Pentecostals in Russia. As a sociologist of religion, he has been a member of the team working on the Keston Institute project to compile an encyclopedia of religious life in Russia today. As a religious journalist he has supplied material for the *Keston News Service*, television, newspapers and the internet media. He has published some 20 scholarly articles.

Ina Merdjanova is the director of the Center for Interreligious Dialogue and Conflict Prevention at the Scientific Research Department, Sofia University, Bulgaria. Her most recent major publication in English is *Religion, Nationalism, and Civil Society in Eastern Europe: the Postcommunist Palimpsest* (2002), and she is the author of books published in Bulgarian on the human person and history in contemporary Orthodox thought (2000) and on religion and politics in the Balkans (2004). Her present research is focused on Muslim communities and interreligious relations in the Balkans.

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Ann Shukman is a freelance writer and translator with a special interest in Russian church history and Orthodox spirituality.

Arūnas Streikus was born in 1973. He has a PhD in history and is a lecturer in the History Faculty at Vilnius University, Lithuania. His research interests are church history in Lithuania under the Soviet and Nazi occupations and Lithuanian culture under Soviet occupation. His book *Sovietu valdžios antibažnytinė politika Lietuvoje 1944–1990* was published in Vilnius in 2002.