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Editorial 309

Notes on Contributors 311

A Modern-Day Saint? Metropolitan Ioann and the Postsoviet Russian Orthodox Church
WENDY SLATER 313

Quantifying Religious Oppression: Russian Orthodox Church Closures and Repression of Priests 1917–41
ANNA DICKINSON 327

A Marriage of Convenience? Domestic and Foreign Policy Reasons for the 1943 Soviet Church–State 'Concordat'
ANNA DICKINSON 337

'Renegade' Monks and Cultural Conflict in Early Nineteenth-Century Russia: The Cases of I. A. Fessler and J. B. Schad
FRANKLIN A. WALKER 347

Nationalism and Religious Protest: The Case of the National Day Celebration Service Controversy in the Hong Kong Protestant Churches
SHUN-HING CHAN 359

Book Reviews 385

Volume Contents and Author Index to Volume 28, 2000

Religion, State & Society, Vol. 28, No. 4, 2000

Editorial

The political involvement of Russian Orthodox bishops and clergy and of Orthodox believers in Russian today is multifarious. In this issue of *Religion, State and Society* Andreas Umland reviews a book which provides useful data on Orthodoxy and monarchists in Russian today; he points out, however, that 'Orthodox believers ... can be found at both extremes of the political spectrum – on the liberal left and the ultranationalist right – as well as, of course, within the political centre. ...' In her article in this issue of *RSS* Wendy Slater looks at the legacy of the conservative and isolationist Metropolitan Ioann of St Petersburg, who during the first postsoviet years resolutely turned his back on Western Europe in the city where Peter the Great first flung open the window on the West 300 years ago. For all the metropolitan's enduring posthumous influence, we nevertheless need to remember that the patriarch himself forbade him to publish in the religious press and made it clear that Metropolitan Ioann did not speak for the church.

The findings of Keston Institute's project to survey religious life in all regions of the Russian Federation are continuing to confirm our impression that local traditions and contemporary circumstances produce widely differing types of social and political involvement on the part of Orthodox clergy and believers in different parts of Russia today. We published two articles on this subject in *RSS* no. 1 this year.

Belgorod is located in the 'Black Earth' belt of southern central Russia, the home of traditional peasant piety and the area where serfdom was practised most systematically in tsarist times. In the Soviet period it had the densest concentration of open and functioning churches in the Soviet Union. However, the population was thoroughly atheised and retained only a formal Orthodoxy. In this region the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in public life has become bound up with 'patriotism'. The clergy today are known for their monarchist, antidemocratic and antiwestern views. One priest, Fr Pavel Veingol'd, says that Orthodoxy has 'a great culturological significance' and that 'not one great Russian writer was an Adventist; not one great Russian painter was a Baptist'. In his view the ideal structure for the state is based on the old tsarist formula 'Orthodoxy, Autocracy and National Identity'.

In the north of Russia, bordering Finland, lies the Republic of Karelia. In Soviet times the idea was to make Karelia completely atheist: the authorities feared its proximity to Finland and traditional openness to western influence. They were largely successful in their aim and after the end of the Soviet period religious life had to be built up anew. However, friendly relations with the Finns were soon resumed and the latter began helping all denominations: Orthodox, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals. There was a large unregulated influx of Finnish Orthodox and Protestant missionaries in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The local Orthodox Bishop Manuil comes from the liberal intelligentsia and was trained under Metropolitan Nikodom (Rotov) who was a champion of ecumenical openness to other confessions. Bishop Manuil has good relations with all the Protestant denominations. In principle he is

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opposed to discrimination against religious minorities. Manuil believes in free speech, and hence does not try to gag the voice of the nationalists: 'there's room for everybody in the church'. Until 1998 the governor of the republic was a communist, and his relations with religion were cool. Bishop Manuil 'did what he could' to support the alternative candidate in the 1998 elections, the democrat Sergei Katanandov, who was successful.

In the Soviet Union the Russian Orthodox Church was institutionally undermined. The two articles by Anna Dickinson in this issue of *RSS* lucidly summarise the current state of our knowledge, based on the most recently available archival material, about the church's experiences in Soviet times. Although allowed an official existence after 1943, the church was still denied any possibility for work and witness in society until the late 1980s, and had no opportunity to work out the theological basis for a programme of social and political involvement.

The problem was compounded by the fact that since 1917 the church had been denied any possibility of cross-fertilisation with churches in other parts of the world. The article by Franklin Walker in this issue of *RSS* reminds us that periods of such cross-fertilisation between Russian Orthodoxy and other Christian traditions have alternated with periods when the Russian Orthodox Church has deliberately closed its doors to foreign influence. The decade since the end of communism has been one such period, and has continued the enforced isolation of Soviet times.

In this context, the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church which took place this August was awaited with interest. One item on the agenda was the promulgation of a preliminary social doctrine for the church: the first time the Russian Orthodox Church has attempted such a thing. Some passages in the document have received favourable comment. It warns that the state does not have the right to 'absolutise itself' or to interfere in the internal governance of the church. It also states that both the church as a whole and the individual Orthodox Christian have the right to disobey directives from the secular power when these will lead to sin. Are we justified in seeing this as an early step in an effort to break with three centuries of close identification on the part of the church with the policies of the state?

As Wendy Slater shows, there are those who are campaigning for the canonisation of Metropolitan Ioann. The Bishops' Council this August created a large number of new saints. Metropolitan Ioann was not among them. However, the new saints did include six of the 27 bishops who were imprisoned by the Bolsheviks on the Solovetsky Islands in 1926. Keston Institute has established that at least some of these were signatories of letters from Solovki arguing vigorously against moves such as those being made at the time by the patriarchal *locum tenens*, Metropolitan Sergi, to commit the church to explicit support for the new regime in Russia. However, the significance of the canonisation is still being debated. Is it the first sign of the church hierarchy distancing itself from its record of collaboration with the Soviet authorities? Or is it, as some have argued, a concession paving the way for the forthcoming canonisation of Metropolitan Sergi himself?

Nine years after the end of the USSR the Russian Orthodox Church is still to a large extent an enigma as far as its potential role in the new Russian state is concerned. Some experts believe that President Putin wants to gain the help of the church in his programme to achieve the 'modernisation' of Russia. Exactly which elements in such a programme the church will prove willing or able to supply remains a matter for considerable speculation.

November 2000 PHILIP WALTERS

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