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Book Reviews

Pravoslavnyye monarkhisty Rossii, 1988–1996 gody: Istoriya, ob"yedineniya, biografii (The Orthodox Monarchists of Russia, 1988–1996: History, Associations, Biographies) by Aleksei Alekseyevich Mukhin. Moscow: Sluzhba politicheskoi informatsii i konsul'tatsii – 'Tsentr', 1997. 153 pp.

One wishes that there might be more studies like this. Many of the recent analyses of the young Russian political parties by western and Russian scholars alike attempt no less than to explain and conceptualise the emergence and nature of the whole party spectrum. However, our knowledge of the general course of events and of particulars in Russia's emerging political scene is still so sketchy and unreliable that comprehensive interpretations or comparisons with other countries are doomed to be preliminary. Our information on such crucial issues as, for instance, the KGB's involvement in the emergence of the new parties in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the various financial sources of the numerous groupings, the real strength of the parties in the regions, or membership numbers of even some of the most important organisations is thin and often contradictory. Moreover, the terms which are used to conceptualise and classify the party spectrum (right, left, communist, conservative, fascist and so on) are sometimes ill-defined or applied inconsistently. They make the object of analysis appear even more cryptic than it is, or create a diverse spectrum of competing, sometimes irreconcilable interpretative and comparative frameworks in the field. For instance, such a crucial figure as Gennadi Zyuganov has been classified as, among others, communist and conservative, social democratic and reactionary, ultra- and internationalist, left- and right-wing, pink and red-brown, bolshevik and fascist. Scholarly statements on other political actors involve similar ambivalence.

One of the more promising strategies for making a lasting contribution to the growth of our knowledge on Russian politics would seem, then, still to be the provision of detailed descriptions of events, actors and documents. Mukhin's book is an example of how this might be done. He picks out of the many ideological currents in the programme of the parties and other groupings two easily definable, particular ideas – Orthodoxy and monarchism – and analyses how these ideas have played out in different contexts and what they imply for the overall political outlook of the relevant groupings. This makes the criterion for his selection of cases transparent, and gives his interpretation a sufficiently narrow focus to secure a dense empirical description and adequate consideration of primary and secondary sources. Area specialists or comparativists will be able to use the handbook with a clear idea of what is of concern, and without the fear of encountering yet another example of conceptual stretching or inadequately justified comparison. In other words, this type of analysis is, at the current state of research into Russian parties, valuable precisely because it confines itself to description. As such, it should remain useful for a good while.

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The introduction gives a short outline of the current state of research into contemporary Russian monarchism, and reveals that this is a surprisingly understudied subject. Chapter 1 reviews the development of the 'Orthodox-monarchist movement' in Russia and abroad from 1920 to the 1980s. Chapter 2 introduces the 'Orthodox-monarchist associations' in the political spectrum of contemporary Russia. It details the emergence of two distinct camps of legitimists – those who advocate the restoration of the Romanovs and those who advocate the election of a tsar by an All-Russian Assembly (the *soborniki*) – and introduces a few of the more prominent imposters currently claiming the Russian throne under various pretexts. Chapter 3 provides a short analysis of the behaviour and fortunes of the monarchists in the elections between 1993 and 1996. Chapter 4 analyses the organisational structures and alliances of the main Orthodox-monarchist groupings in the Russian Federation as well as in the former republics of the USSR, including various Orthodox-monarchist Cossack detachments. Chapter 5 tells the story of the discovery of the remains of the last tsar, Nicholas II, and his family in the Sverdlovsk region and the subsequent controversy. Appendix 1 introduces possible contenders for the Russian throne among the Romanovs. Appendix 2 contains short biographies of the most important activists in the 'Orthodox-monarchist movement'. Appendix 3 lists Russian periodicals with a monarchist orientation, dividing them into those oriented towards legitimism on the one hand and towards the election of a new monarch on the other.

The data are adequately structured, but Mukhin could have streamlined his material. It is unclear why he has chosen to include such a lot of information about the Romanov dynasty. Many of the particulars of the life and death of various members of the Romanov family since 1917 seem redundant in this context in that they contribute little to an understanding of contemporary Russian monarchism. Obviously the question of who would be the most likely contender for the Russian throne should the Romanovs one day be restored is of interest for an evaluation of the legitimist camp, and the quarrels between the different branches of the Romanov family over the last 80 years are a fascinating subject in themselves. However, Mukhin could have saved himself some space for more material pertinent to the main subject of the book. One aspect that Mukhin treats inadequately is the question of what adherence of this or that politician or political grouping to Orthodoxy and monarchism actually implies for this actor's politics and position within the political spectrum. With regard at least to some of the more extreme cases which Mukhin has included in his analysis, such as Dmitri Vasil'yev, Aleksandr Sterligov and others, it seems obvious that neither their professed Orthodox belief nor their monarchist statements are very relevant to their proper ideological classification. Since both Orthodox believers and monarchists can be found at both extremes of the political spectrum – on the liberal left and on the ultranationalist right – as well as, of course, within the political centre, a more extensive treatment of competing interpretations of Orthodoxy and monarchism by various Russian political forces would have been welcome.

Nevertheless, Mukhin has produced an exemplary, clearly focused collection of data and analyses on an important issue in the current Russian public debate. It should find a warm welcome among students of Russian history, politics and religious life.

ANDREAS UMLAND

Triumphs of the Spirit in Russia by Donald Nicholl. Foreword by Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997. x + 244 pp.

In these days when the political and economic news out of Russia is not encouraging, it is good to be reminded of that other, essential, dimension to Russia, the domain of Russian spiritual life and of its extraordinarily enduring popular forms. *Triumphs of the Spirit in Russia*, completed just before the author's death, casts a penetrating spotlight onto four key figures of the Russian Orthodox tradition, and, beyond them, into the still largely undocumented territory of popular piety. A final chapter gathers stories of Christian witness from the years of viciously destructive atheism. Donald Nicholl, a Catholic layman, writes with a profound empathy for his theme, while never losing those qualities of discernment, clarity and inner detachment that make this an outstanding book.

The four Russian Orthodox Christians whom Nicholl focuses on are the *starets* St Serafim of Sarov (1758–1833), the 'supramoralist' Nikolai Fedorov (1823–1903), the writer Fedor Dostoyevsky (1821–81), and the 'scientist martyr' Pavel Florensky (1882–1937).

The 50-page chapter on St Serafim must be one of the best and most comprehensive introductions to that remarkable saint available in English. St Serafim, as Nicholl points out, cannot be readily encapsulated into our normal human categories of doing, or preaching, or teaching: he was rather witness in his life to the possibility of *theosis*, of a person coming so close to God that the Holy Spirit works in and through him, at moments even visibly transfiguring him. St Serafim's extraordinary gifts of healing and of insight into people's needs bear striking witness to the fact that the ascetic way of life can lead not to a turning away from the world, but to an outpouring of the deepest compassion towards the world. This compassion extended to his innumerable visitors, to animals, and above all to his 'orphans', the sisters of the Diveyevo convent which he founded and which is flourishing today. The rejoicing that attended news of the discovery in the Museum of Atheism in Leningrad of St Serafim's relics (authenticated by the brass cross he always wore) and their return to Diveyevo in 1991 testify to the enduring significance of this most popular Russian saint.

Though Nikolai Fedorov was a highly original Russian thinker, his ideas, both in his lifetime and in many western studies of Russian thought, have been undervalued. Nicholl gives a serious and sympathetic account of his life and philosophy, showing the relevance of many of his ideas to our present human situation. High in Fedorov's scheme of values was the notion of kinship (*rodstvo*), the idea that as human beings we are parts not only of family, tribe, local community, nation, but also of universal brotherhood. Human beings are after all the only animals to care for their parents and to cherish their memory after death. But 'disrelatedness' (*nyerodstvo*) is one of the besetting evils of modern human society: like the Prodigal Son of the Gospel parable, the individual deliberately breaks the ties with family and village, and goes off to the city (called by Fedorov 'an aggregate of non-brotherliness' where each competes with the other for wealth, status and sexual glamour, and where there is no community). Such a city he describes as a 'pornocracy'. Fedorov's model for relatedness is the Holy Trinity, which presents us with the image of the perfect society. Why then has Christian Europe gone so far astray? Because, says Fedorov, of its materialism. Commerce, according to Fedorov, is a form of stealing and a way of separating oneself from the common task of society. Fedorov's thinking led him to the passionate belief that the 'common task' of humanity was not only to build

Christian, Trinitarian, society among the living, but also to show love for ancestors by working for the resurrection, for they are as much our kin as the living. It is perhaps the strangeness of this aspect of Fedorov's thought that has led many commentators to dismiss him as a crank and so to overlook the depth of his analysis of the predicament of modern society. Nicholl has done his readers a service in making us think again about this too-long-neglected Orthodox Christian social philosopher.

The chapter on Dostoyevsky draws a picture of Dostoyevsky the Orthodox Christian believer, showing how his faith deepened and changed through his life and how the great novels reflect this. Nicholl sees his life as a *podvig*, a growth towards that Christian integrity which enabled him in his last years to speak as a prophet of healing and reconciliation for Russia and for the world. *Sobornost'* and *umileniye* were the qualities which Russian spirituality could offer a world torn apart by harshness and self-aggrandisement.

The shorter chapter on Pavel Florensky portrays this exceptionally gifted scientist priest who through the years of trial held to his view of the sacredness of life and who at the end gave his life by refusing to incriminate his friends.

Nicholl explains the special quality of Russian spirituality by the fact that Russia escaped 'the wounds the human spirit suffered as a consequence of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the [French] Revolution'. Cut off from the western, Roman, world, Russia avoided also the disputatious theology of the mediaeval schools and the subsequent development of theology as an academic discipline. Russian thinkers were, Nicholl suggests, more free than their western counterparts to tackle the fundamental questions of life and death, and the mystery of the human person, with unconstrained hearts and minds. Nicholl's broadly 'Slavophile' approach enables him to look at Russian spirituality on its own terms and from within its own value-system.

Those who have read and appreciated Nicholl's charismatic little book *Holiness*, or who encountered him as professor of History at Keele or Santa Cruz, or as rector of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute near Jerusalem, may be surprised to discover that in the latter part of his life he devoted his energies to thinking profoundly about the Russian experience and its meaning for the world. The result, this book, is in its own way itself a triumph of the spirit and one that should be essential reading for everyone wanting to understand the deeper enduring currents at work in Russian religious life.

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