

## Book Review

Francis House, *Millenium of Faith: Christianity in Russia 988-1988 A.D.* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988).

Soviet Christians are confronted by issues that challenge all Christians in every place; they too are preoccupied by the central questions of how to live a Christian life under ever-changing political and social conditions, of how to be at the same time a loyal citizen and a dedicated member of the eucharistic community, of where to draw the line between church and state. (It would not be too bold to state that no others have been so strained by the tensions of faith in modernity as those who live in societies shaped by Marxist presumptions.) If Soviet believers have not yet solved the inherent dilemmas satisfactorily, neither have Roman Catholics, nor Anglicans, nor other members of reformation and radical reformation churches in their respective political contexts. Thus it is that a wide range of the faithful, scholars, social commentators, and students of Christianity have a ready common interest in becoming familiar of the story of the Church in the Soviet Union.

Francis House is an Anglican who has cultivated a studied interest in the Russian Orthodox Church for more than half a century. His style of exposition is reminiscent of that of Nicolas Zernov, an author who figures prominently in the bibliography of the work presently under consideration. To this extent *Millennium of Faith* compares well with Zernov's *The Russians and their Church*; both works intend to not only convey a straightforward historical record but generate a feeling for the contours, colors and texture of the Russian religious experience as well. Toward this end, the distinctions between lore, hagiography and history are sometimes obscured by such gloss phrases as "It is said" and "There are numerous accounts" when reporting suggestions of prophecies and healings meant to inspire and edify as much as to inform. A rigorous, high-powered scholarly exercise this book is not; on the other hand, its informality undoubtedly enhances the work's accessibility for the more generalized and less academically inclined types of readership.

In terms of critical evaluation of the church experience between the Petrine reforms and the revolution, House honors the complexity of the subject by assuming a position midway between Zernov's attenuated romanticism and the hard-edged negative appraisals of other accredited scholarship. Along the way House identifies himself as a member of a school of thought that tends to see the Church's early history as a repository of future foreshadowings; examples are seen in his comparison of the autocrats Ivan the Terrible and Stalin, and the patriarchs Joseph of the sixteenth century and Alexis of the twentieth. A lucid account of the Russian Church in the twentieth century is highlighted by interesting conjectures as the motivations behind Stalin's church policy and personality profiles of church figures who were instrumental in securing for the Church membership in the World Council of Churches. Delicate and controversial topics such as Patriarch Alexis's 1927 Declaration of Loyalty to the Soviet State are presented with proper tact and painstaking objectivity. A short synopsis of the historical relationship between the

Russian Orthodox Church and the Church of England, plus the Official Summary of the Rights and Obligations of Religious Societies (reprinted from the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate) constitute the appendix.

Although this reviewer commends House for not underestimating the historical significance of the Moscow Reform Council of 1917-1918--the Church's traditional patriarchal authority structure was therein reestablished--it is regrettable that readers were not provided with a more detailed account of the council's agenda, pertaining as it does to previously presented material treating pre-revolutionary church life. The chapters concerning nonconformist and sectarian movements throughout the history of Russia (Old Believers, Mennonites, Baptists, Evangelicals, plus the more arcane Dukobors, Stundists, and Molokans, among others) are informative in a spotty, haphazard sort of way. The placement of the first of these chapters disrupts the chronological sequence of the book as a whole. Some reports on most recent events are already in need of qualification. For example, the 1987 authorization of the import of one hundred thousand Bibles is described as an instance of the regime relaxing pressure against the church; not mentioned is the fact that the state priced these Bibles much beyond the means of the Soviet believers for whom they are intended.

In the concluding chapter entitled "The Significance of the Russian Experience," House suggests that the Church has survived, and will continue to survive, as long as it maintains its identity as the context and carrier of the believers' sense of history, patriotism, worship, and hope. The significance of the Russian experience for the religious world at large will be ascertained only after the story of this experience becomes more widely known, understood and appreciated. The above minor criticisms aside, Millennium of Faith is to be counted among the worthy first steps toward this end.

Joseph A. Loya, O.S.A.  
Villanova University, PA