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Sergeev's "The Project of the Enlightenment: Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Art" - Book Review

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Sergeev, Mikhail. *The Project of the Enlightenment: Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Art*. Moscow: Russian Philosophical Society, 2004. Reviewed by Victor Shlenkin.

In this collection of essays, written in both Russian and English, Mikhail Sergeev elaborates on the present state of religious, philosophical, and cultural affairs in Russia, comparing its situation with the current religious and philosophical situation in the West. He makes his observations and examines various issues covering the historical period of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This reviewer is not an expert in philosophy or the arts, and accordingly, this review will focus chiefly on religion and theology, where I believe I can contribute to the subject matter. The religious theme is found in the second part of the collection, while in the first part Sergeev's reflections are of a more philosophical and cultural nature. Sergeev describes his religious convictions quite openly, presenting himself as a "liberal Orthodox" (a label which I will discuss more fully below). Therefore, I should likewise admit openly that I belong to the conservative Evangelical confession, and the framework of my own theological assumptions will be obvious in my analysis of Sergeev's work.

Sergeev's own label for himself - "liberal Orthodox" - implies both the limitations and the strengths of his position, and I would like to comment on both of these. First, his work is limited because his strong commitment to Orthodoxy leads him to misunderstand and even to ignore other Christian traditions in Russia. Many among the Orthodox, not to mention the mass media, are reluctant even to admit the existence of Evangelicals in Russia. The present Council/Committee on Religious Affairs includes only three traditional religions: Orthodox (instead of simply Christians), Muslims, and Buddhists. Although Russia is (according to the Constitution) a secular state in which religions stand on equal footing, these three religions are regarded as "the most equal." This paradoxical situation in a supposedly democratic country is an essential aspect of the religious landscape in Russia, and it must be dealt with. I believe that Sergeev's lack of attention to this point is a significant weakness in his presentation. His perspective on the religious situation in post-Soviet Russia would have been greatly enriched if he had acknowledged the fact that Russian Evangelicals are a significant religious force in the Russian Federation, and thus if he had dealt with some issues that are relevant to the Evangelicals.

When Sergeev does address issues pertinent to Evangelicals, he displays a misunderstanding of the character of Protestantism in Russia. In his article "Russian Orthodoxy: Renewal or Revival?" Sergeev makes clear that by "Protestantism" he means the liberal Protestantism that has dominated Lutheran and Reformed Europe for several centuries. However, in Russia Protestantism is primarily represented in its conservative, non-conformist strand: Baptists, Pentecostals, and Adventists. (Recently there have appeared some more "mainline" Evangelical Missions such as Presbyterian, Methodist, Nazarene, Reformed, and others, but at this point these are a very small percentage of Russia's Protestants.) Because Sergeev is concerned primarily about liberal Protestantism, the issues he deals with are not always relevant to the situation in Russia. He argues that the two great stumbling blocks to Orthodox-Protestant relations are Protestantism's lack of commitment to the authority of Scripture and its rejection of the Church's oral tradition. But both of these criticisms apply to liberal Protestantism much more than to the kind of Evangelicalism found in Russia.

In the conservative Evangelical churches of Russia, the authority of Scripture is not questioned. Evangelicals engage in considerable debate about the nature of inspiration and the question of biblical inerrancy, but the issue of *Sola Scriptura* is beyond any doubt (see p. 96). Furthermore, the relationship between the Holy Scriptures and tradition occupies an important place in Evangelical theology.³ Now I should add that Russian Evangelicals rarely raise this issue directly - Russian Evangelicals do not yet have their own representative theologians due to the difficulties of studying under the Soviet regime. However, Evangelicalism as a whole does give tradition a vital role in doing theology, and the importance of tradition is becoming apparent to Russian Evangelicals as well. One can argue that tradition has an important place among Evangelicals, even if that place is not always

³See the noteworthy article dealing with this question: Alister E. McGrath, "The Importance of Tradition for Modern Evangelicalism," in Donald Lewis, ed. *Doing Theology for the People of God: Studies in Honor of J. I. Packer*, edited by 159-173 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 159-73.

recognized. The difference between Evangelical Protestantism and Orthodoxy is not that the former rejects tradition outright, as Sergeev's attention to liberal Protestantism leads him mistakenly to conclude. Instead, the difference is that for Orthodox scholars, tradition has a certain mystical sense (so the Bible, Councils, Church Fathers, etc., are not so much sources of theology as they are merely witnesses of the Holy Spirit's life in the Body of Christ); but for Evangelicals, on the other hand, tradition is primarily understood as an aid for interpreting the Scriptures. As a result, in both camps tradition is present, but it functions very differently!

Therefore, on both the question of scriptural authority and the issue of tradition, Sergeev misunderstands Protestantism by paying too much attention to its liberal variant, which is NOT the variant most commonly found in Russia. Of course, it is normal for a person to lump his "opponents" into one category, rather than seeking to enumerate various strands of thought among them. But even though this is normal, it is not appropriate in scholarly dialogue. Sergeev's lack of attention to the differences among Protestants, and especially his failure to deal with the strand of Protestantism most represented in his own country, is a significant weakness of his presentation.

If Sergeev's *Orthodoxy* hinders him from seeing clearly the true state of the religious landscape in Russia, his *liberal* Orthodoxy constitutes the great strength of this book. More specifically, it enables him to discern clearly two very different strands of Orthodox thought in Russia, which he calls "renewal" and "revival" Orthodoxy. This is quite an original approach to the situation, and Sergeev's thought here calls for extended comment.

The author speaks of Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism as "roots and fruits of the same tree." He continues:

The recognition of the latter by the former as part of itself, and acceptance of what it has given to humanity, I would call the "renewal" of the Orthodox faith, while resistance to growing with its younger sibling, the hostility toward Protestantism in its secular or religious form, I would call the "revival" of Orthodoxy. (p. 97)

Sergeev explains renewal and revival Orthodoxy further through an historical excursion into the philosophical climate in nineteenth-century Russia, speaking of two opposite movements, Westernism and Slavophilism. It is evident from the terms themselves that these movements indicate an inclination either to the West or to the East. Therefore, in Slavophilic circles there was a great deal of contempt for the idea of any contact or cooperation with the West. Sergeev refers to the words of Khomyakov, who alluded to Protestantism as a simple "degradation" of Roman Catholicism. On the other hand, Westernists such as Pyotr Chaadaev saw Catholicism as a guardian of Christian civilization and regarded the Russian political and religious course with skepticism.

At this point the author makes clear his own attitude toward renewal and revival. He concludes that if the Russian Orthodox Church chooses renewal, this will involve openness to ecumenical dialogue with Protestants and the mutual enrichment of both sides through this fellowship. On the other hand, if the Russian Orthodox Church moves toward what he calls revival, this will involve continued hostility toward Protestantism (and especially, I may add, toward Evangelicalism). In any event, "revival" will mean the failure to accommodate a democratic society or to arrange its own ecclesiastical life within that society.

Through this discussion of renewal and revival, the notion of "liberal" Orthodoxy also comes into clearer focus. Sergeev remarks that the philosophical activity of such figures as Vladimir Solov'ev in Russia was almost unnoticed and completely forgotten during the Soviet regime; and Solov'ev's followers, Fr. Sergey Bulgakov and Nicholas Berdyaev, were sharply criticized and opposed by their fellow Russian ex-patriots in France. The followers of the "liberal" trend in Orthodoxy have a great sympathy toward Protestantism and express a desire to enter into dialogue, acknowledging in Protestants the same Christian spirit that the Orthodox have. (It is worth pointing out here that Sergeev's terminology of "liberal" and "conservative" corresponds to the distinction that Donald Fairbairn draws between mature Orthodoxy and popular Orthodoxy in his book *Eastern Orthodoxy through Western Eyes*.)

Sergeev sets out his view of what liberal Orthodoxy would look like in his article, "Liberal

Orthodoxy: From Vladimir Solov'ev to Fr. Alexander Men." Adherents of this liberal trend advocate drawing a political line with regard to the separation of Church and State. The most outstanding advocate of separation between Church and State in Russia was Alexander Men, who was murdered as a result, and then became a most popular figure not only among liberal Orthodox but also among Evangelical Christians both in Russia and in the West. Here many Evangelicals find themselves having much sympathy with so-called "liberal" Orthodoxy, and if Russian Orthodoxy were to move in such a "liberal" or "renewal" direction, this development would receive a wholehearted welcome from Evangelicals. However at present the political course of the Russian Orthodox Church is far away from the position of Bulgakov or Men. Nationalistic Orthodox unions or "*bratstva*" have grown, exhibiting a tendency toward a monarchic structure in Russian politics and a general lack of interest in building a society based on equality and the rule of law. In many ways, this trend seems to be the dominant feature of modern Russian Orthodoxy, the element that constitutes its ecclesiastical inner life. In light of this actual state of affairs in the Russian Orthodox Church, the appearance and advancement of a "liberal" Orthodoxy, such as that which Sergeev advocates, would be highly desirable.

Closely tied to the "non-liberal" strand of Orthodoxy in Russia is religious nationalism, which Sergeev discusses in his short essay, "Russia and the Jews: Reflections about Metaphysical Images of Jerusalem" (pp. 40-44). Religious nationalism in Russia is most evident with regard to the Jews. Sergeev argues that Russians and Jews are both martyr-nations ("*narodni-stradaltsi*"), though their sufferings are of different natures. Whereas Jews suffered in the face of external enemies, Russians suffered at the hands of their cruel rulers. Thus, we can assume, Russians are jealous because Jews as a nation constitute a competing factor, a threat to Russia's identity as a suffering messianic people, and should consequently be removed. Sergeev points out that the idea of religious nationalism is prominent in the writings of some of the Church hierarchs. Then the author uses some biblical texts demonstrating the role of the Jews in fulfilling biblical prophecies as a way of emphasizing that Russian messianic expectations are vain. His conclusion is that Russians who step onto the new democratic stage must recognize this problem and show some sort of respect for the Jewish people, to whom Christians owe their origin. This appeal for kinder treatment of Jews by the Orthodox in Russia should also be welcomed by Evangelicals, who also encounter nationalistic opposition from the Russian Orthodox Church.

Sergeev's laudable appeal for tolerance of Jews is especially poignant in light of some recent events in Russia. Anti-Jewish spirit, always present in Russia, was shockingly expressed in the recently-issued "Document of 500": 500 people, including 20 deputies from the Duma (the Senate) signed a document demanding a ban on all Jewish organizations in Russia. Similar acts are quite common in Russia, and now they come close to defining a political policy among some religious Orthodox fundamentalists (extremists?). What is more, religious nationalism in Russia is evident in view of the newly organized "*bratstva*" which stand for the restoration of the monarchy. With events such as these in mind, it is rather unlikely that the "new democratic Russia" for which the author longs could easily change Russia's mentality or her attitude not only toward Jews, but also toward Evangelicals and others, who are considered foreigners in their own country.

In the end, Sergeev concludes that Russia (or perhaps the Russian Orthodox Church?) nowadays faces two options: the path of revival or the path of renewal. The first option, Sergeev believes, would set Russia on the path of hostility toward the West and would produce messianic forms of nationalism (or, to use a term that was coined by the Ecumenical patriarch, "philetism"). The second option would "witness the spirit of ecumenicity and interreligious dialogue, the establishment of democratic institutions, and an aspiration for universalism and the global integration of humankind" (p. 101). The author believes that the second option must prevail. However, I suggest that in view of all the current evidence from Russian society, it seems that Russia is already on the path of "revival," making its way toward religious exclusivism. It also seems that Russia is constructing a hybrid-state that combines religious ideology and some democratic elements. Some observers claim that Russia reflects a new *clerical ideology* that replaces the former Soviet one. Sergeev's optimism seems misplaced; Russia is not headed toward the "liberal Orthodoxy" he advocates.

I believe that Sergeev's book, in spite of its incompleteness and the weaknesses I have

mentioned, is of paramount importance for the study of the religious situation in Russia. The book's two major merits, I suggest, are the author's sincere desire to admit the existing diversity in Christianity today, and his acknowledgment of the need for Orthodoxy to engage in cooperation and dialogue with Protestant groups. Unfortunately, few Orthodox in Russia itself share Sergeev's desire, since the Church in Russia appears to have already chosen the path of "revivalistic" Orthodoxy. It is also unfortunate that few among the Evangelicals in Russia acknowledge the need for any cooperation and dialogue with the Orthodox. Persecution of Protestants by "revivalistic" Orthodoxy has so embittered Evangelicals that they can muster no trust of the Orthodox or even desire to take them seriously. Sergeev is right that this situation needs to change, but it is unlikely to do so unless revivalistic Orthodoxy gives way to renewal Orthodoxy on Russian soil.

Victor Shlenkin

Popescu, Alexandru, *Petre Țuțea: Between Sacrifice and Suicide*. (Aldershot, England, and Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004) 353 pp. paperback. Reviewed by Michael S. Jones.

In many countries of the Soviet bloc, imprisonment of intellectuals who were not sympathetic to Socialist ideology was widespread and even systematic. There are many great intellectual and spiritual figures who are lost to the world because of the political prisons of Soviet-block countries. Great or promising intellectuals entered these "gulags" and disappeared, died, or were broken. The stories of these lost heroes deserve to be heard. However, Petre Țuțea's is not one of them. Petre Țuțea (1902-1991) rose to greatness *because of* his gulag experience.

Țuțea was born in 1902 in a rural Romanian village. He studied law in Transylvania, earning master's and doctoral degrees, and also studied in Germany. Țuțea read widely, both within and outside of his areas of specialization. He worked as a government administrator, eventually rising to the position of Director of the Office of Economic Publications and Propaganda. During WWII he served as a Director in the Ministry of War Economy.

Țuțea began publishing articles, many of which were on political subjects, in the mid-1920's. His political views seem to have passed through several stages, and at different points in his life he seems to have sympathized with democratic ideals, Marxist thought, and right-wing nationalism. His interests prior to the installation of communism in Romania in 1948 were primarily in the fields of economics and public policy. It is perhaps his outspokenness in these areas and his positions in the governments that preceded communism that made Țuțea a target for "re-education."

Țuțea was imprisoned in facilities specially designated for the "re-education" (brainwashing) of political prisoners, including the prisons at Ocnale Mari and Aiud. His time in prison encompassed 1948 through 1953 and again from 1956 through 1964. Prison life entailed living with very little food, scarce access to other necessities, and sometimes forced labor. Re-education involved enduring severe physical and psychological abuse in addition to ideological indoctrination. The goal of re-education was conversion of the prisoners to the secular communist world-view. Converts were promoted from torture victim to torturer.

A man of education and culture, Țuțea enjoyed a certain amount of prestige and prosperity through his administrative career. The loss of these, the potentially devastating change in his personal circumstances, and the disappointment in the direction taken by his country could have crushed his spirit. Add to this the systematic brutality of a prison system designed intentionally to break the human spirit, and it would be easy to understand if Țuțea had lost his sanity or abandoned his beliefs. His response was just the opposite: loss and imprisonment drove Țuțea to profound, sustaining spirituality, and a philosophy based thereon.

Țuțea's philosophy is a synthesis of science, culture, theology, and philosophy. It is remarkably religious considering the fact that his background is in economics and government. His philosophy could perhaps be described as a Romanian Orthodox philosophical anthropology. He succeeds in using basically secular terminology and a wide array of intellectual sources to express