

Solzhenitsyn at Large

Edward E. Ericson, Jr.: *Solzhenitsyn: The Moral Vision*; Wm. B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Vladimir Lakshin: *Solzhenitsyn, Tvardovsky and 'Novy Mir'*; MIT Press; Cambridge, Massachusetts.

by John W. Cooper

When the pagan Mongols swept into Russia in the 13th century, Russian Christianity already had a three-hundred-year-old heritage rich in piety, monastic charity and missionary spirit. Instead of discouraging the faith, the Mongol conquest deepened the hold of Christianity on the Russians, who regarded the Church as the one institution truly their own, the source of Russian unity. The Church became a permanent symbol of Russian nationalism.

The modern-day tyrants of Russia seem to have confronted a similarly indomitable force in the pen of Solzhenitsyn, who calls not only his own nation, but the West as well, to recover the original Christian faith with its concomitant deabsolutizing of politics. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn has condemned the genocidal policies and totalitarian tyranny of the Soviet system. He has condemned the materialism, anthropocentric humanism and irresponsible attitude of appeasement of the West. What Solzhenitsyn seeks to retrieve is the ancient spirit of love and communal solidarity as an ideal of Christian civilization.

Such traditionalist orthodoxy inevitably comes as something of a shock to Westerners, Americans in particular. Solzhenitsyn's words have behind them the force of integrity. He does not accept the fact that humanism, democratic

capitalism and religious pluralism, though often chaotic, have brought certain rich rewards for Western civilization. He may not appreciate the diffusion of power. But he almost inevitably hits the mark in his literary, political and religious judgments. His grasp of the relationship of art and morality has thrust him into the role of prophet, a serious burden for any believer in the religion of the Cross.

Solzhenitsyn's moral vision, an interconnected theory of aesthetics, politics and faith, has been captured in Edward Ericson's *Solzhenitsyn: The Moral Vision*. Ericson, an English professor at Calvin College, uncovers the thematic unity of Solzhenitsyn's fiction: man's universal moral struggle to respond to the Truth which transcends him. He carefully sorts through the literary treasures from *One Day in the Life of Ivan Dēnisovich* to *The Gulag Archipelago* and shows how Solzhenitsyn's tales of life in a concentration camp and his descriptions of the sufferings inflicted by a centralized bureaucracy reveal the true nature of the Soviet system as well as the unquenchable will-to-power in man. Ericson draws a sharp distinction between a political and an aesthetic interpretation of the novels, showing how Solzhenitsyn's insights transcend the shifting tides of political fortune. Yet, like all Russian literati, Solzhenitsyn is revealed as a writer with a moral mission:

... From the beginning Solzhenitsyn's work was viewed through the wrong lens. A political approach does not penetrate to the heart of *One Day*. The novel is not, in its essence, about Stalin's inhumanity to man; it is about man's inhumanity to man. Stalin is not some aberration in an otherwise smooth progression of humaneness in history. The evil of the human heart is a universal theme: this is Solzhenitsyn's approach.

Ericson's hermeneutics is evident in his discussion of *Cancer Ward* and a character named Shulubin, a patient whose experiences and sufferings lead him to lament his subservience to Marxism and to regret that he had once "agreed to become a little man." Ericson disputes the view of some critics who equate Shulubin's "ethical socialism" with Solzhenitsyn's viewpoint, while showing that even Shulubin cannot concede that his refusal to bow before the state ultimately implies faith in God.

Finally, Ericson provides a thorough analysis of why the Western press persists in seeing Solzhenitsyn as a reactionary, chauvinistic, religious zealot with limited knowledge of the West. He presents Solzhenitsyn's vision as a coherent, defensible whole and dissects the persuasive and subtle tactics of the *Letter to the Soviet Leaders*, which urges a gradual tempering of authoritarianism. According to Solzhenitsyn, the millennium preceding the Bolshevik revolution revealed that Russia's "authoritarian order possessed a strong moral foundation, embryonic and rudimentary though it was—not the ideology of universal violence, but Christian Orthodoxy." Solzhenitsyn's open letter to Patriarch Pimen, the communist-appointed head of the Russian Orthodox Church, is deeply critical of the Church's accommodation to atheistic usurpers.

Solzhenitsyn the politician is the subject of another recent addition to the secondary literature. Vladimir Lakshin's *Solzhenitsyn, Tvardovsky and 'Novy Mir'*, including accompanying essays by Mary Chaffin, Linda Aldwinckle and the translator, Michael Glenny, proceeds from the premise that Solzhenitsyn's *The Oak and the Calf* is a one-sided account of the literary politics of Moscow in the early 1960's. Lakshin, the leading literary critic of *Novy Mir*, the journal which first pub-

lished *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, lashed out at Solzhenitsyn for insulting "the memory of a man who was very dear to me," Aleksandr Tvardovsky.

Tvardovsky, the talented editor who "discovered" Solzhenitsyn, died in 1971 without telling his own story. Lakshin is cut to the quick by Solzhenitsyn's "accusations and reproaches" directed at Tvardovsky. In fact, Solzhenitsyn has explained his reasons for criticizing his first publisher, how Tvardovsky "felt as though he had created me, molded me from clay." Likewise, Khrushchev had tried to use Solzhenitsyn to discredit Stalin and thereby consolidate his own power. The plan backfired. The Soviet system could not stand any internal criticism, or even honesty in a writer. By 1964 Khrushchev had been replaced and in 1974 Solzhenitsyn was exiled.

When the Moscow writers' organization voted in 1967 against the publication of Solzhenitsyn's novel, *Cancer Ward*, Tvardovsky regretfully notified him of *Novy Mir's* refusal. But when Solzhenitsyn went ahead and published it as *samizdat*, Tvardovsky felt betrayed.

Lakshin is incredulous that Solzhenitsyn could condemn the editorial board of *Novy Mir* for not having put up a "courageous resistance." He is deeply hurt by Solzhenitsyn's acerbic condescension toward Tvardovsky for refusing to stand up to the Soviet authorities. Lakshin proclaims Tvardovsky's good intentions and loyalty to ideals:

Tvardovsky did not regard his Party membership card as a meaningless scrap of cardboard. It was linked in his mind with a very genuine, honest — perhaps even hypertrophied — sense of duty. . . . The actual idea of communism as a happy state of democratic equality still ruled his mind and was an essential part of his personal ideal.

Perhaps Solzhenitsyn's treatment of Tvardovsky has been too harsh. On the other hand, it is now abundantly

clear that Tvardovsky symbolizes the antithesis of Solzhenitsyn's literary and moral independence. God will judge, as Lakshin says, who is right and who is wrong. But Lakshin's tirade, which leads him finally to accuse Solzhenitsyn of "Stalinist" hatred, is no reliable source for what actually happened or for what it meant.

Mary Chaffin contributes a biographical essay on Tvardovsky which captures the tragic spectacle of a genuine reformer who was, nevertheless, a true believer in the October Revolution. Both Solzhenitsyn and Tvardovsky challenged the monolith of Soviet reality. Both were knocked down. "Tvardovsky's predicament was the more cruel since each defeat shook his faith in the system to the core while setbacks only confirmed Solzhenitsyn in the justice of his cause." The same Tvardovsky who as a nineteen-year-old Bolshevik had denounced his father as a *kulak*, who had risen to the top echelons of the Soviet literary establishment and was deposed, expressed hurt and bitterness over his father's exile in his last major poem, "By Right of Memory." Another poem which Tvardovsky was fond of reciting, probably one which he wrote himself, captured his despairing mood:

It is as though our time's grown hollow;
What filled it once has gone,
And even what we hoped would follow
Will never now be done.
The body lives today, tomorrow;
The soul from it is gone.

Linda Aldwinckle's essay on the politics of *Novy Mir* argues the merits of the attempt to reform the Soviet system from within. She shows that it was finally Tvardovsky's and Lakshin's faith in socialism which separated them from Solzhenitsyn. Still, she herself seems to share the belief in an ideal socialism not discredited by historical experiments. The story of the struggle to discover a humane Marxism is a pathetic testimony to why the true reformers who remain loyal to the system are inevitably destroyed by it.

Perhaps Solzhenitsyn's greatest achievement lies in the fact that, like the bearded Tolstoy, he embodies some essential of the Russian spirit, of the Russian understanding of the nature and destiny of man and the traditions of the Orthodox Church. He is a resister in the lineage of those 13th-century Russian believers who resisted the Mongols and never forgot that faith and love are deeper and more real than any other human value. □

Intelligently Liberal

Cord Meyer: *Facing Reality: From World Federalism to the CIA*; Harper & Row; New York.

by Alan J. Levine

Cord Meyer was a prominent American liberal leader of the late 1940's. This memoir-history records, with exceptional clarity, his odyssey from organizing the United World Federalists

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to some of the highest positions in the Central Intelligence Agency. It also gives a fine examination of the problems of the CIA and a view of the world situation through the eyes of an especially well-qualified and sagacious observer. Perhaps one of the most interesting revelations of the book is that, for Meyer, there is no inconsistency in his career. No big alteration has ever taken place in his moral outlook or personality — a fact that will doubtless be difficult for many of those who now wear the label "liberal" to accept. He has met,

bravely and sensibly, a life of exceptional difficulty.

Cord Meyer lost his twin brother, and an eye, in the Pacific War. Not surprisingly, he was even more frantically concerned than most people about preventing another world war. Serving as an assistant to the United States delegation at the San Francisco Conference in 1945, he sensed much earlier than did most the futility of the United

efforts—Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty and secret aid to anticommunist groups in Western Europe—mostly to the moderate left. In describing his duties, he offers, incidentally, a fine brief portrait of communist infiltration methods. He sardonically notes the misrepresentation of many of these efforts, and of the CIA's outlook, when they became publicly known in the late 1960's. The New Left and its fellow-

"... self-important and often boring."

—*New York Times Book Review*

Nations. He became one of the leaders of the United World Federalists, a group aimed at forming a more effective world organization to keep the peace. Meyer's successful struggle with communist sympathizers within the United World Federalists, as well as his observation of the Soviets' aggression and obstruction, convinced him of the importance of the Soviet threat and the unlikelihood of Stalin's acceptance of the UWF program.

In 1951 Meyer joined the CIA, becoming involved in covert political-action programs. Surviving a devious smear campaign at the height of McCarthy's influence—Meyer emphasizes that Allen Dulles and the CIA stoutly defended their employees—he rose steadily. Meyer, it should be noted, regards Joe McCarthy's "lasting and significant legacy" not as any injury to American civil liberties but as a disorientation and confusion inflicted on the American intellectual community, giving many persons the impression that opposition to communism was equivalent to unjustified, paranoid hysteria. I think it would be more accurate to say that McCarthy provided many people, mostly of a later generation, a rather slim *excuse* to believe that. There is little reason to think McCarthy had that effect at the time.

During the 1950's, Meyer supervised covert efforts to counter Soviet political and propaganda efforts. He was responsible for our own propaganda

travelers, and the sensation-seekers in the mass media, were successful in obscuring from the public, and perhaps even from themselves, the actual character of the CIA's secret political efforts. As Meyer notes, "It was important to them not to allow their preferred image of the Agency as a conspiratorial group of right-wing fanatics to become blurred by the intrusion of embarrassing evidence that many of its policies were enlightened and its leaders intelligently liberal." The CIA quickly became a favorite dart board of the unintelligently liberal.

Meyer ultimately became Assistant Deputy Director for Plans. The Deputy Director for Plans actually ran the CIA's "clandestine service," its secret intelligence, counterintelligence and covert-action arm. He was in a good position to observe the Agency's decline and near downfall. One may not always agree with his loyal defense of the CIA, but he is quite successful in showing that a great majority of the charges made during the crusade against the CIA in the mid-70's were false or wildly exaggerated. In particular, the Agency's record of adherence to the law and obedience to Presidential authority was far better than most people think. As he notes, the reporting of the period was exceptionally biased and poor. For example, the CIA's mail-opening operation, which from 1953-1973 examined correspondence between American cit-

izens and the Soviet Union, was not at that time illegal. But the Justice Department's finding of this received far less publicity than the ringing public denunciations of invasions of civil liberties. As Meyer notes coolly, the mail-opening operation was actually of little value. (There is a school of thought that tends to defend the CIA's most dubious and underhanded activities as particularly essential; Meyer seems to give little comfort to this group.) He also regards with ill-concealed distaste those like William Colby who, in his view, fumbled the ball when the CIA came under fire, and those who deliberately betrayed their trust, like Philip Agee. Meyer is highly critical of the abortive assassination plots, which he maintains he knew nothing about. He bluntly dismisses assassination as beyond the pale morally; the use of the Mafia against Castro he rightly observes was "monumental folly." Actually, it does not seem to me that assassination, as morally repugnant as it is, can be dismissed quite so summarily; it is at least conceivable that an occasion might arise where the assassination of a dictator might be absolutely necessary. Meyer does not mention, however, the CIA's drug experiments on uninformed subjects, which would seem to be the most reprehensible actions committed by the Agency. Strangely, this issue hasn't interested the CIA's enemies all that much either; a good many of them seem to be more offended by plans to kill foreign tyrants than by the victimization of innocent American citizens.

Particularly interesting sections of the book are Meyer's accounts of CIA's operation in Chile and the Angolan war. In discussing Chile, Meyer provides a quite convincing defense of the *basic policy* of the CIA's covert political activities. This was begun by the Kennedy administration in 1962, and not as a sinister conspiracy against Chilean democracy. Rather the CIA, countering Soviet subsidies to Allende's coalition, supported the reform-minded Christian Democratic Party against