

ular plantings are in violation of the section of the Code. . . . Please trim the plantings.”

Now my wife and I were both furious and fighting mad. Who, we wondered, would complain about our forsythia? When they were in bloom, many people walked by to admire them. People driving down the street stopped to look. Some even took pictures of them. We began to photograph dozens of village hedges in violation, which we planned to register with the village government.

Paulette went door-to-door asking the neighbors if they felt threatened by the “killer” hedge. One did not like the hedge, saying “it looks like a jungle.” The only person my wife did not ask—because he was never home—was Rupert Brook.

After her neighborhood canvas, I walked to the Village Office and asked if the second complaint was also anonymous. It had been filed by Dr. Brook, an individual allegedly in the business of helping patients handle personal conflict. My wife left a few phone messages on the Brooks’ answering machine, but when the calls were not returned, she went directly to the Brooks’ front door to ask why the hedge was so frightening to the doctor, and further, why he would not have first discussed it with us before going to the authorities. He could not be found at home.

My wife talked to both the former and the current “tree warden” and both visited our property: both said they did not feel threatened by the forsythia. From them, we learned that a neighbor, Patrick Kelly, a member of the Village Board, had sponsored the change in the law. Paulette visited Kelly and asked why he sponsored the change. He responded, “What’s going to happen when someone gets picked off on that corner?” My wife said we had lived there with six children, plus visiting friends, that both she and I were home all the time, and there had never been so much as a dead duck (there were lots of ducks in the neighborhood) near our property.

Early in the evening of April 3, 1993, with my list of hedge violation addresses in hand, I walked to Tom Troy’s house to present the list to him. I wanted him to take immediate action, and I was prepared to tell him that after he sent me copies of letters mailed to all the violators, I would trim my hedge. His wife graciously invited me in to their home and led me into the dining room, where

Troy and two guests from England were about to have dinner.

Troy introduced me to his guests: “This is Paul Likoudis. He and his wife are two of Western New York’s leading pro-life activists, and his father, James, is an ultraconservative Catholic right-winger, the founder of *Credo*.” He was obviously prepared to continue, so I interrupted him: “I’m not here to talk about my background and my family, but to deliver a letter containing addresses of all properties in Williamsville that are in violation of the new village ordinance. We are concerned about the flagrant, life-threatening abuses that exist.”

Troy responded that the village could no longer be passive about violations, and that all violators would be brought into compliance. I responded that I could not understand why the village was so intent on harassing us for our hedges. He, perhaps a mite tipsy, replied: “It’s all a plot to get you, Mr. Likoudis, and your wife, out of Williamsville.”

Disregarding his inane comment, I explained that before we planted the hedge, we received the advice on where we could plant from village authorities, and in 1992, after receiving the first complaint, the mayor and three other authorities took measurements and determined the hedge was legal. “Why,” I asked, “did the village have to change the law?”

“The law was changed,” he affirmed again, “in a plot to get Paul and Paulette Likoudis out of Williamsville.” I continued the line of questioning, and each time he gave the same answer. “What is this, the People’s Republic of Williamsville?” I asked. He raised his wine glass. “Long live the People’s Republic of Williamsville.”

I then asked him to let me know when he had sent letters informing all violators of the hedge law to comply. He answered: “Haven’t you sold your house? Aren’t you moving out of Williamsville? You’re going to be causing a lot of difficulty for people on your way out,” to which I replied that it did not matter.

He insisted again that the law was changed specifically to “get Paul and Paulette Likoudis out of Williamsville.” “Is this the People’s Republic of China?” I asked. He again raised his wine glass and toasted: “Long live the People’s Republic of China.” “Tom,” his wife interjected, “you really shouldn’t say things like that.”

One month later, I went to the Village Board Meeting and reported the conver-

sation before the entire board. The majority defended Troy and the new policy, but one member asked the other board members why Paulette and I were not invited to the board meeting, since the law was rewritten specifically with us in mind. No one had an answer. Two months later, we shook the dust from our feet and moved from Williamsville. One year later, Troy was replaced as Village Attorney. Three years later, the hedges in front of our old house are magnificent, and the new owners, apparently, are not being harassed about the forsythia.

Paul Likoudis is news editor for the Wanderer.

RELIGION

Pravoslavophobia by James George Jatras

Item: An American of Greek origin calls a congressional office to protest United States policies in Bosnia that would place Christian Serbs at the mercy of a hostile Muslim regime. “So-called Christians,” corrects a member of the congressman’s staff, ignorant of the caller’s religion.

Item: A national opinion magazine carries on its cover a harsh caricature of Russian “nationalism” personified by three vicious bears, costumed as a peasant, a “czarist” officer, and an Orthodox bishop in liturgical vestments!

Item: In another issue of that magazine, one writer, for whom Orthodox-baiting has been a preoccupation, conjures up an “Orthodox revanche” involving Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Russia that has “drenched” Eastern Europe in “Muslim blood.” And in yet another issue of the magazine the “near genocide” of Muslims in Bosnia is cited as “virtually consecrated by the Orthodox church.”

Item: A distinguished retired American general, commenting on possible NATO expansion, states his view that (traditionally Roman Catholic) Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and, maybe, Slovakia should be rapidly admitted to the Western alliance, but (Or-

thodox) Romania and Bulgaria should *never* be allowed in—and Greece should be ejected!

Item: The Sunday magazine of a leading national newspaper depicts, in appropriate iconographic style, with the Kremlin looming in the background, a mounted Saint George as a black-shirted member of the extremist Pamyat (“Memory”) organization.

Reviewing American media coverage of a series of ethnic conflicts in Eastern Europe—Ukrainian Uniates vs. Ukrainian Orthodox, Hungarians vs. Romanians in Transylvania, Croats and Albanians vs. Serbs in the former Yugoslavia, Bulgarian Turks vs. Bulgarian Bulgarians—*St. Sophia Quarterly* editor Fr. Alexander Webster, author of *The Price of Prophecy: Orthodox Churches on Peace, Freedom, and Security*, observed in a 1990 *Washington Post* op-ed that historical complexities are invariably reduced to identification of “oppressor and victims,” with the Orthodox contenders predictably wearing the black hats. The message is clear: the Orthodox East is the home of troublemakers. “They” (Americans are told) are evidently not like “us”—and the difference is not for the better.

There is an odd consistency to slanted, snidely anti-Orthodox, Western observations of Eastern European phenomena. First, one seldom if ever sees overt, explicit condemnation of Orthodoxy as a religion or of Orthodox national cultures *as such*. (But there are those who come awfully close. Christopher Hitchens in the *Nation* has made it his specialty to pepper his commentaries with gratuitous slaps at the “Serbian fundamentalist Orthodox”—whatever that means—and the presumed victimization of Muslim Chechens and Bosnians by “a sort of neo-czarist and Christian Orthodox imperium.”) Generally, though, there is the use of images (the vicious bears, the Pamyat Saint George, the ubiquitous editorial cartoon villain labeled “the Serbs”) that drive home the notion that “the Orthodox are bad.” Or a mood is woven with seductively vague language: Romanian culture, wrote Robert D. Kaplan, author of *Balkan Ghosts*, in 1993, is “a blend of Latin sexuality and flair, Eastern Orthodox mysticism and superstition, and Byzantine intrigue.” Now, he doesn’t actually claim that “mysticism” and “superstition” are more or less the same thing, both equally “Orthodox.” Nor does he come out and say Romanians are lecherous, irra-

tional, and deceptive, but his reader will hardly miss the point. Or the broadcast media routinely and pointedly (one has to assume this *is* deliberate) match footage of Bosnian Serb officials attending church, crossing themselves, exchanging a threefold kiss, in the company of what to Western eyes must look like outlandish, if not threatening, hirsute figures wearing garish clerical robes—while the voice-over recounts the atrocities the officials are accused of having committed.

Second, it doesn’t seem to matter whether the Western observer is Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Jewish (or most likely, not religious at all, though some might identify with one creed or another). The sense of the Western “us” versus the Eastern “them” is identical. Likewise, the specific religious identity of the presumptive victimized population juxtaposed to that of the supposed Orthodox oppressor likewise seems to make little difference. Whether the conflict is with Roman Catholics or with Muslims, the Orthodox are in the wrong.

Third, to the extent that the historical dimensions of current conflicts are noted at all, any past sins committed against the Orthodox are well past the moral statute of limitations. The annexation of the Ukrainian Uniates by the Russian Orthodox Church “counts,” but the “Union” of Brest doesn’t. The last two centuries of Polish subjugation by Russia is a moral reflection on the latter, but the two centuries before that, when the shoe was on the other foot, are irrelevant. Romanian discrimination against Transylvanian Magyars (between the world wars and since 1945) is a disgrace, but Hungarian treatment of Romanians under the Habsburgs and the Arrow Cross is forgotten. Serbia’s repression of the Albanian Muslim majority in Kosovo since 1989 is roundly condemned, but the violent means employed by the Albanians under Turks, Nazis, and communists alike to *become* the majority are overlooked. The “international community” fairly cheered when the renascent fascist regime of Franjo Tudjman in Croatia, with American and German assistance, blasted their way past U.N. peacekeepers and depopulated the Serb Krajinas in the summer of 1995. But of course the Serbs “had it coming” for having had the temerity to take control of the Krajinas in the summer of 1991, on the flimsy grounds of being the majority population in the disputed areas. Conveniently

omitted from news coverage was any mention of the horrendous slaughters perpetrated against the same Krajina (and Bosnian) Serbs during World War II, or even the reminiscent expulsions of tens of thousands of Serbs from Croatia in the spring of 1991 even *before* Croatia declared its independence.

Fourth and finally, the Orthodox can be defamed with impunity. Call us names, mock our icons, ridicule our clergy, demand we be bombed, applaud our eradication—it’s all in good fun. No journalist or camera-jockey fears a lawsuit from an Orthodox Christian version of the Anti-Defamation League, much less a *fatwa* of the type placed on Salman Rushdie. Even a letter of protest to the editor of the offending publication is unlikely to be published. We are a soft target.

To what do we attribute this phenomenon? For that matter, is it a single phenomenon—more than just a combined Serbophobia, Russophobia, Hellenophobia, etc.? We might simply call it Pravoslavophobia, thus pinpointing the Orthodox religion, with its distinctive cultural stamp.

In his aforementioned *Washington Post* essay, Fr. Alexander suggested the seeming anti-Orthodox slant in media coverage “is due largely to an affinity of reporters and pundits for ‘Western’ culture, meaning Western [i.e., Protestant and Roman Catholic—or even post-Christian] Europe and often only Northwestern Europe. These cultural blinders preclude recognition of the full range of Western civilization, which includes Byzantine political and religious culture too.”

Undoubtedly, that factor—an affinity for one’s own Western experience coupled with ignorance of the separate cultural development of Orthodox Eastern Europe—is important. But there seems to be more to it than that. To start with, many of the Westerners who denigrate the Orthodox have not even the slightest idea who we are or what makes us different from the West. Even a semi-educated Westerner (and probably most Orthodox Easterners) could take a stab at explaining, say, Roman Catholicism as having something to do with the Pope of Rome and Protestantism as a Bible-based protest against papalism. But when they come to Orthodoxy, they draw a blank. They can’t really hate us, because they don’t even have any clear idea who we are. In fact, most serious

Western Christians have a fairly positive attitude toward Orthodoxy. (Protestants generally regard Orthodoxy as superior to Roman Catholicism and vice versa. We're everybody's second-favorite religion.)

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to discuss this matter, in the context of the current Balkan war, with His Grace, Bishop Atanasije (Jevtic) of Herzegovina, one of the infamous, supposedly "nationalist" bishops close to the Bosnian Serb leadership. He had come to Washington to plead his people's case to Western politicians and media, to point out that while Serbs were sinners, not angels, they were certainly not the demons our media made them out to be. In particular, he hoped to present documentary evidence of recent Croatian atrocities against the Orthodox in his diocese, mainly near the town of Medjugorje, the site both of World War II massacres and of an ongoing "Marian apparition" particularly popular among "charismatic" Roman Catholics. Naturally, no one was interested. Only atrocities committed—or said to have been committed—by Serbs have news value. (His Grace told me about little children running from him in terror in a Swiss airport when they heard he was a Serb.)

As we discussed the West's hostility to his plight, I advanced the following theory, which His Grace believed to have some merit: Yes, Pravoslavophobia does exist, but it is a prejudice in the purest sense of the word—a prejudgment based on ignorance, a bias resting on regional parochialism. This prejudice reflects the fact that we are different from Westerners, but they themselves are only vaguely aware of the nature of the difference. It is something they feel rather than think.

This requires some explanation. One of the shibboleths of contemporary Western thought is multiculturalism: an exaggerated, if condescending, affirmation of the worth of other races and nations, religions and cultures. In addressing a non-Christian, non-European civilization, a high-minded Westerner feels obligated to emphasize that their folkways are not only just as good as his but maybe even better ("They have so much to teach us!"). Indeed, in "celebrating their diversity," he may feel the need to denigrate his own social traditions, which, after all, are largely the handiwork of white, Christian, heterosexual males. However, the same enlightened Westerner does not experi-

ence the same pressures when confronting the Orthodox East as he would when speaking to or about, say, Mohawks, Zulus, Chinese, or Afghans. We Orthodox are different enough for him to feel that we are alien but not different enough for him to feel obligated to respect us.

In sum, he perceives us as warped, distorted versions of himself. When he looks at us, he sees a mangled version of his own face, which produces a vague, inarticulate sense of unease, if not revulsion. And since he can't be in the wrong—the problem must be us.

Here is perhaps the greatest irony of the East/West divide within Christendom. After all, the West was once Orthodox—while we were never Roman Catholic or Protestant. The ancient Christian kingdoms of England, France, Spain, etc., began their emergence from barbarism as *sub-Byzantine states and cultures*, displaying, of course, their own distinctive features, much as Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, etc., differ from each other. In time, history was kinder to the West, which achieved its own distinctive cultural synthesis in the High Middle Ages, while the Orthodox East was crippled first by Ottoman/Mongol conquests (often aided by the depredations of our Western brethren) and then by a host of imported Western psychoses, like socialism. Even so, it is still clear, as a historical matter, that in the area of culture no less than religion, the West is derivative of the East, not the other way around.

In the closing decade of this millennium, sensitizing the West to its anti-Orthodox prejudice should not be seen as just one more example of whining and special pleading by yet one more "aggrieved" group. In the wake of two devastating intra-Christian civil wars (World War I and II), the once globally dominant European civilization—what some still quaintly refer to as Christendom—finds itself culturally, morally, religiously, and, perhaps worst of all, demographically moribund. At the same time, the non-European world, spearheaded by a reinvigorated and militant Islam no longer cowed by Western technical and military superiority, is on the offensive. As it happens, along virtually the entire front between Christendom and Islam (from the Balkans through the Caucasus and all through central Asia to the Chinese frontier) the frontline Christian states, *all of them Orthodox*, are not only actively engaged against the Muslim advance but,

in most cases, must contend with the West's tacit or explicit support for their foes. If for no other reason than self-interest, the West should seriously think out long-term consequences of a possible collapse of the Orthodox East. The throat you help slit today may turn out to be your own.

James George Jatras writes from Arlington, Virginia. A version of this article ran in the St. Sophia Quarterly.

REGIONALISM

That Demon Weed

by Joyce L. Bennett

When I hear all the talk about tobacco, I think of my Uncle Rollins, a green-visored straw hat on his salt-and-pepper head and a two-day stubble on his seasoned farmer face. He is standing in a field or by an unpainted barn as he crumbles a yellow-brown leaf and sticks a wad of 'bacca in his mouth to chew. August mornings and fields of the University of Maryland's number 64 plants topping out with white blossoms also come to mind when I reminisce about the raising of the infamous crop. During childhood summers blessed by just the right amount of rainfall, the tobacco would be tall and heavy with exquisitely shaped leaves. Midlife reverie sometimes takes me back to the dark, cool interior of my father's own barn, a place where children would build houses out of tobacco sticks and where copperheads were inclined to hide in the fall.

Autumn on a tobacco farm is gentle and slow and belies the reality of brutal July and August labor and men working and praying for the tiniest puff of breeze blown across the peninsula from salt-water rivers. I ache when I recall the dusty September smell of the harvested plants curing and with such a remembrance can briefly visit a life antithetical to what passes for living in these times. I am but one more old fogey, I suppose, looking to the past and dreading the future, but I consider myself fortunate to be able to mourn the passing of my tide-