

BOOK REVIEWS

Return of the Near-Native

Alexander Woronzoff-Dashkoff

Echoes of a Native Land: Two Centuries of a Russian Village, by Serge Schmemmann, *New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997 350 pp.*

The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemmann, 1973-1983, trans. by Juliana Schmemmann, *Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000 351 pp.*

PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL rootlessness has been a primary source of human suffering and anxiety, especially in our modern age. The cataclysmic upheavals of the past century—including world wars, revolutions, genocide, collectivization, the Holocaust, Gulags, among many others—have added immediacy and a physical presence to an inner feeling of loss and dispossession. The existential and metaphysical aspects of this loss are eloquently rendered in the recently published works of two prominent Russian-Americans. The Rev. Dr. Alexander Schmemmann, a brilliant Russian Orthodox priest, teacher, theologian, and church historian, recorded his thoughts during the last ten years of his life, from 29 January 1973 to 1 June 1983. Written mostly in Russian, his journals were com-

plied, translated, and edited by his wife, Juliana, and appeared in print with an introduction by his son, Serge, a journalist who in 1991 received a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of Germany's reunification. A personal, intimate account of an internal quest, the *Journals* at times reveal highly private thoughts never expressed in Father Alexander's major theological works. Consciously or unconsciously, Serge in *Echoes of a Native Land* continues his father's inner search for meaning and self-definition. He describes his travels to the former estate of his mother's family in Russia; its memory lovingly preserved in his grandfather's unpublished memoirs. There, confronted by questions of ethnicity and a hyphenated identity, he seeks to recover an antecedent, a place of origin, and a "home."

Although often very different, the Schmemmanns are both gifted writers, whose quest is essentially verbal, imaginative, and literary in nature. Indeed, at times they are seemingly more at home in the texts proper than in the land of their forefathers, whether actual or imagined. But they are also uncompromising thinkers, who move beyond questions of physical displacement to a consideration of the "elsewhere"—perhaps located in the space between dream and the often devastating reality of homecoming. What finally emerges is a family chronicle that

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is at least partially defined by a legacy of exile handed down from grandfather (memoir), to father (journals), to son (travelogue). Building on the paradigm of exile and return, these texts of recovery (and discovery) suggest a pattern of repossession that engenders further loss, alienation, and spiritual exile. Nevertheless, while the pain and disillusionment of return may be a bruising experience, it is also an occasion for reconsideration, liberation, and continuity.

Unlike the grandfather, the father and son are neither exiles nor émigrés. Serge cites his father's remarks made in 1977, which were subsequently published in the March 1994 issue of the Russian journal *Novyi mir*: "Emigrant' presupposes that a person emigrated from somewhere, but I, for one, never emigrated from anywhere: I was already born an 'emigrant.' And although I have never been in Russia, I have always since I was conscious, identified myself unequivocally as Russian...." Father Alexander was born in 1921 in Estonia into a family of senior civil servants and jurists. Although of Baltic-German origin, by the time of his birth the family was both Russian Orthodox and considered itself to be Russian. The family fled to France and his childhood and youth were spent in Paris, then a major hub of the post-revolutionary Russian émigré community. Father Alexander spoke Russian, studied at Russian schools, and attended Russian Orthodox services and various social functions, often centered round the Church. Eventually, he transferred to the French lycée, pursued his studies at the Sorbonne, and later enrolled at the St. Sergius Theological Institute in Paris. A center of the Russian Orthodox diaspora, its distinguished faculty (including Father Sergei Bulgakov, among others) represented a continuation of the great tradition of Russian religious thought, especially the early twentieth-century religious renaissance. He arrived with his

family in the United States in 1951 and was appointed Professor of Liturgical Theology and Dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, New York. He was an eloquent and inspirational speaker and theologian, toiling tirelessly on behalf of Orthodoxy in America at the Seminary, with the World Council of Churches, and at major American institutions of higher learning such as Union College and Columbia University. His work was also well known among the Russian intelligentsia, largely due to his Russian language broadcasts for Radio Liberty.

In America Father Alexander found a place where he and his family could live freely and where their efforts were recognized and rewarded. "A strange and joyful feeling," he writes, "America the beautiful!" But what drew him chiefly to this country were the "America dream" and the chance to create a personal identity beyond that of a Russian or a Frenchman. Such self-creation was a liberating experience and he took great pride in the accomplishments of his family, as for example, when his wife was appointed headmistress of Spence School or when his son's pieces appeared in the press: "In the *New York Times*, almost every day, there are articles by my son, Serge. Where does he get his invincible spiritual health, his knowledge of how to be truly objective, truthful, honest?"

Serge was born in 1945 in Paris and educated in the United States. Although his parents were born outside of Russia and brought up in France, he too grew up in a Russian home. It was, by his own admission, a wondrous childhood nurtured by tales of witches, firebirds and men of might, by Russian Orthodox church services and parish schools, by old-world family mementos and faded photographs—a magical land, where the literary classics of childhood such as Jules Verne and James Fenimore Cooper were read aloud in translation, so that

Captain Nemo spoke excellent Russian and Mohicans inhabited the Urals. Fluent in Russian, in 1980 he arrived in Moscow with his wife and three children as a correspondent for the Associated Press and then for *The New York Times*. Traveling by train from Helsinki during the dead of winter, he entered what seemed to be the enchanted realm of his dreams and childhood. In time, his journey became a discovery of self, as he made every effort to visit his lost ancestral home Sergiyevskoye (renamed Koltsovo). A Russian village located on the Oka River, ninety miles south of Moscow, near the city of Kaluga, it once belonged to his mother's family, the Osorgins.

The Osorgins were members of the landed gentry, who for centuries had served Russia as officers, governors, and high government officials. Due to the imperatives of class warfare and because of their intelligence, hard work, and devotion to duty, members of the Osorgin and Schmemmann families, along with other representatives of "ideologically dangerous elements," were among the first to be persecuted. Some perished during the revolution and civil war, others were executed or disappeared in the Gulags, still others were driven from their native land to rebuild their lives in distant places. Serge writes that those who emigrated "lost their birthright, their illusions, and their bearings, as well as the spiritual and cultural heritage my grandfather called Sergiyevskoye."

In an attempt to recover and sort out the remains of his expropriated history, Serge consulted state documents, family archives, and his own memories of family stories. Ironically, as he moves closer and closer to the source of his mother's origins, he inevitably meets his father. As questions of identity and ethnicity are brought to light in Russia, they are regularly compared and contrasted to similar issues in his father's life. Describing his father, Serge also reveals himself:

"Though at home in Russian literature and culture, and more articulate in Russian than most Soviets I met, he was never an émigré consumed by the pursuit of a lost way of life."

Father Alexander wandered extensively in distant lands, including Finland and Yugoslavia, yet he never traveled to Russia or his native Estonia. A man of the present deeply involved in Church politics and fascinated by current events, he was first and foremost a seeker after God in the best tradition of Russian philosophy and literature. Entries in his journals range from workday schedules to moments of private torment and delight—his wife's battle with cancer, a grandchild's birthday, summers at his retreat in Labelle, Canada. According to Father Alexander, the meaning and purpose of the journals are to turn a mirror onto himself, to make sure he exists, and to understand better his inner doubts and feelings of rebellion: "Here I am, fifty-two years old, a priest and a theologian more than a quarter of a century—what does it all mean?"

Most of all, he gives voice to a deeply felt ambivalence shared by others who were brought up Russian, outside of Russia, and reared on the very beliefs and principles that were being systematically eradicated there. His attitude toward Russia and his own "Russianness" is shaped mostly by identification and disassociation, attraction and repulsion. When Serge is assigned to Moscow as bureau chief for the *New York Times*, Father Alexander marvels that Russia will be his son's profession and later imagines his family sitting down to eat borscht in Moscow: "Strange that they are in the same Russia that I never saw, although it determined my whole life....Maybe that's why I don't want to go to Russia as a tourist because I am afraid of losing the Russia whose sweetness was in its distance, snow, birches, etc."

Russia is largely associated with his

émigré childhood and education in France and the profound influence Russia's culture and spirit had on his intellectual and spiritual development. For instance, in a list of his favorite authors, the majority is Russian (Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Anton Chekhov, Ivan Turgenev, Alexander Pushkin) and a few are French (François Mauriac, Julien Green, André Gide, Marcel Proust). Tolstoy's top spot is not surprising, for despite many essential differences, Father Alexander's spiritual restlessness, uncompromising honesty, verbal expressiveness, analytical powers, and emphasis on the individual recall Tolstoy's fiction and journals. (And both rank influential authors!)

The Russian emigration of Father Alexander's childhood was the defining moment of his entire life, although not because the Russian community in Paris maintained strong cultural ties with its roots. Rather, it was there that he became aware of a duality that transcended ethnicity or any notions of a double, Russian/French identity: "The Christian West: it is part of my childhood and youth, when I lived a double life. On the one hand it was a worldly and very Russian émigré life; on the other, a secret, religious life." He had grown conscious of two heterogeneous worlds. One was associated with a light that was capable of transforming tangible, palpable reality—the street, his school, his home in Paris—into something completely "other."

Standing on the balcony of his house before going to church, Father Alexander is temporarily blinded by the reflection of sunlight from the window of a passing car: "All I have ever felt and learned about Holy Saturday, and through that day about the essence of Christianity; all that I have tried to write, has always been an inner need to transmit to myself and to others what bursts forth, what was illuminated and revealed to me in that moment." Further, Father Alexander ex-

plains: "That's why I love Paris, why I need it! It is because it was in Paris, in my Parisian childhood that this experience was given to me, became my being."

A vision of another world was also granted him in Paris, and it was associated with death, nightmare, and the absence of light. He describes his descent into the heart of darkness, when at the age of 14-15, after a life-threatening operation, he looks down from the balcony on the sixth floor of his house: "I felt that I was in an awesome, frightening hole. It is hard to describe: not despair, not fear, but a fearful contradiction. My home, people, life—and it is all mortal! I had never experienced such torture, nor have I since.... We must always realize that this darkness is real, that it is here, ready to engulf us, and God saves us from it." Home for Father Alexander, then, was always so much more than place, and the darkness, ugliness, lifelessness, and conventionality of Communist Russia was contrasted in his mind to the light and joy of his spiritual Home: "I woke up today in a cold fury, thinking: Why has this nightmarish power been reigning in Russia for sixty years, and why is not the world amazed, why does it not scream about it?"

Nevertheless, Father Alexander admired and understood his son's private struggle in Russia to confront, appropriate, and cast light on the nature of his own relationship to a lost patrimony: "The Russia of [Alexander] Solzhenitsyn, the Russia of Russian émigrés, etc., all of these are formulas, reductions. Serge is continually tortured by it and tries to break through to an objective truth—through myths, tremolos, exaggerations, etc. I am very much impressed to see in Serge a constant effort to be fair and conscientious with a refusal to condemn even the Soviet regime."

Serge's desire to connect with his past and to locate himself among the shadows of his ancestors was thwarted by

Soviet officials for ten long years, 1980-1990. The authorities not only impeded his search but in the press venomously attacked "this American Schmemann," a Western reporter with Russian roots, whose mother is an Osorgin, and whose father and brothers-in-law are members of the clergy. Serge's growing frustration is recorded in letters to his parents, and in his journals Father Alexander traces the process of his son's disillusionment from an initial sense that "despite everything, he feels Russian," to a "combination of despair and hope," and finally to a "fury about everything Soviet." Serge's first tour in Russia ended in 1986, without his having reached his family's estate. But in 1990, some seven years after his father's death, he was to renew his Russian odyssey.

Once again assigned to Moscow, Serge cannot quite abandon his grandfather's dream, lyrically and nostalgically preserved in the memoirs, that the family would one day return to Sergiyevskoye. Nor can he shake the sounds of a distant childhood, where evening bells would toll as his grandfather listened to his mother playing a nocturne of Chopin. Serge seems impelled by a magical incantation, the modality of a name linking person and place, past and present—the village (Sergiyevskoye), the grandfather (Sergei), and the son (Serge). On the eve of the Soviet Union's demise, as he gradually approaches his goal, he continually identifies with his grandfather, who a century earlier had journeyed home upstream by steamboat on the Oka River.

Upon arrival Serge is still charmed by the impression of old, fairy tale Russia and memories of his grandfather's lost domicile—the park and gardens, the oak and birch trees, the view opening onto the Oka River. In reality, he is thrust into the heart of Soviet starkness. The imagined never-never land of the past is now juxtaposed to the actual ever-ever land of poverty, alcoholism, political slogans,

and official characterizations of his ancestors as feudal exploiters. Gradually, with a journalist's eye to detail, he begins to ferret out an understanding of place and identity from among his own observations, family memories, village myths, and imposed Soviet ideology.

Yet so little survived, and only ruins remain of the estate from which his family was driven. The countryside is devastated, the community destroyed. The manor house was burned to the ground by peasants revolting against the imposition of communes and the appropriation of land. The village church is also gone, a victim of utopian fantasies. It was torn down in the 1950s for brick the collective farm needed to build new barns. The former parish school still stands, as does the church's gutted bell-tower, where according to village lore a "silver" bell tolled before the revolution. In the community's collective memory the bell is remembered for its material value, while for Serge it represents absence and the echoes of an inner dialogue between past dreams and present actuality, between desire and fulfillment, between faith and the violation of a sacred space: "After so much effort to find the place, I wanted to see its beauty, not the rusted machinery; I wanted to find a quaint old Russia with *izbas* (log cabins), babushkas, and Russian stoves, not to think of the endless toil that mere survival here required. I wanted to see the gutted bell-tower as a romantic ruin, not as a monument to a dictatorship that savaged every church, melting down every bell, smashing every icon."

Serge's description of a harsh and inhospitable environment is sharply contrasted to Father Alexander's understanding of home and the notion of coziness. Referred to repeatedly in the *Journals*, the Russian "*uiut*" is properly translated as coziness or comfort. However, it also has a broader meaning, which is etymologically linked to the word "hut," and in

Vladimir Dal's authoritative dictionary (1882) its primary definition is "priut" (shelter or refuge). For Father Alexander, coziness as comfort is associated both privately and publicly with an oppressive and unthinking reliance on ethnicity: "I feel like a stranger in the midst of the typical Russian 'cozy' atmosphere of the church: Russian piety, complete self-assurance, the absence of any anxiety, any doubt, any questioning." Hence, as opposed to his friend Alexander Solzhenitsyn's obsession with Russia, "For me Russia could disappear, die, and nothing would change in my fundamental vision of the world.... His [Solzhenitsyn's] treasure is Russia and only Russia; mine is the Church."

Deeply concerned about Orthodoxy, its historical development, and its role in contemporary life, Father Alexander believed that it could not be defined as a custodian of pre-revolutionary Russian culture and traditions. The Orthodox Church in the West had to be liberated from any idealized notions of Old Russia. Ethnic origin, whether Russian, Greek, or Serbian, is not the issue and may in fact be present: "Russian parish, slow pace, warm, welcome. Russian cozy atmosphere." More to the point is the experience of coziness as a shelter and refuge from exile and alienation. It is a place of beauty and revelation, which is defined by transcendence, truth, and universality.

Home is essentially a spiritual realm and a manifestation of the "elsewhere," often alluded to in Julien Green's formulation of "*Tout est ailleurs*" ("All is elsewhere"). It is revealed in those epiphanic moments of joy and light, when the visible world is transformed and illuminated with the radiance, wholeness, and harmony of spiritual apprehension. Such moments for Father Alexander do not depend on spatial considerations. They are located at a deeper, higher level of consciousness and may occur anywhere—even at the Pittsburgh airport:

"...and suddenly a feeling of complete union with everything around, as if all things around were somehow becoming softer, turning a friendly close face to me. In such moments, out of time, my whole life is gathered, focused." Still, they are mostly linked to the warmth and fullness of his communion with nature, his family, and above all his Church: "I am *at home* in the Church, although so often in doubt about churchly details. A blue window and a flowing light out of it—and an immediate contact with the joy and peace of the Holy Spirit."

Father Alexander sought to locate, sustain, and return to this flowing light, and the Church in its essence was the Light. His life and works were devoted to a vision of a Home that is a sacred space, complete, meaningful, beautiful, and seemingly more than can be expressed in words: "We have our home and God's home, the Church, and the deepest experience of the Church is that of a home." He believed that a simple, self-evident truth was revealed to him, defining him and touching on all aspects of his being. His writing and teaching were devoted to imparting it to others as faithfully, as fully, and as convincingly as possible.

For the Osorgins, Sergiyevskoye was more than just a home. The family traced its lineage back to St. Juliana and the village church containing her relics was their sacred space. St. Juliana is also the patron saint of Father Alexander's wife and Serge's mother. For Serge, any notion of the reclamation of his mother's sacred space dissolves in the face of a violated terrain where the church once stood, its very destruction reinforcing the notion of a lost home, once a family shrine, that can only be textually reconstructed. The place has been transformed, the landscape is laid to waste, the people changed, the relics perhaps lost forever.

One resident of the village remembers how the "cult paraphernalia" was taken

from the churches: "The cross was broken (probably shot out)—by the way, it was not gold, as we believed in our childhood, but thick glass." Another resident, the daughter of a former village priest, had apparently abandoned everything she was taught to hold sacred: "You know, icons, chalices, mitres," she explained. Her job was to analyze the metal content before the confiscated church treasures were melted down." Serge is beset by mixed feelings and his response to the cynicism, cupidity, alcoholism, and corruption in the village is a by-product of his own questions of identity. At first, he is overcome by feelings of association and solidarity with the people of the village: "I, too, am Russian, and feel some ridiculous (if marginal) guilt for having been spared their degradation." He even buys a wooden cabin (a hut), "to have a place in the old village that I could call home whenever I was visiting." Yet he does not feel cozy there and prefers to sleep in the old schoolhouse, nearer the linden trees and the crumbling bell-tower.

Gradually, while not abandoning his "Russianness" entirely, Serge admits to a growing rift with the community: "I was Russian enough to feel for these people, even to love them, but too foreign to tolerate their maddening fatalism and disorder." In the end, he is virtually a stranger in his "native" land, contending with the emptiness and dull silence of felled cherry orchards. His quest for re-possession has been misunderstood, and he is offered his family's sacred space—the wrack and ruin of his grandfather's dreams plus seventy-two acres—all for a million dollars.

Property deeds and mortgages have nothing to do with an inner need to reclaim lost memories and dreams. Serge's estrangement is set in sharp relief by the pain and sorrow of his forebearers, vividly brought to life in Maria Osorgin's 1923 letter recounting the family's departure from Sergiyevskoye: "I especially

remember Papa's face, and we all kept silent, and endlessly and stupidly waited for the delayed cart. At the gates of the yard and the garden was a mass of peasants, who wept and crossed themselves from a distance, but they were forbidden to come in to say goodbye, and one commissar started yelling at them rudely, something about landowners, bloodsuckers, and so forth." The separation of an individual and a native place, of self and its true home, and the realization of something left behind and perhaps lost forever, define an endlessly recurring pattern.

While evoking the internal and external perception of a paradise lost, both the Schmemmanns and Osorgins echo a universal experience endlessly repeated by the outcasts, refugees, and dispossessed of the world. Dehumanization, expulsion, and ideologically justified coercion are juxtaposed to human suffering, family loss, and a father's silent presence. In the last paragraph of his narrative, Serge, like Maria Osorgin before him, also abandons his patrimony while turning to his family and to his father: "There are no formulas to express what I owe my family. My late father remains my firmest guide."

Sadly, not every returning son is greeted by a father's command to prepare the fatted calf. Nor is he necessarily a hero, welcomed home with golden crosses or the ringing of silver bells. Father Alexander also knew the joys and pain of homecoming and leave-taking. His epiphanic moments of clarity and light depend on eschatological concerns and the pervading sense of an ending. Thus, during a visit to France, a new life in America and the opportunity to serve the Church more completely are coupled with the anxiety of departure and the memory of his father's death: "I did not know then that standing on that same street [in Paris] I would see my father for the last time in the summer of 1957—I

was leaving for New York and he looked down, waving to me from his window on the fourth floor."

Father Alexander was invariably sustained by the Church, by his home, and by the fullness of his family happiness: "The 'family' transcends any relationships; it is not the goal but the source and the strength which feeds life." Christ's injunction that, in order to follow Him, we must leave our family and possessions applies only when they become "idols." Rather, "'Leaving' one's family," he writes, "is its resurrection, its cleansing, its transfiguration, but not its annihilation...distribute, leave, all is positive, all is light and not darkness and destruction." Homecoming is the process of leaving and joining the One who is arriving, and Father Alexander's resolution to exile and rootlessness is spiritual, nonterritorial, and atemporal. Shortly before his death, in the final entry to his *Journals*, he wrote, "What happiness it has all been!"

Images of Perfection and Transcendence

MARY E. SLAYTON

The Image of Christ, by Gabriele

Finaldi; with an Introduction by Neil MacGregor and contributions by Susanna Avery-Quash, Xavier Bray, Erika Langmuir, Neil MacGregor, and Alexander Sturgis, *London: National Gallery; New Haven: Distributed by Yale University Press, 2000. 224 pp.*

IN JULY 1873 the Russian composer Modest Moussorgsky (1839?-1881), suffering from fits of depression, was struck a cruel blow when his friend Victor

Hartmann, an artist and architect, died at the age of thirty-nine. Learning that other admirers of the painter planned to exhibit his drawings and watercolors in Saint Petersburg, Moussorgsky loaned them pictures by Hartmann from his collection. When the exhibition opened in February 1874, the composer strolled through the gallery gazing at sketches the artist had drawn during a tour of Europe funded by a scholarship from the Imperial Gallery. A castle in Italy, a market in Limoges, Roman catacombs in Paris caught his eye. Deeply moved, Moussorgsky transformed his impressions of ten of Hartmann's drawings into a suite for the piano.

Moussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* profoundly affected European music and art devotees, especially in France, where it electrified the City of Lights in the summer of 1913 and captivated Claude Debussy. Ten years later, on May 3, 1923, Maurice Ravel's orchestration of the piano suite premièred triumphantly at the Concerts Koussevitzky in Paris and, three years afterwards, in Boston.

The last of Hartmann's paintings rendered into music by Moussorgsky, *The Great Gate of Kiev*, is an architectural design for a structure of great antiquity, a triumphal arch commemorating Czar Alexander II's narrow escape from assassination in a bomb incident on April 4, 1866, in Saint Petersburg. Hartmann's imaginative creation embraces a figure of the Archangel Michael, a chapel, and a liturgical text in Old Church Slavonic carved over the archway: "Blessed he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Had the insurrectionists plotting the Revolution of 1917, and all they would do after dethroning the Czar of "Holy Russia," contemplated *The Great Gate of Kiev*, or other drawings like it, as intently as did Moussorgsky, and incorporated the

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