

Staretz Amvrosy, by John Dunlop, Mowbrays, 1975, 176 pp., £1.95.

In *Staretz Amvrosy* John Dunlop has ably revealed to us one of the inner springs of Russian Orthodox spirituality of the nineteenth century. Amvrosy stands out as a "man of God" of the kind we meet in the Old Testament in Israel's prophetic days. Sir John Lawrence in his introduction describes him as having a "charismatic ministry", which fully accords with the Orthodox claim of today that the Eastern Church has never lost the dimension of the Holy Spirit, now being rediscovered in the West.

Amvrosy's intense spirituality attracted many seekers after truth and consolation, as well as crowds of curious onlookers. He did not just deal with the many practical problems people brought to him, but penetrated to the underlying spiritual cause. He counselled a mother, troubled by her children, thus :

You desire to do everything for them yourself, and there remains almost no place for the Divine providence to manifest its Divine mercy and goodness and all-powerful nourishment.

Our Western world is activist and quick to proffer solutions to the problems of the under-developed and under-privileged sectors of mankind. Amvrosy, however, emphasizes the importance of inner purification and self-knowledge leading to charity :

Everyone desires in words at least, to work for the good of his neighbours, and takes little or no care to first free himself from evil, and only then care for the welfare of his neighbours.

His counsels sound so simple – and so impossible – to carry out. He taught the need for obedience, humility and repentance, and with his special gift of spiritual insight was able to penetrate to much that lies in the heart of man. In days of inflation and questions about the nature and the future of the priesthood, listen to Amvrosy's century-old advice :

As the love of silver is the root of all evil for laymen, so for monks the root of all evil is self-love.

This book gives a glimpse into the inner life of a Russian spiritual giant who is one in a long line of *startzy* (plural of *staretz*). Thanks to such a tradition, which continues today, Christian spiritual life in many corners of the USSR is rich indeed.

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