
REVIEWS

RUSSIAN HESYCHASM: THE SPIRITUALITY OF NIL SORSKIJ. By *George A. Maloney, S.J.* Slavistic Printings and Reprintings, 269. The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1973. 302 pp. 68 Dglds.

Professor Maloney's book deserves not merely praise but immediate recognition as a most systematic and factual study of Nil Sorsky, the spiritual leader of Russian Hesychasm in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In Maloney we have a scholar who happily combines theological and historical knowledge of his subject. As a result, his book must be of great interest to readers in this field, for it gives a lucid and exact delineation of the theological doctrines of the Nonpossessors as well as exhibiting a deep understanding of Nil's works, his sources, and the true nature of his teaching.

This study aims (in part 2 especially) at analyzing the spirituality of Nil Sorsky. Maloney has achieved this with scrupulous and scholarly accuracy. The elucidation of Nil's ascetic ideals (in section 1) shows the complex nature of his internal struggle (section 2) for self-perfection, which was an important part of his teaching, and adumbrates the psychology of his thought processes. Section 2 also includes a brilliant analysis of the eight sources of passions. Section 3 contains an excellent and detailed explanation of the Hesychastic elements in Nil's views, and the author shows in section 4 how these views were carried into Nil's external practice. Section 5, on the sources of Nil's teaching, is very important, and the author's views on Nil's influence on his contemporaries (section 6) are most interesting, although possibly more could be added here.

It is abundantly clear that the author possesses an all-embracing knowledge of the prime sources of his research: Nil's writings and all of the Christian literature on which this Russian Hesychast drew for his inspiration. The book is undoubtedly an important addition to our knowledge of Russia at that time.

Section 2 of part 1, dealing with Nil's life, is excellent, and the author's description of Russian monasticism is reliable. It is, however, regrettable that in his introduction (p. 9) Maloney makes use of that "tainted" term: the "Russian soul." After Goebbels's pejorative use of "sogenannte russische Seele," my personal view is that this expression must be excluded from any scholar's vocabulary. Nor can I agree with the author's explanation of the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome (pp. 9, 200, 215, 242). He does not appear to know D. S. Likhachev's *Natsional'noe samosoznanie Drevnei Rusi* (1945), Dimitri Strémoukhoff's "Moscow and the Third Rome: Sources of the Doctrine," *Speculum*, 28, no. 1 (1953): 84–101, or my article on Filofei in the *Slavonic and East European Review*, 38, no. 90 (December 1959): 1–31, all of which attempt to elucidate the significance of this theory and the actual historical circumstances which evoked its formulation by a Pskovian monk.

Nevertheless, these minor objections do not in any way detract from the importance of this erudite and well-written work.

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