

Alexandru Popescu, *Petre Tutea: Between Sacrifice and Suicide*. Ashgate, Aldershot, 2004, 345pp., ISBN 0754635503 (hbk); 0754650065 (pbk). Review doi: 10.1558/arsr.v21i1.105.

'Without the idea of suicide it would be necessary for me to kill myself' kidded and threatened E.M. Cioran, that great master of melancholic bile.¹ Like his compatriots in the Romanian nation-in-exile, which included Eliade, it is easy to trace through their searching and restless minds that essence of *Dostoyevshina* that is the mark of the Eastern European psyche. It is a complex of thinking that can now be even more clearly understood because of Popescu's foundational work in English of the *œuvre* of Petre Tutea (pron. 'Tzutzea' [1902–1991]). Moreover, this work also provides a glimpse of what remains important for Christians in their study of other Christians. For the purposes of this review I will not detail Tutea's work in developing his ascetic theology, his death-cell ruminations on faith nor his Christian Anthropology.² I will, nevertheless, recommend these elements to those interested in East–West theological discourse. Rather, I would like to concentrate on a dark theme that haunts this work and which is germane to the contemporary *geist*.

Unlike those scholars noted above, Tutea remained at home and became a central figure in growth and development of pre-war Romania. He sought answers to his homeland's future from a huge range of possibilities that included socialism, communism, fascism, the development of economic policy, peasant movements, the creation of literature (with his own particular theory of theatre), philosophy and a growing fascination with his inherited religious tradition: Romanian Orthodoxy. The development, after World War II, of Romania's tyrannical 'peoples' dictatorship', made an enemy of Tutea. He was relentlessly and ruthlessly persecuted until the last two years of his life when he saw the deserved tearing of the Iron Curtain. Throughout his life he developed a Christianity that was solidly Orthodox in its practice but increasingly Catholic in its philosophy.³ To this extent Tutea is lauded by the (English) archbishops and canons who preface this work as a bridge between Christianities. Indeed the book is obviously dedicated to a (Western) Christian audience, or perhaps the author assumes that all audiences are inherently Western and Christian. Despite the tight theological focus, this book will still appeal to a wider audience by dint of Tutea's startling personality, tenacious mind and general legacy.

Tutea was essential to the recent history of his country partly because of his liminality. A doctor of law, he kept out of the academy yet became a profound national thinker. Never a theologian he championed the rights of the thinking and praying laity to engage in theological concerns. In 1932 we find him co-founding the Marxist journal *Stanga*.⁴ This was before his stint in Berlin (1933–34) where the importance of nationalism was strongly driven into him by various German thinkers. Upon his return we find Tutea stridently opposed to the internationalism of the communists, and in 1935 he co-authored the *Manifestul Revolutiei Nationale*, which is a shameful child of its times, a work of both Christian and fascistic intent. It reads in part:

1. E.M. Cioran, *Œuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).

2. Where, over five volumes, he attempts to demonstrate that the only rational response to the '...origin of the universe, life, and humankind...' is theism (p. 131).

3. 'Rooted in Orthodox practice and tradition, he nevertheless consistently went against the grain of his fellow Orthodox thinkers by using terms of Latin rather than Slav origin... His extensive knowledge of the Western tradition and formulation of profoundly Orthodox theology in such uncompromisingly Western terms have meant that his Orthodox "credentials" are sometimes questioned by those who, perhaps understandably, but nevertheless superficially, have a distrust of everything Western' (pp. xix-xx).

4. Cioran notes, 'Il était marxiste à l'époque; un marxiste enthousiaste, mystique' (p. 36).

The state of the Romanian Orthodox Church, of Christ and His teaching, in our country, has for centuries been dire. In the Romanian countryside sects multiply and superstition flourishes. In the towns there is indifference and blasphemy. Free thought, popular philosophical materialism, illuminist masonry, historical materialism, the irreconcilable hostility of Judaism towards the Crucified Christ, and the cultural mania of those who still maintain we would have been more cultivated had we been Catholic rather than Orthodox—all these have broken the fusion between Orthodoxy and the Romanian nation (p. 17).

The answer, the document stated, was to move from constitutional monarchy back to monarchical absolutism. And indeed this did happen a few years later with the royal dictatorship of Carol II from 1938. However, as all rabid monarchists find, although the king himself remained blameless in Tutea's eyes, forces around the king undermined this chance for an ideal Christian-totalitarian state. By this stage the Ribbentrop–Molotov agreement saw Romania increasingly divided between German and Russian influence and great tensions began to throw Romania into turmoil. It is not surprising that this led Tutea to sympathise and possibly become actively involved with the Legionaries or Iron Guard, an extreme nationalist organization. Numerous forced declarations recently released suggest that Tutea joined this organization in 1940. Tutea, however, denied that he was a member. Certainly there is enough proof at this stage of his thinking to show that he would have had a strong *affinity* with this group if nothing else. When the Legionary Rebellion took place in Romania in 1941, unlike other employees in the Ministry of Foreign Trade, Tutea was not asked to resign; rather, the junta promoted him. Popescu notes that Tutea also published articles in pro-Legionary journals while the junta remained in power.

Oliver O'Donovan,⁵ who is quoted in the publicity of the book, establishes a parallel with Bonhoeffer by suggesting that both worked at '...articulating the philosophy of Christian endurance'. Certainly the personal histories of the two men reflect similar experiences,⁶ and similar sufferings; especially when we consider the tragic second half of Tutea's life. Politically, both were elitists; however, Bonhoeffer was quick to realise that Jesus' message of love was so universal Jews were included. His attitude at this time is surprising and it helps make Bonhoeffer a clear Christian martyr. Whereas the startling differences between these two men during the 1940s leads one to wonder that if Tutea had met Bonhoeffer would he have hugged him or shot him? The question is not as easy to answer as an O'Donovan or some other Christian theologian might retrospectively assume.

It is, then, fascinating to see, after fifty years of communist persecution, how far Tutea moves away from his disturbing right-wing ideas. Popescu gives us a clear idea: '[at the end] he condemned both Communist and Legionary extremism, and died a member of the National Liberal Party' (p. 42). Tutea, however, accepts Liberalism on his own terms. It did not necessarily entail democracy. Rather,

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6. Whereas Bonhoeffer wrote some pieces of literature in prison, including a play, Tutea developed a whole theory of expository theatre entitled 'Theatre as Seminar' from this theory. Tutea only had the chance to develop two works *Bios* and *Eros*. These were staged posthumously in 1993. Cf. John Moses, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Fiction from Tegel Prison 1943–45: His Reflection on the Dark Side of Cultural Protestantism in Nazi Germany', in *The Dark Side* (ed. Hartney and McGarrity; Sydney: RLA Press, 2004), 89–98.

...he was convinced that Romania's dominant Church could develop a national sense of personal freedom within community. The self-transcendence that made solidarity possible even in prison led Tutea to maintain that individuals are equal only in the sight of God (p. 43).

We can say then that democracy is never a social necessity as far as Tutea is concerned; rather, social freedom was always something dished out by Christians who, first, define 'love' and then determine how much of it should be allocated to non-Christians. Given the way Tutea is celebrated for his ability to layer Western thinking into his own Orthodox practise, it is a great shame that the concept of democracy remains an anathema to him. Tutea comes to accept that a society *can* contain atheists, agnostics, even Jews perhaps, but their freedom remains dependant on the majority remaining unified through the ideals of a strongly nationalist Christianity: social unity can only really come from God.

This book opens with paeans of praise from Anglican Church leaders and more generally specialised theologians in Britain⁷ who focus on the many attempts of communist authorities to re-educate Tutea, a Christian who resolutely maintained faith and expressed his thoughts undaunted. Although Popescu is not wilfully obfuscating Tutea's political thoughts, it is significant that he refocuses our attention, in the concluding pages, on Tutea's suffering, which remains the central theme of the book, and obviously will become the dominant theme of his life if these Christians have their way: meditate on his endurance, do not cogitate on his warped political ideas. I too sympathise with his plight. Under the communists he suffered enormously and to a degree incomprehensible for most of us. But he is no Bonhoeffer; there are dark implications to his religious philosophy. After reading Marion Maddox's recent *God Under Howard*,⁸ it seems increasingly that Christ's Kingdom is setting itself against pluralism and democracy.

It seems in our new century that Christians will be forced to take sides: are they for a world that includes and cherishes their faith or are they for a faith that needs to subsume the world? Those who discourage the 'good news' of pluralism and democracy must be identified as the traitors to our modern human spirit, no matter their suffering, no matter the complexity of their theology. It is disappointing and disturbing that those Christians who praise Tutea do so without reservation.

I leave the last words to Cioran who provides us with a brief but remarkable key to Tutea's affection for dictatorships on earth that reflect God's centrality in the cosmos:

Tutea was not a man he was a universe... One had to recognise that his ego was a sort of absolute, and accept that this led him to speak as if he had just been elected head of state or head of the entire universe (p. vi).

Popescu has provided us with a very clear vision of Christian suffering. Reading between the lines the astute observer can also divine from this text a useful insight into the personality and thinking of an interesting category of person: the believer as traitor to the modern human project. More worrying still, one can also see the inability of other Christian commentators unequivocally to draw attention to such treason.

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7. They are: Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, The Reverend Canon Michael Bourdeaux, Founder of the Kenston Institute, Oxford, Christopher Rowland, Professor of Holy Scripture, Queen's College, Oxford, John Webster, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, Christ Church, Oxford.

8. Marion Maddox, *God Under Howard* (Allen & Unwin, 2005).