

From Evil Empire to World Christian Centre in 25 Years



We do not have to be very old to remember the Cold War, the nuclear stand-off between East and West and its threat of MAD – mutually assured destruction. I can well remember recruiting advertisements for the British Army in the 1970s, calling for young people to join it in order to fight for freedom, including the freedom to worship. The enemy clearly portrayed was the atheist Soviet Empire. Today, however, I am a Russian Orthodox priest representing a community which has bought a former British Army church for our use – disused because there are so many atheists and agnostics in the British Army that the large church was no longer required.

Thirty years on it seems that the situation of East and West has reversed. From Wednesday 11 March London double-deckers began running with an advertisement on their sides. It reads: 'There IS God. Believe! Don't worry and enjoy life!' The slogan is accompanied by a picture of domes of Russian Orthodox churches at the Trinity St Sergius Monastery just outside Moscow.

This campaign, paid for largely by Russian Television, is a response to that of an atheist campaign launched in January by the British Humanist Association, which claimed that there is no God. The new campaign has been warmly supported by His Grace Bishop Elisei and parishioners of the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of the Dormition in London. As Bishop Elisei remarked, 'Atheism brings with it disastrous results'. He reminded people that in the twentieth century Russia had to bear the brunt of those disastrous results. Perhaps in the twenty-first century the irrationalism and folly of Western atheism can only be countered by those who have had to endure the awful consequences of its import into their country. In any case, it seems that in London at least it is Russian Orthodox who are taking the lead in fighting this evil.

Fr Andrew