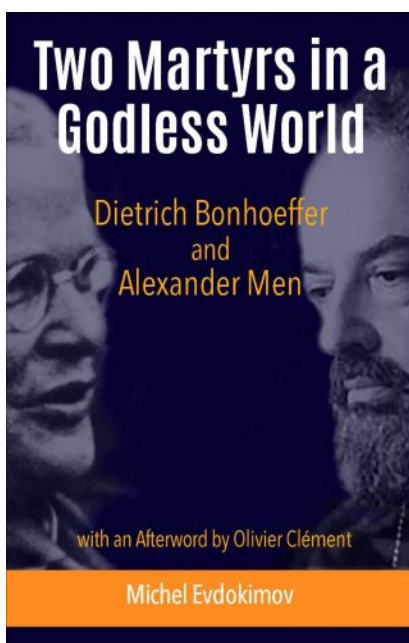


Michel Evdokimov, *Two Martyrs in a Godless World: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Alexander Men*. Translated by Jeremy N. Ingpen with an afterword by Olivier Clément. Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2021.



Reviewed by *Father Stephen Sharman, PhD*

The two texts in this book by Michel Evdokimov and Oliver Clément were written in French in 2015 as *Deux Martyres dans un Monde sans Dieu* and in 2001 as *La Mission Commune des Chrétiens dans la Ville d’Aujourd’hui* respectively and were translated into English and published by Jeremy Ingpen in 2021. Both Evdokimov (19 September 1930 to present) and Clément (17 March 1921 to 15 January 2009) are prolific Orthodox authors, teachers and theologians. Archpriest Michel was a specialist in French, English and Russian literature and taught at the University of Poitiers, France. Clément taught at St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, France. By their scholarly interests and by their lives both are well qualified to speak of the place of the Church in the modern world. Hence, Archpriest Michel can write about Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Fr Alexander Men with authority. The book testifies to the continued interest in the life and witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the growing interest in the life and witness of Alexander Men. As an example of the interest in Fr Alexander Men, we may point to an article in *Logos*, Volume 61, pages 87 to 100, by Robert Wild, “Alexander Men and the Russian Religious Renaissance within Russia.”

Evdokimov's book has four parts, an introduction, a study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a study of Alexander Men and a postscript. Clément's essay supplies an Afterword. Evdokimov gives his readers a short biography of each of the martyrs and a discussion of some of the important themes in their writings. For Bonhoeffer, he writes about secularization, the solidarity of the church, God and living in community. For Men, he writes about the Church in Russia, the human person, atheism and the future of Christianity. These few themes do not exhaust all that can be said about each man but they provide a brilliant introduction for further study.

Both martyrs lived under the harsh totalitarian regimes of Nazi Germany and communist Russia. The logic of both regimes required that state and party enjoy total control of the lives of the people subject to their rule. This put in peril anyone who did not subject himself to the regime whether Lutheran Christians in Germany or Orthodox Christians in Russia. Hence, much of the two martyrs' work involved a critique of the regime. Ultimately both died as the result of their views, one on the gallows in Germany in 1945, and the other murdered in Russia in 1990. One died only weeks before the end of the Second World War and the other as Gorbachev's reforms were loosening the communist grip on power. Both lived with the knowledge that their views did not always endear them to the leaders of their churches, Lutherans in Germany and Orthodox in Russia. Orthodox bishops in the USSR knew too well the perils of Stalin's purges, the harsh realities of Labour camps and the continuing repression of the Church during Khrushchev's time in office. Not every one might dare to say to a Soviet official, as Archbishop Michael Ramsey did, "you are lying, man, you are lying" (Owen Chadwick, *Michael Ramsey: A Life* (Oxford Clarendon Press 1990) page 301). Their Bishops were inclined to be more careful. A Russian Bishop who had experienced the rigours of Soviet labour camps said to a Synod of Bishops: "Forgive me ... but when the moment to speak came, I felt I simply did not have the strength left to face any more torture" (Gillian Crow, *This Holy Man: Impressions of Metropolitan Anthony* (Crestwood, New York St Vladimir's Seminary Press 2005) page 131). His brother bishops understood. That is the world in which Fr Alexander lived and worked. He had experienced the difficulties which his Jewish ancestry and Christian faith caused for him yet he was not afraid to speak and his courage

cost him his life. Bonhoeffer had been equally courageous in his views of the Nazi party and he too paid for his courage with his life.

In an important analysis of the views of the two martyrs, Evdokimov explains how Christians of this generation can cope with the world in which we live. He deals with the secularization, which is so much a part of this century and is considered by many to be a serious challenge to the Church's survival. Bonhoeffer wrote about the God, Who is found in this world which we know, Who is "the weak and powerless God" Who dies on the Cross for our salvation (pages 62-64). This is the God, Who is unaffected by secularization. Men wrote that "Christianity is only just beginning," and still has a future (pages 116-128). The two writers express a calm confidence and faith in God even in the midst of the tribulations of this world. Evdokimov writes "Father Alexander would say that the triumph of Christianity was the triumph of the Church, the triumph of the gathering of Christians around the person of Christ" (p. 91). This provides us with hope. If Christianity can survive the Nazi regime in Germany and the Bolshevik regime in the USSR, it will, with God's help, survive the secularism of our age. Christians suffered under both regimes yet Christianity survived. The price in human lives was high as the Communists tried to destroy the faith yet Christianity survived. God is good!

About the reviewer: Father Stephen Sharman is a priest at St. Nicholas parish in Narol, Manitoba. He received his PhD from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in 2013. The title of his dissertation was *Visions of Light in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*.