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# Breakthrough to Modernity, Apologia for Traditionalism: the Russian Orthodox View of Society and Culture in Comparative Perspective

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## Introduction

This paper will explore the fundamental views of Russian Orthodox Christianity on the contemporary world and its own place in it, and will then inscribe these views within a broad narrative of western thought of recent centuries. I proceed from an assumption that the main objective in western religious thought over the last three centuries was the construction of subtle bridges and continuities linking 'this world' with the transcendental, identifying as its central concern man's relationship to 'this world', and further associating 'this world' with new epistemological fields of 'culture' and 'society'. Russian religious thought was definitely a part of this process. Thus my purpose here is to approach the issue of where Russian Orthodoxy stands today in its vision of the whole complex of world/culture/society.

The main source for this study is a document produced by the Russian Orthodox Church, the *Foundations for a Social Concept* (FSC), officially adopted by the Bishops' Council of 2000.<sup>1</sup> The word 'social' in this document covers a variety of socio-cultural phenomena, encompassing a whole range of issues from state and law to culture to bioethics to secularism. The very fact of formulating these objects of theological quest as an official authoritative endeavour is unprecedented in Eastern Christianity; the document can be seen as the first official, though indirect, response to independent theological modernism in the Christian East, to mainstream trends in western culture, and to (post)modernity as a whole.

While drawing a comparative background for the ideas vocalised by the FSC, I chose as a main point of reference another official and authoritative document – the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) (Catechism, 1997). This text is far larger than the Russian text and by definition cannot be seen as a direct counterpart to it. The Russian document under study can be compared to it only in what both of them say about social/cultural topics, which is just a small part of the Catholic Catechism.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, I chose to compare these two documents of different genre and scale because no other authoritative Orthodox Christian catechism addresses most of the topics that interest me in this paper.<sup>3</sup>

This question of genre is significant in itself. In the FSC, the theological foundations of a social vision are singled out in the first, relatively short chapter. Although each of the subsequent chapters contains some elements of theological argument, the

first chapter serves as a theological prolegomena for the rest of the document, while all other issues are classified and addressed on the basis of their own logic, rather than congruently included in a broader theological framework.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, the social vision of the Catholic Church, as seen in the CCC, is interwoven into its dogmatic body, which is thoroughly systematised around traditional theological paradigms: the members of the Profession of Faith (the *Apostolicum* and the Nicene Creed), the seven Holy Sacraments, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. In fact the social teaching is scattered across the text of the Catechism and subordinated to its ultimate logic.<sup>5</sup> The social issues are 'digested' by Catholic tradition and fully integrated into the *summa theologica*. The Russian document is a separate, novel item of thought, correlating only roughly with the body dogmatic. In this sense the FSC is conceptually and stylistically still quite alien to the whole body dogmatic, which has not officially changed since the time of Metropolitan Filaret (Drozdov's) Large Catechism (Filaret, 1823). The very autonomy of 'social teaching' in Russian Orthodoxy thus reflects the general structure of the established theology and can be explained with good reason by the inherent 'antitheological' disposition of Orthodox spirituality, or rather by its specific theological tenor, with its apophatic disposition.<sup>6</sup> At any rate, this specific autonomy of social teaching has at least two important consequences: it gives this teaching more freedom of interpretation, but makes it theologically less grounded and authoritative.

Here are the questions to be addressed in this paper: What are the major trends in Russian thought as reflected and interpreted in this relatively brief but ideologically suggestive text? How does this tilt toward modern thinking correlate with the evolution of eastern Christian and western religious thought of the last few centuries? What does the Russian Church perceive as its major contemporary challenge and how does it respond? Where can this response be placed on the innovation-conservatism scale?<sup>7</sup>

### Vision of the World

The main theological motive of the whole document is, in my view, the justification of the world as a legitimate object of the church's specific activities. Several major postulates are formulated to meet this goal. The classical thesis of two natures, divine and human, operating in the church provides the main starting point and a rationale for the interaction of the church and the world/culture/society.

The Church is a divine-human organism ... . The Church relates to the world through her human, created nature. However, she interacts with it not as a purely earthly organism but in all her mysterious fullness. It is the divine-human nature of the Church that makes possible the grace-giving transformation and purification of the world accomplished in history in the creative co-work, 'synergy', of the members and the Head of the church body. (I.2)<sup>8</sup>

Through 'synergy' (from the Greek *synergos*, working together), God relates to the church, and through it, to the world.<sup>9</sup> Another passage reads: 'In the Church the creation is deified and God's original design for the world and man is fulfilled by the power of the Holy Spirit' (I.1). To relate to the world, the church goes through the 'process of historical *kenosis* fulfilling her redemptive mission'.<sup>10</sup> Further, the church is called to imitate Christ, and at the same time to serve Him, by serving 'the hungry, homeless, sick, and prisoners', by fulfilling the commandment of compassion

expressed by the parable of the merciful Samaritan (I.2). And then comes another crucial thesis: 'Christ calls upon His disciples not to shun the world, but to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world".' (ibid.)

The next link is a well-known idea that goes back to the letters of St Peter and St Paul: the recognition of the variety of men's gifts, and hence the variety of forms of service of God, can work as a general basis of religious legitimation of society in all its diversity. It also serves for distinguishing and fully acknowledging the equality between three main church-related social categories: the clergy, the monks and the laity (I.3). The church calls its members to participate in social life, in accordance with what Jesus, in his High Priestly Prayer, said about his disciples: 'I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from evil. ... As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world' (John 17:15, 18).

There then follows another programmatic passage:

It is inadmissible to shun the surrounding world in a Manichean way. Christian participation in it should be based on the awareness that the world, society, and state are objects of God's love, for they are to be transformed and purified on the principles of God-commanded love. The Christian should view the world and society in the light of his ultimate destiny, in the eschatological light of the Kingdom of God. (I.3)

The church, with its mission 'to save the world', is called to interact with the state ('even if it is not Christian'), associations and individuals ('even if they do not identify themselves with Christianity'), 'without setting herself the direct task to have all converted to Orthodoxy', but with the hope of restoring piety, peace and well-being as prerequisites for the ultimate task of salvation (I.4).

It looks as if the principal purpose of the whole chapter is to create a theological basis for a world-affirming strategy, and to articulate a repudiation of a world-rejecting strategy. This is done with a clear polemical overtone: twice a position 'to shun' the world is emphatically repudiated, as if the text were aimed (as it really was, at least partly) at ultra-conservative 'black clergy' from powerful monasteries and at some priests who maintain a clearly world-rejecting stance.<sup>11</sup> The concepts of kenosis, synergy, variety of gifts and services, and God's compassionate love toward the weak (and the latter can certainly apply to the whole society of sinners) aim at one basic objective: theologically to elevate the world/society and the church's social involvement.

There is a temptation to deconstruct this conclusion by simply ascribing it to the political ambitions of the current church leadership, which would be partly true, but only superficially true, because as a matter of fact this issue of involvement has been a perennial and fundamental dilemma in all Christian churches. The controversy of involvement in Russia dates from the fifteenth century, with Iosif of Volokolamsk's ecclesiastical strategy of social service opposed to the principled a-sociality put forward by the trans-Volga 'Non-Possessors' (a controversy not completely dissimilar to that between Conventuals and Spirituals in the Franciscan order). Iosif, in this sense, was certainly a predecessor of Metropolitan Kirill in formulating a strategy of involvement.<sup>12</sup> The controversy came to the fore during several critical moments of Russia's history, and in an especially dramatic way during the church reforms of the 1860s (with their ambiguous results) (Rimsky, 1999, pp. 270ff., 564ff.) and in the Renovationist movements of 1905 (the Group of 32) and 1922, which revealed, as a rule, the deep tension between white (parochial) and black (monastic) clergy.<sup>13</sup> The

Local Council (*Pomestny Sobor*) of 1917–18 was a powerful example of the church's exposure to society at large.<sup>14</sup> Theoretically, the message of world-affirmation and world-involvement was certainly not new, and the theology of Fedor Bukharev (in the mid-nineteenth century) was followed by several works by Orthodox philosophers (Vladimir Solov'yev and Sergei Bulgakov, among others) who worked in the same direction.<sup>15</sup> Practically, the most immediate influence was certainly that of Nikodim Rotov, the powerful metropolitan of Leningrad and Novgorod between 1963 and 1978 and the teacher of Kirill.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless the text we are studying here is the first official document of an Eastern Orthodox Church that responds to all these trends and apparently assumes a pro-world stance.<sup>17</sup>

The assertion of this pro-world strategy seems to be indispensable in every respect, both theologically and pragmatically. In asserting it, however, the authors seem to struggle with themselves, trying to reconcile contradictory impulses and to overcome ruptures within the ecclesiastical community, which was for so long deprived of any experience of free expression. The document forcefully attempts to break away from a number of frustrations: the inexperience inherited from the ghetto-type isolation of the church; a certain complex of guilt for institutional servility (in the Soviet Union); a challenging vertigo resulting from instantly acquired freedom and weighty moral authority; and the threat of marginality in a new realm of sweeping secularism (since the end of the Soviet Union).

The traces of this inner quandary are quite palpable in the text of the FSC.<sup>18</sup> The pro-world stance, affirmed in the beginning, is constantly questioned through the rest of the text. It is surprising, with the kind of premise we have just discussed, how dominant and overwhelming, throughout the entirety of the document, is the theme of the *degradation of the world*, and more specifically, of the *contemporary social world*. Mass apostasy is seen as the ultimate root of increasing social disorders: demographic crisis, family breakdown, multiplication of sins in the 'industry of vices', moral degradation manifest in the rise of abortions and drug abuse, dangers of technological interference, catastrophic ecological distortion produced by 'modern civilization' (III.6; XI.4; VI.5; XII.2; XI.6; XII.4; XIII.1) – and all this is exacerbated by the 'spiritual void, the lack of meaning of life, the erosion of moral guidelines' (XI.6). In some cases, the very language of the document induces apocalyptic overtones. The world/society that the church is intending to deal with is profoundly damaged and indeed inimical: in this sense the text retains a classical Christian prophetic tone that has largely withered in western discourse.

Indeed, this sort of controversy seems to have become outdated in the West. The relation of Christianity to modern society has been strategically, if not practically, redefined after the long journey started by the 'new Christianity' of Saint-Simon and his followers in nineteenth-century Europe, by Horace Bushnell, by early Unitarians and by the later liberal Protestantism of late-nineteenth-century 'gilded age' America, which poured out into the Social Gospel movement. In Roman Catholicism the social involvement of the church does not need much justification because of the breakthrough accomplished by Pope Leo XIII in his *Rerum novarum* (in 1891 this was still an area of 'new things' for Rome, as the title of the document clearly suggests) and the 'social doctrine' elaborated by his successors; the problem for the Catholic Church in the twentieth century was rather to delineate the *limits* of this involvement.<sup>19</sup> In Protestantism, strictly speaking, any special 'social doctrine' of the church would seem superfluous, for Protestants tend to assume that 'the Church does not *have*, but *is*, social ethic'.<sup>20</sup>

Western churches went through a very complex and profound theological journey

in order to be able finally to comprehend and totally absorb this social openness. Let us compare the results of this journey with what we have seen as the Orthodox Christians attempt to catch up.

In Protestantism there was a growing focus on 'humanity' after Schleiermacher postulated a decisive turn to the inner self, and it continued with an emphasis on human experience (manifest in the experiential approach of William James and 'empirical theology') and on the historicity of Christianity (beginning with Hegel's view of the human world as essential for God's self-realisation, or Ernst Troeltsch's idea of the figure of Christ as conceivable only through the whole (human) history of 'tradition'). The powerful and deep antiliberal revolt by Karl Barth, with his view of God as 'wholly other', was strongly counterweighted by Emil Brunner's concept of 'divine-human encounter', by Friedrich Gogarten's idea of 'divine intention' to grant the world to men (which became the basis for a passionate affirmation of secular culture in Harvey Cox's *The Secular City*), and by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's conception of the radical 'worldliness' of Christian experience ('belonging wholly to Christ [means to] stand at the same time wholly in the world') (Livingston *et al.*, 2000, pp. 6–7, 26–9, 34–47, 80, 86–93, 122). In fact, even the 'antiliberal' (in the narrow theological sense) elements in the thought of Barth, Bonhoeffer, Protestant existentialists and Reinhold Niebuhr were driven by an overall concern about human autonomy in the world, and consequently by their incontestable affirmation of the social realm.<sup>21</sup> There were, it is true, in Protestantism powerful streams of conservative evangelicalism, fundamentalism and Pentecostalism, which were less influential theologically but which defined, at times, the background moods of premillenianism and antimodernism; however, the evolution of all these three 'movements' in the twentieth century, each in its own way, made them a major part of a complex general landscape that they, nevertheless, did not define.

The Catholic theology of the twentieth century was, *in toto*, a complex response to neoscholastic dogmatism as established in the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879), the Code of Canon Law (1917), and the *Antimodernism Oath* (1917); it was an overcoming of the stubborn emphasis on the clear and inexorable distinction between nature and grace, nature and the supernatural, a response to the strong priority of 'angelic' Thomistic rationality over the Romantic (and partly Modernist) accent on emotions and experience (Livingston *et al.*, 2000, pp. 197–99). *La Nouvelle Théologie* of Henri de Lubac (1896–1991), through an Augustinian interpretation of Aquinas and a 'postcritical' approach to the Bible, marked a trend to revive 'the sense of the sacred' by extolling the dynamic aspiration of human intellect and human spirit toward God, and thus the 'restoration' (as de Lubac saw it) of a dynamic continuum, rather than a deep divide, between man and God (nature and supernatural).<sup>22</sup> Karl Rahner (1904–84) completed this turn by incorporating Heidegger's Existentialism, in order to create a theology of correlation (of human and divine), and especially by introducing the Heideggerian notion of *Vorgriff* (preapprehension) (of God), which according to Rahner is an innate faculty of humanness and a condition *sine qua non* of revelation (an 'implicit religiousness' of all human beings); thus, nature and grace become once again united.<sup>23</sup> These and other similar developments in Roman Catholicism have influenced the Roman *magisterium* and the theological constitution of the Second Vatican Council in its entirety. These ideas are very close in their intonation to the humanisation impulses of Russian religious writers such as Bukharev, Bulgakov and Meyendorff and also quite congruent with what we have seen in the theological clauses of the BSC (although the terms 'synergy' and 'kenosis' are not used in Catholic arguments).<sup>24</sup> However, this trend seems to be more funda-

mentally implanted in Catholic thought. It would be erroneous to reckon that the modern Catholic vision embraces the liberal worldview or even the Enlightenment paradigm in their entirety: such full embracement would simply mean the elimination of Christian identity, and many post-Second Vatican Council documents, including the encyclicals of John Paul II, contain strong criticism of postchristian humanism; but Catholic thought firmly upholds the assumption that the Christian *nature* of the world prevails.

This assumption is buttressed by the understanding of *creation* – perhaps the central notion in the Catholic Catechism. ‘God creates by wisdom and love’ (CCC, 295);<sup>25</sup> he ‘creates the visible world in all its richness, diversity, and order’ (337). In many places, therefore, the text extols the ‘beauty of the universe’ (341), the ‘goodness and perfection of all creatures’ (339), and the domination of good over evil in the world (412). The idea of creation works as a key concept that makes the world good *ex definitio*. There is also stress on man’s being created in God’s own image (Gen. 1:27) (355), and thus man belongs to nature and shares its initial goodness. ‘Laws of nature’ that govern the world are in no way opposed to God; as the thesis of creation suggests, they *are* God’s laws. The created world is also *ordered*, and the idea of the ‘orders of creation’ (also adopted in Protestantism since Luther’s time) is used to embrace the totality of the natural world. The idea of original sin seems to be attenuated in post-Second Vatican Council documents: although ‘sins put the world as a whole in sinful conditions’ (408), God did not prevent the first men from sinning because, as Thomas Aquinas wrote, ‘God permits evil in order to draw forth some greater good’ (412); in another place (in the chapter on marriage) it is said that ‘the disorder we notice so painfully does not stem from the *nature* of man and woman, nor from the nature of their relations, but from *sin*’ (italics in original); and then, ‘nevertheless, the order of creation persists, though seriously disturbed’ (1607–8). Thus sin is clearly juxtaposed to nature; the sources of sin are outside nature, so the ordered natural world, although damaged, can be considered inherently positive. In this positively ordered world, man is ‘entrusted with the responsibility’ to dominate; God ‘enables men to be intelligent and free in order to complete the work of creation, to perfect its harmony. ... [Men] fully become “God’s fellow-workers” and co-workers for his Kingdom’ (307).

The idea of cooperation, as well as an explicit rejection of Manicheanism (285), are consonant with what we have seen in the Russian FSC, but the ground of world-affirmation is considerably weaker in this latter, if only because the key concept of Creation, with all its effects, seems to be peripheral. Consequently, the natural world is not seen as positive and ordered, and not elevated over sin. A tension between God and the world persists, and world-affirmation remains considerably strained and partial. God himself, of course, comes to the rescue of the world through his incarnation, kenosis and atonement; indeed, ‘the world, the society, and the state are the objects of God’s love’ (I.3); however, they constitute just *the objects*, rather than being enhanced or valorised *in their proper nature*. Their alienation from God is much stronger in the Russian text, and therefore Christ’s enduring kenosis is required constantly, whereas in the CCC the *created* world tends to be affirmed ontologically, by definition, while the sin is partly marginalised.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Main Cause of Worldly Problems: Apostate Anthropocentrism**

The main concept used by the Russian social document in explaining the degradation of the world is irreligious anthropocentrism (the word itself is not used but is

implicitly omnipresent). The FSC reads: 'Seduction by the achievements of civilization moves people away from the Creator and leads to a deceptive triumph of reason, which attempts to arrange the world without God' (VI.3). The profound critique of the liberal notion of freedom as 'self-will' or 'license' (*svoyevoliye*) (IV.7), and of humanism as an insufficient ethical foundation (XIII.4), implies the same idea. The treatment of bioethical, medical and ecological issues is based on a classical anti-modernist assumption of 'intervention' by (godless) human reason into 'the design of the Creator of life' (XII.4), which amounts to theomachism (*bogoborchestvo*). The church refuses to recognise 'a world order in which the human personality, corrupted (*pomrachenno*) by sin, is placed at the center of everything' (XIV.4); therefore the church rejects the whole project of modernity and its more recent form, globalisation ('a universal de-spiritualized culture' (16.3)), as intrinsically corrupted by an uncontrolled anthropocentrism.<sup>27</sup> In this respect the FSC inherits the old Russian anti-modernist and antiliberal discourse of man-godship against God-manship<sup>28</sup> of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Fedor Dostoyevsky, Sergei Bulgakov and others), which was widely heard in the late Soviet period in assessing communism as an extreme form of the same modernist 'tower of Babel project'. However, the document seems to overlook the complexity of an approach to 'humanism' as worked out by Russian thinkers such as Sergei Bulgakov, who saw in humanism *both* the spiritual empowerment of man *and* his errancy.<sup>29</sup>

The idea of apostate anthropocentrism is common to Christian (and generally religious) antimodernist discourse, initially going back to the anti-Enlightenment writings of Joseph de Maistre, who exerted a significant influence both on Russian thinkers of the nineteenth century and on western Christian thought. The discourse has changed in the twentieth century, in line with the general trend to reinterpret autonomous human activity as cocreation. To be sure, this change was not irresistible. One powerful critic was Reinhold Niebuhr. However, his brilliant anthropology equating sin with man's intrinsic drive to self-aggrandisement and pride was free from any religious apocalypticism in the style of de Maistre. The anti-Prometheanism of later antiliberals such as Alasdair MacIntyre has tended to move to the margins of public influence.<sup>30</sup>

We have seen this new paradigm of cocreation as clearly present in the Russian document, but it is counterbalanced by passionate philippics against 'man-godship'. The CCC completely avoids any reservation of this kind. Contemporary society is not an object of bitter criticism at all, so there is no need to evoke the old 'tower of Babel argument'; it seems that the Roman Catholic Church, at least on the level of the *magisterium*, has largely rejected the anti-Enlightenment discourse, although by no means accepting the Enlightenment discourse in its entirety.<sup>31</sup>

### **Ecclesiastical and Denominational Sensibility**

As we have seen, in the Russian Orthodox social vision an initial world-affirmation is strongly outweighed by the concept of the world's insurmountable depravity. The church loses its intended affinity with the world and becomes estranged again. Although not quite pure, because of its terrestrial component, the church is a body opposed to the fallen world (IV.4). The theological framework is, quite significantly, ecclesiocentric; the concept of the church is central and is understood in a specific way that I will now analyse.

Firstly, it is perceived as an *institution*, a *social body*, rather than anything else. Starting with more inclusive, spiritual and sacramental definitions by Aleksei



Khomyakov and Maxim the Confessor, the text then clings to a more exclusive, border-cognisant self-perception: the church goes through kenosis, descending to the rest of society (thus being inherently distinct from it); the church consists of 'clerics, monks, and laity' (thus opposed to all the rest); the church is 'interacting' with the state, social associations and individuals (thus being separate). Throughout the document this institutional and sociological self-consciousness persists: for example, the position on political issues can be only the one and 'official' position and never articulated 'without a control by the hierarchy' (V.2, V.4); the hierarchy defines the means of cooperation with social bodies and the church's 'official position' in the mass media (XV.2). The pragmatic intent of the document is obvious here, but more importantly, the whole theological plan of the *reinchurchment* of the world is weakened by an institutional self-isolation: thus a programme of involvement generates its own limits.

Second, this specific institutional and social body, as the church tends (partly involuntarily) to be represented in the document, is also perceived as a *minority*. The document addresses the clergy, the monks and the laity (believers), who are supposed to serve God in a largely secular, apostate society. 'The state, the associations, and the individuals' the church is called to deal with are dubbed 'nonchristian'. The document calls on *Christians* to be moral in politics, without mentioning all the rest, whose morality seems to be out of the church's competence (V.3). In a largely secular modernity, the document requires *nothing more* than just 'recognizing religious worldview ... as a substantial factor' of social life (XVI.4). This self-understanding as a specific social minority, a sober and courageous acknowledgment as it seems to be, leads at the same time to a further involuntary self-isolation.

Thirdly, this minority institution that the church turns out to become is opposed to an *increasingly inimical* environment. The church is represented as being an exclusive locus that retains the purity that the world has lost; it is juxtaposed to the world as another reality, thus restoring the breach between the divine it claims *exclusively* to represent, and the profane, which is by itself inexorably doomed.

Related to this highly *protective* stance is also the high denominational sensibility of the FSC. The document is full of denominational overtones; an Eastern Orthodox flavour is conveyed through the very language (with a few elements of Church Slavonic and archaic Russian vocabulary)<sup>32</sup> and the selection of authoritative references, quotations and historical examples (almost exclusively Eastern Orthodox).<sup>33</sup> The document can mention 'Orthodox politicians' (also painters, philosophers, musicians, architects, and even physicians) (V.3, XIV.2). In other cases, however, we find the words 'Christianity' and 'Christian'. It seems that the text vacillates between Christian universalism and Eastern Orthodox particularity: the authors 'play' by alternating the sequence of these two concepts ('Orthodox' and 'Christian'), either stating their equivalence or their semantic variance; for example, in the chapters on bioethics and law (IV, XII) the denominational accent is relatively weak, while in the passages on the army and state it becomes clearly strong (III, VIII.4). Denomination thus becomes another boundary that the 'only true catholic and apostolic church' creates around itself to oppose the corrupted world beyond its fences.

Compare this denominationalism with the sensitivities of the western churches. In Protestantism, churches are by definition centred *upon* and *as* congregations. This does not completely invalidate the question of the boundary between the church and the secular world, between the sacred and the profane: suffice it to mention how this basic Protestant idea, galvanised in the Social Gospel movement, was at odds with the principle and the practice of the separation of church and state in America (Johnson,

1940, p. 153). Overall, however, equalising religious ethics with a social normative framework, and thus overthrowing the concept of church exclusivity, was a strong and fundamental trend in Protestantism.

A comparison with Roman Catholicism will be more telling at this point. It seems that Roman Catholicism is not as definitely ecclesiocentric as it used to be a century ago. To be sure, the theology of the church is probably one of the most elaborated and pervasive themes in the CCC: the church is a thoroughly organised and authoritarian institution; in fact, much more so than any Eastern Orthodox church. At the same time, in the twentieth century Catholicism went through a major evolution in this respect, trying to comprehend and to adjust the 'border relationships' between the church and the world.

A powerful challenge to neothomistic rigidity was made by Yves Congar (1904–94) in what can be called *communio* ecclesiology, which was eventually adopted by the Second Vatican Council (Livingston *et al.*, 2000, pp. 235–9). According to this cardinal change, the church is centred (at least in theory) not so much upon the hierarchy as upon a local *communio* of believers, performing the *communio* with God through the Holy Eucharist. *Lumen gentium*, a document adopted at the Second Vatican Council, spoke of the church as 'the people of God', including the laity (thus responding to the growing involvement of the laity after the Second World War). This significant shift blurred the previous clear-cut boundary of the church.<sup>34</sup>

Roman Catholicism attempts to go still further. Transcending its own denominational limits, it posits that 'all men are called to the catholic unity of the People of God' (836),<sup>35</sup> recognises the 'goodness and truth in all religions' (843), and proceeding from the common origin and goal for all nations (842) acknowledges the possibility of eternal salvation even for those who 'do not know the Gospel' (847). The Vatican's willingness to be inclusive seems unlimited. At some points, however, the denominational consciousness becomes manifest: Rome and the 'successor of Peter' are declared as presiding in all Christian churches, uniquely offering the 'fullness of the means of salvation' (834, 816), and the Gospel is the only truth all peoples should finally embrace. Comparing this claim to the tonality of the Russian document, we see in Roman Catholicism no trace of a minority complex, but rather a conviction of superiority and a trend toward boundless inclusiveness. The Catholic Church, in contrast to Russian Orthodoxy, seems to be full of confidence about itself, because, in contrast again, it appears to be clearly optimistic about the world in general. The Russian document, however pragmatic it may seem, retains strong eschatological overtones, and clearly occupies a defensive, protective posture.<sup>36</sup>

It is interesting that the Russian Church, willingly or unwillingly missing the trend towards ecclesiological inclusiveness, virtually overlooks the clear prerequisites existing within its own intellectual experience. Aleksei Khomyakov's religious philosophy of the mid-nineteenth century contains a powerful innovatory drive, making the church a '*sobor*', a 'gathering', softening the border between the 'church that teaches' and the 'church that learns' (Meyendorff, 1996, pp. 185–8). As I mentioned, the FSC does include a quotation from Khomyakov, one of his spiritual definitions of the church,<sup>37</sup> a remarkable sign *per se*, but one which is not developed in the rest of the text. The text does not mention the concept of *sobornost'*, deduced from Khomyakov's writings by his followers, and this omission greatly weakens its totality. Another major trend, the 'Eucharistic ecclesiology' elaborated by Georges Florovsky, Nikolai Afanas'yev and Alexander Schmemmann in the twentieth century, would lead to a further deinstitutionalisation and a growing inclusiveness. Paradoxically, this profound liturgical (sacramental) ecclesiology, developed by Russian

thinkers (with an additional contribution by the Greek theologian John Zizioulas), had a direct impact on the Second Vatican Council (Felmi, 1999, pp. 172ff), but was not appropriated (simply overlooked, or perhaps rejected?) by the Russian hierarchy. The Russian Church, on the contrary, seems to have become *romanised* in this respect.

### **Identity, Nation, Culture: a Protective Traditionalist Response to Globalism**

We have seen in the previous paragraphs how Russian Orthodoxy, although trying to come to terms with the new *Lebenswelt* surrounding it, still remains in the final analysis a largely isolated and self-protective subculture, prophetically critical of the world as it is. We are going to see now how this stance affects, or simply becomes manifest in, an array of issues treated in the text under study.

Let us review some of the strikingly prominent discourses permeating the text. One of them is the strong emphasis on the ‘uniqueness of personality’ and the ‘dignity of the human person’. Uniqueness is mentioned five times, once in the chapter on law and ethics and four times in the chapter on bioethics. Personal dignity is mentioned twelve times in different contexts, from a formula legitimising private property to discussions on gender equality, medical treatment and again bioethics. This motif, which is elaborated within the tradition of modernised Christian personalism in the West (and which occurs in the CCC dozens of times in many contexts), is certainly new for Russian Orthodoxy, and its use indicates exactly those parts of the text that are most innovative and ‘modernised’.<sup>38</sup>

It is important to mention right away that the emphasis on personal dignity and uniqueness does not imply, as we have seen, an acceptance of ‘humanism’ in the sense of the intrinsic natural goodness of human beings and does not lead to a recognition of ‘human liberties’. Rather, the FSC treats the ‘unique personality’ as *resisting*, as seeking for *protection* against an expanding godless civilisation (for example, the technologies of assisted reproduction). Uniqueness is endangered by the ‘contemporary world’ and must be saved.<sup>39</sup>

A second pervasive motif of the document, directly linked to the previous one, is the conservation of *diversity*. As cloning threatens the diversity of beings, so catastrophic ecological trends ‘result in the suppressed biological activity and the steady shrinking of the genetic diversity of life’ (XIII.1). This idea of ‘diversity under danger’ takes a powerful turn in the last chapter on international relations and globalisation. Globalisation is treated extensively and profoundly. Although the document admits some advantages of globalism, its whole pathos really consists in warning about the dangers that globalism brings. The Russian Church is primarily concerned with ‘maintaining the spiritual, cultural, and other identity of ... countries and nations’ (XVI.2). Political international structures and transnational corporations are qualified as inimical to diversity, with a barely hidden reprimand toward the ruling elites of the western nations. Globalisation is further linked to the ‘domination of a universal culture devoid of any spirituality and based on the freedom of fallen man unrestricted by anything ...’ (XVI.3). Overall, therefore,

The spiritual and cultural expansion fraught with total unification should be opposed through the joint efforts of the Church, state structures, civil society, and international organizations for the sake of asserting in the world a truly equitable and mutually enriching cultural and informational exchange combined with efforts to protect the identity of nations and other human communities. (XVI.3)<sup>40</sup>

We have here a clear and logical sequence: as an *individual person* must be protected from overwhelming unification, so also must an *individual community*. The notion of *individuality*, no matter what it relates to, is in focus, and actually the centre of gravity is not the person (whose goodness, rationality and liberty do not receive a special elaboration), but rather the community. Protecting a communal *identity* against a sprawling, inimical godless *universalism* seems to be the main rhetorical figure and a quintessential matrix of the whole text.<sup>41</sup>

What is this community that needs to be protected? It would be more understandable to see here a direct concern about the church itself, the hierarchy, the institution that is trying to escape a growing marginality. But the church understands itself as a tradition, and thus links itself to the whole of *traditional* culture, which is also a *national* culture. Thus, the church associates itself with the *nation*, and it is *this* durable link that it tries to save in the conflict of diversity versus unification.

The chapter on nation is second in order, next to the theological prolegomena (see the Appendix to this article), and this is significant in itself. It starts with postulating the innate duality of the biblical people of Israel. As a prototype of the Christian church, Israel, in the light of Christ's atonement, is an absolutely universalistic entity. On the other hand, Israel is a *chosen* people, and as such it is opposed to all other peoples (as '*am* versus *goyim* in the Jewish Bible and as *laos/demos* versus *ethne* in the Septuagint) (II.1). This basic duality is crucial for all further interpretations. Israel was not only 'God's people', whose unity was based on sacral covenant, but also a community tied together by ethnic and linguistic bonds, as well as by 'being rooted in a particular land, the Fatherland' (II.1).<sup>42</sup>

The church therefore has a similar duality: it is 'by its very nature universal and supranational', because the spiritual fatherland of Christians is not earthly, but Heavenly Jerusalem, and because the Gospel is preached in all languages. At the same time, this universalism does not mean to deny the right to national identity and national self-expression; in fact, the church is both universal and national (II.2). Jesus himself was both supranational and still obviously linked to his people:

... He identified Himself with the people to whom He belonged by birth. Talking to the Samaritan woman, He stressed His belonging to the Jewish nation: 'You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know: for salvation is of the Jews' (John 4:22). Jesus was a loyal subject of the Roman Empire and paid taxes in favor of Caesar (Mt. 22: 16–21). St Paul, in his letters teaching on the supranational nature of the Church of Christ, did not forget that by birth he was 'an Hebrew of the Hebrews' (Phil. 3:5), though a Roman by citizenship (Acts 22: 25–9). (II.2)<sup>43</sup>

After these comparisons and considerations, the FSC postulates the legitimacy of 'national Christian culture' and 'Christian patriotism'. Christian patriotism, supported by a number of examples from Russian history, is said to be expressed 'with regard to a nation as an ethnic community and as a community of its citizens' (II.3); finally, 'when a nation, civil or ethnic, represents fully or predominantly a mono-confessional Orthodox community, it can in a certain sense be regarded as one community of faith – an Orthodox people' (II.3).

The chapter ends with an energetic rejection of aggressive nationalism and xenophobia (II.4), but its main emphasis lies in stressing the link between national identity and religion – a real theological challenge to the usual discourse of Christian universalism.<sup>44</sup> In my view, this emphasis on an ethnically and religiously defined nation is the climax of the general paradigm of the document: protecting the

*particular traditional identity* (of a person, a nation or a church) against the pressure of global secular universalism.

In western religious thought, the discourse on unique individual identity and personal dignity entered the mainstream long ago. The Russian document, introducing this discourse for the first time on behalf of the whole church, appears to represent a considerable shift in its overall ethos moving closer toward western Christian attitudes. However, we will not find in the Russian text the positive implications of 'dignity', which are confirmed in contemporary western thought, for example in such concepts as 'human rights' or 'humanism' that embrace the post-Enlightenment notion of individual freedom corroborated by, rather than opposed to, a rediscovered (and reified) Christian personalism and following the thread in modern times leading from Gottfried-Wilhelm Leibnitz to Henri Bergson and the Existentialists, with the contributions of the Pietists and Methodists in the middle. A synthesis of Eastern Christian personalism developed by Nikolai Berdyayev, Fedor Stepun and members of the émigré *Novy Grad* movement in the 1930s was a part of this process, but it was not appropriated by the official social teaching discussed here.<sup>45</sup>

As for the notion of diversity, it was vehemently protected by Romanticism and Existentialism and became one of the axioms of contemporary western religious thought, which does not see diversity as being threatened. In mainstream Protestant and Roman Catholic social teachings, diversity (of individuals, communities and cultures) does not contradict universalism, but is rather one of its principles. The conflict between traditional identities and globalism is usually neither dramatised nor elaborated. The topic of nation and nationalism, so crucial for the Russian Church, is largely left behind in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century; significantly, it is almost completely ignored in the CCC. The mainstream western churches try to negotiate a place in global processes and do not treat new liberal universalism as *obviously* inimical to religion, nor do they have a tendency to identify religion with 'traditional values' in a clear way, as is being done by the Russian Church.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusions

The Russian Church is facing a classical problem of religious ecology:<sup>47</sup> how to respond to constant changes in the *Lebenswelt*, the surrounding social world, while still retaining a cognitive identity and institutional vitality. What the officially engaged religious thinkers are trying to do, in the FSC of 2000, is to catch up with western thought in a tremendous effort to rehabilitate the world, to create a new legitimate language of world-affirmation instead of the traditional world-rejecting paradigm. In doing so, they rely upon Scripture and Tradition, as well as upon ideas (in most cases implicitly present, rather than explicitly quoted) drawing upon the traditions of Russian and western theology and the historical experience of the church.

This world-affirming strategy is, however, only half-successful: its foundations are less solid than in the western theologies, and the motif of rejecting the degenerating contemporary world (perhaps, partly, a sublimated aversion to both Soviet and post-communist Russian reality) remains extremely strong and at times traditionally apocalyptic; the main reason for degradation is defined, in line with religious anti-Enlightenment Romanticism, as a mass apostasy and anthropocentric self-elevation, the Tower of Babel obsession of godless humanism.

The document introduces into official Eastern Christian theology, for the first time,

a clearly articulated personalistic discourse (on the uniqueness and dignity of the individual), of a kind that is profoundly developed in the West. However, the emphasis on individuality, in the context of the entirety of the text, is not elaborated for its own sake (as a new anthropology), but rather serves as just one element in a dominant strategy, which is the *protection of traditional identity* (individual, denominational, cultural) through *resistance to global liberal secularism*. It is this strategy, in the final analysis, that provides a coherence to the major attitudes and definitions in the document. Nevertheless, the FSC remains an intrinsically torn and polyphonic document.<sup>48</sup> It does discover, for the first time at the level of an authoritative document of the Russian Church, the issues of culture and society in all their complexity, emphatically articulates them, attempts to resolve them in a fresh way, and in some instances certainly succeeds (for example, the sections on marriage and bioethics present relatively balanced and lenient approaches). However, a particularistic strategy of identity-protection definitely prevails and conveys a strongly conservative agenda on some crucial issues such as nation, state and culture. An agenda of this kind is not idiosyncratic to the Russian Church and can be found in many religious communities in both western and nonwestern contexts; it may be partly inscribed into a contemporary 'antiglobal' protective agenda, while, on the other hand, it pertains indeed to the very identity of the Christian ethos. This very identity, from the beginning of Christianity, has been articulated through an inherent ambivalence toward the world, the ambivalence of contempt and love, of withdrawal and ministry, of alienation and affinity, of detachment and confluence. In this risky venture at the edge of identity, the Russian Christian tradition is still trying to grope for subtle ways of negotiating the dialectic of being-in-the-world.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Osnovy sotsial'noi kontseptsii Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi (Foundations for a Social Concept for the Russian Orthodox Church)*; first published online on the official site of the Moscow Patriarchate ([www.russian.orthodox.org.ru](http://www.russian.orthodox.org.ru)) and later in a volume of Council documents (Osnovy, 2001). The document was written by over 20 authors, including members of the church establishment and academics, under the aegis of the Department of External Church Relations headed by Metropolitan Kirill (Gundyayev). The fact that the document was created by the administrative body of the church's 'foreign office' rather than by the Theological Commission suggests that the document has strong ideological and bureaucratic underpinnings, providing a rigidly articulated official line on some burning questions that are dividing the episcopate, the clergy and the laity. The adoption of the document was certainly related to high-church politics, as were some of the other resolutions of the Bishops' Council of 2000, such as the canonisation of Tsar Nicolas II and his family and the adoption of an official document on ecumenism. Important resolutions such as these are supposed to be taken by a Local Council (*Pomestny Sobor*) of the whole church rather than by a Bishops' Council (*Arkhieyskiy Sobor*) only; the failure to convoke a bigger forum has been said to diminish the legitimacy of the text and, more generally, to be fraught with the danger of growing 'clericalism'. (Gostev, 2001, p. 155, with a reference to Aleksandr Kartashev.)
- <sup>2</sup> The social teaching of Catholicism is expressed in several documents, starting with Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum* (1891), and minutely elaborated in the 1960s, especially in two documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes* (see Abbot, 1966, pp. 14–101; 199–308).
- <sup>3</sup> It is self-evident that the response to (post)modernity, as we can call it, as articulated in the FSC by no means represents the *practice* of Russian Orthodoxy at the level of local congregations; nor does the Catechism of the Catholic Church provide an adequate descrip-

tion of the practices of Roman Catholicism throughout the world. (Russian Church practice is in general more 'traditionalist' than the views expressed in the FSC, while Catholic practices vary dramatically among countries and communities.) Our comparison belongs rather to the history of ideas than to the evolution of religious practices. However, the documents, *grosso modo*, do mirror the changing ethos of both institutions and church cultures.

- <sup>4</sup> See the Appendix for the contents of the FSC.
- <sup>5</sup> The section of the CCC called *The Social Doctrine of the Church* relates to particular issues of poverty, economic relations and justice, in line with the classical 'social' encyclicals of 1891 through 1967; the placing of this section under the Seventh Commandment rubric ('you shall not steal') delineates its thematic contours and limits. This narrow socio-economic meaning of the 'social doctrine' in Roman Catholicism is only a part of the 'social teaching' as conceived by the Russian document under study; this is the reason why it is misleading to use the term 'social doctrine' in reference to the Russian document.
- <sup>6</sup> See the classical work by Georges Florovsky (Florovsky, 1981), especially chapter IX *passim*; Felmi, 1999, chapters 1, 2, *passim*. Reproaching the Russian Church for theological failure became a mass media cliché used by its critics: Innokenti Pavlov, for example, believes that the church simply does not possess any theology (*Segodnya*, 18 May 1999); another newspaper article, written by Konstantin Zhegalov, speaks of the lack of an intellectual and rationalist tradition and refers to Alexander Schmemmann's dictum about 'a stubborn resistance of the Russian soul to logos', which was 'one of the deepest causes of the fatal failures and crises in Russian history' (*Interfax-Argumenty i fakty*, 12 March 1999).
- <sup>7</sup> I do not intend in this paper to deal with all the particular issues addressed by the FSC, such as church-state relations, labour and property, attitudes to family, gender equality, abortion, homosexuality etc. (see the Appendix to this article), although I may refer to some of them for illustrative purposes. Instead, my task here is to reveal the *most general paradigms*, to which all these specific topics are subordinate. For analyses of the document, see Thesing and Uertz (2001) and Mchedlov (2002), and a few journal articles I cite in this paper.
- <sup>8</sup> A Roman numeral is the number of a chapter and an Arabic numeral that of a paragraph. Citations are taken from the English translation of the document published on the official website of the Moscow Patriarchate.
- <sup>9</sup> Synergy is an important notion in Eastern Orthodox soteriology; however, it is generally understood as being absolutely a product of God's grace, with man's co-action in this case consisting in simply *addressing* God, *inviting* Him to bestow grace (for atonement and deification) (see Felmi, 1999, pp. 158–59); thus traditionally man has been seen as largely a passive partner in the common task.
- <sup>10</sup> *Kenosis* (producing the derived term *kenotic* Christianity), the Greek for self-humiliation or self-reduction, is the word St Paul uses in Phil. 2:8 to speak about the very meaning of the mystery of incarnation; the term is also widely used in Orthodox theology, for instance by Georgi Fedotov, Vladimir Lossky and others, in a broader sense, as meaning a Christian exploit of self-sacrifice.
- <sup>11</sup> The resurgence of conservative clergy and their resistance to any form of *aggiornamento* in the Russian Church can easily be followed in the Russian press and some official documents of the Council. Newspapers reported the growth of a split between the liberals and conservatives through the 1990s (see for example *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 13 April 1996; *Novyye izvestiya*, 24 July 1999; *Interfax-Argumenty i fakty*, 12 March 1999). One central issue, a litmus paper, was ecumenism; many bishops were reported to have opposed ecumenism at the Bishops' Council of 1997 (*NG-Religii*, 3, 1997); vehement criticism of the hierarchy's alleged ecumenism by the monks of the Valaam Monastery became widely public and raised the question of a possible split, or even a full-scale schism, within the church (see *NG-Religii*, 5, 1998; 8, 1998). Another interesting phenomenon was that of the *mladostartsy* ('young elders'), a new type of guru-like charismatic priest-monk with groups of followers around them who were to all intents and purposes independent of the hierarchy and practised a rigorous exclusive Orthodoxy; this was seen as creating a 'danger of

totalitarian sectarianism' (*NG-Religii*, 4, 1997; 7, 1999) and was condemned in special official resolutions by the Bishops' Council in 1997 and the Synod in 1999. These monk-confessors were reported to interfere brutally in family life, treating sensitive issues such as abortion, contraception and divorce in an extremely hard-line way (*NG-Religii*, 11, 1998; 8, 1999). The existence of this extreme right-wing resistance reveals itself in the text of the FSC: defending marriage as a good thing, the authors openly argue against the anonymous confessors who 'compel' their married followers to abstain from sexual relations (XII.3) and who maintain a relentless repudiation of civil marriage (X.2); the document refers to a special resolution of the Synod of 1998 against a 'negative and arrogant attitude towards marriage' (X.1). These are just few examples disclosing strong tensions behind and between the lines of the text under study.

- <sup>12</sup> This does not mean, however, that the case 'Josephites versus Non-Possessors' is analogous to the case 'Kirill versus conservative monks' of the 1990s. In particular, in their doctrinal stubbornness and intolerance the contemporary monastic conservatives are the successors of Joseph rather than of the Non-Possessors. We cannot go further into this question here. On the subject of Conventuals versus Spirituals see Turner (1969, pp. 147ff), who refers to Lambert (1961).
- <sup>13</sup> See Pospelovsky (1995), especially on theologically *bona fide* reformers such as Antonin Granovsky, who without rejecting monasticism (unlike other radical and politically engaged reformers) sought for a close union of laity and clergy as the principal goal (pp. 89–91). In an extreme form the postrevolutionary Renovationist movement was called 'the revolt of power-hungry white clergy' (p. 92).
- <sup>14</sup> John Meyendorff writes of the 'inner, spiritual aggiornamento' of that Council (Meyendorff, 1996, p. 190). The authors of the FSC, including Kirill, do not fail to stress their indebtedness to the first postimperial, and also the last presoviet, *free* Council of the Russian Church (Kirill, 2000a).
- <sup>15</sup> See Valliere (2000). Fr Aleksei Gostev asserts that the text of the BSC contains, in this respect, some implicit references to Vladimir Solov'yev and Aleksandr Kartashev, especially the latter's article '*Tserkov' kak faktor sotsial'nogo ozdorovleniya Rossii*', written in the early 1930s, where he describes 'social service' as a continuation of the church's mission (Gostev, 2001, pp. 142–43).
- <sup>16</sup> On Nikodim's pragmatism, his 'decisive influence upon the selection of bishops' and his extraordinary ecumenical energy, see Tsy-pin (1997, pp. 413–14, 443–45). Aleksandr Morozov calls Nikodim a 'successful man of the sixties' (the '*shestidesyatniki*' were those inspired by the political thaw of the late 1950s) (*NG-Religii*, 11, 1997). The church integrists would rather speak of the 'Nikodiman mafia within the church', accusing it of ecumenism and liberalism (see the article by Konstantin Dushenov in *Zavtra*, 19 November 1997). Nikodim himself was not a 'liberal theologian' or a dissident of any kind, but rather an administrator looking for compromises with the regime; nevertheless, his administration, relying as it did upon open-minded graduates of the revived church academies (especially the academy in Leningrad), was seminal for the opening-up of part of the episcopal hierarchy.
- <sup>17</sup> Overcoming what can be called a liturgical reductionism of the church has been a great theme in postcommunist religious debates. Patriarch Aleksii has polemically rejected the idea that the church should stay 'within the temple' and refrain from involvement in anything outside (see his article in *NG-Religii*, 11, 1997). The newspaper columnist Mikhail Antonov warns that if it is not open in this way the church may transform itself into a sect (*NG-Religii*, 9, 1997).
- <sup>18</sup> One of the leading figures in the whole project, Metropolitan Kirill's aide Fr Vsevolod Chaplin, confessed a few weeks before the Council of 2000 that there had been serious disputes not only amongst church groups involved in the creation of the BSC ('they all are too engaged') but even within the Synod. 'It is not very easy for the church and the lay Orthodox public to reach agreement, and this makes the whole process very complicated' (*NG-Religii*, 26 July 2000).



- <sup>19</sup> See the discussion in Calvez and Perrin (1961, ch. III).
- <sup>20</sup> A quotation from a prominent Methodist theologian, Stanley Hauerwas, cited in Hastings *et al.* (2000, p. 676). This should not be understood as meaning that in his writings Hauerwas is advocating a full and unconditional embrace of the social world, but it shows the inner legitimacy of the social world as such and its unquestionable centrality to church ministry.
- <sup>21</sup> Some similar trends in Jewish theology, in close interrelation with Protestant developments, can be traced back to the Jewish Existentialists Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber, with the concept of the I–Thou dialectic; to the ‘living God’ of Will Herberg; and to Mordecai Kaplan’s innovative vision of God’s dynamic revelation within nature and history, in his *Judaism as a Civilization* (1934) (see Gillman, 2000, pp. 442–50).
- <sup>22</sup> See de Lubac’s *Le Surnaturel* (1946), quoted in Livingston *et al.* (2000, pp. 203–5).
- <sup>23</sup> See Rahner’s fundamental *Theological Investigations*, as referred to in Livingston *et al.* (2000, pp. 207–11).
- <sup>24</sup> Rahner does, however, use the figure of Christ as a perfect symbol of God-man unity, although he does not mention *kenosis* (see Livingston *et al.*, 2000, p. 212).
- <sup>25</sup> Here and hereafter I refer to the paragraph numbers as given in the standard edition of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Catechism, 1997).
- <sup>26</sup> The traditionally rather strong emphasis on creation in Eastern Christian theology is downplayed in the FSC. Moreover, there have been some important modern developments that the contemporary Russian theologians might have used, but did not, to ground their views: the *sophiology* of Vladimir Solov’ev and Sergei Bulgakov, postulating Sophia as partly the world’s response to creation (see Valliere, 2000, pp. 159–60, 260–66); the idea of *logoi*, inner divine principles manifest in all creatures, developed by Dumitru Staniloae after Maximus the Confessor; and the Palamist theory of the immanence of energies (*energeiai*). All three of these provide ways of establishing a stronger immanent ground for a world-affirming strategy, based on creationism (see Ware, 2000).
- <sup>27</sup> Some further theological elaboration of the antiliberal discourse can be found in the report of the Theological Commission delivered by Metropolitan Filaret, a member of the Synod. Speaking of the main thesis of the FSC, Filaret denounced ‘contemporary civilisation’ based on liberal ideas, which combine ‘pagan anthropocentrism, which entered European culture at the time of the Renaissance, Protestant theology and Jewish philosophical thought; these ideas were finally shaped by the end of the Enlightenment as a set of liberal principles’ (Filaret, 2001, p. 109).
- <sup>28</sup> Paul Valliere uses ‘Humanity of God’ to translate the famous Russian term *bogochelovechestvo*, popularised by Solov’ev; this translation, although it clarifies the author’s argument (Valliere, 2000, pp. 11–15), reduces the Christological weight of the term.
- <sup>29</sup> On Sergei Bulgakov’s concept of ‘two cities’ (theism versus pantheism; Christianity versus man-godship), see Bulgakov (1997, pp. 12–13). Bulgakov’s view on humanism is ambiguous: he does call it the state of being a ‘prodigal son’, but he also speaks of a ‘rebellion of humanity, now conscious of its power, against the medieval ascetic worldview, which is mistakenly confused with the true, universal Christianity ...’. Thus humanism in Russia was ‘a natural revolt against Filaret’s catechism ... and Pobedonostsev’s police clericalism, confused with real ecclesianism’ (Bulgakov, 1997, p. 345).
- <sup>30</sup> See Niebuhr (1941–43); on antiprometheanism see Holmes (1993, chs 4 and 5).
- <sup>31</sup> The variety of views within Roman Catholicism include, at the unofficial level, some enduring articulations of anti-enlightenment attitudes. To take just one example, the small-circulation local quarterly bulletin of a southern French congregation published an article by a local priest who quoted Cardinal Rouco Valera, archbishop of Madrid: ‘Immanentist humanism makes up contemporary culture, with its nihilism in philosophy, relativism in epistemology and morality and pragmatism, or cynical hedonism, in its approach to everyday reality; it also accentuates the individualism that reigns in today’s society...’ (Voix, 2000, p. 8).
- <sup>32</sup> Overall, the text is written in a good contemporary Russian prose, combining academic and mass-media styles; its language definitely sets the text aside from mainstream religious

publications and reprints, which are pervaded with archaic vocabulary and nineteenth-century intonations. When it occurs, then, the use of old-style church epithets and expressions becomes all the more remarkable: some old linguistic forms serve, perhaps, as conspicuous markers of denominational identity.

- <sup>33</sup> There are only seven references out of 147 that mention Latin Fathers (Augustine and Tertullian); all the rest are to Greek Fathers, Byzantine and Russian saints, Byzantine and Russian emperors, Orthodox church councils, and institutional documents of the Russian Church, both old and recent. (Elsewhere I analyse the quantitative breakdown of references in the Social Concept, as compared to popular religious literature (Agadjanian, 2003).)
- <sup>34</sup> See similar arguments in a recent study of American Catholicism: 'The Church has redefined itself, toning down its earlier emphasis on the Church as the "people of God"' (meaning the 'people of God' in an exclusive sense); it has become less centralised and more collegial; the number of priests has fallen and the role of the laity, including women, has markedly increased; the church has become integrated into society rather than segregated from it (D'Antonio *et al.*, 2001, pp. 3–4). See the same emphasis on 'no dichotomy' (between church and secular society) in post-Second Vatican Council Catholicism in a sketch on social doctrine (Roets, 1999, p. 17).
- <sup>35</sup> Significantly, the word 'catholic' is not capitalised here.
- <sup>36</sup> It goes without saying that Catholic optimism and inclusiveness may be misleading about the real and profound tensions with the world that the Roman Church experiences no less than the Russian Church. In this sense, the eschatological attitudes expressed in the Russian document seem to be more authentic and genuine in reflecting general Christian concerns. It is another matter, however, to construe how these concerns in fact relate to the intentions of the document's authors.
- <sup>37</sup> The church is the unity of 'the new humanity in Christ', 'the unity of God's grace dwelling in the multitude of rational creatures who submit to grace' (I.1).
- <sup>38</sup> The text of the document is polyphonic (see Novik, 2000, p. 261). Such new intellectual spaces as bioethics or secular law create a vacuum of authority and a potential for emancipated thinking; thus it is not surprising that the sections dealing with them reveal new motifs and use new vocabulary: for example, the motif of *uniqueness* is used in rejecting cloning, extracorporeal insemination and transplantation. At these points the discourses are similar to equivalent western religious discourses. These sections stand out against the more traditional stylistic backdrop of other parts of the text.
- <sup>39</sup> The Roman Catholic Church also denounces assisted reproduction, as 'morally unacceptable', or in fact threatening the 'origin and the dignity of the human person' (Catechism, 2376–2377). Sharing at this point the same conservative attitudes, the two churches, as we have seen, have different positions on the overall issue of 'humanity'.
- <sup>40</sup> Metropolitan Kirill (Gundyayev), the main inspiration behind the FSC, elaborated the issue of globalisation in a series of articles and interviews that predate and anticipate the document under study. Kirill respects 'the achievements of liberal civilisation', but postulates 'the decline of its dominance'; the conclusion is the need to 'harmonise the liberal-secular and religious-traditional approaches', or, in another context, to 'harmonise the secular law and religious traditions' (Kirill, 2000a). In another place he speaks of the challenge to 'religious-historical identities' offered by the liberal ethos that 'emerged outside any tradition' (*predaniye*, which means a specifically religious tradition). Although Kirill accepts the liberal emphasis on the 'absolute value of the human person' he regards secular liberalism as unsustainable *per se* and once again proposes a selective synthesis (Kirill, 2000b). It is clear that Kirill's stance is articulated polemically towards both integralists and modernists in the church. In a third publication Kirill writes about 'an aggressive globalizing monoculture, dominating and assimilating other cultural and national identities ...' and sets forth a theological thesis about national culture as the principal vehicle of Christian tradition (Kirill, 1999, pp. 66 *passim*). On the evolution of Kirill's views, see Kostyuk (2002).
- <sup>41</sup> The romantic anti-Enlightenment idea of protecting diversity was first creatively linked

with Christian Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century by Konstatin Leont'yev in his strongly antiliberal glorification of 'exuberant complexity' that he saw as threatened by liberal-egalitarian progress and soulless universalism coming from Western Europe. In his view liberal individualism ruins the 'individuality of men, regions and nations'. Inequality, diversity and complexity, being both aesthetic and moral categories, were for Leont'yev closely linked to the Byzantine substrate of Russian culture, epitomised in the institutions of monarchy and church (Leont'yev, 1996, pp. 107ff, 129).

- <sup>42</sup> The Russian original, unlike the official English translation posted on the website of the Moscow Patriarchate, speaks about 'tribal' rather than 'ethnic' community. 'Tribal' has a stronger connection with the idea of primordial blood bonds. All three elements of the extrareligious unity of Israel – blood, language and land – are dealt with in detail.
- <sup>43</sup> All three of the quotations here seem here to be significantly misaccentuated (or reaccentuated). Talking with the Samaritan woman, Jesus did not mean to stress anything other than the fact that he belonged to God's people. The premise that Jesus was a 'good citizen' is not obviously supported in the Gospels, nor indeed by the famous coin parable from Matt. 22:15–22. As for the citation from the letter to Philippians, it may be said to be decontextualised: for what Paul is actually stressing at this point, in the words that come right after the cited passage, is precisely his *rejection* of his Jewishness for the sake of Christ (Phil. 3:7–9.). The reaccentuations here are quite telling, however.
- <sup>44</sup> Fr Veniamin Novik points out the nonuniversalist bias of the document (Novik, 2000, p. 258).
- <sup>45</sup> According to Fedor Stepun, 'A social system ought to be personalistic and conciliar [*sobornaya*] at the same time.' The word *sobornost'*, introduced by Aleksei Khomyakov in the nineteenth century to mean people seeking God in free organic unity, was endowed by Stepun with a stronger personalistic content, so that the concept is opposed to 'impersonal collectivity'. This is in line with contemporary Existentialism and in response to the sweeping collectivistic conformity of Bolshevik Russia (Stepun, 1938). See also Nikloai Berdyayev's *Filosofiya neravenstva*, written in 1918 and first published in Berlin in 1923, where he synthesises an apology for diversity (inequality), which has some similarity to Leont'yev (see note 48), with a new strong emphasis on *individual* freedom (Berdyayev, 1970).
- <sup>46</sup> A positive discourse about 'global community' has been present in Catholic teaching since at least John XIII's encyclical *Pacem in terris* (1963) (see Roets, 1999, pp. 96ff).
- <sup>47</sup> The term 'ecology of religion' is used by Jacob Neusner to mean 'the study of the inter-relationship between the religious world a group constructs for itself and the social and political world in which that same group lives' (Neusner, 2000, p. 7).
- <sup>48</sup> See my study of the references in the FSC, as compared to the structure of references in popular mainstream religious literature, that helps to explain the Russian Church's self-positioning within the Orthodox Christian tradition (Agadjanian, 2003). The comparison shows that the FSC is clearly striving for emancipation from the monastic-ascetic historical paradigm and parochialism, and yet develops a strong constraint in relating itself to more liberal paradigms found in both western and eastern Christian thought.

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## Appendix

*Foundations for a Social Concept for the Russian Orthodox Church*  
(Adopted by the Bishops' Council, 13–16 August 2000, Moscow)

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