

Holy Russia and the Soviet Fatherland

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The Russian Orthodox Church and the Soviet state are both preparing for the commemoration of the "Baptism of Rus' ", but they do so in different ways. The church, in her very limited publications, emphasises the great importance of this occasion for the Russian people, while the Soviet authorities use their extensive propaganda apparatus to do all they can to minimise this. An important methodological difference in their approach is that the church avoids any confrontation, and certainly expresses no criticism of the Soviet point of view, while the Soviet authors subject the church's view to a frontal attack, accusing her of using the jubilee for "propaganda". The large number and polemical character of the Soviet publications indicates that the political authorities consider the celebration of a thousand years of Christianity in Russia to be of great importance in the struggle for Russian national consciousness. By re-interpreting and annexing the past, the Soviet government wishes to represent itself as the legitimate heir of Russian history. The Russian Orthodox Church, in her turn, by accentuating her solidarity throughout the centuries with the weal and woe of the Russian nation, wishes to justify her present patriotic stance towards the ruling powers. In this article I shall examine the publications of the Russian Orthodox Church on the millennium of Christianity in Russia.*

The publications of the Russian Church on the subject are limited to a few articles in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate (JMP)*, the only regularly-published journal of the Russian Orthodox Church;¹ a long article by Archbishop Pitirim (the journal's editor-in-chief), which appeared elsewhere;² and a two-page introduction in the church

¹ The *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* appears monthly in Russian and English. The circulation of the Russian edition is thought to be about 15,000 and of the English translation 2,000 to 3,000. The quotations in this article are from the English edition.

² Pitirim's article "The Russian Orthodox Church: Ten Centuries of History and Culture", in Pitirim (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in Russia*, (London, 1982), pp. 17-56, will be dealt with elsewhere (see note below).

*The author will deal with the Soviet books and articles on the millennium in a paper to

calendar. *JMP* first referred to the forthcoming jubilee in 1981, announcing that on 23 December 1980 the Holy Synod had appointed a committee which was to prepare for the celebration of the millennium.³ The committee met for the first time on 24 July 1981. The only report made was that the committee had appointed seven working groups for, respectively, organisation, liturgy, theology, canon law, participation of other churches, information and publicity, and finance.⁴ Neither reference contained specific information about either the speeches made, or discussions and plans.

Several months later an article on the committee meeting appeared.⁵ It was a summary of an address by Patriarch Pimen and expressed reverent agreement with his remarks, but gave no information about what actually took place at the meeting.

In subsequent years several articles on the history of the church in Russia appeared in *JMP*, describing the millennium as an occasion for a historical retrospective review. Since 1981 the annual calendar of the Russian Orthodox Church has included an article on a particular period of its church history, as part of the commemoration of the millennium.

The church literature referred to here, though not extensive, is sufficient to show how the Russian Orthodox Church sees herself and her thousand-year history in the present Soviet context. I shall now discuss this literature in more detail. I shall take issue with the Moscow Patriarchate's view of itself as presented in its publications, particularly its excessive use of, or abuse of, the concept of patriotism. However, as I shall try to show, the Russian Orthodox Church is by no means uniquely guilty in this respect, and some of her strongest critics err in the same way. Finally, I shall offer two comments in extenuation of the earlier criticisms.

The Term "Holy Russia"

The term "Holy Rus'" or "Holy Russia" (*Svyataya Rus'*)* has appeared several times in *JMP* since 1980, not frequently but always in a particular context. On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of

be given at a conference, jointly organised by Keston College and the School of Slavonic & East European Studies, University of London, in July 1988 — *Ed.*

³*JMP*, 1981 No. 2, p. 5.

⁴*JMP*, 1981 No. 11, pp. 2-3.

⁵*JMP*, 1982 No. 1, pp. 5-10. In *JMP*, 1986 No. 9, the general programme for the celebrations was published (pp. 16-17). In the meantime a conference dedicated to the millennium had already been held in Kiev (July 1986), a report on which is given in *JMP*, 1986 No. 10, pp. 12-16.

*A difficulty in translation arises here. The term used in Russian is always "*Svyataya Rus'*", correctly to be translated as "Holy Rus' ". However, the customary translation

the victory over Nazi Germany in 1985, *JMP* quoted a statement made in 1942 by Metropolitan Sergi, patriarchal *locum tenens*, who said that the church was ready to join warriors on the battlefield. "in combat for the liberation of our Holy Rus' from alien invaders". Then followed a summons to priests and faithful to collect money for a tank battalion. In this sentence, Holy Rus' was synonymous with political Russia, with the state, and this had already been hinted at earlier in the report on Sergi's address, as mention was made of "sacred borders of our country" and "holy hatred towards the enemy". In both cases the Russian word used was *svyashchenny*.⁶

The term "Holy Russia" is used at other times for similar reasons: the threat to Russia as a nation. In 1980 the Russian Orthodox Church celebrated the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kulikovo, which signalled the commencement of the liberation of Russia from the Tatar yoke and was of crucial importance for the rise of Muscovite Russia. In a memorial speech Patriarch Pimen said: "Six hundred years ago . . . the Benevolent Divine Providence saw fit to save Holy Russia." Praising the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in this event Pimen added: "From the very beginning of her existence, now a millennium, she helped establish Russia's culture, nationality and state . . . she helped Rus' to withstand foreign domination successfully, and to unite and become Great Russia."⁷ Some weeks later the patriarch said, also in connection with the Battle of Kulikovo: "Let us thank the All-Merciful God Who granted salvation to Holy Rus'."⁸

Other bishops also made similar statements during the extensive ecclesiastical celebrations of the victory in 1380. Metropolitan Yuvenali said that "Holy Rus' and our Church will never forget the feats accomplished by our forefathers on Kulikovo plain."⁹ Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev related "how our forefathers loved Holy Rus' ".¹⁰ A direct connection between 1380 and 1945 was made in the addresses of the patriarch and the metropolitans, and Metropolitan Alexi twice spoke of the "sacred borders of our country".¹¹

It seems that church leaders always use the expression "Holy

into English is "Holy Russia". For example, the title of the Patriarch is "Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus' ", but this is customarily rendered in English as "Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia". In this article, the customary English usage "Holy Russia" has generally been retained. However, where quotations from the English version of *JMP* are concerned, either Rus' (transliterated as "Russ" in the English version of *JMP*) or Russia (*Rossiya*) may be used — *Ed.*

⁶ *JMP*, 1985 No. 5, p. 38. Cf. *JMP*, 1985 No. 12, p. 41 and 1983 No. 2, p. 67.

⁷ *JMP*, 1980 No. 9, p. 5.

⁸ *JMP*, 1980 No. 12, p. 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 19, 24.

Russia" in a national-political context, when the existence of the nation, of the Russian people, is threatened by foreign invasion. Church and state then become allies in the defence of Holy Russia. In this connection the term "sacred borders" or "sacred frontiers" acquires an extra consecrated meaning, surpassing the purely metaphorical use of the adjective "sacred" in general political language. When religious leaders use the terms "sacred" and "holy" the difference between the literal and the metaphorical use of the terms can easily become blurred. In any case it is not very sensible of Russian Christian leaders to use expressions such as "sacred borders", "holy hatred", "sacred struggle", "holy war"¹² in such a manner when the political leaders of the state have linked the terms with military and ideological education, and misused them. The term "sacred borders" is used in military handbooks, and also by the Soviet government in its justification of the shooting down of a Korean civilian airliner in 1983 for having "violated the sacred borders of the Soviet Union".

Although the term "Holy Russia" is used regularly by patriarch and bishops in official addresses, it has no theological status. It appears neither in any call to prayer, nor in the liturgy. In prayers for the country, its leaders and armed forces, the church speaks of "our God-protected country" (*Bogokhranimaya strana nasha*).¹³ The term "Holy Russia" is an emotionally-charged concept employed by Russian church leaders only in a political historical sense and not in a theological sense.¹⁴ It is best compared with the term "Christian West", which is used in Western Christendom, and which witnesses in equal degree to an ideological self-overestimation and an uncritical view of the past. "Holy Russia" should not be compared (although this is sometimes done) with the title "Holy Roman Empire", which was an official name. "Holy Russia" was not used in documents of the Russian Empire nor was it explicitly included in the ideology of Nicholas I, who made "orthodoxy, autocracy and nationalism" the pillars of the state.

More significant than the term "Holy Russia" as such is the idea it incorporates, namely the bond between church and nation. This concept is an essential element in the Russian Orthodox understanding of the church. The church promotes this concept of her unity with the people and the fatherland, not only in times of national disaster but also in peaceful times. She does this in the present Soviet period even

¹²The expression "sacred struggle for the liberation of the homeland" is found in Pitirim, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹³*JMP*, 1985 No. 7, p. 7; 1985 No. 8, p. 47; 1982 No. 12, p. 9.

¹⁴Apart from the quotations in this article, the term "Holy Rus" has been used once more since 1980, in *JMP*, 1985 No. 7, p. 71, where it is mentioned in a historical article on Paul of Aleppo.

more expressly than in earlier times. Before we discuss this political or patriotic ecclesiology of the Russian Orthodox Church, we must examine the terminology more closely.

There are numerous statements in *JMP* on the patriotic disposition of the church. In his speech to the committee preparing for the millennium, Patriarch Pimen stated that the church is "indissolubly bound [up] with the life of our people and state". He spoke of the "service of the Russian Orthodox Church for the good of our Motherland", the "zealous and patriotic labour of churchmen", the "duty of monks and nuns to the Church and their earthly homeland" and the "ardent patriotism of the children of the Russian Orthodox Church".¹⁵ On the anniversary of the installation of the patriarch on 3 June 1985, *JMP* recalled the words of Pimen's enthronement address: "The service of the Holy Russian Orthodox Church is not separate from the service of our Motherland." Metropolitan Yuvenali of Krutitsy and Kolomna praised the patriarch's "service in the spirit of the millennial patriotic tradition . . . service of the Holy Church and our beloved Motherland".¹⁶ It is according to this view of service that Patriarch Pimen points out to his priests at the end of their theological studies that: "A true clergyman of the Russian Church has always been a patriot. Love for his Motherland and defence of her national interests are inalienable features of his ministry."¹⁷ Metropolitan Antoni of Leningrad spurred his priests on in the same spirit to "feelings of love for the Church and your Motherland", to which the priests reply that they "will tirelessly serve the Holy Church and their Motherland".¹⁸ And in his address to the editorial staff of *JMP* on the journal's fortieth anniversary, Pimen referred once again to "bringing up the children of the Church in the spirit of patriotism and love for their earthly Motherland".¹⁹

The introductory article of the 1981 Calendar discussed such education. It mentioned "the formation in the clergy and faithful of a conscious patriotism, an unlimited love for their great Motherland", which, incidentally, is also a quotation from Patriarch Pimen's enthronement address. The article, in which the word "patriotism" appears three more times, concludes: "On the eve of the thousandth anniversary of the Baptism of Rus', the Russian Orthodox Church, in accordance with the command of Christ, zealously continues her work

¹⁵ *JMP*, 1982 No. 1, pp. 7-8. The Russian words for "Motherland" (*Rodina*) and "Fatherland" (*Otechestvo* and *Otchizna*) are always spelt with capital letters. We follow the original.

¹⁶ *JMP*, 1985 No. 7, pp. 10-11. In the English version of *JMP*, the words "patriot", "patriotism" and "patriotic" are generally given as translations of *patriot*, *patriotizm* and *patriotichesky*.

¹⁷ *JMP*, 1985 No. 8, p. 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁹ *JMP*, 1984 No. 1, p. 30.

of salvation to achieve the redemption of her children, employing her strength for the blossoming of our beloved Motherland and for peace and happiness on earth.”²⁰

Other expressions regarding the bond between church and fatherland are found in the addresses on the occasion of Pimen’s 75th birthday, a month after the celebration of his jubilee as Patriarch. *JMP* devoted thirty pages to his birthday, strengthening the readers’ impression that *JMP* promotes a kind of personality cult round the Patriarch of Moscow. The journal is continually filled with pictures of and eulogies to the patriarch, which does nothing to increase its theological and spiritual significance. With regard to our theme, in a congratulatory speech to Pimen, the Bishop of Dmitrov says:

As the keeper of faith and Christian ethics His Holiness Patriarch Pimen teaches the people of God entrusted to him to follow the lofty Gospel ideals, to take an honest attitude to work and to love our great and beautiful Motherland. His Christmas and Paschal Messages are imbued with lofty patriotic feeling. The theme of patriotism has been especially pronounced . . .²¹

Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev also praises the “special attention” of Pimen to educating in the faithful “devotion to and love for their earthly Motherland”, particularly in connection with the approaching millennium.²²

The millennium was again emphasised in an address by Pimen himself, several months later. In it he called the millennium of the Baptism of Rus’ the “millennium of [the Russian Orthodox Church’s] selfless service to the Motherland”. He then quoted 1 John 4:20:

“He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” the apostle says. It is equally difficult to imagine love for our Heavenly Home without loving our earthly homeland. The true pastor always was and still remains a true patriot, loyal to his country, guarding its national interests.”²³

The head of the Russian Orthodox Church allows no opportunity to pass without mention of the theme of “service of the Church to the Motherland”. It appears very frequently in his numerous addresses at peace conferences in the Soviet Union, on national holidays, and in his congratulations on the birthdays or anniversaries of Soviet leaders.

²⁰ *Pravoslavny Tserkovny Kalendar’* 1981, pp. 1-3.

²¹ *JMP*, 1985 No. 11, p. 15.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²³ *JMP*, 1986 No. 1, pp. 26-27.

The identification of the church with national events is sometimes quite outspoken — for example, in the Easter sermon in 1985, where a connection was made between the resurrection of Christ and the fortieth anniversary of the victory of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War. Once again it was explained that the Russian Church had served the country for a thousand years with — as an extraordinary proof of her patriotism — the financing of an air squadron and tank battalion in the last war. This Easter message also included the usual praise for the peace policies of the Soviet leaders and the hope that Orthodox Christians, inspired by “vital and active patriotism”, would further “the might of our country”.²⁴ Elsewhere in this issue of *JMP* are quoted Patriarch Alexi’s words: “A good Christian is one who is a good and faithful son of his Motherland, always ready to sacrifice everything for her glory and prosperity.”²⁵

This Easter and Victory commemoration issue of *JMP* includes many other variations on the theme of church-and-fatherland. They include: “patriotic mission”, “patriotic service”, “patriotic task”, “patriotic devotion”, “patriotic efforts”, “patriotic sermons”, “patriotic campaign”, “patriotic cause”, “ardent patriotic feelings” and “the seeds of patriotism sown in the hearts of believers”. Attention is paid to the symbolic meaning of the helmet-like shape of church cupolas, and the Russian monasteries are said to have been “built as fortresses so that they could foil the enemies of our Motherland and attest to the patriotic service of our Church”.²⁶

Patriotic Ecclesiology

The verbal exuberance of the patriotic ecclesiology of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the frequency with which it is propagated, witness, regrettably, to a poor sense of proportion. True, the church’s relationship to national politics is not unique to the Russian Church. In East and West, and throughout history, there are examples of the identification of the church with national interests and of the usurpation of religion by politics.

In addition to this loyalty to national politics and the worldly authorities, there is a deeper difference between the contemporary patriotic stance of the Russian Orthodox Church and that of earlier times. I would call it a spiritual difference. Whereas metropolitans and patriarchs have always called on the faithful to defend their country, knowing God to be on their side against foreign heathens or

²⁴ *JMP*, 1985 No. 5, p. 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42. For other expressions: *passim*.

heretics, they have always thought that foreign invasions of Holy Russia were God's punishment for the sinfulness of Russia itself. In the old Russian chronicles, in the sermons of the Metropolitans of Kiev and Moscow and in those of one of the national saints, Sergi of Radonezh, we perceive their sense of their own sinfulness, of the common guilt of the people and its leaders for the national disaster. This religious dimension is missing from the messages and addresses of Patriarch Pimen. The Christian awareness of sin is replaced by national self-glorification. The patriotic motif in these patriarchal documents does not reflect the traditional Orthodox humility, and thus the addresses become mainly political messages. Even in the Easter address in 1985 a spiritual content is wanting: it is a summary of the military contributions of the Russian Orthodox Church to the victory in the Second World War. Might it not be said that in thus giving the patriotic themes a central place in religious addresses, service to God seems to be replaced by "service to the Fatherland"?

There is another new element in the present nationalistic attitude of the Russian Church. In the contemporary ideological division of the world into East and West, the nationalistic stance of a church acquires an ideological surplus value which surpasses traditional patriotism. However much the Russian Orthodox Church places her service to the fatherland in the context of general peace politics and a plea for the welfare of all peoples and nations, her worldwide appeals for peace and justice are still inevitably linked to agreement with the foreign policy of one state, the Soviet Union, because any objective and constructive criticism of Soviet politics is missing. When the patriarch calls at peace conferences for Christian condemnation of imperialism, foreign intervention and the arms race, these condemnations are aimed at the United States and NATO. The ideological concept of the enemy created by the Soviet government is adopted by the church and translated into religious or biblical terms. It is not a repudiation of *all* "actions against humanity" and of *every* "sin against the holy gift of life", but a selective one. One party, the United States and Western Europe, is regarded as synonymous with the enemy in Isaiah 59:7-8 and expressly placed under the judgement of God (in the same way as some in the United States one-sidedly consider the Soviet Union to be the "evil empire"). In one of his sermons Patriarch Pimen, referring to the "leadership of the USA and of several NATO countries" regarding the placing of cruise missiles in Europe, says:

Are not the wrathful words of the Prophet Isaiah applicable to these men: "They make haste to shed innocent blood, their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths; the way of peace they know not"? But let them

remember that the Lord's judgement is over the face of the Earth and that this judgement is just and true.

And he continues: "We the children of the Church ardently support the genuinely peace-loving policy of our Motherland, a vivid expression of which was the statement made by our head of state Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov."²⁷ Andropov, after his decease, was referred to by the patriarch as "preserver of the sacred gift of life".²⁸

The consequence of such a transfer of the political enemy-image to a biblical level is that general human evil is identified with a political opponent and one's own government is considered to be immune to the sins of violence and abuse of power.

Nationalistic Exegesis

The Russian Orthodox Church often makes use of the Bible to express her patriotic attitude. In particular John 15:13 is quoted repeatedly at commemorative ceremonies for fallen Russian warriors, from Kulikovo to the Second World War: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." The brotherhood of men proclaimed in the Bible is also seen to be realised in the union of the various Soviet peoples within the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the formation of the USSR *JMP* published an article in which the union of the Soviet peoples was firmly grounded in quotations from both the Old and the New Testaments: Leviticus 19:17; 1 Kings 12:24; 2 Chronicles 11:4; Psalm 133:1; Acts 17:26; Romans 12:10; and 1 Peter 2:17.²⁹ Finally, in contributions to peace conferences by representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, many references are made to the Gospels and to the epistles of Paul, suggesting that Soviet peace politics are to be seen as an extension of the peace of Christ.

This nationalistic biblical exegesis is dubious not only because of its arbitrary character, but primarily because it distorts the essence of the biblical message. Bringing Old Testament prophets into present East-West conflicts as advocates of Soviet politics misses the main point. The prophets, with all their use of belligerent language about the enemies of Israel, also criticised the Israelites themselves for their sinful behaviour. They not only invoked God against the national foe, but also castigated the people of God for their lack of faith in Him. It is this warning against national complacency which is lacking when present church leaders take up a political position, assuming God to

²⁷ *JMP*, 1984 No. 2, p. 10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁹ *JMP*, 1982 No. 12, pp. 10ff.

be on their side as a matter of course.

The same unjustified appeal to the Bible is found in the use of the "crown witness quotation" (John 15:13) by the Russian Orthodox Church leaders: Russian or Soviet patriotism is taken to be the love proclaimed by Christ when a man gives his life for his friends. By taking this quotation completely out of context they ignore the newness of the New Testament message, which is, after all, that one should love one's enemies. It is just as easy to appeal to the New Testament to reject the use of force as it is to support patriotic, military duty. It is obvious that when the Bible is quoted out of context, it is misrepresented. That is certainly the case in the nationalistic exegesis of the Russian Church, which accentuates love for the fatherland and overlooks the even more explicit message of the New Testament to love one's enemies and to strive for reconciliation. This is a consequence of the church's identification with the enemy concept held by the Soviet state. The church seems no longer able to point out the incompatibility of national enemy concepts and political enemy images with the Christian vision of man and society.

Ironically, it is the Soviet state itself which points out this incompatibility. In ideological literature and atheistic propaganda the Christian teaching of forgiveness and love of the enemy is explicitly set against the communist demand for "irreconcilability towards enemies of the state" and "the class enemy". Christian ideas and feelings are repudiated as "undermining communist morale" and "ideological vigilance".³⁰ Soviet ideology therefore consistently rejects dialogue between Christianity and Marxism within the Soviet Union. Equally consistently and logically, the Soviet authorities consider true patriotism to be indissolubly bound to atheism. The formula "patriotic and atheistic education" is a standard expression in Soviet ideological handbooks for teaching personnel and in the frequent appeals of the party to improve atheistic propaganda. In contemporary Soviet society, atheistic propaganda is conducted much more from political-patriotic considerations than from theoretical-philosophical convictions, as Marxism as a whole has in fact been transformed in the

³⁰The *Atheist Dictionary*, the encyclopaedic handbook for students of religion in the Soviet Union, states under the entry "love of one's neighbour":

The central concept in the Christian's love of one's neighbour is the demand to love the enemy: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you (Matthew 5:44)." In the exploitative society this demand hampers the workers in their struggle against the class enemy, and in the socialist society it stands in the way of the struggle against the enemies of the Fatherland and against anti-social elements. (*Ateistichesky slovar'* (Moscow, 1983), p. 267.)

Basic Principles of Scientific Atheism, the secondary school textbook states:

Communist humanism teaches the Soviet people to make clear distinctions between friend and foe and requires that love for the workers be combined with hatred of their enemies. Religion preaches an abstract love of humanity and

Soviet Union into a nationalist and étatistic ideology.*

The patriotic service of the Russian Orthodox Church has not led to the integration of the church in the state's patriotic self-image. In this light her patriotism appears forced. The church has to make "love of the Motherland" one of her primary preaching themes, while the state regards atheism as an essential feature of Soviet patriotism. The church cannot even point out this contradictory situation. Although Soviet ideologists reproach the Orthodox Church for using her patriotism for "religious propaganda", particularly in connection with the celebration of the millennium of Christianity in Russia, the church leadership has never contested the atheism of Soviet patriotism.

The Paradox of the Russian Orthodox Church

The nationalistic ecclesiology and exegesis of the Russian Church seems a negation of the universal nature of the biblical message and of the function of the church. This conclusion follows from our critical analysis of church documents and patriarchal pronouncements. It is not, however, our final conclusion on the Russian Orthodox Church: two important comments have to be added, which alter drastically the nature of the criticism of the church expressed above.

The first comment is that adaptation to the political authorities of the moment and identification with nationalistic interests is not an exclusive feature of the Russian Church. Disturbance of the balance between ecclesiastical nationalism and Christian universalism results from a general degeneration of Christianity. As a supra-national religion, Christianity teaches a unity between people which oversteps the traditional boundaries between states and nations, races and cultures. In reality, however, churches throughout history have become part of those boundaries which divide humanity and have been the source of new divisions between peoples. The identification of church and state dates back to the time that the Christian religion became the state religion of the Roman Empire. After the division of the empire into an Eastern and a Western part, the church also was split in two. When nationalism increased after the Middle Ages the church also divided herself up as a consequence of the inextricable tangle of political and religious interests. Forms of national churches developed in England, Germany, Prussia, Denmark, Sweden,

summons man first of all to love the enemy. (M. N. Gordiyenko, *Osnovy nauchnogo ateizma*, Moscow 1978, p. 106-107.)

*This point has been developed more fully in the author's article "Ideology and Atheism in the Soviet Union", *RCL* Vol. 13 No. 3, 1985, pp. 269-81 — *Ed.*

Holland, Spain and France. In America the mingling of Christian thought and politics finally took the form of a civil religion, which today marks America as "God's own country" in the same way that the Russian Orthodox accord Russia ("our God-protected country") a special relation to God. Fundamentalist preachers in the United States who invoke God against the Soviet Empire are as blind to their own national sins as is the Patriarch of Moscow when he invokes God against American imperialism.

Whether the Christian Church is formally a state religion or has been only informally included in a national ideology, whether she is organised supra-nationally or nationally, she can in all cases become untrue to herself. No church has turned out to be immune to the temptation of nationalism. That applies also to those churches which condemn the nationalism of the Russian Orthodox Church the most fiercely, that is, the Russian Orthodox Church in Exile and the Ukrainian Catholic Church. These are no less nationalistically motivated than their sister church. The Russian Orthodox Church in Exile cherishes a past in which the Orthodox hierarchy never defended the people against state absolutism nor condemned Tsarist policies from a social-Christian point of view, and her canonisation of Tsar Nicholas II in 1982 was an attempt to shift a political struggle to the hereafter. The Ukrainian Catholic Church has identified herself to such an extent with Ukrainian striving for national autonomy (which from a political point of view may be justified) that she is as narrow-minded and un-Christian in her struggle against the Russian Orthodox Church as the latter is with regard to the Ukrainian Catholic Church. A sad example of this is the pamphlet written by the head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, Cardinal Myroslav Lubachivsky: *Was it really Russia that was Christianised in 988?*³¹

Clearly the Russian Orthodox Church is by no means alone in her nationalistic deformation of Christian universalism. But a second comment should be added in her defence. Political opportunism and nationalistic attitudes have not prevented the Russian Church from carrying out her specific Christian task. The patriotic ecclesiology and exegesis are, in fact, an external and emotional phenomenon: there has been no intellectual fusion of theology and ideology, no structural integration of church teaching and Marxism. The Russian Orthodox Church is wary of liberation theology. One of the few references to it is to be found in an interview for the Italian newspaper *Unità* given by Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev in 1985. Filaret gives a reticent answer to a question about liberation theology: he appreciated the efforts of theologians in South America "to bring their Christian faith into line with actually living by this faith, since without a Christian life the

³¹(London/Rome, 1985).

concept of faith itself becomes meaningless. As St James puts it, 'Faith without works is dead' (James 2:26)'. Filaret then continued:

Unfortunately, proponents of the theology of liberation do permit a separation of one from the other and even an underestimation of the importance of faith. As an example one could mention what we see as insufficient attention on the part of some proponents of the theology of liberation to the universal nature of salvation brought to Earth by our Lord Jesus Christ. This underestimation of its universal character leads to a shift in the understanding of salvation to categories of social nature. One may also find such tendencies in the works of some modern theologians from other continents. Sometimes they also manifest themselves in the practice of the ecumenical movement.³²

The term "Marxism" does not appear in this interview, but the answer is clear nonetheless.

The Russian Orthodox Church does not conduct a dialogue with Marxism, and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union is itself categorically and fundamentally against such dialogue. In spite of the political compromise between church and state there is no question in the Soviet Union of a rapprochement between Christianity and Marxism, and the so-called "ideological struggle" of the party against non-communist world-views is also aimed at Christianity and every other religion. Even if the Russian Church were to wish for dialogue, the state and the party would prevent it for two reasons. Firstly, they do not want religion "modernised", brought up to date, and thus able to prolong its existence. Soviet ideologists are already finding it difficult enough to explain the continuation of religion in a communist society. Secondly, they are afraid of infecting communist ideology with the ideas of what, since Lenin, have been called 'god-seekers or god-builders'. Lenin strongly condemned religiously-inspired socialism as "the most repulsive form of socialism".

The anti-dialogue attitude of the Soviet communists is very convenient for the Russian Orthodox Church and is her salvation. It enables her to fulfil what she sees as her task: to keep the church in existence and the Christian inheritance alive. She can do this in the liturgy despite the lip-service she has to pay to the communist system; and, despite the nationalistic exegesis, the Bible is not submitted to the materialistic exegesis of Marxist-inspired theology.

The Russian Orthodox Church is inwardly free and critical of Marxist ideology, more critical and realistic than, for example, a Western group like "Christians for Socialism". She has survived

³² *JMP*, 1985 No. 6, pp. 60-63.

precisely because she has maintained her spiritual and intellectual independence, in contrast with the "Living Church" of the twenties, which aimed at a theological agreement with communism. In spite of all the political restraints, constitutional limitations, legal curtailments and administrative control by the state, the Russian Orthodox Church (together with other churches) remains the only institution in Soviet society which has not been absorbed by state ideology. She has become an island of freedom in the ideological monoculture of the Soviet system: she offers a theology of liberation from the depersonalising ideology of Soviet *étatisme*. Because of her enforced reduction to the minimum she can continue to propagate the trans-ideological essence of the Christian message. That is the paradox of the Russian Orthodox Church and of every church in the Soviet Union.