

# The Russian Orthodox Church and Nationalism After 1988

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In the two years that have elapsed since the celebration of the millennium in June, 1988, the Russian Orthodox Church, like most institutions in the USSR, has found itself battered by gale force winds of change. Like the Soviet Union itself, the Russian Church appears to have entered a period of fundamental crisis. The aim of this paper is to focus upon one pivotal aspect of that crisis: the relationship of the Russian Orthodox Church to the burgeoning nationalism of the Ukraine, Belorussia, Moldavia, and the Russian Republic.

## *The Church Leadership*

The permanent membership of the ruling Holy Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate — the other official name for the Russian Orthodox Church — today consists largely of long-serving representatives of the ecclesiastical *nomenklatura*, individuals elevated by the state to positions of power during the harsh Khrushchev anti-religious campaign of 1959-64 and the long Brezhnev period of stagnation. The newly-elected patriarch, Aleksii (Ridiger-b. 1929), for example, was made a bishop in 1961 at the precocious age of 32, and then, in 1964, was named to the critical post of chancellor of the patriarchate, a position he held throughout the Brezhnev era. One of Aleksii's chief rivals for the post of patriarch, Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev and Galicia (Denisenko-b. 1929) was ordained a bishop in 1962 at the age of 33 and was then soon made head of the Ukrainian exarchate.

These luminaries of what is now called the 'era of stagnation' fully assimilated the philosophy known as *sergiyevshchina* or *sergyanstvo* named after the late metropolitan and patriarch Sergi (d. 1944) who proclaimed in 1927 that the 'joys and sorrows' of the USSR were those of the Russian church.<sup>1</sup> Due to the political liberalisations

<sup>1</sup>For the text of Metropolitan Sergi's 1927 'declaration of loyalty,' see Matthew Spinka, *The Church in Soviet Russia*, (Oxford University Press: New York, 1956), pp. 161-65.

accompanying *glasnost*', and especially to the helpful indiscretions of Konstantin Kharchev, chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) of the USSR Council of Ministers from late 1984 through early 1989 and, upon his removal from that post, a quasi-dissident, we now know that the Russian Orthodox Church has been and is supervised and manipulated by three bodies: the Ideology Department — formerly the Propaganda Department — of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; the KGB; and the Council for Religious Affairs.<sup>2</sup> We also know indubitably that the CRA has a veto over decisions concerning such matters as which monks should be made bishops of the Russian church.

The newly-consecrated patriarch, Aleksii, has in the past fully embodied the servitude to the state required by the philosophy of *sergiyevshchina*. Documents leaked to the West show that he functioned de facto as a CRA informer during the late 1960s, providing detailed reports to the authorities concerning his fellow bishops.<sup>3</sup> Little wonder that Aleksii was among those singled out by V. Furov, deputy chairman of the CRA, in a 1974 report to the party Central Committee — the report was subsequently leaked to the West — as one of the best bishops, one of those 'who in words and deeds affirm not only loyalty but also patriotism towards the socialist society' and who 'realistically understand that our state is not interested in proclaiming the role of religion and the church in society. . .'.<sup>4</sup>

Accustomed to following closely the directions of the state, the members of the Holy Synod were forced into an unfamiliar role when in April 1988 Gorbachev received Patriarch Pimen and the permanent members of the synod in a meeting that was widely reported by the Soviet media. This meeting signaled the beginning of a new approach by the party and by the state toward religious believers, an approach which was, as it were, codified in an unsigned article, i.e. an editorial, appearing in the 1988, No. 4 issue of *Kommunist*, the party's theoretical journal.<sup>5</sup> A close reading of this article, which is entitled 'Socialism and Religion,' shows that Gorbachev wanted a transition from a crude anti-religious approach which alienated millions of believers to a more subtle one, which turned believers into atheists without their being aware of it.

<sup>2</sup>See John B. Dunlop, "'Kharchev Affair" Sheds New Light on Severe Controls on Religion in USSR', *Report on the USSR*, (Radio Liberty) 23 February 1990, pp. 6-9.

<sup>3</sup>On this, see Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: A Contemporary History*, (Indiana U. Press: Bloomington, 1986), pp. 224-25, and Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church and the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, Vol. 2, (St Vladimir's Seminary Press: Crestwood, 1984), pp. 392-93.

<sup>4</sup>Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>5</sup>'Sotsializm i religiya,' *Kommunist*, 1988 No. 4, pp. 115-23.

Since Gorbachev's meeting with Pimen and the appearance of the pathbreaking *Kommunist* article, Aleksii and his fellow hierarchs have had to scramble to 'restructure' themselves and attempt to become a leadership which actually represents the interests of the believing masses, within, of course, the guidelines laid down by the communist party. This task has been difficult in itself, but it has been immensely complicated by the winds of nationalism and separatism which began to blow first in the Baltic republics — Aleksii, incidentally, is a native of Estonia — and then throughout the Soviet Union. By 1990, Lithuania had declared its independence from the USSR and all of the republics had asserted that their laws took precedence over those of the union. These developments directly threatened the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church.

### *Ukrainian Nationalism*

For the present leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate, the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church is directly linked to the unity of the Soviet state. Thus the present chancellor of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Vladimir of Rostov and Novocherkassk, has stated: 'The acceptance of Orthodoxy became the source of our national originality, and the history of Russia cannot be treated apart from Orthodoxy.'<sup>6</sup> For Metropolitan Vladimir, the Ukraine, Belorussia, and Moldavia represent all-Russian (*rossiskiye*) entities, subsets of an overarching Russian and Russian Orthodox identity.

The distinguished specialist on religion in the Soviet Union, Bohdan Bociurkiw, has aptly noted that:

While in the consciousness of Russians the Russian Orthodox Church is perceived as their national church, this church itself never restricted its membership to Russians. On the contrary, it always sought to extend its sway in parallel with the expanding borders of the Russian Empire and to bring into its fold all of the empire's subject peoples. This is what constitutes its essence as an 'imperial' church. National churches, on the other hand, as a rule restrict their membership to faithful of a particular nationality . . . Thus they represent a unique symbiosis of religious and national identities that sustain and reinforce each other.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cited from *Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhi* No. 2 1990, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Bohdan Bociurkiw, 'Nationalities and Soviet Religious Policies,' in *The Nationalities Factor in Soviet Politics and Society*, edited by Lubomyr Hajda and Mark Beissinger. (Westview Press: Boulder, 1990), p. 152.

The tension between the Moscow Patriarchate's attempting to be both a Russian national church and an 'imperial' church is strikingly exemplified by the case of the present-day Ukraine. While the Patriarchate calls itself a *Russian* Orthodox Church, an argument could be made that *Ukrainian* Orthodox Church would be a more appropriate title for the body in question. At the time of the millennium celebrations, Metropolitan Vladimir of Rostov reported that the church had 6,893 functioning parishes.<sup>8</sup> Of these, more than 4,000 were located in the Ukraine, with many of them being situated in the western part of the republic. In the L'vov-Ternopol' area alone, which is a bastion of Uniate Catholic sentiment, there were a reported 1,006 registered parishes, or about one-seventh of the total for the entire USSR.<sup>9</sup> Since there may have been close to a thousand registered churches in Belorussia, Moldavia, the Baltic, and Central Asia — the Georgian Orthodox Church, of course, is autocephalous and thus not part of the Moscow Patriarchate — that would have left approximately 2,000 functioning churches for the vast territory of the Russian Republic, which occupies three quarters of the land and contains half the population of the Soviet Union. Thus the 51.4 million citizens of the Ukraine reported by the 1989 census had more than twice as many functioning Orthodox parishes as did the 147 million citizens of the RSFSR.

The Ukrainianisation of the Russian church has continued in the two years following the celebration of the millennium. Roman Solchanyk has recently observed that two-thirds of the new Orthodox parishes being registered in the USSR are located in the Ukraine, while Keston College has noted that the Ukraine 'is the source of three quarters of all vocations to the priesthood.'<sup>10</sup>

Given this situation, it should be obvious that a threat of a church schism in the Ukraine would constitute a mortal danger to the present-day Russian Orthodox Church. Unfortunately for the new patriarch and his fellow hierarchs, the threat of such a schism has already emerged.

In the light of the freedom of expression accompanying *glasnost*, it was inevitable that the centralising and Russifying role of the Russian Orthodox Church should be called into question by believers in the Ukraine. Nationalistically-minded Ukrainians began to ask, for example, why sermons in most parishes were being delivered in Russian rather than Ukrainian. The emergence of a 'Popular

<sup>8</sup> *Press Release* [of the Moscow Patriarchate], No. 6. English edition, 8 June 1988, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Bohdan Nahaylo, 'Moscow, Ukraine, and the Millennium,' July 1988, (unpublished essay).

<sup>10</sup> See Roman Solchanyk, 'Ukrainian Catholics in the USSR: Towards Legalisation,' *Report on the USSR*, 15 December 1989, p. 27, and *Keston News Service*, No. 341, 11 January 1990, p. 22.

Movement of the Ukraine for Perestroika,' known as *Rukh*, an organisation which aimed at eventual independence for the Ukraine from the Soviet Union, served to increase the intensity behind such questions.

A related development was Gorbachev's decision to meet with the Pope in December, 1989. The session with the Pope gave Gorbachev a form of legitimisation from one of the most significant religious figures in the West, but it also meant that he had to give something in return, and that was apparently an implicit promise to legalise the Ukrainian Uniate Church, which had been a proscribed body since 1946. One notes that on the same day that Gorbachev met with the pontiff, Mykola Kolesnyk, head of the Ukrainian CRA, made an announcement that Ukrainian Catholic parishes could 'now register with the council and would enjoy the same rights as other denominations.'<sup>11</sup>

This announcement provoked a serious crisis for the Ukrainian exarchate of the Moscow Patriarchate. Until then, Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev, a Russified ethnic Ukrainian, had been carrying out a sharp struggle against attempts to legalise the Uniates. Thus in an interview published in *Moscow News* in mid-1989, he stated:

Their [i.e. the Uniates'] main aim is the creation of a 'national church' in opposition to the Orthodox one. Nationalistically-inclined elements are striving with the help of the Unia to break Ukrainians off from their blood brothers, the Russians.<sup>12</sup>

The Uniate Church, Filaret insisted, had been voluntarily disbanded in 1946, and not as a result of pressure applied by Stalin. (This statement was, of course, false.)

The regime's intention had been for there to occur a gradual and orderly turning over of parishes to the Uniates, after the conducting of referenda and sociological surveys. This plan proved utopian. The Uniates had begun occupying Orthodox churches as early as the fall of 1989, before Gorbachev's meeting with the Pope. Emboldened by that meeting, the Uniates then began to take over Orthodox churches *en masse*. On 20 December, Radio Kiev reported that Uniates from Ternopol', Ivano-Frankovsk, L'vov and Kiev had seized the Orthodox cathedral in Ivano-Frankovsk, and that the local Moscow representative, Archbishop Makari, had declared a hunger strike in protest.<sup>13</sup> Keston College reported that in December alone 600 Uniate parishes had applied to register with the CRA, that more than 300

<sup>11</sup> Roman Solchanyk, 'Church and State Split on Ukrainian Catholic Issue,' *Report on the USSR*, 5 January 1990, pp. 10-14.

<sup>11</sup> *Keston News Service*, No. 341, 11 January 1990, p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> In *Moscow News*, 1989, No. 31.

were already functioning within church buildings, and that 200 Orthodox priests had applied for admittance to and been accepted by the Ukrainian Catholic Church.<sup>14</sup> The No. 1, 1990 issue of the Patriarchate publication, *Moskovski tserkovny vestnik*, stated that 200 parishes in L'vov diocese, 140 in Ivano-Frankovsk, and 30 in Ternopol' had gone over to the Unia within a month.<sup>15</sup> In the city of L'vov itself, only four of 19 functioning Orthodox churches remained loyal to Moscow. In desperation, Patriarch Pimen appealed to Gorbachev, to the secretary-general of the UN, and to Pope John Paul II for help in halting the forced seizure of churches.

The Uniate problem represented a serious challenge to the Patriarchate, but it was not the only one. In February 1989, an initiative committee was founded whose purpose was the creation of an autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church free of Moscow's control.<sup>16</sup> Bishop Ioann (Bondarchuk) of Zhitomir, an ordained hierarch of the Russian Church, assumed the leadership of this autocephaly effort; for this, he was summarily defrocked and deprived of his episcopacy by a November 1989 decision of the Moscow synod. This action did nothing to deter Ukrainian pro-autocephaly sentiment. On 5-6 June 1990, seven Orthodox bishops, more than 200 priests, and 500 laymen held a Sobor in Kiev during which they elected Mstyslav, head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the United States, patriarch of the autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church. When the Soviet Union refused to grant Mstyslav a visa, Ioann Bondarchuk, now Metropolitan of L'vov and Volynya, was named Mstyslav's deputy and the acting head of the church.<sup>17</sup>

Faced with the spectres of an upsurge of nationalist and separatist sentiment in the Ukraine — centred in the western Ukraine but threatening to spread to the southern and eastern regions of the republic — with the legalisation of the Ukrainian Uniate Church, and with the threat of a rending schism within the Ukrainian exarchate itself, the Moscow Patriarchate and its regime overseers resolved upon an important 'empire-saving' strategy. On 31 January-1 February 1990, an extraordinary bishops' council was convoked in great haste. At the council, it was decided to bring into existence two new Orthodox churches — a so-called 'Ukrainian Orthodox Church' under Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev and a so-called 'Belorussian Orthodox Church' under Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk.<sup>18</sup> The

<sup>14</sup> *Keston News Service*, No. 341, 11 January 1990, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> *Moskovski tserkovny vestnik*, 1990 No. 1.

<sup>16</sup> See the piece by Bohdan Nahaylo in *Report on the USSR*, 3 March 1989, p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> See *Patriarkhat* (New York), June-July 1990, pp. 9-10. I am grateful to my Hoover colleague Joseph Kladko for translating this item from Ukrainian.

<sup>18</sup> On this, see *Ukrainian Weekly*, 4 March 1990, p. 8.

intention behind this initiative was to convince patriotically-inclined Ukrainians and Belorussians that there was no need to form autocephalous churches or to defect to the Unia.

A close scrutiny of the structures of these two new 'churches' shows that they are in fact heavily dependent on Moscow. Unlike, say, the autonomous Orthodox Church of Japan, which is under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, the new Ukrainian and Belorussian churches must have all decisions taken by their synods 'finally confirmed by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church.'<sup>19</sup> The alleged independence of these two churches is thus an illusion.

To sum up the situation in the Ukraine, two years after the celebration of the millennium, the Moscow Patriarchate has found itself having to resort to subterfuge in a hasty attempt to halt the inroads of nationalist and separatist sentiment among the Orthodox faithful of the Ukraine. One doubts that this attempt will prove successful.

### *Belorussian Nationalism*

In Belorussia, the formation of a new and essentially fictitious Belorussian Orthodox Church, headed by Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk, an ethnic Russian who had not been raised in Belorussia, represented a kind of pre-emptive strike directed against nationalist stirrings. While nationalist and even separatist sentiment were clearly on the upswing in Belorussia, they did not approach the levels observable in the Ukraine. Still, trouble was obviously brewing. Thus when an Orthodox seminary was reopened in Zhirovtitsy in September 1989 — it had been forcibly closed under Khrushchev in 1963 — it emerged that the 15 Belorussian students accepted by the seminary insisted that they be instructed in Belorussian, not Russian. Two separate instructional groups had to be formed — one for Belorussians, and one for Russians and other ethnic groups at the seminary.

To date, the Belorussian Popular Front, *Adradzhen'ne*, has been critical of both the Moscow Patriarchate for its 'Russifying role' and of the Roman Catholic Church in Belorussia for 'its traditional polonising stance.'<sup>20</sup> The recent organisation of a Uniate congregation in Gomel' may represent a new form of Catholic outreach to

<sup>19</sup> On the autonomous Orthodox Church of Japan, see *Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhi*, No. 5 1970, pp. 9-10.

<sup>20</sup> See Elizabeth Ambrose, 'Language and Church in Belorussia,' *Report on the USSR*, 9 February 1990, p. 22.

Belorussian nationalist sentiment.<sup>21</sup> In any case, the new Belorussian Orthodox Church, headed by an ethnic Russian, Filaret of Minsk, will predictably have its work cut out for it in the coming years.

### *Moldavian Nationalism*

The period following the millennium celebrations has also witnessed a strong upsurge of nationalist and separatist sentiment in Moldavia. On July 1, 1990, the Moldavian Popular Front called for the establishment of an autocephalous Romanian Orthodox Church of Bessarabia, Transylvania and Northern Bukovina, an act which constituted a serious challenge to the Moscow Patriarchate.<sup>22</sup> So far the Patriarchate leadership has done little to accommodate Moldavian nationalist strivings, and the Russian church's prospects do not look bright in that republic. The emergence of a breakaway Moldavian church appears to be a likely prospect.

### *Russian Nationalism*

The swirling winds of change have not, of course, left the core Russian republic unaffected. Two developments should be mentioned in particular: the growth of an unfettered Russian nationalism; and a remarkable upsurge in pro-democracy sentiment, whose impressive clout was demonstrated during the recent March 1990 RSFSR elections. The city councils of such major Russian cities as Moscow, Leningrad, Sverdlovsk, Volgograd, Omsk, and Kuibyshev fell to the 'democrats,' while a self-professed Social Democrat, Boris Yel'tsin, was elected president of the RSFSR. These events have necessarily affected the Russian church.

As I have noted in several recent articles,<sup>23</sup> the Russian nationalist tendency, which was a repressed current under Leonid Brezhnev, has, during the Gorbachev period, first surged to a position of influence and then split into two disparate and feuding groups: namely, a larger group of conservative Russian nationalists who, since the period of March-April 1987, have been in close alliance with the embattled and fading Russian neo-Stalinists; and a smaller group of 'liberal

<sup>21</sup> See Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe, *Daily Report*, 15 June 1990, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> See *Daily Report*, 3 July 1990.

<sup>23</sup> John B. Dunlop, 'Soviet Cultural Politics,' *Problems of Communism*, November-December 1987, pp. 34-56; 'The Contemporary Russian Nationalist Spectrum,' *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin*, Special Edition, 19 December 1988, pp. 1-10; and 'The Return of Russian Nationalism,' *Journal of Democracy*, Summer 1990, pp. 114-22.

nationalists' who have been part of a loose alliance with Western-style liberals and reformist Marxists.

We shall treat the liberal nationalists and their views on the Russian church first. The liberal nationalists champion such causes as democracy, pluralism, and a market economy, and they are fully prepared to accept the political sovereignty of the minority republics of the USSR, if that is the will of their populaces. The liberal nationalists are distinguished from Western-style liberals by their often fervent attachment to Russian Orthodoxy and to Russian traditions, and by their especially pronounced abhorrence of Marxist-Leninist ideology. One cause fought for by the liberal nationalist has been the rehabilitation of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and his writings.

The journal *Novy mir*, edited by village prose writer Sergei Zalygin, which currently has a circulation of 2.7 million, serves as the principal mouthpiece for the liberal nationalists, though its editorial board also includes Western-style liberals. Influential representatives of this tendency, in addition to Zalygin, are Academician Dmitri Likhachev, Sergei Averintsev, a corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, critic Alla Latynina, and economics writer Vasili Selyunin.

While the influence of the liberal nationalists is presently not great, it could conceivably grow in the foreseeable future, perhaps under the aegis of a Christian Democratic party. A Christian Democratic Union of Russia was established in August 1989 by former political prisoner Aleksandr Ogorodnikov, himself a liberal nationalist. The platform of this new organisation called for a multi-party democracy, the separation of powers, free elections, and 'a multi-tiered market economy'.<sup>24</sup> Ogorodnikov's new union suffered a schism when a faction led by Aleksandr Chuyev broke off and founded a rival Russian Christian Democratic Party; the major difference between Ogorodnikov's and Chuyev's party seems to be that the latter is prepared to co-operate with the newly-elected Patriarch Aleksii.<sup>25</sup>

In April 1990, another competing Christian Democratic organisation, called the Christian Democratic Movement, was founded by Orthodox priest and former political prisoner Gleb Yakunin, Orthodox priest Vyacheslav Polosin, and outspoken liberal nationalist author Viktor Aksyuchits. The three founders of the organisation had each been elected in 1990 to the RSFSR Congress of People's Deputies. Unlike Ogorodnikov's and Chuyev's groups, this new movement received sympathetic coverage on Soviet television and appears to have a chance of attaining official recognition.

<sup>24</sup>See John B. Dunlop, 'Christian Democratic Party Founded in Moscow,' *Report on the USSR*, 13 October 1989, pp. 1-2.

<sup>25</sup>See *Daily Report*, 22 June 1990.

Many liberal Russian nationalists are implacable opponents of the hierarchy of the Moscow Patriarchate, whom they see as carriers of the bacillus of *sergiyevshchina*. Like the Orthodox autocephaly movement in the Ukraine, its representatives therefore embody the threat of a potential schism from the Russian church.

A recent statement by a group of liberal nationalists, which was published in the informal Russian-language Latvian newspaper *Atmoda* summarises the disagreements of this tendency with the Moscow hierarchy.<sup>26</sup> Citing the testimony of Konstantin Kharchev, the former chairman of the CRA, the statement asserts that the Russian church today continues to be under the supervision and control of the KGB, the CRA, and the Ideological Department of the CPSU. It maintains that KGB officers are employed in the Patriarchate's Department of External Affairs, and it notes that the Soviet state continues to appropriate more than 30 million roubles a year which are forcibly donated by Orthodox parishes to the state Peace Fund. Police informers are said to permeate the ranks of the Orthodox clergy, and the Moscow Patriarchate leadership is indicted for refusing, even under *glasnost*, to condemn the past persecution of the Orthodox Church by the Soviet regime.

The liberal nationalists have also criticised the questionable methods used to elect Aleksii patriarch in June 1990. Even the traditional 40-day period of mourning for the late patriarch, Pimen, was not, they note, observed, and there was no 'free and democratic election of the patriarch,' along the lines of the 1917-18 Sobor which chose Tikhon first-hierarch of the Russian Church. Journalist Aleksandr Nezhny, a writer with close ties to the liberal nationalists, has warned that 'the Russian Orthodox Church is today before the tangible threat of a schism.' 'In the Ukraine,' he notes, 'the schism has already become fact.'<sup>27</sup>

The dissatisfaction of the liberal nationalists and other religious reformers with the politically supine Moscow Patriarchate hierarchy has already resulted in the breakaway of several Orthodox parishes. In April 1990, Archimandrite Valentin (Rusantsev), dean of a cathedral in Suzdal', together with two priests, a deacon, and his entire parish petitioned Metropolitan Vitali, head of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, to take his parish under its wing; the request was granted.<sup>28</sup> According to *Moscow News*, the reason for Fr Valentin's disaffection stemmed from his refusal to inform local secular authorities about foreign visitors whom he received in his church. The local bishop

<sup>26</sup> In *Atmoda*, 12 March 1990, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Aleksandr Nezhny, 'Pered vyborami patriarkha,' *Moskovskie novosti*, 27 May 1990, No. 21 p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> See *Moscow News*, 1990, No. 20, p. 5.

backed the authorities in their request for information on these visitors and attempted to transfer Fr Valentin to another parish; this proposed transfer was the action which precipitated the priest's decision, and that of his flock, to leave the Patriarchate.

Several Orthodox parishes in Siberia have also announced their decision to leave the Moscow Patriarchate for the Russian Church Abroad. Patriarch Aleksii has recently assailed the Church Abroad for attempting to 'split Russian Orthodox believers in the USSR.'<sup>29</sup>

Given the growing strength of the pro-democracy movement in the Russian Republic, the Christian Democratic tendency is likely to expand its influence in the coming years. Fr Yakunin served as an ardent and effective supporter of Boris Yel'tsin in the latter's successful bid to become president of the RSFSR. Using their increased clout, the liberal nationalists may be able to put significant pressure on the Patriarchate to cleanse itself of regime control or to suffer the ravages of a major schism.

### *The Conservative Russian Nationalists*

The conservative Russian nationalists are separated by a considerable gulf from their liberal nationalist brethren. As has already been mentioned, since the spring of 1987, they have been in close alliance with a group of neo-Stalinists. Walter Laqueur has observed that this alliance is a strange one. He notes:

There are the Russian nationalists whose homes are decorated with icons and pictures of Stolypin . . . And there are the neo-Stalinists, who have little enthusiasm for icons and 'old women in old villages.' . . . They would not be caught dead in a cathedral.<sup>30</sup>

The programme of the neo-Stalinist tendency is perhaps best encapsulated in the now-famous 'Nina Andreyeva' letter, which appeared in the 13 March 1988 issue of the newspaper *Sovetskaya Rossiya*. This letter was noteworthy for its virulent anti-Christian and anti-Semitic animus. The 'traditionalists,' i.e. conservative Russian nationalists, were gently chided by Andreyeva for their perceived religious groupings, as well as for a pronounced lack of enthusiasm for the Bolshevik Revolution and for Marxist-Leninist ideology.

In the months following the publication of Andreyeva's letter, it became clear that the attempt, which was apparently spearheaded by

<sup>29</sup>See *Daily Report*, 15 June 1990, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup>Walter Laqueur, 'From Russia with Hate,' *The New Republic*, 5 February 1990, p. 23.

Politburo member Yegor Ligachev, to weaken Gorbachev and rally the conservatives about a programme of neo-Stalinism had failed. This failure subsequently resulted in the conservative Russian nationalists' increasing their influence within the conservative coalition. For the sake of maintaining unity, the neo-Stalinists were forced to embrace such conservative nationalist causes as support for the Russian Orthodox Church and the rehabilitation of Solzhenitsyn and his writings.

Today, most leading conservative Russian nationalists appear to be either Russian Orthodox believers or persons sympathetic to Orthodoxy as an embodiment of the Russian spirit. One could cite here the names of novelist Valentin Rasputin, currently a member of Gorbachev's presidential council, writer Vladimir Soloukhin, Vladimir Krupin, chief editor of the journal *Moskva*, and the young writer and monarchist, Vladimir Karpets. Rasputin has recently used his influence to turn the newspaper, *Literaturny Irkutsk*, officially an organ of the Irkutsk Writers' Organisation, into a Russian Orthodox religious publication. Vadim, the bishop of Irkutsk and Chita, has been named a member of the newspaper's editorial board.

At first glance, it would seem that there would be numerous points of agreement between the conservative nationalists and the Moscow Patriarchate hierarchy. Both hold the unity of the Eastern Slavs to be sacred, and both detest nationalist and separatist leanings among Ukrainians and Belorussians. Both see Russian patriotism as at least as important as spiritual regeneration. For both groups, the most famous of Russian saints, St Sergi of Radonezh, is to be venerated primarily for his blessing of Prince Dmitri Donskoi to do battle against the Tatars at Kulikovo Field. Sergi's mystical exploits and role as a founder of Russian monasticism in the 14th century receive considerably less attention.

A number of conservative nationalists are also convinced monarchists. Many of them desire the restoration of an absolute, rather than a limited constitutional monarch. On 19 May 1990, the Soviet television news programme *Vremya*, reported the founding of an Orthodox Monarchist Order in Moscow.<sup>31</sup> All members of the new organisation reportedly had to be Orthodox, but they did not have to be ethnic Russians. This new union, whose leading spokesman was 36-year-old Sergei Engel'gardt-Yurkov, sought to restore Vladimir Kirillovich Romanov, who currently lives in France, to the imperial throne. In an interview with the British newspaper *The Guardian*, Yurkov affirmed that he was

<sup>31</sup> See *USSR Today* (Radio Liberty), 19 May 1990, pp. 361/21-22, and *Daily Report*, 21 May 1990 and 23 May 1990.

not enamoured by the notion of parliamentary government — a constitutional monarch with restricted powers — nor even by the consultative assembly (*Duma*) which the Tsar set up in 1905.<sup>32</sup>

Yurkov was also sharply critical of the present Moscow Patriarchate leadership. 'It is hard,' he said, 'to say where the KGB ends and the hierarchy begins . . . There has been pressure and infiltration at the top.' Instead of looking to the Moscow Patriarchate for guidance, Yurkov affirmed that he looks to the Russian Church Abroad under Metropolitan Vitali. His organisation, he said,

has applied to the authorities for one of the closed Donskoi monastery churches, which would become the first church in Moscow of 'true' Russian Orthodoxy.

Yurkov noted that his group maintains ties with the catacomb True Orthodox Church throughout the Soviet Union, and claimed that his new union had branches in sixty Russian cities.

Like Yurkov, a number of conservative nationalists have expressed an interest in forming ties with the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. Thus writer Vladimir Soloukhin recently reported that he had received Metropolitan Vitali's blessing to undertake to have a monastery in Russia transferred to the jurisdiction of the Church Abroad.<sup>33</sup>

One activity which has caused strain between the conservative Russian nationalists and the official Moscow Patriarchate leadership has been the latter's active involvement in the ecumenical movement. The journal *Sibirskiye ogni*, for example, has published a letter by a monk and priest at the Pskov-Pechersk Lavra which criticises the Patriarchate for succumbing to the 'heresy' of ecumenism.<sup>34</sup> The authors' objections to ecumenism appeared to be as much 'patriotic' as they were doctrinal. Nationalists are deeply suspicious of the contemporary West, and this suspicion extends to its religious expressions.

A few words should be said concerning *Pamyat*. When this well-known extremist organisation first burst on the scene with a noisy demonstration in May of 1987 in Moscow, the Soviet and Western press made much of its lurid programme, especially its fervent belief in a 'Zionist and Masonic conspiracy.' By now, however, it has become clear that *Pamyat's* radical message is of interest only to limited elements of the Russian lumpen intelligentsia and working class. If Major General Aleksandr Karbainov, deputy chief of the

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Steele, 'From the USSR,' *The Guardian*, 12 March 1990, p. 23. See also the reports on Yurkov's organisation in *Sovetskaya molodezh'* 15 March 1990, p. 2 and 24 April 1990, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> In *Moskovskie novosti*, No. 50, 10 December 1989, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> In *Sibirskiye ogni*, 1990, No. 1.

KGB Directorate for Defence of the Soviet Constitution, is to be believed, *Pamyat* presently has only one thousand members throughout the USSR.<sup>35</sup> Like the pre-revolutionary extreme right, which it resembles in several aspects, *Pamyat* has broken up into a number of competing groups.

Dmitri Vasil'yev, the *vozhd'* or leader of what is perhaps the most significant of the various *Pamyat* groups, outlined his programme to me during a conversation in June 1989.<sup>36</sup> In essence, Vasil'yev and his followers want to turn back the clock and return to an unfettered absolute monarchy, such as existed in the pre-1905 period. In the case of the church, Vasil'yev wants to go back to the pre-Petrine model. His ideal is a re-established Russian Orthodox Church serving as 'the right hand of the tsar'. Vasil'yev expressed a low opinion of the current Moscow Patriarchate hierarchy for its political subservience to the Communist Party. *Pamyat*, incidentally, is distinguished from the newly-formed Orthodox Monarchist Order by its virulent anti-Semitism; the Monarchist Order, in words at least, opposes anti-Semitism.

The recently-held elections to the RSFSR Congress and to local soviets demonstrated that the conservative coalition of right-wing Russian nationalists and neo-Stalinists — and even more *Pamyat*, which has been shunned by the coalition for its extremism — enjoys little support among present-day voters in the Russian Republic.<sup>37</sup> The 'democrats' and their allies, the Christian Democrats, by contrast, fared exceedingly well. This suggests that we may see a growing liberal Russian nationalist challenge to the political servitude of the Moscow Patriarchate leadership in coming years.

### *Conclusion*

To summarise, the forces of nationalism and separatism promise to buffet the Russian Church over the last decade of this century. The new patriarch, Aleksii II, was raised in Estonia and is thus presumably sensitive to the non-Russian mentality, but his efforts, no matter how vigorous and ingenious, are unlikely to prevail against the centrifugal forces presently rending the church. Two Western political observers have recently written concerning the future of the Soviet Union:

<sup>35</sup> See *Moskovskiy novosti* No. 7, 18 February 1990, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> For the conversation with Vasil'yev, see *Report on the USSR*, 15 December 1989, pp. 12-16. On the various *Pamyat* groups, see the volume *Neformal'naya Rossiya*, Moscow, 'Molodaya gvardiya,' (1990), and the 23 May 1989 issue of the informal publication *Reyestr*.

<sup>37</sup> On the March 1990 elections, see John B. Dunlop, 'Moscow voters Reject Conservative Coalition,' *Report on the USSR*, 20 April 1990, pp. 15-17.

... the Soviet state is confronted with the uncomfortable choice of redefining the limits of *glasnost*' or of redefining the basis of empire.<sup>38</sup>

The same dictum could be applied to the future of the Russian Orthodox Church. If *glasnost*' continues, then the Russian imperial church would appear to be doomed.

It should be stressed that the emergence of national churches on the territory of newly independent states has been a pattern historically sanctioned by the Orthodox Church. To be sure, mother Orthodox churches have often been reluctant to let their daughter churches go, and recognition has at times taken a century or longer. Still, the existence of national churches is in fact the norm in the Orthodox world. One notes that, unlike Patriarch Aleksii II, who is attempting to hold a fragmenting imperial church together, the Georgian patriarch Il'ya II, the leader of a resurgent autocephalous church, enjoys great popularity among his flock. A recent Soviet poll conducted in that republic identified Il'ya as 'the individual who had contributed the most to Georgian society in recent times.'<sup>39</sup>

If the Soviet empire continues to fragment, the emergence of autocephalous Orthodox churches in the Ukraine, Belorussia, and Moldavia appears likely. These new churches, in turn, will face strong competition from an expanding Uniate Catholic Church. In the Russian Republic, the church, freed of its non-Russian 'colonies,' will increasingly be required to focus upon Russian and *rossiiskie* problems. Instead of stridently advocating the limitation of Western long-range missiles and defending the Soviet state against charges of anti-religious persecution, the Russian Church will have to turn its attention to such core issues as the 'churchification' of tens of millions of believers, the reopening of thousands of parishes throughout the republic, the provision of religious literature in sufficient quantities to believers starved for religious reading material, the founding of Sunday schools, the opening of catechetical schools for adult converts, and so forth. The re-Russianisation of Russia should logically be accompanied by a 're-nationalisation' of the Russian Orthodox Church.

<sup>38</sup>Mark Beissinger and Lubomyr Hajda, 'Nationalism and Reform in Soviet Politics' in *The Nationalities Factor*, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

<sup>39</sup>See *Daily Report*, 25 June 1990.