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Editorial

I am writing this editorial a few days after the death of Metropolitan Ioann of St Petersburg on 2 November. His appointment in 1990 to Russia's second city, and thereby his *de facto* elevation to the position of second-ranking hierarch to the patriarch, came as a surprise. St Petersburg was founded by Peter the Great as a 'window onto Europe'; but in those early heady days of reform and new opportunities Metropolitan Ioann resolutely turned his back to that window. His appointment must have reflected the delicate balance between those in the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church favouring openness and those favouring isolationism, and the victory on this particular occasion of the latter. During his five years in St Petersburg Metropolitan Ioann resolutely an icon for ultra-conservatives within church and state. Claiming he was concerned only with problems of church life and faith, 'Humble Ioann' – as he sometimes signed his regular contributions to the conservative communist newspaper *Sovetskaya Rossiya* – inevitably played a political role and was an embarrassment to those of his colleagues, including Patriarch Aleksii, who wanted their church to work openly and creatively in post-Soviet society.

Widespread spiritual disorientation amongst the population has been the consequence of the sudden huge influx of foreign religious organisations into Russia since the late 1980s. In taking a stance against what he saw as this uncontrolled onslaught on traditional Russian spiritual values Metropolitan Ioann was undoubtedly speaking for significant numbers of ordinary believers. Nevertheless, his position was an extreme one. He saw 'a single-minded campaign under way to wipe out the Russian nation', involving 'world Freemasonry, Roman Catholicism, the major western powers, Zionism and Marxism'. In his 1994 book *Samoderzhaviye dukha (Autocracy of the Spirit)* he argued that Russia had always been the object of Jewish conspiracy. When a journalist put it to him in an interview that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, to which the Metropolitan made frequent reference, were a forgery, Ioann replied, 'Yes, of course, it's hard to tell who wrote them, but the whole programme is in fact in action, regardless of who the author was.'

In his article in this issue of *Religion, State & Society* Dimitry Pospelovsky describes those 'former *komsomol* activists or even communists, repainted as nationalist-monarchists and defenders of the honour of the Orthodox Church', who have become advisers for some bishops like Ioann of St Petersburg. One accusation they level at western evangelists and foreign religious organisations is that they are 'poaching' the flock of potential Orthodox believers. Pospelovsky however argues that it is the Russian Orthodox Church that has not risen adequately to the challenge of presenting its message to society at large; he speaks of the 'missionary failure' of the Church. Patriarch Aleksii would apparently agree with him. Pospelovsky quotes him at a public meeting: 'Prosyletism and religious expansion from the West and the East ought to be challenged by the living witness of our own faith and life, not by legislative restrictions.' The patriarch goes on to appeal to clergy and laity to go out

to the people as active missionaries of their faith in word and deed, rather than waiting for the people to come to them.

The Orthodox Church may be failing in its missionary outreach to the Russian people; but different problems attend its record in reaching out to non-Russian nations, and these problems have become acute in the post-Soviet period when non-Russian nations within the Russian Federation are redefining their identities and testing the boundaries of their freedom. Amongst the nations of the Volga region, argue Filatov and Shchipkov in this issue of *Religion, State & Society*, the current national revival is giving rise to unprecedented religious creativity. Amongst these nations Russian Orthodoxy is viewed as 'antinational', a tool of imperialist occupation. Those involved in the national revival are trying to encourage their own distinctive local faiths. Some have turned to other Christian denominations. In recent years the Mordovians, for instance, have set up a range of contacts with the Finns, with whom they are ethnically related, and one consequence has been the founding of a Mordovian Lutheran Church. There has however been conflict between Finnish missionaries and the indigenous new converts. The former represent modern Western European Lutheranism with its formal attitude towards the sacraments, theological liberalism, women priests and support for sexual minorities. It is a widespread phenomenon in formerly communist countries that current western liberal values are perceived as alien and irrelevant by the indigenous Christians. This kind of cultural gulf obviously represents a challenge for western missionaries – of a different order from that simple chauvinism of Metropolitan Ioann and his ilk, but a serious challenge nevertheless, and one which deserves to be taken seriously.

Other non-Russian nations within the Russian Federation are turning to non-Christian faiths in order to establish their unique identity. These faiths include Islam, Judaism and Zoroastrianism; yet the most powerful current is the attempt to revive paganism. It is entirely possible, argue Filatov and Shchipkov, that the predominantly pagan nation of Mari El will become the first European nation-state in which paganism is the recognised state religion. Mari El could then become a focus for all the other pagan ethnic groups in the Volga region; and a common faith and favourable political circumstances could lead to the setting up of a union of Volga nations more monolithic than the association of mountain nations of the Caucasus. 'In this case the "pagan factor" would be heard at full volume and demand a response from the rest of Russia.'

The article by Filatov & Shchipkov is part of a thoroughgoing sociological investigation of religious life today throughout the Russian Federation. The investigation, the publishing of its findings and the collation of a comprehensive database are being supported by Keston Institute as part of its research programme in Russia. The findings will obviously be of major importance in many quarters, and not least for western religious organisations planning to carry on any kind of mission within Russia today.

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Sergei Filatov graduated from the History Faculty of Moscow University. He has worked at the Centre for the Study of the USA and Canada in Moscow, and since 1989 at the Analytical Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences. His book on Catholicism in the USA appeared in 1993, and he has also collaborated with Fr Gleb Yakunin on a book on religion and democracy.

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Dimitri Pospelovsky is a professor in the Department of History at the University of Western Ontario. A Russian-Ukrainian by birth, he has been spending several months each year in Russia since 1990 lecturing on Russian and Soviet church history at various theological schools and secular higher educational establishments.

Mikhail Roshchin, an Old Believer, is a researcher at the Institute of Eastern Studies attached to the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Yuri Senokosov is head of the Merab Mamardashvili Foundation for Interdisciplinary Research in Moscow and a member of the editorial board of the 'Voprosy filosofii' series of collected works, for which series he edited the works of Semen Frank.

Aleksandr Shchipkov was expelled from the Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages in 1978, joined the Christian Seminar led by Aleksandr Ogorodnikov, and worked as a manual labourer. He is now a journalist specialising in church-state relations and the political involvement of Christians in Russia. He is writing a book on Christian Democracy.