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Impressions of the Contemporary Russian Orthodox Church: Its Problems and Its Theological Education

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The Russian Orthodox Church has failed to find in itself the living force to lead Russian society morally or spiritually, as was hoped by both believers and nonbelievers when the collapse of the Soviet state had become obvious.

The 1988 Millennial Council (*Sobor*) of the Church adopted a statute which is close in essence and spirit to the statutes and decisions adopted by the Moscow *Sobor* of 1917–18. The statute is largely ignored, however. Thus, for example, no ecclesiastical courts, as stipulated by the statute, have been created. The resulting tendency is for bishops either to rule their dioceses as despots or to allow total independence to each parish priest and ecclesiastical anarchy to prevail. When the situation becomes intolerable and the bishop gets too many complaints from the laity a priest is removed, suspended, pensioned off or defrocked administratively; this then allows him to complain of injustice and seek acceptance either by another bishop in another diocese or by the Synod of the Church in Exile, and to publish brochures under such headings as *Pochemu ya pereshel v Zarubezhnuyu chast' Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi* (*Why I Have Joined the Russian Church Abroad*).¹ Let us take as an example the case of Archimandrite Adrian of Noginsk (formerly Bogorodsk). Parents of Sunday-school children he had taught sent in protests about his homosexual activity. Patriarch Aleksii threatened him with suspension, whereupon on 18 January 1993 he joined the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) under Valentin of Suzdal'. On 16 March of the same year, however, the ROCOR Synod suspended him for 'very grave moral transgressions'. In the summer of 1993, allegedly in protest against the ROCOR leadership's support for Pamyat' and other fascist and anti-semitic groups, Bishop Valentin organised a conference of some sixty schismatic parishes and declared temporary autocephaly – independence from both the émigré ROCOR and the Moscow Patriarchate. Archimandrite Adrian chose not to abide by the order of his ecclesiastical superiors, and joined the new autocephalous formation. The marriage was brief, however: on 23 January 1994 Bishop Valentin banned Adrian 'for violating the Apostolic rules and the canons of our Church Fathers, [as well as] for allowing unordained persons to serve at the altar and for sacking priests without episcopal approval'. Adrian consequently addressed himself to the schismatic metropolitan of Kiev Filaret, defrocked by a 1992 council of all the bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church for immoral behaviour, mistreatment of the clergy and scandalous revelations about his collaboration with the KGB. Filaret, who on his return from the Moscow council of bishops had violated the oath to retire he had

given at the council and had joined the Ukrainian autocephalists as their leader, accepted Adrian and consecrated him a bishop with the title 'Exarch of the Kievian Patriarchate in Russia'.²

The case of Filaret himself illustrates how difficult it is for the Church to remove bishops without an ecclesiastical court. It was only after an independent journalist's fact-finding visit to Ukraine in 1991, allegedly financed by the Russian parliamentary commission investigating KGB control of the Church, and his subsequent publication of scandalous details about Metropolitan Filaret's personal and political immorality, that the patriarch at last dared to raise the Filaret issue at the 1992 bishops' council, with the above-mentioned consequences.³

Despite support for Filaret by the Ukrainian government under Kravchuk and by Ukrainian nationalist organisations, over 5600 Orthodox parishes in Ukraine have remained faithful to the Autonomous Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate, headed by Metropolitan Vladimir (Sabodan). At the beginning of 1993 Filaret claimed some 1500 churches. Then a split occurred in his 'own' church. The unilaterally declared patriarch, Mstyslav, resident in New Jersey, whom Filaret had claimed to represent, disowned him and, recognising the validity of his defrocking, ordered him to retire.⁴ Needless to say, Filaret did not retire; nevertheless, upon Mstyslav's death in June 1993 both Filaret's Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kiev Patriarchate (UOC–KP) and Mstyslav's West-Ukrainian based Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) held patriarchal elections. The UOC–KP elected former prisoner of conscience Vasyl Romanyuk as patriarch with the monastic name of Volodymyr. Filaret must have hoped that the new patriarch would be merely a figurehead under his own control. However, the sudden death of the 70-year old Volodymyr in July 1995 led to suspicions of murder and of Filaret's part in it. According to a published police investigation document, Volodymyr had reported to the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs on Filaret's financial ties with the criminal world and the appropriation by him of all the central funds of the Ukrainian Church which, Volodymyr suspected, Filaret had transferred to foreign banks in his own name. He also complained that Filaret's paramilitary groups were terrorising him. Soon after that Volodymyr died, and Filaret became absolute head of the UOC–KP with the nominal title of *locum tenens*. The UAOC, with some 500 parishes, mostly in Galicia and West Volynia, elected the 77-year-old Petro Yarema as Patriarch Demetri.⁵

There thus now seem to be four Orthodox and two Uniate (Ukrainian Greek-Catholic) jurisdictions in Ukraine. Among the Uniates the adherents of Cardinal Lubachiv's'ky subscribe to his theory that the Uniates are a black patch on the white frock of the pope, or a stepping-stone on the road to full merger with Rome; the followers of Metropolitan Sterniuk see themselves as a national Ukrainian church distinct from the Roman Catholic Church. Sterniuk has even hinted at the desirability of a merger with the Orthodox autocephalist followers of the late Mstyslav – but on what terms it is not clear.

The local governments in Galicia are sympathetic to the Uniates, who have thus been able to use the special police (OMON) and unofficial paramilitary forces against the Orthodox;⁶ in Volynia and other areas of Ukraine, mostly west of the Dnieper, it is Filaret's autocephalists who have used the local OMON and some private paramilitary groups against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church: they have seized cathedrals by force in the main cities of those provinces, hoping that from there they will gradually be able to take over other parishes. Another autocephalous jurisdiction of several scores of parishes was headed by three brothers Bodnarchuk. The senior of

them, formerly Ivan of Zhitomir, actually began the autocephalist movement when he broke away from the Moscow Patriarchate in late 1989. Then with the help of an imposter calling himself a catacomb bishop, Vikenti of Tula,⁷ he consecrated his two other brothers as bishops of the new autocephalous church under Mstyslav. When Filaret of Kiev joined the autocephalists in 1992, Bodnarchuk appealed to the Moscow Patriarchate to reaccept and forgive him, but a bishops' council ruled that only a full council of the whole Russian Church can tackle the problem of restoring a defrocked bishop. In the meantime Canadian Ukrainians allegedly sent him a million dollars for the Autocephalous Church, which the three brothers decided to keep for themselves, forming their own jurisdiction in spring 1993. (Ivan Bodnarchuk died early in 1995.)

According to Fr Dimitri, a prominent Moscow priest and dean of students at the St Tikhon Moscow Theological Institute, so far six patriarchal priests in the western provinces and a considerably higher number of laypeople have been killed in clashes. East of the Dnieper none of the three nationalist-autocephalist groups has had any success, especially since there they cannot even rely on the local OMON.

The split between the two nationalist churches, Filaret's scandalous behaviour and the refusal of all local (i.e. autocephalous national) Orthodox churches, including Constantinople, to recognise the legitimacy of either have led to the defection of five bishops from the UOC-KP, including Metropolitan Antoni (Masendich), the head of the church's External Relations Department. They returned to the Moscow Patriarchate in February 1994, taking with them eight monasteries and hundreds of parishes; thereafter only some 500 parishes remained under Filaret's control. The near-collapse of Filaret's venture also profited the UAOC, which grew to some 1500 parishes. That church, clearly a national Ukrainian formation, has succeeded in checking the further expansion of the Uniate Church, which has used nationalist rather than theological arguments against the Orthodox, accusing them of being Moscow's fifth column. Although unrecognised by any of the local Orthodox churches and unlicensed by Kravchuk's Council for Religious Affairs,⁸ the UAOC seems to coexist relatively amicably with the UOC of the Moscow Patriarchate, whose leader in the Ukraine, Metropolitan Vladimir, has repeatedly stated his support for Ukrainian autocephaly – which, however, he argues, ought to be established in a canonical manner and at a time when it will not cause splits and dissensions.⁹ President Kravchuk was Filaret's staunchest ally; with Kravchuk's retirement the prospects for Filaret's church and for himself as its leader looked less promising. Nevertheless there have been reports in 1995 under Kravchuk's successor Kuchma of continuing violence against the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate by gangs loyal to Filaret.

The problems of the Russian Orthodox Church are not confined to Ukraine. When priests were allowed to sit in the USSR Supreme Soviet, and appeared on television wearing cassocks and pectoral crosses and vigorously attacking their adversaries, there was widespread dismay among ordinary clergy and laypeople. In October 1993 the Holy Synod decided to forbid clergy of all ranks to run for seats in legislative bodies at both federal and local level. All priests who were being proposed as electoral candidates were called in by the Synod and given a choice: they could either be defrocked and be elected as laymen or withdraw their names from the lists of candidates and remain priests. All the priests concerned chose the second option, except Fr Gleb Yakunin, who chose to continue to run for parliament. In November 1993 he was in Washington DC where, with the support of some ROCOR clergy and laity, he was creating the impression that the Synod's decision had been aimed specifically at him.¹⁰ This impression is incorrect: as we have seen, other priests besides Yakunin

were given the same option; and as Yakunin himself stated later, the patriarch personally tried to convince him to give up his parliamentary career and as a compromise said that he would allow him to work in the executive branch of the government.

There was widespread pro-Yakunin reaction in the West, as well as among the religiously neutral elements in Russia, but many Russian Orthodox believers, even of a very liberal hue, were shocked by Yakunin's choice of politics over priesthood, and many of his former sympathisers turned against him. Yakunin is legally in the right. The 1917–18 Local Council (*Pomestny Sobor*) of clergy and laity in Moscow ruled that the clergy may engage in political and state activities as citizens, and the decisions of a Local Council can be overruled only by another Local Council, not by a Synod of a dozen bishops. Moreover, a priest can be defrocked only for heresy, blasphemy or gross immorality; hence the patriarch and his Synod had the option of temporarily suspending Yakunin from priestly duties for the duration of his activities in the State Duma, but not of defrocking him.

If proper ecclesiastical courts had been established in accordance with the 1988 statute, problems such as those described could be properly resolved. The arbitrary practices of bishops have been facilitated by another omission in the statute: in contrast to the statutes adopted by the 1917–18 Council, the current statute has no stipulation for any representation of parish clergy and laity at the patriarchal level of administration. Moreover, members of the patriarchal Synod of bishops are either *ex-officio* or selected by the Synod from among the diocesan bishops by rota for a term of six months.

Without a permanent ecclesiastical court or any properly institutionalised two-way communication between the laity and parish priests on the one hand and the bishops of the Synod on the other, then, there prevails an arbitrary episcopal despotism in the contemporary Russian Orthodox Church.

I will offer some illustrations. The Swiss aid and information organisation *Glaube in der 2 Welt*, which has been very generous to the reemerging churches in Russia and Eastern Europe, presented a compact offset printing outfit to a Russian theological school. The school planned to use it to produce textbooks and educational manuals for the seminarians. The ruling bishop took the machine away from the school, however, claiming he had other plans for its use. Consequently the machine lies idle somewhere, the Swiss donors are very angry that such an expensive gift has not been put to proper use and to the present day seminaries in Russia have almost no textbooks. In the five years of religious freedom only two small manuals have been produced by the efforts of a single professor of the Moscow Theological Academy, and one of these, a brief history of the Russian Orthodox Church in the twentieth century, is unsatisfactory by any standard: its author has tried so hard to avoid offending anyone that the manual has been reduced to a simple list of facts from which the least comfortable ones have been excluded. Students continue to study from the mimeographed notes of professors written decades ago or from their own lecture notes.

Former *komsomol* activists or even communists, repainted as nationalist-monarchists and defenders of the honour of the Orthodox Church, have become advisers and even ghost-writers for some bishops, notably Ioann of St Petersburg. They conveniently blame the missionary failure of the Orthodox Church on the activities of western evangelists, lump these evangelists' preaching of the 'prosperity theology' of primitive neo-Calvinism together with the uglier aspects of the prevailing primitive forms of capitalism – corruption, pornography and crime – and present the whole as

aspects of a concerted western Judeo-Masonic plot aimed at subverting the morality of Russia and paralysing the Orthodox Church's role in Russian society. People who were raised on the doctrines of enemy encirclement and hatred of the class enemy now continue to preach the same doctrines under the guise of defending Orthodoxy. It is of these elements that the 'Vserossiisky soyuz pravoslavnykh bratstv' (All-Russian Union of Orthodox Brotherhoods) is composed.

At its third congress in St Petersburg in June 1992 the Union declared that the patriarch was a Judeo-Mason for having presented a memorandum to the New York rabbinical college declaring a common Judeo-Christian Old Testament heritage. At its fourth congress in the spring of 1993 it listed as perpetrators of a 'Judaic heresy' the most active and intellectually influential priests of Moscow, from 'leftists' such as Fr Georgi Kochetkov, Fr Vsevolod Chaplin and Fr Vitali Borovoy to right-wing monarchists like Fr Vladimir Vorob'yev, the dean of the St Tikhon Institute. The congress called for the canonisation of Nicholas II with the formula 'ritually killed by the Jews', for the canonisation of Ivan the Terrible as a fighter against the Judaising heresy and for the restoration of Ivan's *oprichnina* as a tool for combatting the agents of Zionism.¹¹

The patriarch has repeatedly condemned racialism and extreme forms of nationalism in statements for the press, but has taken no disciplinary action against the Union of Brotherhoods, nor against its chairman, Archimandrite Kirill Sakharov of the Danilov Monastery, of which the patriarch is the nominal abbot. The biggest and one of the most active brotherhoods in Russia, that of the Merciful Saviour chaired by Fr Vladimir Vorob'yev, runs the St Tikhon Theological Institute, with over 1000 students, and numerous other charitable and educational institutions. This brotherhood has left the Union, as have most other truly church-oriented brotherhoods; this fact is, however, not recorded in any published documents. The man in the street thinks of the Union with its programme of hatred, xenophobia and pogrom as representing all church brotherhoods and as being the mouthpiece of the Orthodox Church.

The Church is vitally in need of well-educated, balanced clergy. Because of the disastrous financial situation in the Church, however, intake into the graduate theological academies up to and including 1994 had been decreasing. In 1993 over 90 academically worthy candidates applied for the first year at the Moscow Theological Academy, but the patriarchate limited the intake to 30, and finally only 28 were accepted. There is, of course, now the St Tikhon Institute with 1000 students, the Aleksandr Men' Orthodox Open University with 300–400 students, the Orthodox University of the Patriarchal Department of Christian Education with about 150 students, two other similar Orthodox universities (one in Volgograd and another in a north Caucasian town) and the Higher Orthodox-Christian School of the Brotherhood of the Meeting of the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God run by Fr Kochetkov. None of these schools has permanent quarters, however, and none has an impressive library. Only the academies of Sergiyev Posad and St Petersburg and, perhaps, the recently reopened one in Kiev, with their teaching traditions and excellent libraries, can serve as true research centres. Yet it is in these institutions that the student body was being cut instead of increasing – and this despite the fact, for example, that since 1993 the St Petersburg Academy has had the potential of almost doubling its teaching and living space, having finally received the building of the prerevolutionary theological academy in addition to its present one which had been the seat of the undergraduate seminary before the revolution.

Seminaries closed under Krushchev began to reopen after 1988 and the need for theology instructors began to grow rapidly. It was soon apparent that the majority of

the theological academy graduates, who had completed a total of eight years of theology studies, were failures as teachers, although traditionally one of the main purposes of the postgraduate theological academies has been, precisely, to train teachers. Most of the effective theology teachers in Russia today are either so-called 'Varangians' – visiting professors from secular universities, theologically self-taught – or men who have gone on to train in seminaries as graduates of secular universities. Would then theological faculties at secular universities be a solution? Not so, argued an erudite speaker, a priest with full university and theological academy education, at a conference on church and society organised by Metropolitan Ioann of St Petersburg in 1993. He warned against establishing such faculties on the grounds that the Church would not be able to provide qualified professors for them and they would end up hiring people with doctorates in atheism gained during the Soviet period, who would teach such subjects as Orthodox doctrine in an 'objective' manner – that is, in the same way they had taught the same subjects formerly at institutes of 'scientific atheism'.

The theological academies of the period since the Second World War have thus essentially failed to build up cadres of creative and imaginative theologians. Of course, in the past they were not allowed to teach pedagogic; but this is not a valid excuse: most professors at institutions of higher education in the West have never studied pedagogics. The problems lie with the whole method of teaching theology in the established Russian schools: the basis is rote learning, and there is very limited independent reading. The chief librarian of the Trinity-St Sergius Academy at Sergiyev Posad, for instance, does not allow students to take out books which he thinks they should not read. Among such unofficially indexed books is the Paris-based *Vestnik Russkogo Khristianskogo Dvizheniya*, undoubtedly the best Christian periodical in the Russian language. Three years ago I gave some 30 back issues of this quarterly to the library: they have not even been catalogued, and students are unaware of their existence.

The newly opened seminaries and lower theological schools suffer from limited space, poor libraries, shortage of qualified teachers and shortage of money; but the atmosphere in some of them – Kostroma, Smolensk, Stavropol' and especially Kursk – is incomparably better than in the old-established schools. It is true that the Church has been bankrupted by inflation; but the idea that it is the Church alone which should finance religious education is fallacious. New religious education establishments are now mostly financed by a number of Western European Christian foundations and private individuals, mostly German and Swiss, by some newly rich Russian benefactors, and even by commercial operations entered into by some enterprising clergymen and brotherhoods, as well as by some local governments. There is a widespread feeling of guilt among middle-aged apparatchiks (including Yel'tsin) about the past destruction of churches and a widespread tendency to make amends – for example, the recent rebuilding from scratch of the seventeenth-century Kazan' Cathedral in Red Square, financed by the Moscow mayoral office.

Until 1995 then, there has been no unified church educational initiative coordinated from above. Instead, the initiatives have come from individual parishes and local church organisations, some of which are very active and even mission-oriented – for instance, the groups led by Fr Georgi Kochetkov and Fr Aleksandr Borisov, both pupils of Fr Aleksandr Men'.¹² These two priests run higher theological schools (mentioned earlier), large Sunday schools for children and catechetical institutes for the preparation of adults for baptism, and engage in charity work. Both churches use contemporary spoken Russian instead of the largely incomprehensible Church

Slavonic for Scripture readings in church services. This practice has attracted the wrath of the Union of Brotherhoods and other petrified elements in the Church. Fr Georgi Kochetkov has come under particular attack. His 'crimes' are many. He has russified the whole church service by moderating Church Slavonic syntax in accordance with Russian grammatical rules and replacing with Russian words those Slavonic words which have either lost all meaning in modern Russian or whose meaning has changed. Moreover, after the exclamation 'Catechumens, depart!', he asks all the unbaptised and nonbelievers present to leave and shuts the church doors for the Liturgy of the Faithful – those who will be taking communion. His ministry has been tremendously successful. Despite the fact that he baptises adults only at Easter and Pentecost and only after at least a year of preparation at his catechetical institute he baptises over 100 adults each year; and although many of the newly baptised join local parishes, Fr Georgi's own parish has grown since its establishment in 1990 from a few dozen to some 1500 members. In 1991 they received the beautiful early seventeenth-century church of the Meeting of the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God on Lubyanka Street.¹³ The church was being used as a workshop by art restorers. It took the parish almost two years to move the restorers from the building and to clean up and properly decorate the church. The church was already becoming too small for such a large parish, however, and in 1993 Moscow city authorities gave the parish a second church within one block of the first. This one, however, housed a naval museum. No sooner had the battle with the naval museum for its withdrawal been won than the patriarch ordered Fr Georgi and his community to vacate the Meeting of the Icon Church on the pretext that as a part of a former monastery it would need to become a monastic church, arguing that with only one priest the community needed only one building – the one taken over from the naval museum. Kochetkov's community will receive no material compensation for all the hard work and expenditure involved in restoring their original church, and they will have to do all the restoration work needed at the new church at their own expense. The patriarch has ordered Kochetkov to return to Church Slavonic for the services, although the Scriptures may be read in Russian, as is done in Fr Aleksandr Borisov's church and some others. Had there been a proper ecclesiastical court, as the current church statute stipulates, Fr Georgi and his community could have appealed against these decisions.

Fr Georgi's Higher Orthodox Theological School has produced dozens of competent theologians ready for ordination. Yet the patriarchate refuses to ordain any of them, while ordaining hundreds each year who have no theological education or at most a two-year junior seminary training after secondary school. The real reason for such a harsh reaction on the part of the patriarch towards Fr Georgi's activity is a concerted campaign on the part of the reactionaries, led by the Union of Church Brotherhoods. Their campaign against Fr Georgi has included collective letters to the patriarch asking him to put Fr Georgi on trial for 'Judaic heresy' or 'renovationism'. Some of the more reactionary brotherhoods have organised conferences attacking the use of spoken Russian in church services; the claim has been made that Church Slavonic is a holy language specially created by SS Cyril and Methodius for their mission among the Slavs and that Russian is a profane language. One collective letter has even called the use of Russian an act of treason against Cyril and Methodius. Amazingly enough, the signatories of this letter included several theology professors from the Moscow Academy who apparently do not realise that their claim is the reverse of the truth. Cyril and Methodius did not invent a language, but simply gave a written form of expression to a Slavonic dialect spoken in the area of their native

Thessaloniki. They did this in order to make the Christian message comprehensible to the Slavs. Hence translation of the services from Slavonic into contemporary spoken language when the former has long ago ceased to be understood is precisely faithfulness to the legacy of Cyril and Methodius and a continuation of their work.¹⁴

The patriarch has partially given in to the pressure of the 'right-wingers', not because of any particular sympathy for their views but because he fears a major church schism, which is more likely to come from the politicised, essentially unchurched and theologically ignorant 'rightist extremists'¹⁵ than from the so-called church reformers with their wholly Orthodox ecclesiastical perceptions. In a conversation with this author Patriarch Aleksii said that both the rightists and the leftists were trying to involve the Church in ideological polemics. After seven decades of conditioning by Marxist–Leninist hate-propaganda, the nation is dangerously split along ideological, political, ethnic, class and economic lines. If the Church were to get involved in the polemics and take sides, the split would penetrate the Church and cause another schism, which in its weakened state the Church of today might not survive. Moreover, there is at least one point in the anti-Kochetkov campaign that strikes a sympathetic chord in the patriarch's heart: he loves the Church Slavonic language. Privately he agrees that a gradual russification of church services is inevitable, but believes that it has to be done by the decision of the whole Church and that the translations should be from Greek, not Church Slavonic, and done by experts, not by individual pastors. All such novelties must be introduced very cautiously and gradually, he believes, because after the trauma of the renovationist split of the 1920s the people of the Church suspect 'renovationist' subversion in every minor alteration of the services. The majority of bishops are against the use of Russian and generally prefer to see no changes at all – life is quieter and more comfortable that way. Reduced more or less to decorative functions under communist rule, most of the bishops of the older generation have got used to that status and simply do not dare to act.

Because of the above-mentioned lack of proper church infrastructures, any educational or missionary initiatives take place at the local level. Perhaps recognising his helplessness, the patriarch, who had consistently rejected the idea of restoring the Orthodox Church to the status of 'state church', petitioned the Ministry of Justice in the spring of 1993 to introduce some restrictions on foreign missionary activities. The proposal was to allow only those foreign missionaries to operate in Russia who were invited by the established Russian religious organisations (for example, those representing the Orthodox, the Baptists, the Jews or the Muslims). This proposal was rejected by President Yel'tsin, which indicates that, fearing worldwide protests,¹⁶ his government is not willing to give such protection to the established Russian religions – even on a temporary basis. The patriarch had asked that the restrictions remain in effect for some five to seven years only, presumably hoping that in the meanwhile the Orthodox Church (and other established faiths) would be able to produce sufficient numbers of properly trained missionaries and religious teachers to stand up to the foreign challenge. There are few grounds for believing that this hope will be fulfilled, unless the patriarchate changes its policies on such initiatives as that of Fr Georgi Kochetkov and begins to ordain the graduates of the Fr Aleksandr Men' Open Orthodox University and of Kochetkov's Higher Orthodox School, which are unique in training their graduates as teachers and missionaries.

If the government were to issue protective legislation, there would always be the danger that sooner or later the government would want its pound of flesh from the Church in return. Russian history provides plenty of precedents. The patriarch seems

to appreciate this danger. Answering questions from the audience at a meeting in Kostroma on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the diocese, the patriarch declared: 'Proselytism 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.' He also appealed to the clergy and laity to go to the people, to be active missionaries of their faith in word and deed, rather than to wait for the people, spiritually confused by decades of communist conditioning, to come to them.¹⁷

Whatever the patriarch may say, the current weakness and material poverty of the Church will continue to force local dioceses and individual parishes to look to local governments for support. It is on this level that a new unofficial church–state symbiosis is most likely to develop. As the old communist apparatchiks still remain rather prominent in local government bodies, such rapprochement would present the paradox of an intermarriage between the Church and the remnants of those very institutions which persecuted the Church for seven decades.

The tragedy for the Church is that it has proved incapable of filling the spiritual vacuum in society, of quenching the thirst for spiritual sustenance among the population in general, which is instead being swamped by the outpourings of astrologers, television healers, occultists and fundamentalist preachers. In relation to their efforts and the money poured into their 'evangelical' campaigns in Russia the effect of these people's witness is minimal; but the much more significant side-effect of their activities has been to disillusion the religiously thirsty but ignorant masses, in whose eyes this market-place of religious competition has negatively affected the status of all religions, including the Orthodox Church. Moreover, it is clear that as long as the Orthodox Church continues to use poorly understood Church Slavonic and does not develop some simplified forms of worship for the beginner, supplement worship with catechism for adults and make religious literature in a modern idiom readily available, its missionary role will remain minimal.

In 1988–91 millions became members of the Orthodox Church in mass baptisms; not one-tenth of these neophytes have become regular churchgoers. In 1992 there began a clear decline in church attendance, despite such local successes as the Kochetkov and Borisov parishes, where lengthy catechisation means that 90 per cent of neophytes become regular church members. For the nominally 'Orthodox' majority the church means an occasional memorial service for deceased relatives, a marriage ceremony, a baptism, a funeral. In their opinion the liturgy is for the priests, not for the laity. And indeed, such an opinion may not be too far from the truth if the liturgy is celebrated in a language which hardly anybody understands, the Scriptures are read with the reader's back to the congregation and large parts of the service are barely audible from behind closed altar doors with the icon screen wholly separating the clergy from the laity.¹⁸ For many of the laity the 'liturgy' is an akathist to the Virgin Mary or to a popular saint and the blessing of waters – in many churches of the Moscow diocese, at least, both these ceremonies are performed regularly every Sunday immediately after the liturgy.

In concluding this survey, I want to look to the future. Is the situation likely to improve with the arrival of the postcommunist generation of clergy? In other words, what is the spiritual and intellectual potential of today's seminary students? Having been a visiting lecturer in Russian theological schools every year since 1990, I can venture some observations.

The first thing to note is that the contingents of students are quite different in the two different types of theological educational establishment. On the one hand we have the traditional four-year undergraduate theological seminaries followed by the

four-year postgraduate academies, the aim of which has always been to prepare students for ordination; and on the other, we have the two-year interdiocesan spiritual schools, all of which were founded after 1988 and which were originally meant to train church readers, Sunday-school teachers and choir directors. The opening of new parishes in the postcommunist era has been so rapid and extensive, however, that even despite the fact that the number of seminaries has grown from three in the whole USSR in 1987 to eight in Russia alone by 1994 (plus at least seven in the rest of the former USSR) and that extra-mural sections have been opened in almost all of them, they have not caught up with the need for more priests; hence the interdiocesan schools have begun to be used as a pool for ordinations as well. To date there are at least eighteen such schools in Russia and at least eight in the other parts of the former USSR. The old seminaries are male only. Most of the new seminaries and all the interdiocesan schools are mixed, the girls being trained as choir directors but also studying all theological subjects except pastoral theology. Generally, the new seminaries have a more open atmosphere about them: their mixed intake may be a contributing factor here. Their rectors are mostly adult converts with secular university degrees preceding their theological education. Adult converts typically come to the Church via the theological writings of the new Russian theologians of the twentieth century, who were themselves converted or reconverted to Christianity after a period as Marxists. They began to write in the last prerevolutionary decade in Russia. Most of them were expelled from Russia by Lenin in 1922. Eventually many of them converged on Paris, where they founded the St Serge Theological Institute, whose graduates in turn established St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in the USA. This new Russian theological movement is known as the 'Paris Theologians' or the 'American Orthodox School'. They and their theological output have been attacked by the conservative émigré churchmen known as the Karlovtsians after the town in Yugoslavia where the group was founded in 1921. Currently these attacks are being echoed by similar circles in Russia, who like the Karlovtsians take as their textbooks of true Orthodox theology the most reactionary religious publications of nineteenth-century Russia, with their staunchly monarchist, autocratic and often antisemitic orientation. It is publications of this type which are being reprinted in huge quantities in Russia today by the most reactionary brotherhoods. These are mostly centred on monasteries; for example, the Trinity-St Sergius Monastery where the biggest and oldest seminary, with a total of almost 900 students, is situated.

Who are the students in this and other seminaries? They are a highly uneven group. Perhaps as many as a quarter have already gained a secular degree before entering the seminary: medical doctors, mathematicians, physicists, art historians and musicians are among the most commonly encountered pretheological professions, perhaps not in that order of frequency. Practically all members of this category are adult converts, former atheists or agnostics, often from families with strong communist party connections in the past. Quite a few come from military officers' families and have themselves been to military schools or even served as officers in the army or navy before going to the seminary. Probably a similar proportion are young people who have been converted as teenagers. Reading a book by Fr Aleksandr Shmeman, listening to foreign Orthodox religious broadcasts on the radio, meeting a priest invited by their high-school teacher to give a talk at the school – these are typical ways to the Church and to the seminary for that (much younger) group. The remaining 40 to 50 per cent either are sons of priests or come from traditionally religious families, mostly rural and most frequently from Western Ukraine. In many cases even they have gone through a period of denial of God, and thus could

also be considered as neophytes.

The first two categories contain the most interesting and most promising individuals; but in seminaries like the one at the Trinity-St Sergius Monastery, within two years of study most of their religious enthusiasm, fired by love of Christ and their fellow men and open to the world, is replaced by a sense of being encircled by enemies, by the desire to isolate themselves from the sinful world around them and by the suspicion that they are surrounded by Judeo-Masonic plots against the Orthodox Church. Their monastic spiritual fathers tell them of doomsday forthcoming in the immediate future and of the futility of learning in such circumstances. In this kind of climate a studious seminarian who spends most of his free time with his books becomes suspect as not a true Orthodox believer, perhaps even an agent of Zionism. Any external lecturer who introduces new ideas likewise becomes suspect. The above-mentioned 'Varangians' have had numerous reports accusing them of heresy sent by seminarians to the patriarch.

In February 1994, for the first time for decades, a consultation of rectors of all Russian theological schools was convened at the Trinity-St Sergius Seminary. The consensus of the educators was that the situation within the schools is unsatisfactory, the financial crisis being only one of the factors. All too often a student entering the seminary full of enthusiasm loses all that enthusiasm after two to three years of study and becomes a total mediocrity as a priest on ordination. However, as the more progressive rectors of the new theological schools complained to me, the cause of the problem is wrongly diagnosed by the conservatives in charge of religious education, who put the blame on the secular world outside and on the liberals.

Let us turn now to the two-year interdiocesan spiritual schools. Here the student body consists predominantly of recent high-school graduates, with only a sprinkling of students with secular university degrees. Most of the students are less sophisticated than those in the full seminaries. Many of them have been acolytes and church servers, mostly in rural and small-town parishes, and have been sent to the schools by their priests. As most of the rural priests are rather poorly educated, at least theologically, they are easy prey for the propagandists of doomsday and Zionist encirclement. Many of the students, then, start their courses at the interdiocesan schools with the same ideas that their colleagues in the senior seminaries adopt during their years of training, but in contrast to the latter they tend to lose such preconceived ideas in the course of their studies because of the greater openness of these schools and the use they make of teachers from secular universities as well as visiting lecturers from abroad to compensate for their own shortage of teaching staff.

Some seminaries also engage in active charity and social aid work. The St Petersburg theological schools look after a gerontological hospital and a penal colony in the suburbs. The Kursk seminarians look after a large orphanage, preparing the children for baptism through religious education, collecting and distributing gifts for them and taking them out on picnics and educational visits and, of course, to church.

The seminary in Kursk was the only one where I encountered open student discussion at lectures and questions asked or disagreement expressed directly and orally in the class. In all the other seminaries students generally do not dare openly challenge the lecturer in class or even get up and ask questions. At most they send up written notes, catch the lecturer after class or visit him in his room in order to have a private conversation. They might come as a group of friends, and then a discussion can last for hours, switching from subject to subject, trying to solve all the world's problems in a day in typically Russian fashion.

Despite the manifold problems in the Russian Orthodox Church today, I am

hopeful for a brighter future for the Russian theological schools, for the next generation of clergy and eventually for their flock and the country as a whole. The country is not a total wasteland, and neither is its Church, which here and there sprouts healthy buds. These, however frail, are buds of life; the alternatives on offer hold out no hope for life or growth, only for stagnation. The buds of living, healthy, open Christianity are therefore bound to prevail.

Notes and References

The author, a member of the Orthodox Church and a Russian-Ukrainian by birth, has been spending from two to five months each year in Russia since 1990, lecturing on aspects of Russian and Soviet church history at numerous Russian theological schools as well as at some secular higher and secondary educational establishments. Russian is his native tongue.

- ¹ This one was written by the priest Lev Lebedev of Kursk Diocese, who was forced into retirement by his bishop after he had been found drunk in a ditch wearing his cassock and pectoral cross.
- ² The Moscow Patriarchate's Department of the External Church Relations, faxed *Soobshcheniya dlya organov informatsii (Information for the Media)*, 4 February 1994.
- ³ Aleksandr Nezhny, 'Ego blazhenstvo bez mitry i zhezla', *Ogonek*, no. 48 (November 1991), pp. 8–10; no. 49 (December 1991), pp. 20–22.
- ⁴ *Ukrains'ka avtokefal'na pravoslavna Tserkva*, an eight-page pamphlet containing Mstyslav's order to Filaret and his request to Kravchuk to give legal recognition to an Autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church, separate from Filaret, with its centre in Galicia.
- ⁵ 'Some insights into strife dividing church in Ukraine', *The Church Messenger* (Johnstown, PA), 21 November 1993, pp. 4 and 8. The article gives unrealistically inflated figures for the number of churches in each of these jurisdictions: 3000 for the UOC–KP and 1500 for the UAOC. For the circumstances surrounding the death of Patriarch Volodymyr, see S. Kiselev, 'Otchego umer svyateishi patriarkh Vladimir?', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 2 August 1995.
- ⁶ One of the leaders of the latter has been ex-political prisoner Ivan Hel', head of the 'Defence League of the Ukrainian Catholic Church'. While in a Mordovian labour camp he and his friend Valentyn Moroz were censured by all other prisoners, Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian, for disseminating national hatred and for beating that same Fr Vasyl' Romanyuk who became the nominal patriarch of the UOC–KP. *Chronicle of Current Events* (Moscow, *samizdat*, reprinted by Amnesty International), no. 47, 1978, pp. 107–8.
- ⁷ According to official information from the Moscow Patriarchate Vikenti was a deacon in Tula diocese until found guilty of sexually violating young boys. For this he was defrocked, while the secular court sentenced him to a term in labour camp. As a layman he later worked as a foreman on the Danilov Monastery construction site until found guilty of embezzlement and sacked. Then in 1987 or 1988 he went to the USA to gain ROCOR recognition as a catacomb bishop. ROCOR refused to recognise his alleged titles. He then tried to join the Orthodox Church in America, visiting the late Fr John Meyendorff, dean of St Vladimir's Seminary. Having failed to impress the Orthodox authorities in the West, he returned to Russia and declared himself a catacomb bishop. By 1990 he was already with the Ukrainian Uniates. Sternuk recognised him as a bishop of the Uniate Church for Russia; Cardinal Lyubachiv's'ky later reprimanded Sternuk for this. Vikenti's current status is unclear.
- ⁸ Ukraine and Belarus' are the only republics of the former USSR which retained their CRAs after 1990.
- ⁹ A. Korolev, 'Pokayaniye bludnogo syna', *Trud*, 25 February 1994, p. 12; see also *La Service Orthodoxe de presse* (Paris), no. 185, February 1994.
- ¹⁰ *Soobshcheniya dlya organov informatsii*, Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, 3 November 1993.

- ¹¹ Interview with Iyeromonakh Kirill, chairman of the Union of Brotherhoods, 'Soyuz pravoslavnykh bratsv – redut Tserkvi', followed by comment by D. Shusharin, 'Ibo o tom, chto oni delayut taino, stydno i govorit', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 21 May 1992. Also oral testimony to this author by A. Kiperovsky, leader of the Brotherhood of the Meeting of the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God, Moscow, August 1992.
- ¹² Fr Aleksandr Men' was a brilliant preacher, author of books of popular theology, and a unique missionary pastor of the intelligentsia who brought literally thousands to the Church. Of Jewish birth, he was particularly successful at bringing Jews to Christ. He was murdered in September 1990 at the age of 55 while on his way to celebrate a Sunday liturgy. Fr Aleksandr Borisov is his disciple and rector of the Church of SS Kosma and Damian in Moscow. In 1994 a very energetic 37-year old pedagogue, Bishop Yevgeni (Reshetnikov), was appointed to chair the Patriarchate's Committee on Education. Under his leadership there are now signs of initiatives being taken from above.
- ¹³ It was the site where in 1380 the Grand Duke of Moscow Dimitri Donskoy met the icon being brought from the city of Vladimir to bless and accompany his troops to the fateful Battle of Kulikovo against the Mongols. In gratitude for his subsequent victory Dimitri built a monastery named after the meeting of the icon on that spot.
- ¹⁴ 'Obrashcheniye Soveta Soyuz pravoslavnykh bratsv k ... Patriarkhu ... Aleksiyu', *Russky vestnik*, no. 1, 1994; O. G. Kochetkov, 'Mertvoye i zhivoye. O russkom yazyke v bogoslužhenii', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 14 January 1994; Prot. Vitali Borovoy, 'Priority: yedinstvo i obnoveniye', *Moskovskiy novosti*, 23–30 January 1994; D. Pospelovsky, 'Opasnyye simptomy v sovremennom russkom pravoslavii', *Segodnya*, 19 November 1994; 'Patriarkhu ... Aleksiyu' (a collective letter in Kochetkov's support), *Segodnya*, 26 November 1994; 'Koyegozhdo deyaniya obnazhat'sya' (Kochetkov's response to the Union of Brotherhoods), *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 3 March 1994; a collective letter to the patriarch signed by 41 laymen of the national-bolshevik camp (only one of whom is a church historian) condemning individual experiments in liturgical practice, *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, 4 March 1994; a collective letter to the patriarch from 21 clergymen (including four Moscow Theological Academy lecturers and a dean of the St Tikhon Institute) and seven laymen condemning the use of Russian as a betrayal of Cyril and Methodius, *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, 11 March 1994; a response from 35 clergymen (including the retired Archbishop Mikhail (Mud'yugin), a professor at the St Petersburg theological academy, two other professors at that school and at least two Moscow professors of theology): a collective address to the patriarch in support of the use of the Russian language and other reforms in the Church, *Segodnya*, 4 May 1994. This is but a small selection. Paradoxically, Metropolitan Ioann of St Petersburg, who claims to be a Russian patriot fighting for Russia's salvation from a 'Judeo-Masonic' plot, is vehemently against the use of Russian in church, calling it a language of prostitutes and thieves. So much for his love of Russia!
- ¹⁵ The term is highly misleading because these 'rightists' are mostly former *komsomol* activists who combine their monarchism with nostalgia for the communist past, cooperating politically with both the communists and the fascists (Barkashov's) 'Russkoye natsional'noye yedinstvo' (Russian National Unity Movement) and publishing their diatribes in the national bolshevik newspapers.
- ¹⁶ Media reactions to the plan, both in Russia and abroad, were indeed negative – and arguably unjustly. Unjustly because many democratic countries limit the right of proselytism, especially to people who are not citizens of those countries: Israel, Finland, modern Lithuania; and even Great Britain, where Orthodox bishops, for instance, must carry non-British eparchial titles, and where the Orthodox churches have been under some semi-official pressure not to accept disaffected Anglican clergy wanting to join them as a movement or group. Limitations on foreign religious competition might be compared to customs barriers introduced by democratic governments to protect home industries. Such 'temporary' protectionist measures, which sometimes remain in place for decades, have never been attacked as contradicting democracy, although free trade is a democratic maxim.

- ¹⁷ 'Svyateishy Patriarkh ... Aleksii II sovershil zakladku novogo khrama v Kostrome', *Soobshcheniya dlya organov informatsii*, Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, 28 July 1994.
- ¹⁸ Among the 'misdemeanours' of which Fr Georgi Kochetkov and other 'modernists' stand accused are that they keep the altar doors open during most of the service, read the Scriptures facing the laity, use low icon screens and read all the eucharistic prayers out loud so that all the people can participate in them.