

# RELIGION, STATE & SOCIETY

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## **Editorial**

During the formal sessions and plenary debates at the Second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz (23–29 June), as well as in the informal ‘hearings’ and in private conversations, it was clear that as far as many of the churches of the formerly communist countries of Europe – especially the Orthodox churches – are concerned the whole issue of ‘proselytising’ by ‘foreign’ sects and missions is at the top of the agenda of problems to be solved. During his plenary address at the start of the Assembly Catholicos Karekin of the Armenian Church, one of the keynote speakers, addressed the theme with fervour:

How can one imagine that people will come to that country of Armenia which has been a Christian land and has endured all kinds of tribulations for having continuously and faithfully witnessed to Christ at the cost of martyrdom, and consider it a ‘virgin land’ for the so-called Christian mission? How can a land where every stone, every book, every piece of art, the whole culture, speak of the Christian faith, be considered a ‘mission field’ in the ordinary sense of that word?

Similar sentiments were expressed at the end of 1996 by Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk, head of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, when he addressed a Conference on World Mission and Evangelism organised by the World Council of Churches. He defended the principle of the ‘local church’, which ‘stipulates that the church in a given place shall be fully responsible for its people before God’.

Metropolitan Kirill did not explain exactly how the ‘local church’ is to be defined. The new Russian law on religion, passed in June by an overwhelming majority (but now stalled by the president’s veto), helps to do so. In its preamble it names four religions which are said to be traditional in the Russian Federation: Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism.

There are no doubt those in Russia in both church and state who would like to see the Russian Orthodox Church officially established as the ‘state church’. The new legislation does not do so, and as Kathleen Smith shows in her article in this issue of *RSS* analysing the different expectations of all parties to the reconstruction of the Church of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, there are in fact multiple different views current of the ideal relationship between the Orthodox faith and Russian statehood and nationhood. One of her conclusions, however, is that ‘the new Russian state, like the old, will use its patronage of monumental architecture to ... exclude religious minorities ...’

The proposed new Russian law on religion, which would replace the very liberal legislation of 1990, is obviously directed at curbing the activity of harmful cults, but if rigorously and consistently applied it would place severe restrictions on the activity of major non-Orthodox churches, including most Protestant denominations and the

Roman Catholic Church as well.

Relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Vatican continue at a low ebb. One of the disappointments affecting the atmosphere at Graz was that the proposed pre-Assembly meeting in Vienna between Patriarch Aleksii and Pope John Paul had been called off. In his article in this issue of *RSS* Serge Keleher describes the good relations between Moscow and the Vatican from the time of the opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962 throughout the 1960s and 1970s. These were of course to a large extent shaped by the political requirements of the Soviet government; nevertheless it is salutary to remember that in December 1969 it was announced that the Holy Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate had decided to permit Catholics to receive holy communion in Russian Orthodox churches, and that the announcement was made by Metropolitan Aleksii (Ridiger) of Tallinn – now Patriarch Aleksii II.

In the context of the debate on proselytising, it is instructive to look much more closely than has hitherto been possible at those parts of the Russian Federation which have retained a traditional pagan faith and where Russian Orthodox Christianity has itself been relatively recently introduced by missionary activity. In *RSS* we have published a number of articles which arise out of the research work being done by Sergei Filatov and his team, with financial support from Keston, on religiosity throughout the Russian Federation today. In this issue we include an article on religious developments in Udmurtia. We are also publishing a short article on the situation in Karelia, whose author Aleksandr Shchipkov, part of the Filatov team, focusses our attention on ‘a unique case of “proselytism” by an Orthodox church in an Orthodox diocese’. ‘Finnicised Orthodox Karelians travel from Finland into Karelia and baptise Russified Soviet Karelians.’ The situation ‘threatens to lead to serious conflict’, observes Shchipkov. Indeed, as Shchipkov goes on to note, the tension in Karelia probably exacerbated the crisis of early 1996 when a number of Orthodox parishes in Estonia, with the support of the Finnish Orthodox Church, broke with the Moscow Patriarchate and placed themselves under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople.

It is in fact by no means the case that the Orthodox world today stands united in the face of a perceived common enemy. Dimitry Pospelovsky’s article in this issue of *RSS* uses material from newly-available archival sources to remind us that after the Second World War the Moscow Patriarchate was used in the context of Soviet foreign policy ‘for the purpose of bringing Orthodox churches beyond Soviet borders under its direct control or at least into its sphere of influence’; and Serge Keleher looks at the history of the troubled relationship between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate throughout the twentieth century, showing that the current Estonian crisis, although of exceptional seriousness, is by no means unique in the history of the Orthodox world. ‘Eastern Orthodox Christianity claims to constitute one Universal Church,’ observes Keleher; administratively, however, the Orthodox world is a federation of rather more than a dozen ‘local churches’, each of which possesses the status of ‘autocephaly’; and while the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople is ranked as ‘*primus inter pares*’, ‘it is not at all clear just what primatial rights [he] enjoys ...’

The Orthodox churches today find themselves beset, then, by a combination of acute challenges, some internal, some external. As one Orthodox representative commented at the Ecumenical Assembly, ‘what we really need is our own Graz for the Orthodox world’.

In its 25th anniversary year the Keston journal finds itself examining problems of

religious life in the postcommunist world which are no less complex than those of communist times, and just as important to resolve. What is more, they are problems which cannot be properly understood or tackled without an understanding of the historical context in which they have arisen. In the aftermath of the return of Hong Kong to Chinese ownership the article by Xuchu Xu in this issue of *RSS* is a timely reminder that in China today traditional old communist policies are still very much on the agenda. Persecution of the burgeoning churches has been intensifying since mid-1995: 'Christianity is still viewed as connected with "subversive" foreign forces, and therefore a threat to the state.' *Mutatis mutandis*, a similar perception is what lies behind this summer's new legislation on religion in Russia.

July 1997

PHILIP WALTERS

## Announcement and Call for Papers

### INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON VLADIMIR SOLOV'YEV AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NIJMEGEN, THE NETHERLANDS

*Organised by:*

University of Nijmegen (Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Theology, Institute of Eastern Christian Studies)  
Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research, Utrecht University  
Transnational Vladimir Solovyov Society

*Dates:* Tuesday evening **15 September**–Friday **18 September 1998**

*Topics:*

- philosophy and religion
- philosophy of right and political philosophy (theocracy)
- social philosophy and ethics
- Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Judaism
- nationalism and religion
- mysticism and religious experience
- apocalypse, Godmanhood and cosmism
- literary aspects (Solov'yev's poetry; influence on symbolist movement)
- Solov'yev in relation to German idealism (Hegel, Schelling)
- Solov'yev's reception in the West
- Solov'yev in Russia (incl. Soviet Union, post-Soviet Russia, emigration)
- Solov'yev and his philosophical successors and critics (Trubetskoy, Shestov, Berdyayev)

All scholars who take an interest in any of these topics are kindly invited to submit a paper. Please send us the title and one-page abstract of your paper in English, **before 1 December 1997**. The official language of the conference is English; papers in other languages are welcome, provided they are accompanied by an extensive synopsis or hand-out in English. Of course, you can also participate without giving a paper.

*Organisers:*

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*Expenses (registration, coffee/tea, lunches, dinner on 15 and 16 September, materials):*

300 Dutch guilders (appr. US\$150)

200 Dutch guilders (appr. US\$100) for undergraduates and Ph.D. students

Optional Social Programme (excursion and dinner on 17 September): 100 Dutch guilders (appr. US\$50)

Please contact us before 1 December 1997. We will then send you a preliminary programme, a registration form, and practical information concerning costs, hotels, transport, etc., in January 1998.

## Notes on Contributors

**Archbishop Aristarkh** is head of the Russian Old Orthodox Church, the smaller of the two Russian Old Believer churches of the 'Popovtsy' branch of Novozybkov, Moscow and All Russia.

**Sergei Filatov**, born in 1951, graduated from the Departments of Psychology and History at Moscow University and then worked in the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences. He is now a scholar at the Institute of the USA and Canada and director of the Sociological Centre of the Russian Scientific Foundation. In 1990–92 he directed a Russia-wide sociological survey 'The Religiosity and World-View of the Russian People', and is currently head of the project 'Encyclopedia of Religious Life in Russia'.

**Serge Keleher**, a Greek-Catholic priest, graduated in political science from Michigan State University and has an MA in Theology from the University of Toronto. A research fellow of the University of Toronto's Chair of Ukrainian Studies, he has been associated with Keston Institute since 1988.

**Dimitry Pospelovsky** has just retired as professor in the Department of History at the University of Western Ontario. He has written widely on the history of the Russian Orthodox Church. 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.

**Aleksandr Shchipkov** was born in Leningrad in 1957 and studied at the Philological Faculty. In the 1970s and 80s he was active as a religious dissident and came into conflict with the authorities. He did manual labour and published his articles abroad. Since the onset of *perestroika* he has been publishing in Russia on current church-state and interconfessional relations, conducting sociological studies of Christian political groups and new religious movements and teaching sociology of religion at St Petersburg University. He is head of the Christian journalists' section of the St Petersburg Union of Journalists.

**Kathleen E. Smith** is an assistant professor of government at Hamilton College, Clinton, New York. She is the author of *Remembering Stalin's Victims: Popular Memory and the End of the USSR* (Cornell University Press, 1996), and is currently at work on a study of the use of historical referents in modern Russian politics.

**Veniamin Novik**, a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church, was born in Leningrad in 1946 and graduated from the Leningrad Polytechnical Institute. For some years he

worked as a computer engineer. He entered the Leningrad Theological Academy in 1983 and after graduating remained there as a lecturer in fundamental theology and comparative theology. His interests are Russian religious philosophy and the social dimension of Christianity, and he has written a number of articles in these fields.

**Xuchu Xu**, currently teaching Chinese at a school in Oxfordshire, is a freelance writer on current Chinese religious affairs for Keston Institute.