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Fear of Proselytism: the Russian Orthodox Church Sets Itself against Catholicism

GERD STRICKER

Since the eastern bloc opened up in the late 1980s the Orthodox have increasingly complained that western churches are proselytising at their expense. To proselytise is to lure away members of other churches or confessions and to win them over to one's own church. It is a serious allegation for a church to make, and proselytism is fiercely condemned by most churches. The Moscow Patriarchate's denunciations of Protestants are directed predominantly at 'American sects', which have conducted mass mission on a grand scale with 'millions of dollars' and to some extent continue to do so. However, Russian criticism of the Catholic Church is even more harsh. This paper will attempt to cast some light on the background behind Russian Orthodox accusations of proselytism by Rome. The author is a Lutheran.

Some quotations clearly demonstrate the contemporary tensions between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

Numerous attempts to split the church are being made today. The Catholic Church is expanding rapidly. This expansion began in the western regions of Ukraine, then spread to eastern Ukraine and Russia. Even in Siberia and the Far East the Catholic Church has invested huge capital in this activity: under the noble pretext of humanitarian aid Orthodox are being drawn to alien faiths. We have to resist this.

Here is an extract from the declaration of the mixed commission for theological dialogue between the Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church: '... Any attempt to attract believers of one church into another, that is, proselytism, must be ruled out as an aim of pastoral activity ... Catholic *kostely* are being resurrected in Siberia [from Polish *kościół*: the concepts "Catholic" and "Polish" are intimately linked – G.S.]. Although the Catholic communities here are very small the Catholic Church is investing significant energy ... I suspect that we will soon be faced with increased Catholic expansion, and incidents of proselytism among the Orthodox population.'

Patriarch Aleksii on 15 May 1991 in Novosibirsk, Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii, no. 9, 1991, p. 18

For example, the Lutheran Church in Germany ..., the Greek Church in Cyprus, the Coptic Church in Egypt, the Anglican Church – we have

excellent relations with all these churches. They do not proselytise in our country. Unfortunately the same cannot be said of the Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church, which is literally destroying our Orthodox dioceses in western Ukraine and reviving Uniatism ... We have agreed that the Roman Catholic Church must inform the Moscow Patriarchate without fail if it establishes new structures on our canonical territory. Unfortunately, however, this agreement exists only on paper. We declare with all seriousness that we are ready for further dialogue on condition that this agreement is put into practice.

Patriarch Aleksii on 26 May 1995 in an interview with Moscow TV Channel 3 in the 'Russky dom' series

The conflict with the Roman Catholic Church is far from over. We are continuing dialogue. However, the Catholic Church has strayed far from the resolutions of the Second Vatican Council, which, among other things, contained clear rejections of proselytism – the poaching of believers ... The Catholic Church is conducting aggressive mission on the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church, the area of the CIS. The Catholic Church likes to stress that the Orthodox churches are sister churches. However, the way in which the Roman Catholic Church is behaving in the CIS states today is far from sisterly.

Patriarch Aleksii on 28 June 1995 at a press conference during a visit to Switzerland

Many western contemporaries may have wondered why the new freedom which appeared after the collapse of the Soviet Empire brought with it not only notorious economic, social and psychological problems but also civil war, and in the ecclesiastical sphere the failure of the ecumenical idea. Among the many inter- and intra-church conflicts on the territory of the former Soviet Union the tensions between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Catholic Church pose a particularly difficult problem. Indicative of this strained relationship is the fact that Orthodox priests who resist the pull towards anti-Catholicism and call for constructive dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church are branded 'the fifth column of the Vatican' by the Moscow Patriarchate. Priests who are first in the firing line include some in the church leadership, such as Igumen Ioann (Ekonomtsev), others who write in Catholic journals (for example *Istina i zhizn'*) such as Georgi Chistyakov and Ioann Sviridov, and the 'reformist priests' Georgi Kochetkov and Aleksandr Borisov. In common with almost all developments which we regard as unwelcome following the political changes in Eastern Europe, the Orthodox–Catholic conflict on Russian soil today is not the consequence of a current problem but has roots in profound historical experiences, psychoses and complexes. Without examining the past not even a partially accurate assessment of events is possible.

Catholicism and Russia

Throughout almost a thousand years since the schism of 1054 relations between Orthodox and Catholics have been complex and almost always strained. However, although religious and cultural differences at the interface between the Byzantine East and Latin West attained political significance there were exceptions: the

Ottoman occupation, or 'Turkish yoke', endured by the Balkans for almost 500 years produced front lines between Islam and Christianity which seemingly superseded the East–West, Orthodox–Latin opposition. There was a similar outcome in completely different circumstances in the Soviet Union, where phases of savage religious persecution produced a quite different opposition – that of believers of all faiths against the Soviet state.

One area where Orthodox and Catholic peoples faced each other with balanced forces was the border between Russia and Poland–Lithuania. Over six to seven centuries along this frequently fluctuating line the differences between cultures, confessions and mentalities deepened to a fundamental opposition which can barely be understood in the West. On a national level this opposition was the result of the profound mistrust which had built up over centuries between Orthodox Russia and Catholic Poland. The Russian Orthodox Church elevated distressing historical experiences to a religious and ideological level so that it became rooted in the subconsciousness of the Russian people. Over the centuries concepts such as 'Poland', 'West' and 'Catholic' merged into a complex, which gave rise to a permanent feeling of insecurity, fear and mistrust of Poles among Russians, not unlike a psychosis, which has played a role in shaping Russian identity.

The Kievan state was drawn into the Eastern church and the Byzantine cultural sphere by the baptism of St Vladimir and the people of Kiev in 988. The initially insignificant princes of Moscow in the north of the Kievan state succeeded in securing a prominent position among the other East Slav Russian princes as a result of intrigues and a shrewd policy of appeasement towards the Tatar khanates. The Poles, together with the Lithuanians (personal union 1385, full union 1569), became an increasing threat to the rise of Moscow from the fourteenth century onwards, and intermittently posed a real threat to the Muscovite grand princes until the seventeenth century. The domination of east Central Europe by the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth was above all a check on the western expansion of the Muscovites: from the end of the thirteenth century the Lithuanians took the central Kievan territories from the Tatars piece by piece, including the ancient capital Kiev itself, which became part of the Polish–Lithuanian *staté*. The recovery of these Orthodox regions was regarded in Moscow as sacred historical mission. However, the longer and more stubbornly Poland–Lithuania held on to these territories, even posing a threat to Moscow, the deeper anti-Polish and anti-Catholic resentment became there.

The last great Polish threat to Muscovy followed the extinction of the Rurik dynasty. During the Time of Troubles (1605–13) the Polish king Sigismund III (1587–1632) attempted to annex the 'Moscow tsardom' and installed a Polish puppet, the 'False Dimitri', on the Moscow throne. For two years Polish troops occupied Moscow and Catholic masses were celebrated in the Kremlin (1610–12). It was only with the election of the first Romanov tsar (Mikhail Fedorovich, 1613–45) that stability returned, and Russian expansion to the West soon followed.

Meanwhile the Union of Brest (1595–96), which is a strain on Orthodox–Catholic relations to this day, had deepened the gulf between Orthodox Russians and Catholic Poles. Over the course of time the Orthodox population on the territory of the former Kievan state (that is, large parts of modern-day Ukraine and Belarus') dropped to the level of a peasant underclass. The Catholic Church restricted Orthodox church life so effectively that Orthodoxy dwindled almost to a superstition, and the Orthodox bishops – enticed by the prospect of privileges from King Sigismund III and the Catholic hierarchy – saw subordination to Rome as the only escape for Orthodoxy. In return they were granted permission to continue conducting the Byzantine rite in

Church Slavonic and observing Orthodox traditions. However, some bishops and their parishes converted back to Orthodoxy after a few decades because the Catholic side did not fulfil its promises. Since 1620 there has thus been a third church in Poland–Lithuania alongside the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches – the Greek Catholic or ‘Uniate’ Church. The Orthodox view this church as ‘an apostate which must be brought back to the bosom of the Orthodox mother church’. On the other hand the Vatican did not regard the Greek Catholics as full Catholics until very recently, and sees them as posing a major ecumenical problem.

The depth of Russian resentment of Catholics was evident as early as the mid-1600s, when for example only Protestant foreign miners, foundrymen, craftsmen and other specialists were invited in large numbers to work in Russia. They were allowed to build a Lutheran church in the German quarter of Moscow in 1576. Other Lutheran and Reformed churches followed. Peter the Great requested thousands of foreigners to come to Russia to realise his extensive plans, but only individual Catholics were permitted by special invitation. The immigration controls for Catholics were finally lifted when the Enlightenment Empress Catherine II (1762–96) allowed 7000 Catholic colonists to come to Russia among the 25,000 Germans who were settled on the Volga between 1763 and 1769.

Once the partitions of Poland (1772–95 and 1815) had given Russia 80 per cent of Polish territory the Greek Catholic Church was incorporated illegally into the Russian Orthodox Church (1839–41). Thereafter Russian rulers tried to separate the Roman Catholic Church in Russia from Rome and integrate it into the Russian state as a state church. The bloody uprisings of 1830 and 1863, in which the Poles tried to shake off Russian domination, demonstrated the anger and desire for self-determination on the part of the humiliated Poles, and further intensified the hostility between the two sides. Russian thinkers such as Petr Chaadayev (1794–1856) and Vladimir Solov’yev (1853–1900), who were trying to bring Orthodoxy and Catholicism closer together, were unable to weaken prejudices; their ideas were decisively rejected.

The Bolsheviks adopted the anti-Polish resentment of prerevolutionary Russia. During the 1920s and 1930s persecution of Catholics in western parts of the Soviet Union was possibly more intense than that of the Orthodox. This was because the head of the Catholic Church in Rome, unlike the Orthodox patriarch in Moscow, was out of reach of the Soviet authorities and therefore impossible to manipulate.

The Catholic Church’s worldwide denunciation of the criminal nature of Soviet communism was harmful to the international reputation of the Bolsheviks. Consequently in Soviet propaganda the Catholic Church was always given the most negative epithets, such as ‘imperialist’, ‘capitalist’ or ‘antisoviet’. After the Second World War the most substantial resistance against Soviet power within the USSR developed in Catholic Lithuania and Greek Catholic western Ukraine, and this intensified the anti-Catholicism of the Soviet authorities. This attitude spread to the Orthodox ‘cadres’ within the Moscow Patriarchate; to a considerable extent these same people are still in place today.

Just as Russian anti-Catholicism survived the 1917 Revolution and dominated Soviet religious policy, so it continued after the collapse of the Soviet regime. One event in particular gave the old hostility to the Catholic Church in Orthodox circles a decisive new impetus: on 1 December 1989 Mikhail Gorbachev issued a decree recognising the Greek Catholic Church in Galicia, which Stalin had forcibly dissolved in 1946 after the annexation of that area, pushing it either underground or ‘back into the bosom of the Russian Orthodox mother church’. A fierce church conflict began in L’viv, Ivano-Frankivs’k and Ternopil’ in 1990, as a result of which

Orthodoxy was pushed out of Galicia, which had been almost entirely Greek Catholic until 1946. The Moscow Patriarchate thus lost one of its richest areas – richest both financially and in the number of churches – and attempts to resolve the conflict over the disputed area with Rome have met with little success. On the one hand, any solution is unsatisfactory and painful for the Moscow Patriarchate in comparison with the situation between 1941 and 1989, while on the other hand the Greek Catholics, having endured 40 years of repression from which the Orthodox Patriarchate profited, have proceeded impatiently and often violently against the Orthodox and generally ignored the Vatican's calls for restraint. The shock which this turnaround caused in the Moscow Patriarchate led to deep resentment of the Vatican. Frustration and disappointment over the loss as well as the bitter church conflict in Galicia may be the reason why anything connected with the Catholic Church – even matters which have nothing to do with events in Galicia – provokes an irritated, almost allergic reaction from the Moscow Patriarchate, and frequently results in an exaggerated anti-Catholic polemic in the unofficial church press.

It seemed in the 1970s that the Russian Orthodox Church had overcome its latent anti-Catholicism, thanks to the tireless personal commitment of Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad (Rotov, born 1910), who, symbolically, died in the arms of Pope John Paul I in 1978. However, Moscow's traditional scepticism towards Rome returned after his death.

Canonical Territory of the Russian Orthodox Church

Anyone who follows the Orthodox press in Russia will soon discover that the term 'proselytism' is used differently there from the way it is used in the Latin or Protestant West. We were all completely at a loss when arbitrary accusations of proselytism were directed against western churches by the Russian Orthodox Church at the beginning of the 1990s. In the West we proceeded from the fact that between 80 and 90 per cent of all former believers and their descendants were alienated from the Christian faith during the 75 years of the Soviet period. We believed it to be the concern of all Christendom to revive Christian life in this spiritually barren country, and that confessional egoism had no place in this task. From the outset the churches which were ecumenically linked with the Russian Orthodox Church were clear that the rights of the Orthodox Church would not be violated. However, in both Protestant and Catholic camps there are those who do not always view the idea of re-evangelising Russia in ecumenical terms, for example, evangelical groups on the Protestant side and Fatima groups on the Catholic side; but these groups are not much in evidence in Russia statistically. On the other hand, various American churches, fringe Protestant religious groups and American-backed free churches with great missionary impulses and sometimes apparently inexhaustible millions of dollars have chosen the countries of the former Soviet Union as their mission field. American concepts of religious pluralism and absolute religious equality mean that ecumenical considerations are usually alien to them. However, they too strongly refute accusations that they intend to convert members of the Russian Orthodox Church: they stress that only Russians who are uninterested in religion or 'atheists' or members of other nationalities are their target group.

The vehement protest expressed by the Moscow Patriarchate when the 'religious invasion' began to roll towards Russia cannot be put down solely to rejection of religious pluralism. The claim of the Russian Orthodox Church that it has shaped Russian history and all spheres of Russian culture is justified. Communism in Russia

all but destroyed a cultural landscape that had evolved over centuries. Basic reconstruction of the country should include not only the material but also the spiritual and cultural spheres. The reestablishment of the Russian Orthodox Church as a national church has to be part of the renaissance of Russian culture and tradition. Religious pluralism, which would secure for western and free churches an unbridled presence in Russia, would make the renewal of prerevolutionary Russian culture and the Russian traditions of the 'good old days' more difficult, if not impossible. Attempts by the Moscow Patriarchate to replace the liberal religious law of 1990 with a new law corresponding more closely to the interests of the Russian Orthodox Church, and its support of the religious law of September 1997, which we regard as questionable, should be understood in this context.

It would be terrible if the end result of liberation from Soviet tyranny were a confessional 'reversal of polarity' in Russia, in the sense of religious westernisation. In order to prevent this happening the Russian Church has constructed an ideology on the basis of which it can reject the ambitions of western churches towards the East with a certain moral justification and condemn them as unfair, aggressive and unchristian. This argument runs as follows. Before 1917 almost all the 'Russian' population of the Russian Empire was Orthodox. 'Russian' is understood as meaning 'East Slav' and thus includes the Belarusians and Ukrainians. As a result of the anti-religious terror of Soviet leaders from Lenin to Brezhnev most Orthodox have had to turn away from the church of their fathers in order to survive – not voluntarily, but under violent coercion. As this secularisation was brought about by terror, only the Russian Church has the right to lead people back to Christianity; that is, to the Orthodox faith of their forefathers. In view of the historical and religious catastrophe which took place on Russian soil between 1917 and 1991, 'sister churches' in the West should respect the claims of the Moscow Patriarchate and refrain from mission efforts on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

This is the basis for the thesis of the 'canonical territory of the Moscow Patriarchate', identical to the territory of the former USSR: all areas where Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians live today, from Vladivostok to the Polish border, from the Arctic Ocean to the Chinese border and from the Baltic (including the Baltic States) to the Romanian border.

While one can sympathise with the Russian Orthodox Church's wish to achieve a revival of Russian Orthodox culture through religious homogeneity, the way in which the ideology of the 'canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church' is translated into practice is often open to question. 'Canonical territory' is often understood purely as a security measure; it is reduced to the idea of a Russian Orthodox protection zone in which other churches are generally unwelcome. The Moscow Patriarchate sometimes tries to justify theologically-unfounded 'canonical territory' claims with national legends which do not always correspond to historical truth: during the dispute between Constantinople and Moscow over the Orthodox Church in Estonia in 1996, for example, it was claimed that Estonia and Latvia belonged to the heartlands of Russian Orthodoxy. In the light of this ideology of 'canonical territory' the Moscow Patriarchate holds that every other religious community active in its area is disregarding the Patriarchate's claim to be the only legitimate representative religious organisation, and that these religious communities are therefore guilty of a particularly subtle form of proselytism. The Russian Church has too few missionaries, priests, catechists and financial resources to defy western missionaries and bring back to the fold the hundred million people uprooted from the church of their forefathers. The Moscow Patriarchate did set up an educational institution for

lay missionaries near Kursk in 1995. However, Patriarch Aleksii has lamented the fact that many priests feel it beneath them to 'go to the people' – they usually expect the people to come to them.

Catholic Proselytism? The Case of Former Soviet Asia

When reading the Orthodox church press one gets the impression that Catholic proselytism is even more rife on Russian 'canonical territory' than the invasion of Protestant sects. This reproach is one of the most powerful weapons the Russian Church brings to bear against the Vatican. As a rule, however, the accusations are couched in general terms, so that it is impossible to gauge the precise extent of this 'proselytism'. One of the few concrete claims concerns former Soviet Asia: Siberia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Before 1988 only 16 Catholic parishes were registered there. Today, however, there are almost 80 in Siberia alone, with a further 50 in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. The statistics are convincing. However, if one examines the situation more closely a different picture emerges. From the outset the Catholic Church has claimed, correctly, that the parishes in question are not communities of ethnic Russians, so that the accusation of proselytism does not apply – even allowing for the current Russian understanding of the term. Catholic communities in the Asian part of the former Soviet Union are almost exclusively made up of Poles, Lithuanians, Russo-Germans, Ukrainians and Latvians who were deported beyond the Urals from their European homelands in 1939, 1941 and in phases after 1944, and their descendants. In 1830 and 1863 thousands of Poles were exiled to Siberia and Kazakhstan, where they founded Catholic parishes. These deported Catholics attempted to preserve their religious traditions by forming prayer circles in conditions of utmost secrecy – as did the Protestants, who were much greater in number.

A comparison of the church situation of Protestants and Catholics in former Soviet Asia reveals some interesting statistics. There were 16 registered Catholic parishes in 1988, as against 300 registered German Lutheran parishes and at least 60 registered German Mennonite and Baptist communities. However, this ratio of 360 German Protestant parishes to 16 mixed-nationality Catholic parishes in no way reflects the actual statistics of population and denomination. In 1988 approximately 1.4 million Russo-Germans of Protestant origin lived in Soviet Asia. There were estimated to be between 700,000 and 800,000 people of Catholic background in the same area – of whom around 550,000 were Russo-Germans, a few hundred thousand were Poles and some tens of thousands were Lithuanians, Latvians and Ukrainians. Thus while the ratio of people of Catholic background to those of Protestant background in Soviet Asia in 1988 was approximately 1:2, the ratio of their registered parishes was 1:22.

This striking discrepancy is the result of a clear Soviet strategy: discrimination against Catholics. Although there were hundreds of Catholic communities in Soviet Asia the authorities usually rejected their applications for 'registration' (state recognition). They could hope for 'registration' only if they were able to prove that they had a fully-ordained parish priest. This was practically impossible because there was only one Catholic seminary, in Riga, which was permitted to send priests to the diaspora, and only rarely even then. Without registration, however, a parish could not acquire a prayer house, but had to meet illegally and conduct its spiritual life secretly. The fact that for the Lutherans, Mennonites and Baptists registration was never made dependent on their having an ordained pastor demonstrates that the requirement that Catholics must have an ordained priest when applying for registration was anti-

Catholic discrimination. It was only after the liberalisation of Soviet religious policy with the religious law of 1990 that the many Catholic communities which had been forced underground were able to gather openly and attain state recognition. Viewed in this context the Russian Orthodox criticism of growing numbers of Catholic parishes in Siberia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia appears extremely cynical.

Catholic Russians?

In the wake of the religious liberalisation after 1988 it was not uncommon for young Russian intellectuals to seek a spiritual home in Catholic communities. They would explain that they had initially turned to Orthodox priests in the hope of receiving spiritual advice and answers to their questions on philosophy and their view of the world, but that the Orthodox clergy had been unable to offer them spiritual help, and had been distrustful and negative towards the young intellectuals. Most of these priests had of course never received a full education.

At that time some previously underground Catholic parishes had just been registered. Many of these had active priests, as highly educated priests from the West were often dispatched to former Soviet Asia in the early 1990s in order to help build up normal parish life. Frustrated Russian intellectuals finally turned to these Catholic priests, who accepted them with open arms, nationalism at that time not being the issue that it is today. These priests then became conversation partners for the young Russians, and eventually their spiritual mentors. Finally, some of these Russian intellectuals were baptised by the priests. As a result, within some mixed-nationality Catholic communities in large cities such as Novosibirsk these Russian intellectuals formed small circles which were particularly close to the priests. However, the intellectual groups they formed were alien to the traditional Catholic communities, which even today are often characterised by a conservative piety and inwardness. The Russians were also rejected by Poles, Germans and Lithuanians because it was their fathers who had deported them to Asia: Russians were generally unwelcome in deportee communities. The apostolic administrator for Siberia, Russo-German Bishop Joseph Werth S.J., reports that these Russian intellectual circles no longer exist in Catholic parishes: Russian nationalism and the widespread antiwestern mood have caused them to withdraw from Catholic communities and seek to join Orthodox parishes. They had been finding that the differences between the Russian and the German or Polish mentality were an increasing problem as far as their own developing sense of national identity was concerned.

The existence of Russian circles in the Catholic parishes of Siberia is thus an episode which belongs to the past. And even here, despite what the Orthodox say, there was never any question of 'proselytism': rather, young Russians who were disappointed by Orthodox priests flocked of their own accord around educated Catholic priests.

European Russia

The situation regarding parishes in the European part of Russia is quite different from that in the former deportation areas beyond the Urals. Until a few years ago there were almost no Catholic communities in European Russia other than in cities such as Moscow and St Petersburg: they were liquidated in the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. Catholic church buildings, scattered but intact in many Russian cities, recall once flourishing parishes. The Catholic parishes which exist in European Russia

today have grown from nothing in the years following religious liberalisation.

Sometimes individual Catholics gathered together. More often than not they were Russified Poles and Germans whose ancestors had been Catholics but who themselves had barely any understanding of the faith of their fathers. In this period of upheaval and in view of the return to cultural and religious traditions, as well as their lack of orientation after the collapse of Soviet ideology, they wished to resume their discontinued tradition once again, to live by the Catholic faith once more. They seized on any literature which looked as if it might help them find their way. Discussion groups sprang up. Only some of their members came from the Catholic tradition. Most of them did not have Catholic roots at all, but were above all seeking spiritual orientation and human warmth. They included a relatively high percentage of spiritually uprooted Russians.

After a period of consolidation some of these groups decided they wanted to contact Catholic priests who would introduce them to the Catholic faith and eventually baptise them. In this way in many cities in European Russia there arose Catholic communities with a very mixed national composition but with a considerable portion of ethnic Russians. A Catholic priest who sees new parishes coming into being after a historical experience like that of the Soviet Union is in no position to expel the Russians, and would surely be loath to do so for pastoral reasons. Nevertheless, the considerable number of Russians in these new parishes in European Russia gives further grounds for Orthodox accusations of proselytism. This is not surprising, given the doctrine of 'canonical territory'. What is surprising, however, is that exactly the same thing happens in Lutheran parishes – even more so than in Catholic parishes – but the Orthodox rarely accuse Lutherans of proselytism. New Lutheran parishes are being formed in exactly the same way as Catholic ones in almost all cities in European Russia and Ukraine; and in Lutheran parishes in European Russia the Russian element even predominates. Are the Orthodox applying double standards?

Tactlessness

Representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate complain that Rome has covered their 'canonical territory' – the area of the former USSR – with a church structure without having discussed this delicate problem with them. The former apostolic nuncio in Moscow, Archbishop Colasuonno, rejects such criticism, saying that the Vatican 'informed' Moscow. Whatever that might mean, Moscow was not content with being 'informed'. The creation of the Apostolic Administrations (European Russia with Polish Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz in Moscow; Siberia with Russo-German Bishop Joseph Werth in Novosibirsk; Kazakhstan with Polish Bishop Jan Lenga in Karaganda) was taken by the Orthodox to be a Catholic attack on Russian Orthodoxy, and has caused deep resentment. The installation of a Catholic archbishop in 'Holy Moscow', the spiritual centre of Russian Orthodoxy, is deeply offensive to Orthodox consciousness. Perhaps the Catholic Church does sometimes lack the necessary gentle touch on the 'canonical territory of the Russian Church'. Knowing the extent of the allergic reaction to anything Polish in large sections of the Moscow Patriarchate, one might have expected Rome to call for restraint in this area. Apparently, however, this has not happened; or at least not to the required extent. While German Bishop Joseph Werth in Siberia is seriously concerned about maintaining a good relationship with Orthodox bishops in his area (and seems to be making gradual progress), and his priests and parishes show respect for the Russian

national church, Polish Bishop Jan Lenga of Karaganda annoys his Orthodox fellow-bishops by carrying out massive polonisation of the entire Catholic Church in Kazakhstan, where many parishes are regarded as a piece of 'little Poland' (although a large proportion, if not the majority, of parishioners are of German origin). These parishes operate in a nationalist climate and proselytising Russians is not on their agenda. However, this kind of Catholicism – zealous, largely fundamentalist and preconiliar, tinged with Polish nationalism – is highly provocative to neighbouring Russians in the tense situation of today.

On the other hand, Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz cannot be blamed when he occasionally expresses his anger over the skulduggery of the authorities and the Moscow Patriarchate. When, for example, the Catholic seminary was moved from Moscow to St Petersburg in 1996, the real reason was not the chicanery of the various state or city authorities regarding premises, board and lodging for students and so on. Rather it was the aggressively anti-Catholic atmosphere in Moscow which finally persuaded the seminary directors to move it to more tolerant St Petersburg. In order to resolve a hopelessly confused situation the Vatican tried to explain to its Orthodox partners that Catholic structures were not aimed against Orthodoxy, but were set up only in order to build up ministry to Catholic Christians of Polish, German, Lithuanian and other nationalities which had inhabited the Russian Empire for centuries and which had been forced underground in the Soviet period. So that there would be no misunderstandings about these parishes and Orthodox clergy would not feel under pressure from Catholic priests the Vatican issued the following clear code of conduct to Catholic priests working in Russia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia (1 June 1992; adopted in the encyclical *Ut unum sint* of 25 May 1995): they must proceed with utmost caution in the area where they are installed; they must not provoke Orthodox clergy but must involve them in as many decision-making processes as possible; they must always avoid giving the impression of proselytising when dealing with Russians. Catholic priests now complain that this encyclical restricts their room for manoeuvre in the CIS states and makes them vulnerable to the wiles of Orthodox clergy. The Vatican code of conduct is criticised as the expression of an excessive belief in the need for harmony.

These clear directions from Rome and the fact that parish members tend to reject Russians have led Catholic priests to react very nervously now if Russians 'knock on their door'. They send them on to the Orthodox church and do their best to stop Russians setting foot in Catholic parishes. In Siberia and Kazakhstan Catholic priests refuse to baptise Russians on principle: they do not wish either to worsen the already tense relationship with their Orthodox colleagues or to annoy their own parishioners.

Outlook

The Moscow Patriarchate's fears that the opening-up of the former Soviet Union would turn the country into a playing field for competing religious groups have been realised in many areas of Russia and the CIS states, as well as in other states of the former eastern bloc. However, massive problems – of a financial nature, for example – have dogged the longed-for renaissance in the Russian Orthodox Church. The dispute with western religious denominations which are active on the territory of the former Soviet Union has largely been a consequence of this opening-up to the West. It is not only western commentators who believe that the Orthodox polemic against the Roman Catholic Church on Russian soil is out of proportion: so do clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church itself (those who are not part of the anti-Catholic league,

of course).

Two huge stumbling-blocks to ecumenism could be removed. On the one hand, priests and spokesmen of the Catholic Church in Russia ought to abandon their Polish nationalist stance and thus cease provoking the feeling among their Orthodox neighbours that Catholic parishes are forming a miniature Poland with an anti-Russian orientation. On the other hand, the Russian Orthodox Church ought to be more objective, less blindly emotional, in its dealings with the Catholic Church and stop using obviously exaggerated accusations of proselytism as an ecumenical cattle prod with the aim of enlisting western churches as allies in its campaign against the Vatican. The clear acknowledgment of ecumenical errors would provide an opportunity to put them right; blanket condemnation poisons the ecumenical climate.

(Translated from the German by Geraldine Fagan)