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The Russian Orthodox Church in Twentieth-Century Britain: Laity and 'Openness to the World'*

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The purpose of this paper is threefold: firstly, it describes the life of the Russian Orthodox Diocese of Sourozh, focusing on the relationship between the Church and the world as reflected in the practice of the diocese, and focusing also on how the laity's role in this relationship is understood; secondly, the paper considers the sources and origin of the openness practised within Orthodoxy in Britain; and thirdly, it attempts to offer some preliminary remarks which might allow one to arrive at a theological understanding of the openness underpinning the relationship between tradition and the world under various circumstances and conditions. This latter aspect of my paper touches upon Orthodoxy's relationship to cultural, ethnic and national identity and ecological issues also. What I present here are my research findings from four months of fieldwork carried out in Britain during summer 1997 and early 1998. First, though, a word or two needs to be said about the 'engaged' nature and logic of the very questions addressed in my research, as also about their practical as well as their academic significance for an understanding of the fate and the place of Orthodox Christianity in postsoviet society.

There is no doubt that the fundamental experience of Orthodox life during the Soviet period was the existence of the Church under conditions imposed by an atheistic state, that is, a necessarily closed existence where the Church's ties with the social life beyond its walls were exceptionally weak. This 'closedness' was accepted as almost natural, and it was justified in terms of the separation of the Church from the state. However, it is also the case that this closedness affected the *internal* life of the Church and deformed certain key intuitions in the traditional experience of Christians. Of these intuitions, the one that was most adversely affected was that relating to the place and role of laypeople. How did, or how does, the activity of laypeople fit among the various forms of service which clergy, deacons and believers fulfil within the Church? On a practical level the impoverishment in the understanding of a proper role for lay believers became evident in three ways: in the dying out of parish life; in the destruction of the Church's service in society (*diakonia*); and in the debasement of notions about the Church's relations with and towards the world.

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The very closedness or seclusion of the Church has defined the principal characteristics of postsoviet religiosity. On one hand, the demise of the state's policy of militant atheism signified that it was possible to restore the Church's *organic* relations with the world. On the other hand, this new possibility exposed to view all the difficult paradoxes involved in openness. It was an openness that did not arise simply and naturally after the removal of the external forms of repression; rather, its emergence depended upon complex spiritual endeavour, including endeavour on the theological front. Given all this, it has now become absolutely clear that widely current ideas about a religious 'boom' in postsoviet society have proved to be greatly exaggerated. Recent sociological research into the evolution of Russian religiosity has shown the superficiality of the supposed 'religious renaissance', a renaissance that actually has more to do with certain political programmes or platforms than with real changes in society. It becomes possible to agree with the authors of this research, who write: 'In Russia it is not religion that is victorious over atheism. Rather, religion and atheism are both eclipsed by the growth of vagueness and eclecticism in the realm of worldviews and ideas.'¹ A long time has already elapsed since the boundary between Church and the world was marked by a firmly-drawn line. At the turn of the twentieth century the religious thinker Vasili Rozanov entitled one of his books *At the Walls of the Church (Okolo tserkovnykh sten)*. At present it could be said that a very large part of society finds itself 'at the walls of the church', not deciding or else not wishing to come right in, and yet not removing itself from the church walls once and for all. As far as the internal life of the Church is concerned, the religious 'boom' constitutes the appearance of a phenomenon which one might well call 'ignorant Orthodoxy', namely a huge number of baptisms without preparatory instruction, and this leading to the emergence of Orthodox believers who hold extremely eclectic views on the nature of Orthodox experience and who bring in elements from elsewhere that are fundamentally alien to Orthodox traditions and give rise to a conflict between Orthodox experience and the frameworks for ideas and behaviour that evolved in a totalitarian society. People have come to expect from Orthodoxy things which contradict its very essence: on one hand they seek the formulation of a national idea, the acquisition of a definite political and cultural identity; and on the other hand (and in complete contrast to this first tendency), people expend great efforts to preserve the spiritual experience of Orthodoxy, as it were behind a 'fence', which the Church puts up to protect it from the world. In many respects the real life of the Church is now defined by, on the one hand, liberation from its external constraints, that is, from closedness and also from the all-embracing nature of social and cultural life; and, on the other hand, by the reconceptualisation of the relationship between the Church and the world, which in its turn entails the heightened topicality of the question regarding the place of lay believers in that relationship, viewed from an Orthodox perspective.

The very complexity of this cluster of problems makes it necessary to examine closely the recent history of Orthodox Christianity and to focus upon all instances of a decisive rupture in the relations between the Church and the state and of a weakening in the ties between the Church and culture. One can state that for Russian Orthodoxy the catastrophe of 1917 constitutes a key landmark. On the domestic front, within the Soviet state, the Church was defined in juxtaposition to the society which was taking shape then, while the other part of the Church, finding itself in emigration, was placed in the conditions of an alien culture, of a culture whose growth rested upon a quite different spiritual experience. One way or another, the fate of the Russian Orthodox Church was rendered a tragically acute instance of the

problematic relationship between tradition and the world. Within the Soviet state the Church brought forth Christian witness in the forms of martyrdom and 'holy foolishness' (*yurodstvo*), the extent of which has yet to be fully researched. The Church's history in emigration became enriched by the experience of extremely varied strategies for pursuing the relations between Orthodoxy and a culture that was not organically connected with it. It is precisely this experience that has yet to be carefully examined with reference to the contemporary postsoviet situation.

With a view to analysing the religious needs of postsoviet society, one can say that Orthodoxy in Great Britain actually provides a very fitting model. It has been in the British Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate that the most complex and fruitful strategy for relations with the non-Orthodox world has been applied. This strategy made it possible to avoid an unduly close identification of religion with ethnic or national identity. Numerically small communities are prone to that kind of identification between religion and ethnic identity, and indeed the Greek Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Britain can be said to have succumbed to this. Something that is actually incompatible with the strategy adopted by the Russian Orthodox Church in Britain is *proselytism*. Here it is the Russian Church in Exile that provides the contrast: its stance amounts to just one variant of relations towards the non-Orthodox world, namely *conversion*. Created in 1962 and headed by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, the Moscow Patriarchate's Diocese of Sourozh has refrained from the extreme forms of *closedness* which ethnic and cultural self-assertion and proselytism represent, and it has been consistent in practising a strategy of openness in the most various forms. It is the spiritual experience of this diocese, expressed in its social life, traditions and history, that warrants the research project I have embarked on. A succinct way to describe my own journey into the world of British Orthodoxy from the unhealthily strained and contradictory situation of Orthodox life in postsoviet countries would be simply to utter the words '*a return home*'. I am struck by the paradox of what I have experienced, and these words happen to express it accurately. Precisely here, in England, I have felt myself getting ever closer to an understanding of my own spiritual difficulties, that is, difficulties born of encounters between Orthodox tradition and modern, postsoviet culture. In the culture we now call 'postsoviet' it has already proved true that questions relating to the place and role of lay believers express people's religious yearning in concentrated form.

The Present State of the Diocese of Sourozh

To gain a panoramic view of British Orthodoxy and of the place of the Diocese of Sourozh within it, it is sufficient to turn to the annually issued *Directory of Orthodox Parishes and Clergy in the British Isles*.² At present there are 196 Orthodox parishes in Britain, and the following are all represented: the Ecumenical Patriarchate (Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain); the Antiochan, Bulgarian, Moscow, Romanian and Serbian Patriarchates; the Belorussian Autocephalous Orthodox Church; the Ukrainian Diocese of the Ecumenical Patriarchate; and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. Among these the Sourozh Diocese, with its 25 parishes, is second in size, after the Archdiocese of Thyateira which has 101 parishes. The next in size after the Diocese of Sourozh is the Ukrainian Diocese of the Ecumenical Patriarch, with its 17 parishes. The remaining Churches between them have fewer than ten parishes. However, if we modify the above figures with figures for ethnic representation, then the special position of the Diocese of Sourozh

becomes clear: Greek Orthodox believers make up 85 per cent (250,000 persons) of all Orthodox in Britain, and among the remaining 15 per cent of Orthodox the Russian community comes third, after the Ukrainians and the Serbs.

The small size of the Russian community in exile reflects emigration patterns after 1917, with the greater part of that community settling in France. This was a consequence of varying immigration policies in the receiving countries. As Metropolitan Anthony has observed:

Fewer than 700 persons were admitted to Britain after the Russian Revolution, and it is really the case that Britain accepted very few people. However, Britain did ensure employment or other assistance for *all* of those it received, whereas France received large numbers of Russian émigrés but undertook to help nobody.³

For the Russian Church in Britain this situation was almost catastrophic: when Metropolitan Anthony began serving the community in 1948 the London parish amounted to approximately 200 elderly parishioners, and the community was dying out. In such conditions a conservative and closed strategy would have been ruinous, and from the very outset Metropolitan Anthony, with whose activity the creation and life of the Diocese of Sourozh is directly linked, opted for a strategy of openness. Furthermore, he held an exalted view of emigration as a form of Orthodox witness in a world of other creeds.

It is essential to mention that the very choice of a name for the diocese at the time of its creation in 1962 became symbolic of a particular understanding of openness which is extremely pertinent for postsoviet countries now. It expressed a firm aim to make a distinction between *missionary activity* as pursued in agreement with locally-based Churches and *proselytism* which was unacceptable for the English context. According to Metropolitan Anthony's recollections, his own new title as well as the name of the Diocese were agreed with Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury at that time.⁴ The diocese refrains from the practice of active conversion, and that itself is an expression of the decision to forego the path of proselytism. But, also, more than that: with individuals seeking to convert from another denomination, the *rejection* of their former traditions and spiritual history is *not* deemed to be sufficient grounds for acceptance into the Orthodox Church. Any authentic personal conversion presupposes *gratitude* towards that Church which revealed Christ to that particular person – be it Roman Catholic, Anglican or Protestant – as well as an informed and aware choice of Orthodoxy. Acceptance into the Russian Orthodox Church is preceded by several years of being a catechumen, during which the believer is introduced to the life of the Church, and this time period makes it possible to arrive at the requisite responsible choice. Although acceptance into the Orthodox Church is a lengthy and far from easy matter, it is nevertheless the case that the Russian Diocese, pursuing its practice of openness, *has* grown by accepting British people. Developments in the Oxford parish illustrate this point. (Only the London parish is larger and older than the Oxford parish.) According to its resident bishop, Basil Osborne, who bears the title Bishop of Sergievo, things developed in the following way: the parish was entirely Russian in 1959, the year it was founded, when it consisted of five families, approximately 20–25 people. By 1989 Russian-speaking members of the parish accounted for only 20 per cent of the total. With recent arrivals of Russians in England, Russian representation in the parish has risen to about 25 per cent, but about 110 individuals, a significant proportion of the parish, are either British or Western European.⁵

In these figures we can see the fruits of the Russian Orthodox Church's strategy of

openness. It is a strategy that has steered away from self-isolation based on national and ethnic identity and from extreme forms of proselytism. The strategy amounts to more than simply a means of survival. It is indeed far more than that, for it has been defined by a profound understanding of the relations between Tradition and the Culture born within it. In order to proclaim the very *universality* of Orthodoxy, its openness to *all* peoples and cultures, it was necessary to weaken or at least downplay the established and much-cherished link between Russian Orthodox tradition and Russian culture, and this was made one of the most creative operating principles in the Diocese of Sourozh. Responding to a *Letter to Bishops of the Orthodox Church* written by participants in the Third Orthodox Youth Festival organised by Synodos in 1988, Metropolitan Anthony put the matter thus:

We are not constructing unity. Rather, we are growing in unity through increasingly full and perfect fidelity to the Gospel, and where temporal matters such as ethnic, cultural and national issues are concerned, we accord them due importance. They have a legitimate claim on our attention, but their significance is secondary when set alongside the Gospel.⁶

On the problems of conducting relations within a multinational parish, Metropolitan Anthony emphasised the following:

From the very outset, for forty years and more, and looking at matters in a positive light, we Russians have considered that we have been *sent* to this country in order to bring Orthodoxy here, that is, to share the most valuable thing we ourselves possess, to give it to anyone at all who feels a need for it. This we have done not violently, nor by proselytism, but by proclaiming it for anyone to hear and by sharing it. We are the Russian Church because we indeed belong to the spiritual tradition of Russian Orthodoxy, *not* because we constitute a particular ethnic group, not because we are Russians. It is not for us to affirm *any* specific ethnic allegiance, whether it be British, English, Scottish, or some other kind. Orthodoxy is open, and it is offered to anyone at all who needs it.⁷

One of the fruits of such openness has been the use of English for liturgical purposes, which became established in the Diocese of Sourozh. Other manifestations of this openness are the veneration of British saints, and also the holding of services and the painting of icons dedicated to those saints. The early life of the Church in Britain is also commemorated in various ways, and Russian Orthodoxy is helping to put people back in touch with the traditions and the experience of that Church.

This practice of openness and the Russian Church's accumulated experience of openness pose extremely challenging questions for those engaged in research into religion. In particular, they highlight the problematic nature of religion's existence beyond the confines of culture and, correspondingly, beyond its theological context, or – in other words – the revealed context of any culture that affirms its distinctiveness rather than its isolation and that creates a space for communication with other cultures, that sustains variety rather than suppressing it. The theme of openness presupposes a corresponding phenomenological description of tradition, and the task of providing such a description is rendered extremely difficult by this kind of cultural contextuality. It is the theme of openness that restores a theological dimension to the problematic nature of pluralistic society. Where pluralistic society is concerned, openness operates in a twofold way: making its problematic nature more acute and providing concrete material for it. Space is too limited to be able to develop this

particular theme here, but I feel it necessary to stress the extreme topicality of this facet of the experience of the Diocese of Sourozh, and here I refer to Metropolitan Anthony's observations as expressed in his answer to the Synodesmos letter:

We do not strive to make others just the same as us but, rather, we strive to share with them the transforming joy of the knowledge of God and of communication with Him, so that others may become themselves, that is to say, as unlike us as they are unique in the eyes of God. It is not through uniformity that we wish to become one, but through the unity which is possible only through uniqueness.⁸

Given that outlook on the matter, the Russian Church's service in society (*diakonia*) assumes a very distinct character. When set alongside the social activism of western Churches the Russian Church's service in society appears to be absolutely minimal. However, it would be false to assert that the Russian Church is deficient in this respect: as close examination reveals, it is *not* a case of indifference to the social realm. Instead we find another form of *practice* in relation to social action. Whereas in the British context the parishes of various denominations strive to be self-sufficient communities or embodiments of Christian fellowship within society, containing within themselves all forms of social life, from the Orthodox point of view such a tendency towards autonomy appears dangerous. According to Metropolitan Anthony the problem is that 'in our eagerness to be involved in "Christian action", integration in the activity of humanity at large may elude us'. Given this insight, we arrive at the following precept for social action: 'Our duty is to be everywhere, to participate in any human activity, everywhere and at any time. The point is to participate in human activity with a feeling of responsibility, comprehendingly sensing a third dimension over and above what others bring to this activity.'⁹ The social activity of the Russian Church has a hidden, non-prominent character. In effect, Bishop Basil makes this very point when describing the Oxford parish:

It is interesting that English people frequently complain that we Orthodox lack any social programme or scheme for social work. It happens to be the case, though, that almost all the members of our parish, that is, almost all of those in employment, engage in work which is socially significant, be it as teachers, doctors or social workers.¹⁰

In the Diocese of Sourozh the strategy of openness is practised on two levels: in fruitful communication among Orthodox; and also in numerous interconfessional contacts. A clear example of the former is the life of the Oxford parish itself, where Russian Orthodox and Greek Orthodox share one and the same church building. Such coexistence provides the richest possible material for the experience of forming a joint, organically interwoven life for two Orthodox communities, whose openness towards one another could serve as an inspiring model for intra-Orthodox communication. In the Diocese of Sourozh the practice of establishing and sustaining interdenominational contacts and its involvement in ecumenical activity have deep historical roots, and we need to turn our attention to these if we are to clarify this aspect of the Russian Church's strategy of openness.

The Origin and Development of the Practice of Openness in the Diocese of Sourozh

In order to present adequately the nature and extent of ecumenical openness practised

by the Russian Orthodox Church in Britain, it is essential to begin with the broad perspective afforded by the encounter between Orthodoxy and Anglicanism, an encounter which began as early as the seventeenth century.¹¹ For a long period the initiative for this encounter came from the Anglican Church, which, finding itself situated somewhere between the Roman Catholics and various Protestant denominations and also seeking a link with the undivided Church of the first Christian millennium, strove towards a rapprochement with the Orthodox world. The Anglican Church's openness was a favourable factor leading to the fruitful activation of contacts in this century, and it was indeed during this century that the Russian Church took the lead in furthering contacts with the non-Orthodox world, especially after 1917. Mutual rapprochement, in the form of some conferences convened by the British Student Christian Movement in 1923, 1927 and 1928, led in time to the founding of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius.

Certain major figures stood behind this new body, including Bishop Walter Frere, who had visited Russia in 1914 and had represented the Anglican Eastern Church Union, and Fr Sergi Bulgakov. In his capacity as vice-president of the Fellowship, Fr Sergi provided charismatic leadership in the years before the Second World War. The active work of the Fellowship, with its programme of conferences, lectures and publishing, was the locus for a real and extremely fruitful Anglican–Orthodox encounter. From the very outset the Fellowship was linked with Dr Nikolai Mikhailovich Zernov (1898–1980), whose life was marked by Christian endeavour. As the Fellowship's secretary between 1934 and 1947, and subsequently as Oxford University's Spalding Lecturer in Eastern Orthodox Culture (1947–66) and as warden of the House of St Gregory and St Macrina (1959–80), Dr Zernov personified the openness of Orthodoxy and its striving towards Christian unity. The books he wrote and also his personal archive together comprise an invaluable source for the history of the Anglican–Orthodox encounters I have been describing.¹² It is the case, however, that even though certain remarkable works have appeared which give an overview of this subject, the richest elements of this ecumenical experience have yet to be studied in sufficient depth.¹³

Such research is tremendously important, inasmuch as it is precisely within the framework of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius that Orthodox principles for ecumenical activity were first elaborated, in the course of tense and often difficult debate. The key figures of Fr Sergi Bulgakov and Fr Georges Florovsky represent the two poles in this prolonged debate: they offered two differing interpretations of inter-confessional openness, arising out of contradictory tendencies in the creative theology of the Paris School coming from the Institut St Serge. In 1933 Bulgakov proposed interdenominational communion as a way of crowning 60 years of joint liturgical worship and as a prelude to solving the differences between Churches. Florovsky criticised this idea in forthright terms, and his position regarding the unshakable witness of Orthodoxy in ecumenical encounters, which allowed neither theological concessions of any kind, nor any amorphousness in terms of dogma, was a position formulated in the course of debates within the Fellowship. It was Florovsky's position that defined Orthodoxy's ecumenical *praxis*; Florovsky was the embodiment of Orthodox ecumenism. From 1929 right up to the Second World War Florovsky regularly took part in the Fellowship's annual conferences, and gave lecture series under the aegis of the Fellowship, speaking at numerous venues in Britain, including non-Anglican ones. From 1936 he was coeditor of the Fellowship's journal *Sobornost*, and from 1937 he was the Fellowship's vice-president.¹⁴ It was actually within the Fellowship that Florovsky grew to become a

major theologian, one who, after the War, represented Orthodoxy's ecumenical movement at the World Council of Churches. Indeed, Florovsky was directly involved in the creation of the World Council of Churches. It was within the heart of the Fellowship, in the fruitful discussions of the prewar years, that ecumenism took shape, an ecumenism founded, firstly, on the idea of openness to the world of other faiths, but also on overcoming closedness while at the same time ensuring that the experience that resides in tradition is not dissolved away in the course of human efforts to become united. The solution of the world's urgent problems should itself be a form of creative witness to the efficacy of this experience. This is the kind of ecumenism that was articulated in the fruitful debates that took place in the Fellowship before the War: it served as the basis for the Fellowship's further activity, which was consolidated during the War and flourished anew thereafter. Simply mentioning the names of those who participated will give an idea of the high level of theological debate: Fr Sergi Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdyayev, Fr Sergi Chetverikov, G. P. Fedotov, A. V. Kartashev, V. Veidle and V. Zen'kovsky, while the British were represented by figures as illustrious as the future archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey.

In the postwar years the Fellowship's activity was marked by changes among its Orthodox participants. Some of the most active ones died, and a significant number of them moved to the USA, including Florovsky himself, Georgi Fedotov, Nikolai Arsen'yev and Alexander Schmemmann. This period was marked, above all, by the appearance of two figures representing the Moscow Patriarchate in Paris: the theologian Vladimir Nikolayevich Lossky, an absolutely regular participant in the Fellowship's annual conferences, and Fr Anthony. After his ordination in 1948 by Serafim, patriarchal exarch of Western Europe, Fr Anthony was appointed to be the Fellowship's spiritual mentor. In two respects Lossky provided a continuation of Florovsky's theological endeavour: as a creative theologian he felt close to the neopatristic synthesis that Florovsky advocated; and he took much the same line as Florovsky where ecumenical activity was concerned. Being himself a major scholar in western spirituality and a creative theologian, Lossky drew on the accumulated experience of the Fellowship when elaborating his own conception of how the theology of the *filioque* influenced the diverse spiritual experience and traditions of the Christian East and West. When we turn to the activity of Fr Anthony, we see that the experience of the Fellowship was one of the sources for the creation of the Diocese of Sourozh. His role in the postwar history of the Fellowship is laconically described by Nicolas Zernov:

If Fr Bulgakov could be described as the inspirer of the Fellowship in the prewar period, this was the role of Fr Anthony in the postwar years. Whereas Fr Bulgakov was deeply concerned with the restoration of the sacramental union between Orthodox and Anglicans, Fr Anthony's message was addressed to individual Christians, calling them to discover the reality of their spiritual life.¹⁵

If, as is the case, Metropolitan Anthony's spiritual authority is felt far beyond the confines of the Diocese of Sourozh and, indeed, beyond the Orthodox world, with his preaching activity and his countless lectures, his radio broadcasts and television appearances, his books on the experience of prayer all known so widely, this authority and renown are themselves an expression of the diocese's general strategy of openness, of an openness that has absorbed the fruitful experience of inter-confessional encounters accumulated within the Fellowship. This genealogical

connection between the diocese and the Fellowship has yet to be researched in full detail, but one can already form some idea about the significance of the fruits yielded by this quite unique diocese by turning to Bishop Kallistos Ware's extremely succinct description in his classic study *The Orthodox Church*: 'His diocese has taken the lead in Britain in using the English language at services, and at its annual [diocesan] conference there is an unusually close collaboration between clergy and laity.'¹⁶ These words of Bishop Kallistos allude directly to the deep internal connection between the strategy of openness I have spoken about and the activation and reinterpretation of the significance of lay believers' service both in the Church and in the world.

Lay Activism and the Theology of Openness

Theology of the laity has become a significant element in the creative theology of Orthodoxy during the twentieth century; it has occasioned a reexamination of the mismatch between the Church's liturgical life on the one hand and, on the other hand, some rather scholastic conceptions of the laity's role in the Church as being merely a passive one. In this context essential reading is Fr Nikolai Afanas'yev's classic study *Sluzheniye miryan v tserkvi (The Service of the Laity in the Church)*, which appeared in 1955.¹⁷ In this book Afanas'yev reaffirms the conception of lay believers as embodying one form of royal priesthood, that is to say, a form of service within the Church that possesses priestly dignity.

The variety of forms of service does not jeopardise the unity of the nature of the members of the Church. The ontological unity of all members of the Church flows from their unity 'in Christ'. In their own nature all members of the Church are identical insofar as they all have one and the same Spirit. Their gifts are various, but the Spirit is one and the same. (1 Cor. 12:4).¹⁸

Afanas'yev goes on to explain what follows from this:

Clergy, deacons and laity are all only members of the Church but they do not constitute the *whole* Church, and consequently they cannot exist without the other members, for otherwise they would be unable to fulfil the functions for which they have been ordained by God. The difference between those members of the Church who have special forms of service to perform and those who do not is not an ontological difference, but merely a functional one.

The distinction between clergy and laity within the people of God thus has a functional character, but it presupposes a spiritual unity. This is expressed in liturgical form in the distinction made between the people and the priest, where the priestly character of the latter is not juxtaposed to the royal priesthood of the people of God, but actually expresses it.

This perspective, which rescues us from a conception of the laity as separated from the clergy and therefore passive, is the one on which the practice of the Diocese of Sourozh is based. Metropolitan Anthony insists that both the bishop and the priest belong to the people of God,¹⁹ and here the Greek word *laikos* is more telling than the Russian word *miryanin*. The same understanding of laity operates at the annual diocesan conference where joint discussion of burning issues in the present-day life of the diocese (that is, discussion involving both clergy and laity) and a common life

of prayer have become the two most important unifying forces. It would be worth mentioning here that themes discussed at these conferences include the following: 'How are we to live together?' (1989), 'Orthodoxy and ecology' (1990), 'Secularisation of the Church' (1992), 'Royal priesthood: the role of the laity' (1993), 'Our Orthodox presence in England' (1995) and 'To be what we are: the Orthodox understanding of the person' (1996).

The Russian word for laity, *miryanstvo*, corresponds to the Greek word *laos*. As its root it has the word *mir*, which means 'world', and thus the Russian word for laity itself alludes to the problem of the relationship between the Church and the world, alludes to the service of lay believers *in the world*. Thus it is that the very logic of the Russian language links the two key themes in the theology of laity: lay people's service *within* the Church and their stance towards the world. According to Metropolitan Anthony the principal difficulty for modern-day Christianity is due to self-seclusion:

We have begun to create closed communities. People have begun coming to church in order to take refuge from the outside world and all that it stands for. What people should be coming for is a face-to-face encounter with Christ and also in order to listen to His words: 'I send you out like sheep among wolves' ... The actual role of the Church is to inspire people to go out into the world and to transform it.²⁰

Overcoming self-seclusion and closedness has its own dangers, and these are understandable. The very difficulty of the tasks facing Christians can be seen in, for instance, negative forms of *renewal*, which, as Metropolitan Anthony expresses it, 'involve, above all, the Church's accommodation to the world, and contempt for the Church's memory in the name of accommodating to new circumstances'.²¹ If we are to try to express the imperative of 'being open to the world' in language that adequately reflects this aspect of lay believers' service, we can do no better than to quote the Gospel precept: 'Be in the world, but not of the world'.

For all its apparent simplicity this imperative contains real theological depth, and without an understanding of it, it is quite impossible to describe adequately the place and role of laypeople. In the first place, its realisation requires more than mere assent. *Being* open involves far more than simple recognition of the incomplete and illusory nature of self-seclusion. In Metropolitan Anthony's words:

Christ's actions were born from within deep contemplation, and it is only from the depths of contemplation that the activity of Christian believers can be born. If contemplation is lacking, then their activity would rest solely upon principles – moral, theological or of some other kind – but however true, fine or just those principles might be they would not correspond to a God-centred dynamic, to the abrupt dynamic of the unprecedented and the incomprehensible, features which distinguish the action of God Wisdom proceeds by ways that seem 'mad' to us. Wisdom involves immersing one's vision in God, immersing one's vision in life itself, in search of what I have just called God's 'trace'; wisdom involves acting counter to the ways of the mind and of logic, in the face of all human reasoning, just as God teaches us to act.²²

Immersion of one's vision in God is achieved in and through a life of prayer and through liturgical life. In the life of prayer and liturgical worship it exists in concentrated form and is the sole foundation for any *praxis* of openness. This was under-

stood acutely well throughout the entire history of the encounters between Orthodoxy and the non-Orthodox world during this century. These encounters were never reduced to the level of theological discussions alone, but presupposed incorporation into the Church's liturgical practice. In the British context this was given expression as early as the first Anglican-Orthodox conference of 1927, described by Nicolas Zernov in the following way: 'The distinguishing feature of this conference was to be found in its clearly expressed liturgical character. Anglicans and Orthodox not only discussed and disputed theological matters, but they also prayed together. Each day began with the Eucharist.'²³

It thus emerges that it is not sufficient to understand openness as a programmatic principle, for declaring such a principle in drafts and memoranda does not bring one a single step closer to its realisation, even though this activity may guard one against the limitations of closedness. The source of openness is in the very practice of prayer, and thus it is that we find such a close fusion between Metropolitan Anthony's sermons which concentrate on the 'school of prayer', the unprecedentedly close relations between clergy and laity in the common life of the diocese, and the practice of openness, itself rooted in liturgical service.

Familiarity with the life of the Diocese of Sourozh has allowed me to understand yet one further aspect of openness, which is extremely important for an understanding of the difficulties of religiosity in the postsoviet context. This notion or intuition can be conveyed in a single word, one that manages, in a positive way, to highlight the ascetic nature of openness. I first came across this word in a book by the American scholar Jacob Needleman called *Lost Christianity*. The author describes conversations he had with Metropolitan Anthony, where they focused upon differences between Orthodox experience and American conceptions of religiosity. Needleman was struck by Metropolitan Anthony's seemingly paradoxical assertions that 'Emotion must be destroyed' and 'We have to get rid of emotions ... in order to reach feeling'. He went right back to the very beginning and asked Metropolitan Anthony 'What is prayer?' And I myself was struck by the answer given to that question: 'In prayer one is *vulnerable* You must not be enthusiastic, nor rejecting – but only *open*. This is the whole aim of asceticism: to become open.'²⁴

So it emerges that openness shows its ascetic character, revealing itself in *vulnerability*. Is it not the case, though, that we often tend to associate the religious quest with the aspiration to achieve *invulnerability*? I myself would suggest that this very identification of the religious quest with *invulnerability* may be the most unhealthy manifestation of postsoviet religiosity. In numerous languages there is an etymological connection between the words 'wound' and 'wonder' or 'miracle' (as in English and German). Furthermore, the Russian word *podlinny*, meaning 'authentic', is etymologically linked with the words *pod lin'kami*, one of whose meanings is 'under dressings' or 'under bandages'.

Vulnerability reveals the mystery of openness to be not merely a difficult ideal, but also an awesome one, one whose acceptance inescapably requires a measure of decisiveness. If we start from the position that the relationship between God and the World serves as a paradigm for our understanding of the relationship between the Church and the world, then, in the words of Metropolitan Anthony, 'we must agree to be only that which God was, God as he appeared in His Revelation: vulnerable, defenceless, fragile and defeated, as though despised and despicable; and yet at the same time the Revelation of something extremely important, namely the greatness of humankind.'²⁵ It is actually prayerful openness to God, expressed so eminently well in the word *vulnerability*, which makes possible *this* order of decisive acceptance of

the radically understood openness towards the world suggested in the above quotation. In the face of distinctions and the experience of 'otherness' it becomes possible to refrain from setting up divisions. We are reminded, indeed, that 'Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Proverbs 1:7), and this is further confirmed by the words of St Paul: 'It is fearful to fall into the hands of the living God' (Hebrews 10:31). Only as the fruit of *that* kind of decisiveness, a decisiveness that ripens in prayer, only when it becomes something which turns people to God and opens them up to Him, only then can *openness to the World* cease being a purely theoretical condition or ideal. Indeed, only then can openness to the world become the foundation for authentic relations between the Church and the world.

However incompletely and poorly it may have been described in the foregoing pages, the experience of the Diocese of Sourozh represents an invaluable treasure for the entire Orthodox world. In that world the problem of openness is now directly linked to Orthodoxy's awareness of its own place and calling in Europe. As testimony to this, one might quote that major Greek Orthodox theologian Metropolitan John Zizioulas, who brings out the heart of the issue, directly linking the calling of the Orthodox Church in Western Europe with the witness of Orthodox tradition 'in the face of the ethos and values of western Christianity and western culture'. And, moreover, in his view such witness cannot simply be a matter of proselytism, the kind of proselytism whose effect would be to turn Orthodoxy into one of many 'exotic' religions. First and foremost, that witness must be oriented towards openness. And where this openness is at stake the overriding imperative should, according to Zizioulas, be this: 'to relate tradition to the problems of contemporary western man, which problems are, to an increasing extent, becoming the problems of humanity right across the globe'.²⁶ This very same strategy created the unique features of the Diocese of Sourozh, features whose value is every bit as great now for the task of solving problems *within* Orthodoxy in the postsoviet context. I end by stating my firm belief that postsoviet society now urgently needs to do away with 'exotic' self-seclusion in the name of the open and fully reinstated witness of Orthodoxy.

Notes and References

- ¹ Kimmo Kääriäinen and D. B. Furman, 'Veruyushchiye, ateisty i prochiye (Evolyutsiya rossiiskoi religioznosti)', *Voprosy filosofii* (Moscow), no. 6, 1997, p. 39.
- ² *Directory of Orthodox Parishes and Clergy in the British Isles* (Orthodox Fellowship of St John the Baptist, Oxford).
- ³ Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, as quoted in *Cathedral Newsletter* (London), no. 316, February 1998, p. 2.
- ⁴ Mitropolit Antoni Surozhsky, 'Byt' pravoslavnym v Anglii', *Alfa i Omega* (Moscow), no. 2(5), 1995, pp. 93–94.
- ⁵ 'Britanskoye pravoslaviye: interv'yu s yepiskopom Sergiyevskim Vasiliyem', *Kontinent* (Moscow/Paris), 83, no. 1, 1995, p. 228.
- ⁶ Mitropolit Antoni Surozhsky, 'Otvét Sindesmosu', *Russkaya mysl'*, no. 4199, 27 November–3 December 1997.
- ⁷ Address by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh on the problems of language, culture and mutual relations in a multinational parish, *Cathedral Newsletter*, no. 284, May 1995, p. 11.
- ⁸ Mitropolit Antoni, 'Otvét Sindesmosu'.
- ⁹ Mitropolit Antoni Surozhsky, 'Vzaimootnosheniya tserkvi i mira s pravoslavnoi tochki zreniya', *Kontinent*, 89, no. 3, 1996, p. 253.
- ¹⁰ 'Britanskoye pravoslaviye ...', p. 230.
- ¹¹ For a brief survey of these encounters see Nikolai M. Zernov, 'Russky religiozny opyt i

ego vliyanie na Angliyu' in Nikolai P. Polotoratzky (ed.), *Russkaya religiozno-filozofskaya mysl' XX veka* (Pittsburgh, 1975), pp. 125–32. Some English material on these encounters and on the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius can be found in Andrew Blane (ed.), *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual, Orthodox Churchman* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1993), pp. 63–77.

- ¹² Dr Zernov's personal archive is held at the House of Ss Gregory and Macrina, 1 Canterbury Road, Oxford, and for access to it one should apply to Revd Stephen Platt, present secretary of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, at the above address.
- ¹³ Readers may wish to turn to Dr Zernov's own book *Orthodox Encounter* (James Clarke, London, 1961) with its chapter 'The Anglican Communion and the Christian East', pp. 132–56, and also to John Lawrence's chapter 'Anglicans and Orthodoxy' in E. L. B. Fry and A. H. Armstrong (eds), *Rediscovering Eastern Christendom: Essays in Memory of Dom Bede Winslow* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1963), pp. 119–34. The Fry and Armstrong book covers numerous aspects of ecumenism in addition to Anglican–Orthodox encounters.
- ¹⁴ For more information on Florovsky see Blane, *op. cit.*, and Timothy Ware (Kallistos Ware, Bishop of Diokleia), *The Orthodox Church* (Penguin), 1997 edn, *passim*.
- ¹⁵ See the relevant chapters in N. M. Zernov and M. V. Zernova (eds), *Za rubezhom: Belgrad-Parizh-Oksford (Khronika sem'i Zernovykh)* (YMCA Press, Paris, 1973).
- ¹⁶ Ware, *op. cit.*, p. 179.
- ¹⁷ Nikolai Afanas'yev, *Sluzheniye miryan v tserkvi* (Moscow, 1995).
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 16–17.
- ¹⁹ Interv'y u s mitropolitom Surozhskim Antoniyem (marking the Feast of the Transfiguration, 19 August 1994), *Kontinent*, 82, no. 4, 1994, p. 241.
- ²⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 238–39.
- ²¹ *ibid.*, p. 243.
- ²² Mitropolit Antoni, 'Vzaimootnosheniya tserkvi i mira ...', p. 253.
- ²³ Zernov, 'Russky religiozny opyt ...', p. 128.
- ²⁴ Jacob Needleman, *Lost Christianity: A Journey of Rediscovery to the Centre of Christian Experience* (Element Books, Shaftesbury, Dorset, 1993), p. 25. (1st edn, Doubleday, New York, 1980.)
- ²⁵ Mitropolit Antoni, 'Vzaimootnosheniya tserkvi i mira ...', p. 246.
- ²⁶ Ioann Zizioulas, 'Obshcheniye i inakovost', *Kontinent*, 83, no. 1, 1995, p. 214.

(Translated from the Russian by Jonathan Sutton)