

## Catholic and Anti-Catholic Traditions in Russia\*

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After an absence of almost 50 years, Catholicism once more exists on Russian soil. Despite the religious diversity of our society and the religious eclecticism of the majority of our contemporaries, no other religious confession appears to arouse such passionate emotions and often indeed outright hostility. Anti-Catholic intolerance cannot simply be explained in the context of a general intolerance of believers of other faiths. Russia now has Muslims, Buddhists and even Protestants, who have encountered difficulties mainly due to their missionary activity.

It would seem that the phenomenon of Russian Catholicism today can be explained only if we understand the nature of the problem: what is Catholicism in the context of Russian spiritual and political culture and what does conversion to Catholicism mean to a Russian?

In early years Russia was open to both Greek and Roman missionaries. At the end of the tenth century the adoption of one particular faith was not made on the basis of its dogma: the differences between Western and Eastern Christianity were simply beyond the understanding of the unsophisticated population of Ancient Rus', unversed as it was in questions of theology. The new faith was received on the basis of its cultural traditions and the attractiveness of its ceremonies. It was not so much the teaching of this faith which attracted, rather the appeal and 'beauty' of the ritual: indeed the cultural component was the determining factor in the attitude of the Russian people towards Catholicism.

Over the centuries Russian national consciousness has been built on an opposition to the 'West', and this multilayered concept has most often been interpreted as Catholicism itself. Russian 'spirituality', statehood and culture were all seen in antithesis to 'papism'. While certain European innovations in the fields of technological advancement, fashion and the arts were welcomed, the religious divide could not be bridged, and the Russian sense of spiritual superiority was preserved. 'Pravoslaviye' ('right belief') stood against 'nepravoslaviye' ('wrong belief') – in other words, Catholicism.

Anti-Catholic feeling was not only inextricably bound up with religiosity, but to an equal extent with national consciousness, patriotism and belief in a particular system of government. From the thirteenth century, when Prince Aleksandr Nevsky heroically defeated the German Catholic knights at Lake Chud and wisely submitted to the Tatar-Mongols, an anti-Catholic state ideology began to evolve, which stated

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that a true patriot knew no more constant or perilous an enemy than the West. The ideological link between Orthodoxy and autocracy quickly became reciprocal: not only was the supreme ruler the defender of the one true faith, but Orthodoxy itself sanctified and strengthened the God-given authority of the autocrat, who was equally at risk from the corrupting Latin influences of the West. Ivan the Terrible revealed the essence of the Russian anti-Catholic phobia in a letter to Andrei Kurbsky. Explaining his hatred of Catholics, the Russian autocrat wrote: 'Their rulers do not rule, they follow the directions of their subjects. Russian rulers, by contrast, do not follow the whim of their nobles and aristocrats, they are sovereign.' A state system where 'rulers do not rule' can exist, according to Ivan the Terrible, only where the people are 'godless'.<sup>1</sup> The well-known trinity of 'Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality' thus has ancient roots. It reflects a formulation of national identity which has been created over the centuries, an identity which is not only antiwestern but also anti-Catholic in its origins. In the minds of the devout Russian people any perceived threat from the Vatican represented a danger not only to the purity of their faith but to autocracy itself.

Pro-Catholic attitudes first began to make themselves felt at the beginning of the modern era, and always directly coincided with periods of accelerated modernisation. Such was the case at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries, when Peter the Great instituted administrative and cultural reforms which marked a significant break with religious isolationism: the first Catholic churches appeared in Moscow and St Petersburg, as well as in Astrakhan'. Thereafter many Catholic communities, made up of Poles, Germans and other Western Europeans, spread throughout the Empire, until there were Catholic parishes in all the major towns. Their congregations included civil servants, military officers, merchants and artisans. Their Russian neighbours treated them as if there were no religious differences between them. This was the situation at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the reforms of the young Emperor Alexander I and his desire for Russia to become actively involved in Europe led to a period of unprecedented, albeit shortlived, religious liberalisation, including a growth of pro-Catholic tendencies. This period saw the first Russian conversions to Catholicism, involving almost exclusively members of the upper classes. Almost all these converts were later forced to emigrate because of the repressive policies of the authorities.

In the nineteenth century a whole series of outstanding members of the Russian nobility, such as P. Chaadayev, Z. Volkonskaya, M. Lunin and V. Pecherin, were individually converted to Catholicism. Why? One reason was that they believed that Russia was called to be part of the Europe, and they came to the conviction that it was essential to overcome Russia's religious isolationism from western countries. In the eyes of Russian Catholics unity with the Roman Church was equally an incorporation into European Christian culture. Many considered the West to be the ideal model of civilisation which incorporated 'a threefold unity of culture, religion and mores'.<sup>2</sup> Mikhail Lunin, for example, argues that the absolute truth of the Catholic faith necessarily entails the establishment of political freedom:

It is said that Protestantism is favourable to political freedom. Historical facts prove the opposite is true. Protestantism prevailed by infiltrating the highest circles of the state: through sovereigns, aristocrats, magistrates. It was not successful in republican lands: Poland, Genoa, Venice, Ferrara. In Switzerland it prevailed only in the aristocratic cantons. The democratic cantons – Schwyz, Uri and Unterwalden – rejected it. In England the

constitution took shape long before the sixteenth century, while the country was still in the bosom of the Catholic Church. When Great Britain split away from the Church, all three states were independent and financial matters and the army were subject to the Commons and the Lords. The republics in the Spanish colonies were also Catholic. Finally, France has become a constitutional monarchy. No good can come of error, even indirectly.<sup>3</sup>

Lunin goes further. Catholicism is not only essential for producing political freedom, it is also in the Roman Church alone that beauty is possible:

The Catholic faith seems to be visibly embodied in women. It perfects their innate elegance, makes up for their imperfections and adorns both plain girls and beauties, as the dew adorns all flowers. A Catholic woman can be recognised immediately among thousands of women, by her bearing, her way of speaking and her appearance. There is something sweet, calm and serene in her entire being, indicating the presence of Truth. Follow her into a Gothic church, where she has gone to pray: kneeling before the altar, almost fading into the semi-darkness, enveloped in harmonious sounds, she resembles those heavenly messengers who come to earth to reveal to mankind its higher destiny.<sup>4</sup>

The second reason why many members of the intellectual elite of the nineteenth century turned to Catholicism was their negative assessment of the state of Russia. Chaadayev expressed this most vividly when he wrote that the Russian Empire was characterised by 'a permanent, all-pervading absence of the concepts of duty, justice, law and order'. He attributed the age-old problem of Russian backwardness in comparison to the more developed Western European nations to the fact that Russia adopted Christianity from a Byzantium 'despised by all peoples', which according to him would 'lead nowhere when seeking to establish the ideals of the Kingdom of God on Earth'.<sup>5</sup>

Ideas of this kind were developed most consistently and radically by Ivan Gagarin, a Russian diplomat, who converted to Catholicism in Paris in 1842 and joined the Jesuit order. Gagarin considered that Russia had no future outside Catholicism, that only if the Russian people were united with Rome would the threat of revolution and national ruin be avoided. The Slavonic Library in Paris, founded by Prince Gagarin, became the intellectual centre for a group of Russian Jesuits, who dreamed of converting their homeland to Catholicism. Only a minority of Russian Catholics in the early nineteenth century held views as radical as these, however. More typical was Zinaida Volkonskaya, for example, who dreamed of reuniting the Churches on an equal basis.<sup>6</sup>

In the nineteenth century some groups of educated Russians developed the view that the Catholic and Orthodox Churches were equally true. We shall never know how widespread these views were, as it could have been dangerous to express them and neither the government nor the Church welcomed them, to put it mildly. Nikolai Gogol' wrote: 'I shall not change my religious rite, because our religion and that of the Catholics are absolutely one and the same, so there is no point whatever in exchanging one for the other.'<sup>7</sup> In 1896 the religious philosopher Vladimir Solov'yev took part in a ceremony of personal reunion with the Universal Church, which he himself had devised. He saw this reunion not as a conversion from one Church to the other but as a recognition of his membership of both Churches, which in fact formed

the one mystical Church of Christ. His action was contrary to the canon law of both Churches.<sup>8</sup>

The next stage of Russian modernisation, at the beginning of the twentieth century, marked a definitive transformation in the fortunes of Catholicism in Russia. Ethnic Russian Catholic parishes began to appear for the first time. By 1907 a Russian Catholic Church of the Eastern Rite was in the process of official formation.

Attempts to find a rapprochement of these two church-cultural traditions, in view of the integral role of the Eastern rite in the Russian cultural tradition, were being made as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, but these ideas gained wider currency only when Vladimir Solov'yev expressed his ideas on church union at the beginning of the twentieth century. His work helped to dispel the cultural and religious isolationism of the time: it facilitated an understanding and wider knowledge of the spiritual values of the Western Church, without doing violence to Orthodox thinking. The pro-Catholic and ecumenical ideas expressed by Solov'yev and other Russian philosophers at that time in many ways paved the way for the establishment of the Russian Eastern-rite Catholic Church in 1907. Orthodox priests Aleksei Zerchaninov and Leonid Fedorov and the Old Believer priest Yevstafi Susalev were the *de facto* founders of the Greek Catholic Church, as it became known. Aleksei Zerchaninov was a simple priest from Nizhni Novgorod who out of the blue became convinced of the truth of Catholicism. Leonid Fedorov, who was drawn to Catholicism, left the St Petersburg Theological Academy during his third year and set off for Rome, dedicating his whole life to the Uniate cause from that day onwards. In May 1917 he became the head of the exarchate of the Russian Catholic Church.

Thus since before the Revolution two rites have coexisted in Russian Catholicism and, correspondingly, two spiritual and intellectual traditions. At the beginning of the twentieth century it was the norm for the Latin rite to be followed in Polish and German Catholic communities and the Eastern rite in most Russian Catholic communities. Leonid Fedorov described the need for the Eastern rite in the following terms:

It is always necessary to make a distinction between the universal idea of the Church and its forms. The spirit of Christ, the spirit of pure Catholicism, not only does not necessarily demand one particular form, but may develop in different directions. Our tendency to mimic everything Latin and to value the Latin Rite more than the Eastern I see only as a demonstration of Eastern slavishness and our typical Russian self-abnegation – for the sake of humility which is contrary to pride.<sup>9</sup>

Vladimir and Anna (Yekaterina) Abrikosov, members of a famous merchant family, founded a community which played a significant role in the preservation of Eastern-rite Catholicism after the Revolution. This community miraculously survived policies of the communist authorities aimed at eradicating Russian Catholicism, and its members continued to observe the Eastern rite in secret. Secret Russian converts to Catholicism during the 'years of stagnation' managed to discover these so-called 'remnants of the past' and joined in fellowship with them. Thus the continuity of the Eastern-rite tradition was preserved.

Within Russian Catholicism the 'Uniate' movement has always represented the wing of the Church that is most sympathetic to Orthodoxy; it likes to see itself as a bridge between two equally valid 'sister Churches'.

The shortlived period of the legal existence of the Russian Catholic Church at the

beginning of the twentieth century was characterised by the hostile reactions of the authorities, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian nationalists. The Church also had to contend with a negative, neurotic reaction on the part of the Polish clergy, who had become used to seeing Catholicism in Russia as their national Church; thus for them the appearance of ethnic Russian parishioners were nothing short of scandalous. Disregarding traditional Catholic discipline, they even refused to recognise the Russian Exarchate of the Greek Catholic Church. One analyst of this reaction writes that 'the Poles consider they have a monopoly on Catholicism in Russia'. The result was that the Russian Catholics and their supporters abroad, whatever their particular churchmanship – Fedorov, Abrikosov, d'Herbigny, Sheptitsky and others – felt that Poles should no longer be allowed to work with Russians, 'because of a national and cultural antagonism, which is the result of history'.<sup>10</sup>

Before the communist takeover in October 1917 the Catholic Church in Russia was one of the largest. On the territory of the present Russian Federation there were two Catholic dioceses and an exarchate of the Eastern Catholic rite – 331 Catholic parishes, which in practice meant that there was at least one Catholic church in every large Russian town. They had a well organised system of charitable and educational institutions.

The communist seizure of power soon put an end to this favourable situation. In the first years after the Revolution the authorities were relatively tolerant of Protestants and Old Believers, as minorities which had been persecuted by the autocracy, but this attitude did not extend to the Catholics. The Catholic Church, like the Orthodox Church, aroused particular hostility on the part of the Bolsheviks. They inherited anti-Catholic stereotypes and prejudices from the radical socialist and revolutionary movement, which in turn derived its ideas from European anticlericalism in the tradition of Voltaire, Diderot and Béranger. Émile Zola was extremely popular among Russian revolutionaries at the beginning of the century. Catholicism was regarded by the leaders and ideologists of the proletarian revolution as a bulwark of tyranny and reactionary power, 'suffocating freedom of thought'.

The destruction of the Catholic Church began in 1922, during the campaign for the confiscation of Church valuables, with the trial of Archbishop Jan Cieplak and Mgr Konstantin Butkevich, and came to an end in the mid-1930s with the complete liquidation of the legal Catholic church structure. Before the Second World War there was only one properly functioning church, in Moscow.

In the 1920s, when all Russian denominations were being repressed by the atheists, there was a unique rapprochement between the Catholics and the Orthodox of a kind difficult to imagine today. Patriarch Tikhon and some other Orthodox bishops, who had not previously been known for their love of the Vatican, showed sympathetic interest in the Catholics, reacted favourably to ecumenical meetings and themselves took part in them.<sup>11</sup>

It was also in the 1920s that Archbishop Michel d'Herbigny began to take an active part in one of the boldest and truly aggressive attempts at real Catholic proselytism among Orthodox Russians. In his youth d'Herbigny had studied at Prince Gagarin's Slavonic Library in Paris. Like Gagarin, d'Herbigny dreamed of Russia becoming a great Catholic superpower, from which Russian missionaries would be sent out to convert China and other Asian countries to the true faith. For over a decade d'Herbigny played a leading role in shaping Vatican policy towards Russia. It was an aggressive policy, totally hostile to the Orthodox Church. D'Herbigny made no secret of the fact that his aim was to wipe out 'Photianism' (it was under the Byzantine Patriarch Photius that the Eastern and Western Churches had been

divided) and to establish Catholicism in its place. In his view the 'Photian schismatics' no longer had the gift of grace and as a result had been overtaken by moral and spiritual dissolution. He regarded the victory of the Bolsheviks as God's punishment for the rift with the Catholic Church. D'Herbigny established contact with the 'Living Church' and began secret talks with Chicherin, Levitin and Smidovich, quite seriously counting on an agreement with them to obtain permission for a Catholic mission in Russia. It was on his recommendation that in 1930 the Vatican publicly adopted an uncompromisingly anti-Bolshevik position (most western Protestants had done so much earlier). D'Herbigny's essentially absurd plan was from the very start destined to fail in Russia itself. Meanwhile d'Herbigny was making great efforts among Russian emigres in the West. Humanitarian aid, charitable and educational programmes and periodical publications sponsored by the Vatican were all used for aggressive Catholic propaganda and defamation of the Orthodox faith. D'Herbigny was demoted and defrocked in late 1933, largely as a result of pressure from Polish priests indignant at his scornful attitude to Polish Catholicism, which d'Herbigny saw as too nationalist and provincial, constantly putting obstacles in the way of his global plans. To some extent, d'Herbigny was merely continuing the work of those Russian Catholic extremists who saw it as their aim to 'save Russia from Orthodoxy'.<sup>12</sup>

What were the results of all this activity? According to the historian L. Tretjakewitsch they were insignificant – no more than 150 converts, mostly from non-religious Russian families. Conversions to Catholicism among Russian Orthodox emigres at that time were in no way linked with d'Herbigny's mission. These Russian converts belonged to Catholic circles which condemned his activities. The only real results of d'Herbigny's energetic work were widespread anti-Catholic attitudes among Russian emigres; their echoes can still be heard among elderly people from the first wave of emigration.<sup>13</sup> This particular episode of 'expansion' and 'aggressive proselytism' in fact showed quite clearly that this kind of thing is not a threat at all, and may indeed even play into the hands of isolationists and nationalists in the Orthodox Church. Abrikosov and likeminded people were uncompromising opponents of d'Herbigny in their time, as d'Herbigny tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Vatican to abolish the Greek-Catholic exarchate.

The concordat Stalin established with religion during the Second World War gave the Moscow Patriarchate a certain ceremonial status in the Soviet structure; the Muslims, Baptists, Old Believers and some Protestants were also given legal status. However, Stalinist rule turned out to be far more difficult as far as Catholicism was concerned. The Catholic Church received no concessions on the territory of the RSFSR, and it was also subjected to severe repression in the western territories that were returned to the Soviet Union after the War. The liquidation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was regarded as revenge for western expansion eastwards by conquest many centuries earlier: so the Catholic 'expansionists' supposedly got what they deserved, not only in Ukraine, but in Belorussia, Latvia and Estonia. A legal Catholic presence had to be accepted in practice only in Lithuania. The anti-Catholicism of Stalin's empire was ideologically logical. The ideology of the post-war regime was an odd combination of revolutionary mentality and that of the Black Hundreds – of Chernyshevsky and Purishkevich, both of whom hated the Vatican and saw in it a threat to their own ideals.

Over the next 30 years, which saw the final disintegration of the communist ideology, society gradually became more tolerant towards religion, but the basic arguments for tolerance were usually not applied to Catholicism: emphasis was laid

on the importance of the Orthodox Church in the creation of Russian culture and the Russian state, or else on the idea of there being 'something out there', so that the spiritual search turned in the direction of the occult and magic, or towards the psychotherapeutic role of religion. A religious search in these terms was hardly likely to find much in Catholicism. If anything, Catholicism was seen as being an obstacle to this search: Catholic cosmopolitanism was opposed to religious nationalism and to the search for national spiritual roots; its reflective, balanced dogma and its spiritual and moral discipline were far removed from primitive and chaotic searches for the 'miraculous'.

Nevertheless, in the 1970s Russian Catholicism unexpectedly experienced a revival once more. It was unlike that of the nineteenth century, when most Catholic conversions had been among the secularised aristocracy and intelligentsia, people who had received a western education and, when they found God, did so in the western cultural and spiritual tradition. In the 1970s, by contrast, those who converted to Catholicism had often earlier considered themselves Orthodox. Even Orthodox clergy found themselves sympathetic to Catholicism. Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) of Leningrad was responsible for rekindling interest in Catholicism in his diocese. His direct influence led to the emergence of pro-Catholic sentiments in Orthodox church circles and to a movement for Christian unity. In Moscow students and followers of priest Aleksandr Men' founded the Catholic community of Vladimir Nikiforov, which was broken up by the KGB in 1983.

During this period a new generation of underground Catholic communities sprang up, led by 'independent' priests. Many spontaneous individual conversions furthered the Catholic revival. The converts were baptised and received into the Church by priests who had entered the country illegally from Poland, Czechoslovakia and France. Many such spontaneous personal conversions to Catholicism occurred even in the postsoviet period.

The stories of Natal'ya Komdurova and Aleksei Kikshayev provide remarkable examples. Natal'ya Komdurova, a young Russian intellectual in the city of Naberezhnyye Chelny, came to a conviction of the truth of Catholicism as part of a personal spiritual quest. Following her conversion she attracted a large group of both Russians and Tatars, who had no Catholic roots, and has established a large and viable Catholic community in her city. Aleksei Kikshayev, a Kalmyk from Elista, was an amateur theologian. Through his studies of religious literature and reflections about God he became convinced of the truth of the Catholic faith. At the beginning of *perestroika* he moved from Kalmykia to L'vov, went to a Latin-rite church and approached the priest with a request for baptism. After questioning Kikshayev the priest came to the conclusion that he was not quite ready for baptism and gave him some literature, suggesting that he study some more and give the matter further reflection. A year later the young Kalmyk passed the test and was baptised. The new convert returned to Elista and started a vigorous campaign, calling upon his compatriots to receive the true faith. Many members of the Kalmyk intelligentsia were attracted to Catholicism as a result of his impassioned sermons. Kikshayev would gather together the few remaining elderly Catholic Poles and Germans and form a community. Subsequently he had several meetings with Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, who agreed to send a priest to Elista as well as with the president of Kalmykia, Ilyumzhinov, who pledged his support for the community. Kikshayev subsequently became a monk and emigrated to join a French monastery, but he left behind three thriving Catholic communities in Kalmykia.

Meanwhile ethnic German-Polish Catholicism had also survived underground. In

fact in Siberia the Catholic tradition was never interrupted at all. In many towns and villages exiled German Catholics regularly met for secret prayer meetings, even though they had no priests. In the early 1980s Iosif Svidnitsky (Swidnicki), a Polish priest from Ukraine, found these congregations in his travels around Siberia, and made the first attempts to have them legalised. He was imprisoned for two and a half years for his pains.

It seems unlikely that Catholicism maintained its existence in Russia during this period: for several decades just two churches in the country (in Moscow and Leningrad) were allowed to function by the authorities, while ethnic Catholics – Poles, Germans and Lithuanians – took trips to Poland or Lithuania to attend church services and crypto-Catholics in the Siberian taiga assembled in huts and whispered the ‘Pater Noster’.

The latest stage of modernisation, from the late 1980s, once again offered Russia a choice, including a choice of faiths. The transition from decades of official atheism to a ‘religious revival’ opened up prospects for Catholicism. The short period of Gorbachev’s *perestroika* was one of the rare moments in history which ideologically and politically favoured a revival of Catholicism in Russia. The general feeling that Russia would do well to get rid of the communist system and would immediately become a ‘normal western country’, where freedom, humanity and justice would reign, aroused a euphoria for anything western: not only for western politics, culture and economics, but also for western spiritual values. Traditional Russian isolationism – both communist and nationalist – was weakened and discredited for a short while. In the period from 1989 to 1993 there were a huge number of conversions to Catholicism.

In 1991, following the Gorbachev reforms, the Catholic hierarchy was re-established in Russia. The country was divided into two dioceses: a European diocese with its centre in Moscow, led by Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, a Pole from Belarus; and an Eastern diocese with its centre in Novosibirsk, led by a German, Josef Werth. This marked the beginning of a gradual revival of all the Catholic parishes which had existed before the Revolution.

The Second Vatican Council had fundamentally changed the Catholic Church’s attitude to Orthodoxy. The official doctrine of the Catholic Church now recognises that grace and salvation can be attained through the Orthodox Church. Influential circles in the Vatican consider that the establishment of friendly relations with the Moscow Patriarchate is more important than the revival of Catholicism in Russia. The official position of the Catholic Church is that the revival of Catholicism in Russia should be encouraged only as far as Poles, Germans, Lithuanians and Latvians are concerned – in other words, for the benefit of ethnic Catholics. One of the ideologists of Russian Catholicism has even formulated a sort of doctrine of ‘canonical parishioners’, as an alternative to the ‘problem of canonical territory’.<sup>14</sup> Things have turned out differently, however. The creation of Catholic parishes follows a standard pattern all over Russia: a group of elderly Russian Poles or Germans asks the diocese to send a priest; four to six years later, the majority of parishioners in this so-called ‘ethnic’ parish are young Russian intellectuals. This is quite understandable, in fact. The cultural barriers which used to exist between Russians and non-Russians are no more: most Poles, Germans, Lithuanians and Latvians have intermarried and become russified to such an extent that many have forgotten their mother tongue. Services held in the languages of these ‘ethnic’ Catholics are usually simply incomprehensible to them. In many parishes the dividing line between Russians and Poles or Germans has been hard to determine



from the outset.

The restoration of the Catholic Church in Russia has also meant that problems of Russian–Polish relations within the Church characteristics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have resurfaced. Even if Poles no longer dominate the Church, as they did before 1917, they still play a very important role in it: the majority of priests and a significant number of believers are Poles.

There is often now no trace of the prerevolutionary antagonisms between Poles and Russians. In some cities (including Yekaterinburg, Irkutsk, Orenburg and Astrakhan') Polish priests command great authority and deep respect in their communities, attracting hundreds of new Russian converts. The parish priest of the Catholic Church in Irkutsk, the Salvatorian Ignacy Pawlus, is a brilliant and somewhat atypical representative of the Catholic clergy. A deep love for Russia and Russian culture brought him from Kraków to Irkutsk in 1990. According to him, 'Russia can still become the heart of the world, just as Germany is now the nerve centre of the world'. This priest adopted Russian citizenship in Irkutsk and conducts regular masses to pray for the revival of Russia. When the city authorities asked him to facilitate the receipt of western humanitarian aid he categorically refused, saying that 'it is shameful for a great country such as Russia to beg for handouts'. And so the Irkutsk parish finances its own charitable work. Fr Ignacy describes the basic sociological precept governing his ministry: 'Communism denied people a conscience. This happened in Russia and in Poland. If during my lifetime I am able to awaken the voice of conscience, if only in a few hundred people, it will be my gift to Russia and the Russian state.' Through his ministry Fr Ignacy has come to command unbelievable authority. We have even heard one die-hard Russian nationalist, who hates the West and Roman Catholicism, make the unexpected statement 'I am not going to talk about Fr Ignacy, he is a good priest'.

However, ethnic conflicts are not altogether a thing of the past. Today there is some discontent among Russian priests and laypeople at perceived Polish and Polish–Belarusian 'nationalism'. Even Archbishop Kondrusiewicz has sometimes become a target for criticism. More often than not, the prime causes of these conflicts are the attitude of Russian Poles, and the perceived desire of priests newly arrived from Poland to turn new parishes into something akin to exclusive Polish religious and cultural centres. In Polish Catholic circles in Moscow and St Petersburg there are people who express openly nationalist and anti-Russian views. The prior of the Dominican community in Moscow has become notorious for his outspokenness.

Nationalist tensions are not the only problem. Difficulties have also begun to surface between the church hierarchy and the laity, because of socio-cultural differences. Kondrusiewicz and his immediate colleagues – mainly Poles – came originally from peasant and working-class families in Belarus'. They moved to Russia shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union and thus gained Russian citizenship. These people bravely proclaimed their faith during the Soviet period and all suffered persecution to a greater or lesser extent. But to try to find a common language with the Moscow and St Petersburg intelligentsia is perhaps more difficult for them than it was to stand up to the KGB. Of the numerous priests and monks who have come from Poland into Russia, Kondrusiewicz tends to prefer those who have a similar level of education and background – it is easier for him to relate to them. It is much harder, however, for the educated Russian laity to relate to them. In the central Russian city of Tula, for example, young Russian Catholic activists have more or less broken away from the parish. 'We received the Catholic faith, not Polish citizenship', they claim. 'Perhaps it would be a good thing if Polish priests were denied visas, then

Russian Catholicism could quietly gather strength without their domineering attitudes and for the next ten or so years we could simply travel abroad to receive the spiritual nourishment we need in the meantime.' This position is an extreme and atypical tendency within the Church.

The cultural component is very important for all Russian Catholics, whether they are observers of the Eastern or the Latin rite. When foreign priests come from the West they bring not only a universal Catholic faith, but also their own national traditions of religious life, their Catholic folklore, which they (sometimes without realising it) try to instill on Russian soil. Many Polish priests often do this consciously, believing that they are in fact reviving Polish parishes. Priests from other countries, however, are also starting to introduce their own cultural and national traditions. The parishes in Nizhni Novgorod and Vladimir are influenced by Italian culture; in Chelyabinsk, Ufa and Marks there is German cultural influence; in Samara, Vladikavkaz and Nal'chik – Irish; in Voronezh and Yakutsk – Slovak; in Kazan', Argentinian cultural influences hold sway. In Vladivostok the American priest, Myron Effing, has incorporated the American festival of Thanksgiving into the church calendar, and it is now enthusiastically celebrated by Catholics in the Far East.

Russian Catholics of the Latin rite have understandably reacted against all this 'foreignness'. The need to russify Catholicism, to root it in Russian spiritual and cultural traditions, began to be discussed in the Catholic press and at various meetings of Catholic lay activists during 1996–97. Various proposals have been put forward, including the honouring of Orthodox saints canonised since after the division of the church in 1054; the introduction of elements of the Orthodox liturgy into the Latin rite; and the rejection of some liturgical practices which clearly emanate from a Polish cultural tradition.<sup>15</sup>

We are now seeing the development of a particular Russian form of Catholicism, with a Russian Catholic consciousness and Russian patriotism. This is by no means just a melange of Western European and Russian ideas. Russian Catholics are in the process of seriously rethinking Russian history, culture and spirituality. Russian Catholics see Russia as part of 'the West' and its religion and culture as part of the common European tradition. They see those periods of total resistance to the West as historical misunderstandings that now belong to the distant past, and believe that from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century Russian culture returned to its native European home, with brilliant results, of which they can feel proud. Catholics in Russia generally espouse western political and cultural values such as political liberty, respect for the individual and the primacy of law. These values, typical of western 'conservatism', are almost completely alien to Russian 'right-wingers', for whom 'democracy' and 'human rights' are terms of abuse.

In the mid-1990s the question of the Eastern rite, thought to belong only to history, was suddenly revived. This has an immediate relevance for Catholics brought up in the Russian Orthodox tradition who do not wish to be under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. The desire to restore a separate Russian Catholic Church sometimes stems from a reaction to Polish nationalism. Usually the discussion centres on the revival of the Russian Catholic Church of the Eastern Rite which was to all intents and purposes liquidated on the territory of the USSR in 1946. The *de facto* leader and apologist for this Eastern-rite Catholic movement is Ivan Lupandin.<sup>16</sup>

At present, there are semilegal unregulated Russian Eastern-rite Catholic groups and communities in Moscow, Tula, Kaluga and Vologda and other towns mainly in European Russia. This movement launched itself unexpectedly into the public gaze

when the religious supplement of *Nezavisimaya gazeta* published a letter from a certain Aleksandr Berezkin, a member of the Eastern-rite movement from Ryazan', in June 1997. He announced the formation of the Brotherhood for the Reunification of Orthodoxy (*Bratstvo za vossoyedineniye pravoslaviya*) and assured his readers that Russian Catholics would overcome all obstacles and would eventually reestablish their 'Local Church'. This letter typifies the thinking of Russian Greek Catholics today,

It is no secret that many people, mainly from the believing intelligentsia who have access to objective information about Catholicism, are convinced that the unity of the Church is more important than human considerations since it is the will of Christ. They act in accordance with their conscience, that is they become Catholics. There are not many Catholic churches in the provinces, and it is not possible for everyone to travel 100 kilometres to get to church. An absurd situation from the ecclesiastical point of view arises: a local church exists (the Russian Catholic Church is recognised as such by the Acts of the Council of Florence, which have not been annulled) which is denied the right to any existence. It may be possible to say that after a period of confusion, laypeople themselves have realised that they are part of a genuine, quite numerous Church in unity with Rome. People unite almost spontaneously, sometimes informally, sometimes through offering hospitality to one another, sometimes as genuine 'parishes without a priest'. The Brotherhood for the Reunification of Orthodoxy was recently created, the aims of which are: to gain recognition of the right for the reunited Church to have its own pastors; and to collect signatures to a petition asking that Rome reestablish the episcopate. We hope that such initiatives are not interpreted as 'aggression from the Vatican', since the question is of the reunification of the Church 'from below'.<sup>17</sup>

These groups maintain close links with Western Ukrainian and Belarusian Greek Catholics, with whom they have an affinity in terms of religious practice and mentality. The Catholic Eastern-rite priest in Grodno, Viktor Danilov, is gradually being recognised as the leading exponent of the Greek Catholic cause, in Russia as well as in Belarus'.

The Moscow Patriarchate is categorically opposed to the establishment of the Eastern rite in Catholic parishes in Russia, and the Vatican does not believe it is necessary. However, Eastern-rite parishes already exist, and are growing and developing apace. Sooner or later everyone will have to come to terms with this fact. Moreover, the movement for the reestablishment of Eastern-rite Catholicism has a long and firmly-rooted tradition in Russian philosophical and religious thought.

Russian Catholicism has achieved much in the last eight years of reforms, after having been almost totally destroyed in the communist era. According to official Catholic statistics there are around half a million Catholics in Russia. We estimate the figures to be around 150,000, but this is still good going for a Church which has more or less risen from the ashes. This number, together with the Vatican's projection of future growth of the Church, points to a further three million people for whom a conversion to Catholicism would represent a return to the faith of their forefathers.<sup>18</sup> Of course no one can say with certainty how many will actually return to the Catholic faith, or how many Russians (and Tatars, Yakuts and others) will find God in the Catholic Church. Just seven years ago no one foresaw that the Armenians

would play such a significant role in Russian Catholicism, but in recent years hundreds of Armenian families belonging to the Catholic tradition have moved to Russia from the Caucasus region. By the end of 1997 Armenians comprised the majority of Catholic parishioners in Krasnodar, Sochi, Rostov-on-Don and some other southern cities.

In 1998 there were about 200 registered Catholic congregations in Russia. The official figures do not fully reflect the actual extent of Catholicism in the country: in Novosibirsk *oblast'* alone, for example, the priests of the three registered parishes regularly also minister to about 70 German and Polish Catholic villages. Regional differences play a key role in the development of Catholic parishes. In central Russia, where Orthodoxy is most firmly rooted, Catholics experience great difficulty in establishing themselves and there is powerful opposition from both state authorities and public opinion. In the eastern regions, such as the Lower Volga, the Urals and Siberia, Catholicism is developing naturally and easily. Public opinion in some cities, for example Irkutsk, Krasnoyarsk and Orenburg, readily accepts Catholicism as a valid alternative to Russian Orthodoxy. Today practically all the clergy are foreigners, mainly Poles. The first ordinations of Russian priests graduating from the seminary in St Petersburg will take place in 1999. There are still very few native Russians among the Catholic clergy, but this is not likely to impede the activity of the Church for long.

In the course of its development in recent years Russian Catholicism has had to contend increasingly with anti-Catholic attitudes. Anti-Catholicism in Russia today, as in the past, is not so much religious as cultural and political in character and arises out of renewed resistance to the West and western values. Hopeful expectations in the late 1980s and early 1990s that there would be a fast and easy solution to Russia's social and economic problems, and that a society based on law, 'of the western kind', was about to be created, have given way to 'sour grapes' cynicism: 'We haven't got a flourishing democratic state, but we don't want one anyway'. Two types of nationalism – communist and fundamentalist Orthodox – sometimes in conflict with each other, sometimes cooperating, are dragging the country into isolation and stagnation in the cultural, religious, political and economic spheres. Both these movements see the Catholic Church as their sworn enemy. The nationalist press, both communist and noncommunist, uses the same myths, prejudices and accusations: the Catholic conspiracy, Catholic expansion, Jesuit plots – these are what are behind Russia's problems.

Unfortunately, the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church and many of its clergy are playing their part in this anti-Catholic campaign. Recent history explains why. The current ideology of the Moscow Patriarchate was shaped in the 1940s and 1950s. At the end of the Second World War Stalin legalised the Orthodox Church and gave it a firmly centralised organisational structure. The context was Stalin's rejection of the ideology of world revolution and global internationalism and his transition to superpower ideology and Russian nationalism. It was at that time that Patriarch Sergi (Stragorodsky) formulated the doctrine of 'patriotic service'. The Church saw itself as offering ideological support to the secular authorities, acting as an obstacle to 'internal sedition' and to 'expanding western influence'. The doctrine of 'patriotic service' revived some extremely archaic and primitive nationalist ideas which are not religious, but political *par excellence*.

During the following decades the doctrine of 'patriotic service' enabled the Church to prove its usefulness and thus to continue to exist in an anti-Christian state. However, it ate deeply into the consciousness of the Orthodox clergy. Getting rid of

it will be a long and difficult task. Since the early 1990s the marked antiwestern, anti-Catholic (and, in Russia, implicitly antidemocratic and nationalist) tenor in the words and deeds of the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy has been steadily increasing. It is symbolic that the first two churches to be rebuilt in Moscow – the Church of the Kazan' Mother of God and the Church of Christ the Saviour – are both linked with victories over the Catholic West: Poland in the seventeenth century and France in the nineteenth century.

Although some Russian Orthodox clergy, including some bishops, are tolerant and at times even favourably disposed towards the Catholic Church, they are in a clear minority and have no influence over policy. The patriarch and other influential clergy constantly accuse Catholics of 'proselytism', 'expansionism' and 'spiritual aggression'. Any gains made by Russian Catholics are seen as a 'defeat' for Orthodoxy. The patriarch, reacting to Catholic protests about the discriminatory nature of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience, virtually denied the Catholics any right to existence:

Where have you seen the historical presence of Catholics in today's Russia? Before the Revolution in the Russian Empire, Catholics mainly lived in Poland, but you cannot claim that there is a Catholic tradition in modern Russia. Even if there are Catholics here, in Moscow they tend to belong to the foreign diplomatic community.<sup>19</sup>

Catholics are being pressurised to move the diocesan centre from Moscow to St Petersburg, and they are being asked to refrain from creating new dioceses in the future.

The leadership of the Catholic Church is trying to smooth over the constantly growing tension in its relations with the Moscow Patriarchate. It is trying on its own initiative to establish friendly relations with Orthodox clergy wherever possible. Up to now almost all revivals of Catholic parishes have been in places where they existed before 1917 (there are a few exceptions, mainly in Siberia, where many Poles and Germans were sent into exile by the Bolsheviks). The Vatican is seeking to preserve and improve its relationship with the Moscow Patriarchate by genuinely pursuing a policy aimed exclusively at reviving prerevolutionary so-called 'ethnic' parishes. Unfortunately this policy is impracticable. It is impossible to differentiate between Russians, Poles and Germans and no Catholic priest can prevent a Russian, even one baptised into the Orthodox Church, from becoming a Catholic. When such attempts have been made, they have only inspired hatred towards both Russian Orthodoxy and 'the Polish mafia' in those who have been refused. Moreover, the Vatican's attempts to preserve good relations with the Moscow Patriarchate by voluntarily restricting its activity to the revival of 'ethnic parishes' are justifiably seen as lacking in sincerity, for despite everything Catholic churches everywhere are still full of Russians. Moreover, the current situation is causing a neurotic reaction among the Russian Catholics and evoking schismatic tendencies within the Catholic Church itself. For example, some groups have established links with the Lefebvre movement in the West, and there have even been attempts to create underground Orthodox 'Latin-rite' parishes.

Any efforts made by Catholic parishes to establish close ecumenical links with Orthodox churches usually lead to friendly relations with only two or three more liberally-minded priests in a given diocese. The conservative majority then usually accuse these liberal clerics of heretical and schismatic tendencies and the Catholics of seeking to undermine their Church. A policy aimed at building bridges between

the two communities, then, might lessen the conflict 'at the top' but lead to more tensions and conflicts lower down. Even at the highest level there is a long way to go before the relationship can be described as fraternal. The Moscow Patriarchate would seemingly be most pleased if Catholicism in Russia simply disappeared; but this is not a realistic possibility: even if the Vatican recalled all its priests, some form of nonconformist 'Russian Catholicism', perhaps operating entirely independently of any authority, would continue to exist.

The phenomenon of contemporary Russian Catholicism cannot be explained in terms of the missionary activity of the Church, which is negligible. Catholicism exists because there is a natural, spontaneous attraction towards it among certain sections of Russian society. This can be seen by looking at the sociological profile of Catholic parishes. Most of the parishioners are young, mainly students and members of the intelligentsia – in other words from the most active and sensitive sections of society, which feel more acutely the exigencies of the times. The generally high level of education among the parishioners (mainly artists, teachers and academics) gives Catholicism greater influence and appeal, than, for example, the Baptist Church. Catholics are as a rule well-educated, with a western outlook: for many of them the concepts of culture and freedom are linked primarily with the Catholic Church.

Despite the position of the hierarchy, there is a growing tendency among Orthodox not to see any difference between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. This is a tendency which goes back to Vladimir Solov'yev. It is a fairly common view today among clergy as well as laypeople. Two recent cases gained enormous publicity because those involved were punished by the Patriarchate. A famous icon painter, priest-monk Zinon, was suspended because he had taken communion at a Catholic service;<sup>20</sup> and in Obninsk the local dean, Fr Rostislav, was removed from his post and sent to the Tikhonov monastery to mend his ways for a similar misdemeanour.<sup>21</sup> Zinon and Rostislav were caught out, but people in Russia, including priests, know how to keep a low profile and in all probability such instances are not all that rare. It is not only liberals who have a fraternal feeling towards the 'Sister Church'. The newspaper *Tat'yantin den*, the unofficial mouthpiece of conservative Orthodox intellectuals, constantly criticises contemporary Catholicism for its 'modernism' and 'renovationism' whilst at the same time emphasising a common spiritual heritage and allying itself to the Catholicism of the time before the Second Vatican Council. It does not go so far as to proclaim openly the unity of Orthodoxy and pre-Council Catholicism, but any regular reader of the newspaper must inevitably come to that conclusion.

The question of which of the two Churches is the more liberal is not in fact as simple as it might first appear. One provincial Catholic priest we interviewed gave us this rather unexpected evaluation:

Catholics, even liberal Catholics, are usually far more traditional than the Orthodox in their daily lives. They go more regularly to church, pray more often, take communion more often, take the teachings of the Church on sexual morality and family life more seriously and so on. The conservatism of the Orthodox is proclaimed mainly for effect: in their conduct and way of life the Orthodox are far more modern and 'renovationist'.

These words reflect a sad truth: for most Russian Orthodox, religion is a political ideology, not a faith which asks its followers to live according to a strict moral discipline.

Historically it has been the case that conversion to Catholicism in Russia has

meant far more than a choice of faith: it has also been a choice of cultural orientation, a choice between civilisations. For most Russian Catholics today the adoption of the Catholic faith represents neither a break with nor a return to the faith of their forefathers. For them becoming a Catholic is, rather, a discovery of Christ and Christianity, a participation in the creation of a new cultural and religious way of life. In this era of postsoviet confusion, when all the former national ideologies have crumbled, they see their future and the future of their country not only in being with Christ, but in the wider context of Christianity and western civilisation.

Nowadays, after the euphoria of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, forces are again emerging in our country which set their hopes on a 'Eurasian path of development' and assert that the 'soulless western values' of democracy, legality, freedom and human rights are unacceptable in Russia. They are confirming Chaadayev's russo-phobic view of Russia: that it is a country which considers 'a permanent, all-pervading absence of the concepts of duty, justice, law and order' quite natural. The country faces the real risk of becoming once again a 'state standing apart', to use Nikolai Leskov's colourful image – 'a dark, dirty cattle wagon, with feeble rays of light penetrating the murky darkness here and there through a few cracks in the walls'. The presence of a spiritually and intellectually active Russian Catholic minority may become one of the factors holding the country back from descending into that Eurasian darkness. They recognise that Russia will never become a Catholic country, but nevertheless by their very existence they are throwing down a spiritual and intellectual challenge to Russian Orthodoxy. In the future this challenge might well induce the 'dominant Church' to reject its general opposition to the West.

Russian Catholics today doubtless choose the Catholic faith for many of the same reasons as their nineteenth-century predecessors: the obvious unpleasantness of contemporary Russian life, economic chaos, political excesses and a cultural void. Converts to Catholicism also reject a Russian Orthodoxy discredited by its links with communism and characterised by authoritarianism, moral bankruptcy, nationalism and antiintellectualism.

However, new Russian Catholics do not typically see a sharp, direct opposition between Russia and the West. They have not inherited Chaadayev's vision of Russia as a negative *non-entity* which may or may not become *something*. Becoming a Catholic entails a rejection of the old dilemmas and contradictions of the Russian soul. For today's new Russian Catholic converts the age-old dichotomies of 'Russia or the world', 'Democracy or the Church', 'West or East', 'Christ or the Grand Inquisitor', 'red or white' are simply irrelevant. These Catholics generally share the same basic philosophical outlook as the majority of 'anonymous' unchurched Russian believers who are 'just Christian'. From this point of view contemporary Russian Catholicism has a past, a present and a future.

## Notes and References

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- <sup>3</sup> M. S. Lunin, *Pis'ma iz Sibiri* (Nauka, Moscow, 1987), pp. 197–98.
- <sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 176.
- <sup>5</sup> Chaadayev, p. 147.
- <sup>6</sup> A. Kir'yanov, 'Rimskiye kanikuly Gogol'ya', *Istina i zhizn'*, no. 4, 1996, pp. 45–51.
- <sup>7</sup> N. V. Gogol', *Polnoye sobraniye sochinenii* (Moscow, 1937–52), vol. 9, p. 118.
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- <sup>10</sup> L. Tretjakewitsch, *Bishop Michel d'Herbigny SJ and Russia* (Augustinus, Würzburg, 1990), pp. 56–58, 128.
- <sup>11</sup> Knyaz' P. M. Volkonsky, 'Russkiye katoliki na priyeme u patriarkha Tikhona', *Logos* (Brussels/Moscow), no. 48, 1993, pp. 123–29.
- <sup>12</sup> Tretjakewitsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–27.
- <sup>13</sup> *op. cit.*
- <sup>14</sup> Yuli Shreider, 'Mezhtserkovnyye otnosheniya: tochka zreniya katolika', *Svet Yevangeliya*, no. 35, 1997.
- <sup>15</sup> S. Mikhailov, 'Yeshche raz o russkikh katolikakh', *Svet Yevangeliya*, no. 22, 1997.
- <sup>16</sup> I. Lupandin, 'Dekret II Vatikanskogo Sobora o Vostochnykh Katolicheskikh Tserkvakh i sud'ba Katolicheskoi Tserkvi vostochnogo obryada v Rossii (1917–1995)', *Teologiya* (Moscow), no. 5, July–December 1994, pp. 100–8.
- <sup>17</sup> *NG – Religiya*, no. 7, July 1997.
- <sup>18</sup> A. Barmin, 'Katolicheskoye prisutstviye v sovremennoi Rossii', *Religiya i prava cheloveka: na puti k svobode sovesti*, 3rd edn (Nauka, Moscow, 1996), p. 124.
- <sup>19</sup> *Izvestiya*, 5 August 1997. Some of the more irresponsible anti-Latin polemicists go even further. According to the Catholic newspaper *Svet Yevangeliya* one Orthodox journalist averred that not only did Catholicism not exist in Russia, it had never existed anywhere. 'There is no such thing as Catholicism. There are all kinds of Catholic journalists, Catholic hierarchs, theologians, schools, universities. But they all represent themselves, and they are all quite different from each other.' *Svet Yevangeliya*, no. 34, 1997.
- <sup>20</sup> *Radonezh*, no. 33, December 1996, p. 15.
- <sup>21</sup> *Metafrasis*, no. 3, 1997, p. 8.

(New sections translated from the Russian by Marite Sapiets)