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## Christian Mission in a Russian Orthodox Context

Walter Sawatsky

Christian mission in Orthodox lands is a 2000-year-old story, generally unknown in the West and still unexplored sufficiently for the purpose of Christian mission in post-Communist states. Because of Orthodox repression under Islamic and Soviet overlords, and a stifling tsarist bear hug in between, public perception has not yet perceived Orthodoxy as a missionary church.

### The Babylonian Captivity

Even if the Russian Orthodox Mission Society, founded in 1865, achieved impressive results in the spread of Christianity across major tribal peoples of Siberia and in East Asia, Russian Orthodox leadership came to refer to the period from 1721 to 1917 as the era of the “Babylonian Captivity.” As a modernizing despot, Peter I (1696-1725) applied bureaucratic models of governance derived from Scandinavia and Germany and, for the sake of the empire, modernized church structures similarly. As a result, by 1814 Russia had established self-financed church schools, including seminaries, in key cities and theological academies in St. Petersburg, then in Moscow, Kyiv, and finally Kazan (the latter with a mission and linguistic studies curriculum). By the 1890s nearly 90 percent of Orthodox priests had completed seminary, the academies were fully conversant with the ideas and literature of the best of the theological faculties in Western Europe, and the journals from those academies are still worth reading today. The “Babylonian Captivity” label emerged because central financial control and appointments of hierarchs had become tsarist absolutist prerogatives.

Out of the Pietist era of early 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia a Bible Society emerged (1813) with a modern Russian New Testament circulating by 1821, but the whole Bible only from 1876. The emergence of the Russian evangelical movement may be traced to a democratization process, as more and more peasants and urban workers learned to read the Bible. How much evangelical faith was and remained an indigenous renewal movement within Orthodoxy, and how much it was influenced by similar Bible-based movements in German principalities, Scandinavia, the Baltics, and Britain, remains under debate to the present.

### The Soviet War on Religion

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the most intense period of testing for all faith traditions, in a manner that also resulted in their forming a common core of traumatic experiences. To understand the rapid shifts following the fall of communism in 1991, it helps to recall the

significantly different church-state experiences of Orthodox and evangelicals during the Soviet era.

Perhaps the most profound difference was that following the October Revolution, the first action of Soviet authorities was to declare the separation of the churches from the state. The new regime also refused the legal right of juridical personhood to all religious bodies, including the newly established Russian Patriarchate, calling into question the future of all organized religious life. Orthodox experienced the first decade of Soviet power as an outright war on the church, specifically the destruction of Orthodox institutions, until in 1927 acting patriarch Sergei declared full loyalty to Soviet power without reservation. Not only did his action precipitate a break-away movement that went underground (the True Orthodox Church), but between 1927 and the purges of 1937 Orthodoxy was so severely persecuted that only four bishops were still free, a large majority of bishops and priests had been executed, and others languished in the Gulag.

Evangelical Protestants, only granted tolerance in 1906, expanded rapidly from that date. In contrast to Orthodox under siege, the years 1918 to 1929 came to be known as the golden age for evangelicals. Nevertheless, in addition to being pressured to declare loyalty to Soviet power, Baptists, Evangelical Christians, Pentecostals, as well as Mennonites, had to abandon official support for pacifism or biblical nonresistance between 1923 and 1926.

Still, evangelicals’ highly flexible organizations meant that imprisoning key leaders was less effective in suppressing them than was the case with Orthodox. Then came the 1929 Law on Cults which in short order resulted in the shutting down of virtually all public worship.

What has become better known since 1991 through access to archives is the fact that Orthodox resistance to Soviet pressures was indeed intense and creative. Knowing that leading hierarchs were being imprisoned, and assuming a *sobor* (church council) would not be permitted to elect another patriarch, Patriarch Tikhon had left a testament naming more than nine possible successors in order of elimination. Sergei, who became acting patriarch in 1925, suffered three imprisonments before issuing his declaration of loyalty. When the theological academies and seminaries were forbidden, their leaders tried to sustain short-course programs and tutoring for priests, so there would never be a time when priests stopped functioning in secret. Materials about the suppression

(continued on page 2)

## Christian Mission in a Russian Orthodox Context (continued from page 1)

of monasteries in the 1920s that this author was able to examine in 1994 were filled with pathos. When a women's monastery was closed, trucks came to drive the nuns a long distance away, leaving them to fend for themselves. They still managed to return and were arrested again. In the same archival files were hundreds of lay letters of protest. In the post-Soviet era it was from such materials that lists of Christian martyrs numbering in the millions were collected.

We now also know of creative forms of witness by enterprising priests and members of the intelligentsia. As with evangelical witness and clandestine mission, efforts to sustain faith included assistance from abroad. The writings of Father Alexander Men, for example, were published through the efforts of an Eastern-Rite Catholic monastic community in Belgium, and Orthodox priests and bishops allowed to travel abroad during the ecumenical era after 1961 brought back copies of Men's writings and other religious literature in their luggage.

### Expectations of a New Golden Age

It was only in the late fall of 1987 that it became certain that Soviet authorities would agree to a celebration of the millennium of the baptism of Rus in 988. With a rethinking of the role of Christianity and religion in general in Russian history, *perestroika* finally came to include matters of faith. Most striking was the television program at Easter time 1988 showing original footage of the destruction of churches, the imprisonment of clergy and believers, and an interview with a *de facto* nun peeling potatoes as she talked about her life of faith, the camera highlighting her gentle hands, and no atheist conclusions ending the program. Then came the actual celebration of the baptism on the banks of the Dnepr River in Kyiv, Gorbachev announcing the re-opening of a monastery, an international celebration at the Danilov Monastery (the new patriarchal residence in Moscow), and the recognition of Patriarch Tikhon as a saint with his icon placed in the Donskoi Monastery.

As the U.S.S.R. collapsed, the Orthodox Church found itself in urgent need of priests and funds to repair re-opened churches. Then in the mid-1990s the economy in Russia, Ukraine, and numerous other successor states suffered an economic catastrophe, massive unemployment, and galloping inflation that destroyed seniors' pensions. Local Baptist churches began relying on donations from fellow believers abroad, while many priests and bishops, receiving proportionately less aid from fellow believers overseas, drew financial support from newly rich—but often corrupt—businesses.

Unfortunately, some of the clergy, and even major leaders such as Metropolitan Ioann of St. Petersburg, took nationalistic political stands that included anti-Semitic racism. Other Orthodox leaders sought to draw on the visions of renovationist renewal from before the Revolution, or from much-admired writings of Orthodox theologians in the diaspora, such as Nikolai Berdiaev and Alexander Schmemmann. In 2000 the special Sobor of Orthodox Bishops (known

as the Jubilee Sobor) gave evidence of both deeply conservative and liberal Orthodox perspectives. On the one hand, the Sobor declared Tsar Nicholas II and his family saints for the way they had conducted themselves when executed in 1918. On the other hand, the Sobor approved a comprehensive statement of social concerns prepared under the leadership of Metropolitan Kirill (then head of the International Department, now Patriarch). Already in 1994 the Bishops' Sobor had approved a commitment to mission and evangelism, calling upon Orthodox seminaries and theological academies to include such training for all priests. It was also a period when several Orthodox mission study centers were opened (Apostol'ski gorod in St. Petersburg led by Vladimir Fedorov and another center in Moscow led by Sergei Shirokov, [missioncenter@nm.ru](mailto:missioncenter@nm.ru)).

But then the atmosphere began to change. Several key elements account for the shift. Although a new law on religion stressing widespread religious liberty had passed the Soviet Duma before the U.S.S.R. dissolved (with similar legislation in the sovereign states of the post-Soviet era), by 1997 Russian revisions to that law were already limiting freedoms, especially for foreign missionaries.

The first sociological studies after 1991 showed that evangelical Christians were highly respected, less so the leaders of Orthodoxy; but early in the new century public attitudes shifted with Orthodoxy accorded greater respect (even if religious practice was relatively low). In contrast, evangelical leaders and believers were increasingly linked with undesirable Western ways.

### "Canonical Territory"

In 1994 Metropolitan Kirill championed an ancient notion of "canonical territory" as part of his call to mission that served to warn against proselytization by Catholic and Protestant missionaries in what Russian Orthodoxy considered its Orthodox world. That stance revealed the persistent impact of centuries of Orthodox isolation, in contrast to the globalization of the rest of Christianity since 1500. A profound isolation of Christian confessions into their own territorial limits had set in since 1054, so that taking converts from other Christian traditions was justified on the grounds that the "others" lacked full marks of the Holy Spirit. As the modern missionary movement proceeded, this sorry situation led an international missions gathering in Edinburgh in 1910 to confront the fragmentation of Christianity with the intent of new initiatives to overcome division. By 1948 this effort had resulted in the ecumenical movement organizing a World Council of Churches. By 1974 a parallel Lausanne Movement had emerged seeking closer cooperation among evangelicals globally. The mid-1960s also witnessed Vatican II, a gathering of Catholic bishops that resulted in new declarations on evangelization, a more tolerant view of "separated brethren," and steps toward the development of formal conversations with other Christian traditions. Kirill's anxieties over proselytism revealed not only Russian Orthodoxy's century of absence from these unity efforts, but

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also widespread distrust of ecumenism because of the politically compromised way in which Russian Orthodox and Evangelical Christians-Baptists joined the World Council of Churches in 1961.

Because of Soviet Christian isolation from the shifts in thinking globally during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian Orthodox notion of canonical territory no longer made sense, given the way Christian mission had proceeded. Roman Catholics, once only one of five patriarchates, had expanded through organized mission since the 1550s into Asia, Africa, and the Americas, coming to account for just over half of all Christians. The next largest bloc of Christians, “Independents,” consists of free church and indigenous Christian movements with no links to historic Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant traditions. Because of the many centuries of dominance by Islam in historically Orthodox territories, Orthodox growth remained stunted. Further undermining the concept of canonical lands have been forced population movements of Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants in Europe and their mostly voluntary migration and intermingling in the Americas and Australia.

### Striking Growth and Striking Limitations

Thus, the Russian Orthodox context since 1991 reveals both striking growth patterns and striking limitations and incapacities. When Metropolitan Hilarion addressed the World Council of Churches Assembly in Busan, Korea, in November 2013, he noted his church’s 25,000 parishes, a massive increase over 25 years, amounting to three new parishes per day. He also enumerated 50 theological schools, 800 monasteries, and a rising tide of new vocations (*Russian Orthodox Church News*, 1 November 2013; www.mospat.ru). From another perspective, Nadezda Kizenko, a highly respected scholar of Orthodoxy, wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that a “deep discontent [exists] among the Orthodox laity about the church hierarchy’s alliance with the state,” meaning its close ties with President Putin of ill repute (“Russia’s Orthodox Awakening,” *Nachrichtendienst Östliche Kirchen* 38 [No.13, 26 September 2013], 1-2). Kizenko went on to cite Sergei Chapnin, editor of the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, whose new book, *The Church in Post-Soviet Russia*, stressed that “church structures should expressly support lay participation,” a way of saying that a democratization of church structures and practice was a necessary task for the future.

Also in 2013, Willy Fautre, a long-time observer of religious freedom violations, noted ongoing internal conflicts among Baptists, Pentecostals, and Methodists in the former Soviet Union (cited in Martin Banks, “Eastern Europe: Freedom of Religion or Belief Still under Serious Threat,” *Nachrichtendienst Östliche Kirchen* 38 [No. 13, 26 September 2013], 1-2). That is, the two decades of post-Soviet growth of evangelicals had not resulted in greater unity, but a continuing, incapacitating ethos of distrust and competition.

Russian sociologist Nikolai Mitrokhin has criticized previous decades of Western scholarship for relying too heavily on *samizdat* and human rights themes which have revealed too little of the inner

spiritual life of believers and of clergy. In particular, Mitrokhin highlights the daunting task before the Orthodox Church of catechizing the population of its claimed canonical territory—in part the legacy of generations of state atheism (*Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov’: sovremennoe sostoianie; aktual’nye problemy* [Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006]). It called to mind the post-1991 challenge “of reaching an immense religiously inactive population” that historian of Russian Orthodoxy Nathaniel Davis laid bare in his respected account, *A Long Walk to Church* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

Patriarch Aleksei II stated in 1991 that “the new generation has forgotten everything. . . . People live with emptied souls.” Metropolitan Vladimir (Kyiv) spoke of the task of “re-Christianization. . . bringing the Church to the population. . . which estranged itself from the Church.” In the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* Vladimir Semenko appealed to the laity to become missionaries “in the ocean of paganism that surrounds us.”

### Church Demographics

Orthodox “territory,” in fact, is currently quite uneven, understandably so, if we call to mind Russian and Soviet population movements: from west to east, from village to city, and from freedom to *Gulag*. For one, Soviet industrialization projects resulted in new cities void of churches to address spiritual and social needs. Mitrokhin’s findings from data between 2002 and 2006 revealed that Russian Orthodox Church domination was strong in central Russia, central Ukraine, Belarus (except Grodno), and Moldova. Even so, in 14 of 89 regions the number of Protestant congregations was greater than the number of Orthodox parishes. Further, in Central Asia Protestants were more widespread than Orthodox, and in the Far East, 409 Protestant congregations outnumbered 317 Orthodox parishes. Siberia was home to 834 Orthodox parishes and 557 Protestant congregations, which indicated that this vast territory was much like the confessional diversity of the American Midwest and West Coast, due to similarly expansive frontiers over the past two centuries. Even further, if in central Russia 4,030 Orthodox parishes outnumbered 1,056 Protestant congregations, still, one in five churches were Protestant. In southern Russia 1,154 Orthodox parishes outnumbered 676 Protestant ones, but again, one in three churches was Protestant (Mitrokhin, *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov’*, 409-11). Finally, in a two-volume encyclopedia published in 2003, Orthodox scholar Sergei Filatov documented that a wide region of eastern Russian was best described as an atheist or secular zone. Filatov’s findings also drew attention to the persistence or revival of pre-Christian religions, as well as major regions of Muslim presence, not only in Tatarstan, within the Russian Federation (*Sovremennaia religioznaia zhizn’ Rossii. Opyt’ sistematicheskogo opisaniia* [Moscow: Logos, 2003]).

### What Orthodoxy Can Teach and Learn from Global Christianity

Numerous consultations have been held over the past two decades on mission and education, coming to

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(continued on page 4)

Slavic Christianity has much to teach, but also much to learn from Christian witness in the rest of the world.

### Christian Mission in a Russian Orthodox Context *(continued from page 3)*

the conclusion that education is mission. In November 2010 the World Council of Churches reported on an “international inter-Orthodox consultation on theological education, the ecumenical movement, and the life of Orthodox Churches.” The gathering’s communique stated, “Love should be rekindled and strengthened among the churches so that they should no more consider one another as strangers and foreigners, but as relatives, and as a part of the household of Christ (Ephesians 3: 6).” What followed were statements by Orthodox leaders giving thanks for having been helped by other churches and exhortations that, in spite of continuing differences on ecumenical issues, Christian churches “should deliver a clear common witness to the world and to secularized society.” The consultation ended with specific commitments to improve Orthodox theological education to better understand other churches, to move from “polemical apologetics” to “fair-minded, non-polemical” methods, and to adopt “a self-critical approach... in a spirit of humility” as “essential for authentic Orthodox dialogue and engagement” (WCC International Inter-Orthodox Consultation, Sibiu, Romania, 9-12 November 2010, *WCC E-Newsletter*).

Early in the 1990s, I participated in gatherings of mission society representatives eager to learn from the models, methods, and experience of specialists from the West. It was a sobering moment because I rightly came to question what we from the West had done to justify running mission seminars, especially as we knew only too well how widespread was the crisis of belief in the West. In stark contrast to the

West, Slavic Christian witness, whether under Islamic or Soviet atheist repression, very often had been forced to express itself in martyrdom. This reflection called to mind the title of an Orthodox publication sponsored by the World Council of Churches following a consultation on “mission today.” The title was *Martyria/Mission: The Witness of the Orthodox Churches Today* (Geneva: Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, World Council of Churches, 1980), edited by Romanian Ion Bria.

The missiological emphasis today is to resist denominational pride, to think modestly, and to seek to appreciate how one can notice the marks of the work of the Holy Spirit in other churches and ministries. In addition, mission from and to a Slavic context demands knowledge of mission in other contexts if it is to be part of what God is doing everywhere. After 25 years of renewed mission in a post-Soviet context, what is particularly lacking is engagement with global missions and missiologists with a global perspective. Slavic Christianity thus has much to teach, but also much to learn from Christian witness in the rest of the world. ♦

*Editor’s Note: Edited excerpts published with permission from the author’s chapter in Peter Penner and Vladimir Ubeivolec, eds., Novye gorizonty missii: razmyshleniia o missio Dei v post-sovetskom prostranstve (Kyiv: Colloquium, forthcoming).*

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## The Ukraine Crisis: The Perspective of a Missionary in Russia

Anonymous

My spouse from Ukraine and I have been missionaries in Russia for well over a decade. In our missions organization, which includes Russians and Ukrainians, Ukrainians publish their opinions in blogs and newsletters, while Russians with dissenting views are (mostly) silent.

While I agree with the observations and most of the sentiments made in the [Ukraine theme issue of the *East-West Church and Ministry*] Report, I do believe one aspect of the situation was not covered. The thing is: Putin is wildly popular in Russia—beloved by Christians and non-Christians alike. He is not seen by most as a dictator who must be tolerated or endured. My spouse refers to him as “God’s man for Russia in this hour.”

Because of our missionary work we meet with many Protestant pastors in our region from different denominations, and they all unanimously support Putin. I do not believe this is due to propaganda, but rather is a result of the many positive changes he has brought to the country (mostly economic). I have heard pastors say, “There simply isn’t anyone else who would be capable of leading this great country.” Any laws passed that are restrictive toward religion or Christianity are not seen as coming from the hand of Putin, but from certain other politicians who

may be hostile toward believers. There have been some prophecies about a great revival coming out of Russia, and many believe that Putin is paving the way for Russia to rise as a spiritual giant. Laws against NGOs are not seen as attacks against the church but as direct attacks against anti-government organizations — of which there were many that were funded by the U.S. and kicked out of Russia after the new laws were passed.

These views, of course, are incredibly offensive to many Ukrainians and western missionaries who think of Russia as evil and menacing. Russians are not able to discuss their views with most Ukrainians who respond explosively, so they just stay silent. I have seen missionaries from Russia and Ukraine—who previously worked together—yell at one another over social media and vow to never work together again. It is heartbreaking.

The restrictive laws passed in Russia have not in any way affected our missionary work, nor our status as permanent residents. The church we attend is large, and it now has to apply for a permit to hold meetings outside in a park, etc. The church applies for permits, receives permission, and holds its outdoor meetings. Life goes on, and the Gospel continues to be preached. ♦

Putin is wildly popular in Russia—beloved by Christians and non-Christians alike. He is not seen by most as a dictator who must be tolerated or endured.

# Moscow Seeing the Ukraine Conflict as a Spiritual Struggle

Paul Goble

## Lavrov and Putin

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov says that the West is opposing Moscow in Ukraine because Russia is returning to Orthodoxy. Other Russian commentators suggest that Moscow must fight in Ukraine not just to oppose Kyiv's shift toward Europe but also to block the eastward expansion of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism into the Slavic world.

Such statements tap into some of the deepest levels of Russian paranoia. It figures in the history of Aleksandr Nevsky who, according to Moscow historians, fought the Teutonic Knights not because they were representatives of the German emperor, but because they were the advance guard of the Vatican. Such Russian paranoia makes any resolution of the Ukraine conflict by a negotiated compromise that much more difficult, if not impossible.

On 5 June, Lavrov argued that the West is so opposed to Russia's return to its "traditional spiritual values" that it has deployed Ukraine against Moscow. "To our surprise," the top Russian diplomat said, "the thesis has begun to circulate that the Soviet Union with its Communist doctrine [at least] remained within the framework of the system of ideas developed in the West, while the new Russia is returning to its traditional values which are rooted in Orthodoxy, and as a result has become less understandable" ([interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=55525](http://interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=55525)).

Speaking to the Russian World Affairs Council in Moscow, Lavrov suggested that the West "attempts to impose Western values on everyone." These Western values, the Russian foreign minister continued, are "ever more detached from their own Christian roots and are ever less acceptable to the religious feelings of people of other faiths."

In his actions and statements, Vladimir Putin has long reflected the deep national antagonism toward Catholicism and Protestantism, viewing the first as one of the sources of Polish resistance to Russia and the latter, which at present is the fastest growing denomination in the Russian Federation, as a threat to the dominance of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, with which the Kremlin leader has formed a close alliance.

Now, as the conflict continues in Ukraine, others are following Putin and Lavrov's lead. Such critics suggest that what is going on in Ukraine is not just a political struggle between those in Ukraine who want to become part of Europe and those who oppose such a step by preferring to link their fates with Moscow. Rather, the defenders of this view argue that the Ukrainian crisis represents a clash of civilizations between Western Christianity and Russian-led Eastern Christianity.

## Archpriest Andrey Novikov

One of the clearest articulations of that notion

was provided by Archpriest Andrey Novikov in Moscow's Pravoslavny Vzglyad portal on 4 June. Novikov, who the Orthodox outlet noted had to flee from his parish in Odessa, said pointedly that Russia must win in Ukraine to defend the values of Russian Orthodoxy against Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and what he called schismatic Ukrainian Orthodox groups. If it does not, he warned, this war "will come to Russia itself" ([orthoview.ru/protoierej-andrej-novikov-esli-my-ne-ostanovim-vojnu-na-ukraine-ona-pridet-v-rossiyu/](http://orthoview.ru/protoierej-andrej-novikov-esli-my-ne-ostanovim-vojnu-na-ukraine-ona-pridet-v-rossiyu/)).

Were Moscow to leave the people of southeastern Ukraine to their fate under Kyiv, Novikov said, "they [Orthodox residents of southeastern Ukraine] would never trust Russia again." But Russia has additional reasons for acting, Novikov noted. Throughout history, "Russia's mission lies in the preservation of a tough faith and the defense of Orthodox Christians" wherever they are to be found against Rome and Protestant denominations that descend from Rome. This means, he continued, that Moscow cannot ignore the religious dimension of the conflict in Ukraine. If it does, he suggested, "we will lose the moral right to defend ourselves."

Summing up, the former religious leader from Odessa said, "Russia has always been spiritually opposed to the West, repulsing Catholic and Protestant expansion. Now, Russia is opposing the complete destruction of Christian morality and the creation of a new type of man on anti-humanistic foundations. The Donetsk People's Republic is basing itself on Orthodox principles," and that is why it has generated "such fanatic opposition from Western Ukraine (the Uniates and the splitters) as well as from Kyiv and the West," which he suggested is "the puppeteer behind all these events."

Such language has another consequence beyond making compromise in Ukraine more problematic. It is triggering the kind of discussions inside Russia itself that may make it even more difficult for the country to escape from its current wave of obscurantism and oppression of all faiths except the favored Russian Orthodox of the Moscow Patriarchate. Indeed, in this area as in so many others, the real consequences of Putin's Ukrainian adventure are likely to be felt beyond the borders of that country. ♦

*Edited excerpt reprinted with permission from Paul Goble, "Moscow Draws a Religious Line in the Sand in Ukraine," Eurasia Daily Monitor 11 (No. 104, 10 June 2014).*

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Russian commentators suggest that Moscow must fight in Ukraine not just to oppose Kyiv's shift toward Europe but also to block the eastward expansion of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism into the Slavic world.

# Old Church Slavonic Versus Russian in the Divine Liturgy

Brian P. Bennett

Any changes to the liturgy can be seen to threaten the entire faith.

In the 1990s, Russian Orthodoxy experienced a divisive debate over liturgical language. The question of language was “bundled” with a number of other proposed reforms, including switching to the Gregorian calendar (the Russian Church still uses the Julian), introducing pews (members are expected to stand during the long church services), moving the iconostasis (the icon screen that separates the mysteries at the altar from the main part of the church), and developing a more dynamic social outreach and inter-faith profile. But it was the issue of language that became the symbolic flashpoint in these complex and hotly disputed matters.

The issue of whether the traditional Church Slavonic liturgy should be maintained or in some measure “russified” started as an in-house debate. But it quickly spilled into the public arena, where it was taken up in newspaper articles and radio shows. It even became something of a *cause célèbre* when such high-profile intellectuals as Dmitrii Likhachev, Valentin Rasputin, and Igor Shafarevich weighed in on the matter. As it happens, all three were in favor of maintaining Church Slavonic.

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## Fr. Georgii Kochetkov

Although a number of progressive Russian Orthodox priests have advocated replacing Slavonic, the debate in the 1990s was fueled by one particular parish in Moscow that experimented with using Russian in the liturgy. Fr. Georgii Kochetkov and his small but active congregation wanted to introduce the vernacular in order to make the faith more accessible and meaningful, especially to the many neophytes who, post-Communism, were entering churches for the first time. When traditionalists heard of these innovations, they reacted with vehemence. They insisted on the sacredness and immutability of the archaic Church Slavonic language. They viewed any attempt at change, especially when done without the approval of church authorities, as tantamount to apostasy. They denounced the translations of liturgical service books done by the “Kochetkovites” as a betrayal of Orthodoxy and indeed of Russia. Though traditionalists typically celebrated the Russian language in other contexts and lobbied for its defense against the incursion of loanwords and non-standard elements, they feared that replacing Slavonic with Russian in the liturgy heralded a nightmarish future of rampant heresy, secularization, and ecumenism. Traditionalists worry about “forces” (*sily*) that conspire against the Russian Church (e.g. Tikhon 1999: 5). Meanwhile, reformists noted that even the Catholic Church, which used to be decried in Orthodox catechism for using a dead language, had made the move to the vernacular. They accused traditionalists of turning their backs on religious seekers and making a false idol out of the Slavonic language.

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## The Centrality of Liturgy

To understand the intensity of the debate, one must first appreciate the place of liturgy within the Russian Orthodox Church. The Bible, creed, and doctrines that are thought to form the hard skeletal structure of Western Christianity are understood by Eastern Christians as being “embodied” in the organic

fullness of the liturgy. In his classic introduction to Eastern Orthodoxy, Timothy (Kallistos) Ware writes:

The Orthodox approach to religion is fundamentally a liturgical approach which understands doctrine in the context of divine worship: it is no coincidence that the word “Orthodoxy” should signify alike right belief and right worship, for the two things are inseparable (Ware 1964: 271-2).

One consequence of this orientation, Ware goes on to suggest, is that any changes to the liturgy can be seen to threaten the entire faith. The Soviet handling of religion actually magnified the customary liturgical piety of the Orthodox Church. A Church that was already conservative became even more so during the parlous Soviet reign (Ramet 2006: 150). Theological study, which was never cultivated to the extent that it was in the West, was cut short in 1917 (Ivanov 1994: 37). With other channels of religious expression eliminated, the liturgy became that much more important (Bodin 2009: 37). As scholar James Billington (1999: 59) explains:

Soviet regulations permitted only liturgical worship and sought to prevent all broader teaching of the faith or even reading of the Bible in the hopes that Christianity would die by becoming simply a theatrical artifact. On the contrary, the intensity of devotion invested in the liturgy became even greater, since there was no other point of contact with the Church.

Just as the Russian Orthodox Church was trying to reestablish its position in society, a variety of foreign missionary groups, as well as the more exotic “Moonies” and Scientologists, appeared in Russia. The country seemed to be drowning in tawdry Western products. Therefore, a move to replace Church Slavonic seemed catastrophic to religious and cultural conservatives.

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## The Taint of Renovatism

Another crucial factor was the legacy of Communism. From public allegations of clerical collaboration with the KGB (reaching all the way up to Patriarch Aleksii II) to the growing cult of “new martyrs,” the 1990s were a time of reflection on the Church’s tangled relationship with Soviet power. (See, especially, Ellis 1994). In terms of liturgical language, this means, above all, coming to terms with Renovatism, a movement that—not entirely correctly—is associated with a Bolshevik-inspired push for use of vernacular Russian in the liturgy. “The experience of the Renovatist schism caused deep trauma in the ROC [Russian Orthodox Church], and its spectre continues to haunt the hierarchy today” (Walters 2004: 89). Thus, the thorny legacy of Communism, the perceived threat of Western cults and culture, and the relationship between Church and society in a pluralistic environment were all thrown into the crucible of the 1990s liturgical language debate.

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## The 1917-18 Church Council

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, questions began to be asked about the intelligibility of Church Slavonic. At that time, the Russian Church was

beginning to prepare for a local council. Though not on a par with the seven Ecumenical Councils that are considered authoritative across the Orthodox world, a local council can be of great consequence for the practice and organization of a particular canonical territory. In 1905 Russian bishops were canvassed about the state of the Church, though not about Church Slavonic in particular. Their “Responses” (*Otzyvy*) expressed a wide range of opinions. Of the prelates who responded, 18 of 48 commented on the incomprehensibility of Church Slavonic (Gopenko 2009: 134). Most favored a fresh Slavonic translation of the service books or a capital revision of the existing ones. Some called for the texts to be composed in “New Slavonic,” a Russified variety of Slavonic, while still others advocated wholesale translation into Russian (Balashov 2001: 24-31). These “Responses” have been published and continue to be mined by both traditionalists and reformists in the post-Communist period.

Pre-revolutionary Russia enjoyed a vibrant religious press, and between 1905 and 1917 the issue of liturgical language was widely discussed in ecclesiastical publications (Balashov 2001: 117-18). When the council of 1917-18 finally convened, the issues involving Slavonic and liturgical language had been debated off and on for a decade. The end result of these discussions was a *doklad* (article) that included the following planks:

- The Slavonic language is a great heritage and treasure and should therefore be retained as the basic language of the liturgy.
- In order to bring the liturgy closer to the people, the right of Russian to be used in the liturgy is acknowledged.
- The quick and complete introduction of Russian is impractical and undesirable.
- The partial application of Russian (in certain prayers, for instance) is acceptable if it helps comprehension.

(Balashov 2001: 136-45)

The Church could, but was not required to, implement the *doklad*. The disputed status of the recommendations figure in the post-Communist debate.

### **The Impact of Renovatism upon the Debate**

The issue is unsettled in part because the Church was soon overtaken by events. The Bolshevik Revolution and the Civil War meant that issues of ecclesiastical reform were put aside in the struggle for sheer survival. In fact, information about the 1917-18 council and the various documents attached to it were not well known even within Russian Orthodox circles until the 1990s (Kravetskii and Pletneva 2001: 164). Reform-minded clerics in the post-Soviet period have looked to reclaim the spirit of the council after the Soviet interregnum, while traditionalists cast doubt on its validity.

The next phase in the history of the Church Slavonic language question involves the controversial subject of Renovatism. This was a reform movement that arose within the Russian Orthodox Church after the 1917 Revolution, although its roots go back considerably farther (Roslof 2002). As the name indicates, it sought to renew—renovate—Russian church life. While the official Church was mostly

on its heels following the revolution, the clerics in the Renovatist camp sought to blend Russian Orthodoxy with Soviet ideology, even adapting Bolshevik language and organization for religious purposes (Roslof 2002: 69, 72). Some peripheral groups within the movement sought to invigorate church life by introducing the Russian vernacular into liturgical services, making the ritual more accessible to the common people. For their efforts, the Renovatists received the hedging support of the Communists and the enmity of religionists. They were vilified as “red priests” and “commissars in cassocks.” In the eyes of its opponents, Renovatism was “the religion of the Antichrist.”

However, Renovatists did not work out a consistent program of liturgical reform, and any linguistic experiments, including using Russian in worship services, were carried out by marginal groups and not sanctioned by the movement’s leaders. Yet, regardless of what historians say, in popular and traditionalist discourse Renovatists are simply and unequivocally associated with schismatic liturgical reform. Kochetkovites are, in turn, consistently described by their opponents in terms of Renovatism.

If, before the revolution, the vast majority of Russians had some knowledge of Church Slavonic, this ceased to be the case the further the Soviet Union moved away from the rule of the tsars. Slavonic, of course, was no longer taught in state schools, and a great many churches and seminaries were shuttered. The ecclesiastical press was largely eliminated; some 400 periodicals had ceased to exist by 1922 (Bakina 2003: 9-13). The liturgy was treated as a relic from a superseded past. Issues of liturgical language reform were put on the back burner. They were discussed, but not openly nor officially. In fact, between 1945 and 1988 only one article on the topic was published in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. The question of liturgical reform was broached in the *samizdat* literature of the 1950s and 1960s, but of course its readership was quite limited (Kravetskii and Pletneva 2001: 241-42).

The issue was raised again in earnest only in 1988, at the time of the millennial celebrations of Christianity in Russia. Two well-known philologists debated the issue. Sergei Averintsev was in favor of translating the service books into Russian, and he would later contribute to this task as part of Kochetkov’s Moscow parish. Gelian Prokhorov countered that Church Slavonic should be preserved, and that those who needed to study the language should do so (Gopenko 2009: 167). In the 1990s, Prokhorov would be supported by other philologists at the prestigious Pushkin House in St. Petersburg, including Dmitrii Likhachev.

As I noted above, the liturgical language debate flared up again in the 1990s in conjunction with the pastoral work of Fr. Kochetkov. Since reformists put the issue back on the table, I will give precedence to their arguments, and then discuss the responses or refutations of traditionalists.

### **Intelligibility**

The rituals of the Russian Orthodox Church are performed in Church Slavonic. The crux of the debate is whether this language is intelligible to the average churchgoer. Both reformists and traditionalists agree

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(continued on page 8)

that Church Slavonic is different from Russian. The question is how different? And is this difference a good or a bad thing? Does it enhance the sense of mystery or impede simple comprehension? Orthodox traditionalists claim that Church Slavonic is perhaps comparable to “Cranmerian English,” which is to say, they consider it an appropriately elevated yet still understandable idiom for Russian speakers. The reformist position, on the other hand, is that Church Slavonic has become the “Latin” of the Russian Church—a dead language that has become remote and unintelligible to the majority of believers and neophytes.

Orthodox reformists recognize that Church Slavonic has played a vital role in the course of Russian civilization, but insist that it has, in effect, outlived its usefulness. It is now an impediment. The Gospel message is being obscured by a thick fog of beautiful but opaque liturgical hymnody.

Traditionalists would concur with Heretz (2008: 23) when he says that “to frame the language question in terms of intellectual comprehension—as opposed to the evocation of a certain psychological state—is to accept the premises of Protestantism.” The liturgy, some say, is an enveloping mystery that cannot be reduced to the verbal-semantic level (Rafail 2008: 218). Reformists, on the other hand, suggest that without intellectual comprehension, without the mind being engaged, the ceremony is meaningless (Kostromin 1997: 112). They acknowledge the beauty of Church Slavonic, but contend that aesthetic qualities are not a priority, and moreover that the price to be paid for such beauty—namely, a loss of comprehension—is too steep (Zuttner 1997: 91). Reformists also link the issue of intelligibility to the competition that the Russian Church faces in the post-Soviet “market place of faiths.” For instance, Krylezher (1997: 39) juxtaposes the experience of newcomers at “evangelical meetings” with that of a Russian Orthodox service. Averintsev (1997 [1994]: 11) warns that people will leave the Church.

The chief contention of traditionalists is that Church Slavonic must be maintained in the Russian Orthodox liturgy. They object to Kochetkov on a number of grounds. He behaved without the endorsement of the church hierarchy; he fostered a cult-like atmosphere in his parish; his translations of liturgical texts into Russian were at best poorly done and at worst a desecration of sacred tradition; and, abetted by forces hostile to Russia, Kochetkovites represent a kind of fifth column intent on destroying Russian Orthodoxy from within.

However, some traditionalists do acknowledge comprehension of Church Slavonic is a problem for contemporary believers. But translation is considered far too radical and dangerous, especially when simpler solutions—such as increased education and attendance—are at hand. As in the legal, medical, or philosophical domains, the ecclesiastical domain has a specialized vocabulary that is distinct from everyday speech and must be learned (Kondrat’eva 2002: 364). Why do people believe they should be able to drop into a worship service at any time and immediately understand what is being said (Mamonov 1999: 266)? Why should the Church have to make concessions to Philistines and not the other way around (Likhachev

1999 [1998]: 276)?

As a recent textbook would have it: “The Church Slavonic language is in large part understandable even without special study when a believer really listens reverently to it” (Vorob’eva 2008: 4). Traditionalists observe that people are willing to spend a great amount of time and energy studying English or German or Chinese—so why not Slavonic, which is much more important? Some impute laziness to those who do not bother to acquire the language of the faith.

According to traditionalists, Slavonic is intelligible to people who attend church on a regular basis; it is only the neophyte intelligentsia who do not understand it, and constitute a vocal minority agitating for change. Intellectual fashions come and go, but the people remain constant in their piety and practice. “Standing among the simple people and looking at their faces, one sees that they understand the liturgy” (Kozarzhevskii 1999: 235). And here is another key component in the traditionalist argument: For those schooled in the faith, who regularly pray and attend the liturgy, there is basically no problem. Thus, traditionalist discourse projects a scenario of opposition between the church masses, who are for Church Slavonic, and unchurched intellectuals, who are against it.

#### **The Merits of Church Slavonic and Russian**

According to reformists, Russian is perfectly acceptable for use in the liturgy—in fact, any language is. In the pre-revolutionary period, it was common to point out that the Orthodox liturgy had already been translated for many of the peoples of the Russian Empire—Tatars, Mordvinians, Finns, *et al.*—yet, ironically, not for the Russians themselves (Balashov 2001: 63–66). But this argument is not heard in the post-Soviet period.

One of the main tactics of reformists is to call into question the very idea of a “sacred” language. It is not that they are particularly enamored of Russian or feel that it is somehow superior to Church Slavonic. Rather, they question the sacralization of Slavonic. Christianity, it is asserted, is *not* a religion of the book in the mold of Islam or Judaism, but a religion of a person: Christ (Borisov 1994: 125). The idea of a sacred language is actually inimical to Christianity. Calling this or that language “sacred” is tantamount to idolatry (cf Borisov 1994: 132).

For traditionalists however, there is a clear and vital distinction between the sacred and the profane. They mark off Church Slavonic as a sacred language distinct from—and superior to—Russian. Church Slavonic is not an idol, but “our verbal icon” (*nashi slovesnaia ikona*) (Kamchatnov 1999: 220). According to Mamonov (1999), Church Slavonic is a special kind of language, just as church architecture and vestments are different from everyday buildings and clothing. The difference between Russian and Church Slavonic is comparable to the architectural difference between a *dom* (house, building) and a *khram* (temple, church). As for clothing, should the Orthodox, asks Mamonov, start wearing jeans to church services as the Protestant sectarians do?

In the eyes of traditionalists, Church Slavonic is pure, subtle, and complex—capable of expressing all the shades and nuances of Orthodox theology. Russian, on the other hand, is deemed impoverished.

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It changes—and not always for the better. In this connection, traditionalists point to the startling transformation of Russian since the fall of Communism. The language has become beclouded by loanwords, obscenities, and prison jargon. Switching to Russian would result in the diminution of the rich, multifaceted Orthodox Tradition. Thus, although they defend Russian in other contexts, the logic of the traditionalist position is such that they must denigrate the vernacular as a vehicle for Orthodox worship. The language of the street is altogether out of place in the sanctuary. The late Metropolitan Ioann, a notoriously right-wing prelate, called Russian a language of prostitutes and thieves (Pospelovsky 1995: 261). ♦

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Although they defend Russian in other contexts, the logic of the traditionalist position is such that they must denigrate the vernacular as a vehicle for Orthodox worship.

# Faith and Fatherland in Poland

Brian Porter-Szücs

## Faith and Fatherland Intermingled

Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński once observed that “nowhere else is the union of Church and nation as strong as in Poland.” This would certainly seem to be the case: 99 percent of all children in Poland are baptized, 92.8 percent of all marriages are accompanied by a church wedding, and between 90 and 98 percent of the population will answer “Roman Catholic” when asked about their religion. The rituals of the Church have punctuated the calendars of the Polish peasantry for centuries, the clergy have long enjoyed respect and authority, and Catholic iconography has provided an aesthetic vocabulary for art, music, and popular culture. While language may tie Poles to other Slavs, religion gives them a mark of distinction that they are quick to cite whenever lumped together with “Eastern Europe.”

Poland’s Catholicity gives meaning to its past by making the nation dependent upon the Church (as the receptacle for true national identity) and by making the Church dependent upon the nation (as the Eastern bastion of the faith). This mutual entanglement of faith and fatherland gives specific meaning to the past and helps determine what is remembered and what is forgotten.

Unfortunately, some versions of history silence as much as they reveal. There has been a great deal of religious diversity in Poland over the centuries, and advocates of a distinctly Catholic narrative of Polish history must perform some delicate maneuvers to hold up their story against alternative ways of ascribing meaning to the past. The Church is deeply rooted in Poland, but the linkage between Catholicism and an ethnic identity – not to mention a politicized understanding of national belonging – is more tenuous than is usually assumed. The equation of Pole with Catholic is supported by a deeply ingrained but highly selective telling of national history.

## Past Religious Diversity

The Republic of Poland-Lithuania (as the country was known until it was destroyed at the end of the eighteenth century) contained a hodgepodge of Catholics, Jews, Eastern Orthodox, Protestants, Armenian Catholics, and even some Muslims, making it one of the most religiously diverse countries in Europe. For a period in the mid-sixteenth century Protestants enjoyed a majority in the Polish Senate, and at the high point of the Reformation there were about 1,000 Protestant parishes in the Republic compared to about 3,000 Roman Catholic parishes. In 1573, during the so-called Warsaw Confederation, the assembled nobles of the Republic even issued a declaration promising, “We who are divided by faith will keep peace among ourselves, and not shed blood on account of differences in faith or church.” In passages like this, “we” were the nobility of the entire republic, with Protestants and Catholics alike considered compatriots. In other words, this is not an example of tolerance for a confessional minority, but an unusual affirmation of a religiously heterogeneous community.

Catholics today tend to believe that the Polish nation is and always has been fundamentally loyal to the Catholic Church, mostly by defining non-Catholics as tolerated foreigners living in a Polish Catholic country. For example, the historian Bohdan Cywiński

recognizes the importance of the Reformation in Poland, but still insists that the national past was “almost entirely Catholic” and that the Catholic Church was “the element supporting the entire Polish edifice.” Cywiński emphasizes that Protestantism was limited to the nobility and the townsmen, while “both society and the state remained Catholic.” By implication, those who joined the Protestant movement did not belong to (or by converting had renounced) Polish “society.”

## The Counter-Reformation

During the Counter-Reformation Catholics tried to take control of Poland’s past as well as its present to both minimize religious diversity within the Polish-Lithuanian Republic and to write Protestantism out of the country’s history. In 1658 we see this first expulsion of non-Catholics (the members of the Polish Brethren denomination), and a decade later it became a crime for Catholics to convert to other faiths. In 1673 the Sejm (the Polish Parliament) made it impossible for non-Catholics to be ennobled; in 1716 a decree banned the construction of non-Catholic houses of worship and three decrees in 1718, 1736, and 1764 specified that only Catholics could be deputies to the Sejm and employees of the state administration.

The real focal point of the Catholic narrative of Polish history, however, is the nineteenth century, in which Poland was partitioned and occupied by Russia, Prussia, and the Habsburg Empire. Michael Bernhard writes, “The Church was often the only institution that had a Polish character. Thus Polish national consciousness came to be strongly tied to a Catholic religious identity.”

## The Nineteenth Century—A Mixed Picture of Faith and Fatherland Links

To be sure, at key moments, defending the Catholic Church and defending the nation seemed synonymous. But the bond between faith and fatherland in Poland was more complicated than it might appear at first glance. In general, religion was far less important to “national survival” in the nineteenth century than is usually assumed. Even during the worst years of denationalization, the Catholic Church was never the *only* space within which Poles could express and cultivate their ethnicity. Newspapers, magazines, and books in Polish continued to appear, and many of them (particularly during the 1860s and 1870s) were liberal and anti-clerical. Plays and operas in the Polish language were available to both urban and rural residents, and the stage both propagated and defined national identity. Even a Polish-language commercial life remained vibrant. In other words, the Catholic Church was just one of the many sites for cultivating Polishness during the period when there was no Polish state.

Moreover, official Catholic institutions tended to oppose the patriotic cause throughout the nineteenth century. In his inaugural sermon as archbishop of Warsaw in 1815, Jan Pawel Woronicz affirmed the legitimacy of Alexander I by characterizing the Russian tsar’s authority as an emanation of divine providence. Meanwhile, secular authorities in the Russian-controlled Polish Kingdom (the grandiloquent name for the nominally autonomous territories around Warsaw and Lublin) were far more problematic from

The equation of Pole with Catholic is supported by a deeply ingrained but highly selective telling of national history.

the Catholic Church's perspective. Stanislaw Potocki, the minister of religious denominations and public enlightenment for the Polish Kingdom from 1815 to 1820, was famous (or infamous) for his book, *Journey to the City of Darkness*, a biting anticlerical satire that portrayed priests as ignorant and backward. With people like Potocki governing in Warsaw, the Catholic hierarchy often found Petersburg a more reliable source of support. For example, when the government of the Polish Kingdom tried to institute civil marriages, the bishops successfully appealed to the tsar to scuttle the plan. The situation was similar in the Prussian partition, where a conservative monarch provided security for Catholics who, in the 1830s and 1840s, confronted liberal Polish nationalists on one side and liberal German nationalists on the other. And in Austria few members of the Galician clergy could see a reason to oppose the Catholic Habsburg emperor in favor of a revolutionary national movement.

Only a handful of priests supported the uprising against Russian rule in 1830, and they acted in defiance of the Catholic hierarchy's strong condemnation of the rebellion. In 1863, when Polish nationalists once again revolted, Catholic Church authorities were only somewhat more supportive. Perhaps as many as 15 percent of the parish clergy acknowledged the rebels as the legitimate national government, but the bishops remained unanimous in urging the rebels to lay down their arms and consent to Russian rule.

### **The Twentieth Century—Consolidation of the Faith and Fatherland Link**

The strong ideological link between faith and fatherland emerged in full force only at the start of the twentieth century, and it would be many decades before it became unquestioned common sense that Poles were necessarily Catholic. Any remaining uncertainty regarding the equation between Pole and Catholic was made irrelevant by the Second World War and its immediate aftermath. The postwar boundaries were drawn so as to exclude almost all Lithuanians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians; the Germans and most of the remaining Ukrainians were forcibly expelled; and nearly all the Jews perished in the Holocaust. After 1945 Poland did indeed appear monolithic – for the first time in its history. It seemed only natural, therefore, that the anti-Communist opposition began to draw upon religious imagery in the late 1970s and that several bishops were called upon to participate in the roundtable negotiations that brought an end to Communism in 1989. Thus, in the minds of many Poles today, their nation has *always* been religiously and ethnically homogeneous, even though a great number of “foreigners” (Jews, Protestant Germans, Greek Catholic and Orthodox Ukrainians, etc.) once lived within the boundaries of the Polish state. After World War II those aliens were gone, and it became easier than ever to promote an exclusivist version of Poland's past.

### **The Twenty-First Century—Erosion in the Faith and Fatherland Link**

For many Catholics the indissoluble bond between faith and nation represents an ideal that is all too far removed from the actually existing Poland. Nearly two-thirds of Poles support the death penalty, despite the Church's oft-stated opposition to this form of punishment. On the touchstone issue of abortion, again despite Catholic opposition, overwhelming majorities (from 75 to 82 percent) are willing to approve of the

practice if the mother's health is in danger, if the child would be born severely handicapped, or if the pregnancy was the result of rape. In general, Polish attitudes toward sexuality hardly fit the image of a devout Catholic population. In a survey from 2007, 63 percent agreed that “it is entirely normal that people in love have sexual relations; marriage is not necessary for this.” Although religious practice is notoriously hard to measure (insofar as Poles, like Americans, routinely overstate the frequency with which they go to church), it seems clear that well under half of the population attend mass regularly. A figure of 40 percent church attendance in 2008 would be extraordinary in any other European country, but it is far from the stereotype of universal piety.

The idea of Poland as a homogeneous Catholic nation, then, is simultaneously a claim about Poland's past and a demand that a particular model of national Catholicism be maintained in the present. A Polish catechism from 1999 lamented, “About 90 percent of the people in our country, if asked whether they believe in God, will say yes. Beneath these words, however, hide various meanings.”

### **Father Tadeusz Rydzyk and Radio Maryja**

Among those committed to upholding an image of Poland as homogeneously Catholic is Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, founder and director of the Radio Maryja network, who often repeats the slogan, “In the Gospels the word ‘tolerance’ does not appear.” He describes liberal parliamentary democracy as “a monstrous totalitarianism, probably worse than the last one, worse than Communism,” because it forces on the nation a set of alien, cosmopolitan values. Rydzyk's world view could be summed up in a proclamation from 2002: “To adjust to the world is to collaborate with evil.” His Catholicism is one that eschews moderation, accommodation, and dialogue, because he occupies a world where the Church is under constant attack by enemies (both open and concealed) and where the faithful must hold to a firm, uncompromising faith in order to survive. Rydzyk perceives an ongoing battle with evil in which the forces of Satan have gained control of virtually all social and political institutions, infiltrating even the Catholic Church itself in the form of liberal priests and theologians. Rydzyk is hardly marginal; he enjoys the support of several bishops and a sizable minority of Poland's Catholic laity. Radio Maryja, which includes a mixture of devotional material and extremist right-wing political commentary, is heard by 5.9 million people a week (including 1.4 million who listen on a daily basis), and his newspaper, *Nasz Dziennik*, has a daily print run of 250,000.

Among those affiliated with Father Tadeusz Rydzyk's Radio Maryja network, the mythology of Christian victimization at the hands of Jews continues to thrive. In his circles, Archbishop Józef Życiński of Lublin (the most outspoken critic of Radio Maryja in the Polish Episcopate) is nicknamed “Żydciski” (Jew-ciński). For his part, the Archbishop considers Rydzyk's particular form of national Catholicism a “theological pathology” because it “treats God and the nation as two equal components of Catholicism.” Elsewhere he issued a call to his compatriots to “get away from the provincial mentality whose representatives are prone to almost believe that the Lord God is a Pole.”

Regarding the equation between Pole and Catholic, after 1945 Poland did indeed appear monolithic – for the first time in its history.

The idea of Poland as a homogeneous Catholic nation is simultaneously a claim about Poland's past and a demand that a particular model of national Catholicism be maintained in the present.

*(continued on page 12)*

### Critics of Radio Maryja

When confronted with Rydzyk's rants about anti-Polish, anti-Catholic plots, most Poles today (particularly most younger Poles) see nothing but laughable paranoia. The six million or so people who occasionally listen to Radio Maryja constitute a small minority of the approximately 35 million Catholics in Poland. Among young Catholics the station's popularity is even lower: 42 percent of Radio Maryja listeners are over 65, and another 19 percent are between 52 and 64. Almost half have only an elementary education. Perhaps more important, most members of the Catholic hierarchy now realize (thanks to regular run-ins with the international media) that they should avoid spouting conspiratorial views in public. On several occasions the bishops have even spoken out against anti-Semitism.

Writing in *Tygodnik Powszechny* in 2003, Sebastian Duda complained that Radio Maryja's prominence made it very hard to spread the Gospels because too many people assumed that Rydzyk represented the true face of the Church. This was absolutely not the case, Duda insisted; in fact, he considered Radio Maryja's views to diverge from mainstream Catholicism on many key points. Not least of these was the us/them mind-set that the station propagated. Of course Catholicism had enemies, Duda acknowledged, but "the answer of the Christian should not be struggle, but circumspect and courageous dialogue from which no one should be excluded.... The basic task of the Church is not the ruthless condemnation of persecutors, but the proclamation of Christ to all people." Along the same lines, Father Maciej Zięba wrote in 2003, "The simple scheme of us/them, friend/enemy, good/evil is theologically false, for each of us is a sinner."

### The Marian Cult

It is no coincidence that Tadeusz Rydzyk calls his station Radio Maryja. When Karol Wojtyła became Pope John Paul II in 1978 he announced that the slogan for his papacy would be *Totus Tuus* (Totally Yours). The "you" to whom he was addressing this commitment was the Virgin Mary, Blessed Mother, Queen of Heaven, Handmaiden of the Lord, *Mater Dolorosa*, Woman of Valor, Paragon of Chastity, Supreme Mediatrix, and (certainly not least) Queen of Poland. For many, the Marian cult virtually defines Catholic spirituality. Since at least 1656, when she was crowned Queen of Poland by King Jan Kazimierz, the Virgin has stood at the very center of the Polish homiletic tradition and has served as an object of deeply felt devotion for countless ordinary believers. Few Catholic homes in Poland lack a reproduction of the Virgin of Częstochowa.

It was the siege of Jasna Góra near the town of Częstochowa in 1655 that propelled Mary to the very center of Catholic devotion in Poland. During a time of domestic chaos and foreign invasion that came to be called "the Deluge," a Swedish army laid siege to the fortified monastery of Jasna Góra, which possessed an ancient icon of the Virgin that was reputed to work miracles. The battle of Częstochowa, as a victory by Catholic Poles over Protestant Swedes at a Marian shrine, had obvious symbolic power. Publicists loyal to King Jan Kazimierz took full advantage of this victory, and it became the war's turning point. After

peace was restored, and against the backdrop of the Counter-Reformation Church's effort to entrench orthodox Catholicism in what had been a notoriously pluralistic and heterodox country, the king staged an elaborate ceremony (attended by 150,000 people) at which the icon of Częstochowa was crowned "Queen of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Ruthenia, Prussia, Mazovia, Samogitia, Livonia, Smolensk, and Chernigov." From this point Jasna Góra became the country's leading site of Catholic pilgrimage and devotion, and the Virgin of Częstochowa would remain the most familiar image in the repertoire of national symbolism. From this story comes one of the central elements of the Polish Marian cult: the Virgin as the military protector of the Polish nation.

Even a casual traveler to Poland will notice the pervasive Marian cult: today there are more than 800 Catholic shrines in the country, and 700 of these are devoted to the Virgin. (Sixty are devoted to Jesus and 56 to assorted other saints.) The most important of these shrines, the Jasna Góra monastery in Częstochowa, was visited during the interwar years by about 1.5 million pilgrims annually, a figure that increased to 2.4 million by the early 1980s and 3.5 million by the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thus, Marian worship is almost invariably perceived in Poland as a *national* devotion. With her emphasis on service, selflessness, sacrifice, and suffering, Mary is deployed to encourage conservative forms of femininity, and conversely, challenges to those norms are seen as attacks on the nation. Even today Mary is called upon to save Poland from its foes, be they Swedes, Turks, Russians, or the temptations of modernity.

### Conclusion

In early 2002 the mass-market weekly *Wprost* ran an article entitled "A Schism in the Church," in which the author described a growing gap separating the Roman Catholic Church from what the author called "the Toruń Catholic Church," referring to the city where Radio Maryja is based. The magazine's cover captured the tone of the piece with an illustration showing Father Tadeusz Rydzyk strangling Primate Józef Glemp with a microphone cable.

Archbishop Tadeusz Gocłowski called the article "brutal" and said, "It is not permitted to behave in that way. It is not permitted to write that the Church is divided into the Toruń Church and some other sort of Church." Gocłowski defended this stance, however, by arguing that Rydzyk's group was merely a "pathological phenomenon on the organism of the Church," and not a breakaway sect. No matter how much Church leaders talk about unity, the animosity between supporters and opponents of Radio Maryja has grown stronger and stronger.

If there are indeed two branches of Polish Catholicism today, which better exemplifies the traditions of the Church, and which is in a better position to determine the Church's future? There is no doubt that Radio Maryja represents a minority of Poland's practicing Catholics, and an even smaller minority of the overall population. Only 17 percent of Poles surveyed in mid-2008 said that they ever listened to Radio Maryja, and of these, 33 percent said that they did not like what they heard. Of all Poles, 46

No matter how much Church leaders talk about unity, the animosity between supporters and opponents of Radio Maryja has grown stronger and stronger.

percent had a negative opinion of the station, and only 18 percent praised it. In another poll only 14 percent considered Father Rydzyk trustworthy and 66 percent said he was untrustworthy—figures suggesting that he is the most unpopular public figure in post-Communist Poland.

On the other hand, as one moves away from the fringes of the Catholic population (those who identify as Catholic but attend mass sporadically) and toward the most devout, support for the “Toruń Church” increases steadily. Among priests, about 50 percent listen to Radio Maryja and read *Nasz Dziennik* regularly. The Catholic Episcopate is also divided: there are enough bishops in Rydzyk’s corner to ensure that he is not effectively restrained, but also enough opponents to generate occasional official rebukes of his extremism.

If we move from survey data to history, it is hard to deny that Rydzyk embodies several trends with deep roots in Polish Catholicism. His emphatic Marianism is probably more in line with the Polish homiletic tradition than is the Christological approach of the Catholic intelligentsia. On the devotional level Rydzyk promotes frequent recitation of the rosary, just as the Virgin herself commanded during her 19<sup>th</sup>-century apparitions. The conspiracy theories and conflict-centered worldview propagated on Radio Maryja would have been standard fare for any interwar Catholic periodical, and the anti-Semitic commentators on the station would have found a reasonably large audience among Polish Catholics throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (though perhaps not in the 19<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup>). So we are left with a dilemma: a large majority of Polish Catholics find Radio Maryja distasteful or even repugnant, yet it has at least as much claim on the Catholic tradition as its opponents.

Some might wish for a Catholicism that would, once postulated, generate one and only one set of predictable beliefs among all believers, but that will never be. At the same time, though homogeneity is unattainable, it is possible to close off some options, to push some ideas and actions outside the bounds of acceptable belief and behavior. For example, a mere century ago one could still find many Catholics in Poland who would insist that democracy was incompatible with their faith; now almost two-thirds of the Polish clergy identify democracy as the best of all possible political systems, a figure that is actually higher than among the general population. Among those who remain skeptical about democratic politics, few indeed would openly argue that it is irreconcilable with Catholicism. This form of cultural realignment is usually glacially slow, but it is nonetheless omnipresent and inexorable. Those Catholics in Poland today who argue that xenophobia should be recognized as a violation of the commandment to love one’s neighbor are attempting to generate just such a reconfiguration of the limits of the acceptable. That a significant minority of Catholics still find it quite easy to state that the Bolshevik-Masonic-Jewish-Liberal conspiracy is plotting Poland’s demise indicates that this reconfiguration has not yet been completed. That a solid majority considers such claims outrageous indicates that the process is well under way. ♦

*Edited excerpts reprinted with permission from Brian Porter-Szücs, Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).*

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A large majority of Polish Catholics find Radio Maryja distasteful or even repugnant, yet it has at least as much claim on the Catholic tradition as its opponents.

## Book Reviews

French, April, ed. *An Inner Step toward God: Writings and Teachings on Prayer by Father Alexander Men*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2014. Reviewed by Erich Lippman.

Father Alexander Men was one of the most enigmatic late Soviet religious figures. A convert from Judaism, Men participated in the revitalization of the Russian Orthodox Church in that period. His approach to Orthodox spirituality reflected the tensions of his era. In keeping with the resistance revitalization often encountered on the political level, he was frequently questioned by the KGB. Revitalization also often encountered resistance on a religious level. Thus, Men had to contend with an embattled Orthodox Church that had become accustomed to accepting the Soviet regime’s constraints as unavoidable. Not surprisingly, Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms catapulted Men into the public sphere. His murder in 1990, tragic as it was, spared him the post-Soviet identity crisis in which so many heroic dissidents lost their luster. Instead, Men’s reputation grew under the halo of martyrdom, and his variety of written works have slowly made their way from Russian *samizdat* and *tamizdat* into English. *An Inner Step toward God* is such a volume, dedicated specifically to Men’s writings on prayer.

This text functions on two levels. To English-speaking Christians (Orthodox and otherwise) it provides a dynamic and highly practical approach

to developing a deep prayer life—one of the editor’s stated goals. In addition to this devotional dimension, French’s editing of Men’s *Writings and Teachings on Prayer* provides “clues that point to the book’s original Soviet context” (p. 6). For those interested in the study of late Soviet spirituality, this book provides invaluable access in English to some of the period’s primary sources. The text’s endnotes, as well as the glossaries of terms and personages, provide useful tools for bridging the gap between the volume’s two probable audiences: popular and academic. The notes are concise, informative, and thorough. I only found two terms that could have used more explanation. Men refers to St. Ignatius of Antioch as “God-Bearer” (p. 96)—a theologically loaded term in the Orthodox world, but perhaps not so recognizable to Westerners not steeped in this imagery. He also refers to Christ as “God-Man” (p. 118)—another term that bears many deeper theological and philosophical connotations in the Russian context than it normally would in the West, hearkening back at least as far as Vladimir Soloviev’s *Lectures on Godmanhood*.

For Western Christians, this volume offers some unique bridging elements. Unlike many Orthodox

Father Alexander Men had to contend with an embattled Orthodox Church that had become accustomed to accepting the Soviet regime’s constraints as unavoidable.

*(continued on page 14)*

## Book Reviews (continued from page 13)

texts, Men does not take every opportunity to compare Orthodox and Western Christian approaches, to the detriment of the latter. Sometimes quite surprisingly, he is willing to use examples of Western Christians from a “Baptist friend” (p. 23) to various Catholic thinkers. Often these references are made on sensitive issues. For instance, Men cites a Baptist criticizing Orthodox for not praying “in [their] own words” (p. 23), then proceeds to agree with the criticism. Although Men extrapolates at length on the necessity of a prayer rule and the utility of the prayers of the saints, his emphasis on personal prayer is quite remarkable. His insistence that “constant reference to the Bible... should become our vital necessity” (p. 66) might also surprise some Protestant readers. More significant, however, is the practical nature of Men’s prayer advice. Whereas some Orthodox books on prayer can soar into mystical realms seemingly only available to monastics, Men is always mindful of the daily realities faced by Soviet believers with whom he dealt. Consequently, his advice focuses more on what prayer can achieve in a few minutes or, at most, half an hour.

Even given these practical approaches to prayer life, Men’s reflections are thoroughly steeped in the trichotomous anthropology of the Orthodox Church which views human beings as inextricably interwoven in spirit, soul, and body (pp. 21; 46-48). He also strongly emphasizes that prayer is an exercise (*askesis*) and must be done with the body and soul fully engaged so that the spirit may achieve its deepest encounter with the divine. Far from a

denial of the flesh, Men’s concept of asceticism assumes the restoration of the natural order from the unnatural chaos of the “flesh” (body and soul). He insists that this process must be judged by its fruits, stating that we must evaluate our asceticism based on its effect on “our attitude toward others” (p. 51). In keeping with his holistic approach to prayer, Men devotes considerable space to discussion of the proper positioning of the body and techniques for deep breathing that might facilitate a more profound experience of the divine. Throughout, Men deftly walks a tightrope between touting the physical and psychological benefits of prayer and insisting that prayer nonetheless exists for the purpose of deepening the believer’s relationship with God, not merely as a psycho-somatic exercise.

The current volume has much to offer Western Christians looking for an accessible Orthodox guide to prayer from one of Soviet Russia’s most acclaimed religious figures, and those with a scholarly interest in Soviet religious history. Christa Belyaeva provides a direct but approachable translation of Men’s words. In addition, French’s editorial commentary, four appendices, ten pages of notes, and two glossaries provide welcome assistance to both popular and scholarly readers. This volume gives a valuable glimpse into the mind of a figure whose importance continues unabated in contemporary Russia. ♦

**Erich Lippman**, *Assistant Professor of History, St. Mary’s University of Minnesota, Winona, Minnesota*

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### **Wardin, Jr., Albert W. *On the Edge: Baptists and Other Free Church Evangelicals in Tsarist Russia, 1855-1917.* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013. Reviewed by Sharyl Corrado.**

More than once when perusing Dr. Wardin’s immense bibliography on sectarianism in the Russian Empire and the U.S.S.R. (*Evangelical Sectarianism in the Russian Empire and the USSR: A Bibliographic Guide* [Lanham, MD, and London: 1995]), I wondered whether he could possibly ever read the sources he had compiled, and what story they would tell. With this volume, my wish has come true. Albert Wardin has not only skillfully brought together bibliographic data (552 sources) on 62 years of evangelicalism in Russia, he also tells a complex and nuanced story of evangelical movements in late Imperial Russia. Beginning with German Baptists and Mennonite Brethren on the edges of the empire, Wardin navigates through Ukraine, the Caucasus, St. Petersburg, and Siberia exploring the history of those he deems theologically “evangelical,” including Baptists, Mennonite Brethren, Stundists, Pashkovites, and Evangelical Christians. From humble beginnings, evangelicals were nearly ubiquitous by the turn of the century, surging in number and visibility following the 1905 Edict of Toleration. Wardin’s work is particularly remarkable given the diversity and ever-changing legal status of Russian evangelicals. As European

missionary Frederick Baedeker explained in 1898, “There are ups and downs in this big Russian Empire, and one has to seize opportunities as they present themselves. The open door in one part is no security for one elsewhere, nor does the permission at one time give a right for another time” (p. 259).

While Wardin is himself a Baptist historian, his work differs from many confessional histories. Russian evangelicals today tend to emphasize their indigenous roots over the roles of foreign ideas and institutions in the shaping of their faith. Wardin, in contrast, places the movements in their international contexts, including their German Baptist and Pietist origins and the roles of European missionaries, literature, and theological education. A second theme that emerges is that of conflict among evangelicals themselves. While one might expect the hostile environment would facilitate unity, instead disunity was rampant throughout the decades. Wardin details conflicts between Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren, Mennonite Brethren and German Baptists, German Baptists and Stundists, and Stundists and Evangelical Christians. While unity was a stated goal of many evangelical leaders, as evident in a number of

Albert Wardin tells a complex and nuanced story of evangelical movements in late Imperial Russia.

inter-confessional congresses, it was seldom achieved.

While the book's strength is in its sources, it is also limited by those same sources. Wardin's account is disproportionately one of male leaders, large congresses, missionary statistics, and persecution. While this information is valuable—and Wardin does a particularly good job describing leaders' personalities and backgrounds—it leaves the reader wondering what ordinary believers were like. The most compelling sections of the book, I would argue, are those that departed from this pattern, focusing on the lives and values of Stundists (Chapter 12) and Pashkovites (Chapter 15). Following decades of research, Wardin knows well the scholarship of the Cold War era, but fails to consult many recent works based on newly available sources. The book's abrupt ending in 1917 also leaves the reader dissatisfied. As recent scholarship has demonstrated, Russian cultural and religious history does not fit neatly into a

periodization defined by the 1917 Revolution. While bringing together a tremendous amount of data, this book does not represent the state of the field today.

The book's biggest flaw, in my opinion, is poor editing. Filled with typographical errors, misspellings, and inconsistent transliteration of Cyrillic, *On the Edge* repeats itself a lot, as if each chapter were meant to be read alone. The two maps are difficult to use. The length and detail make reading tedious at times, with name after name, statistic after statistic, event after event. The book would have been more attractive to non-specialists if it were 200 pages shorter. Yet the fact that poor editing is its primary flaw speaks to the significance of the volume as a whole. It will serve as a valuable reference work for decades to come. ♦

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**Bullough, Oliver.** *The Last Man in Russia and the Struggle to Save a Dying Nation.* London: Penguin, 2013. Reviewed by Canon Dr. Michael Bourdeaux.

“The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones.” So said Brutus of Julius Caesar. With Fr. Dmitry Dudko, the opposite is true, yet he tried, under threat of further imprisonment at the hands of the KGB, to undo all the good he had done.

Fr. Dmitry was one of a handful of priests of the Russian Orthodox Church who had stood heroically against state atheism. His outspoken sermons, especially his question-and-answer sessions at the end of the liturgy, drew thousands and influenced a generation of young people in the 1970s. Yet he betrayed his followers and renounced his conduct in an infamous TV interview on 20 June 1980. In a subsequent article in *Izvestia* he confessed to being a criminal, to betraying the Soviet state and his own hierarchy. He rejected what he had preached, what he had written, and the friends, both foreign and Russian, who had supported him while he was being persecuted. In the 24 years up to his death in 2004 he never regained his former influence.

Fr. Dmitry immediately realized the enormity of his betrayal. In a letter to Archbishop Vasily of Brussels he wrote: “I have never suffered such torments as now. I now know from my own experience what hell is. I am ready to do anything to correct the situation, but I don't know how.”

Oliver Bullough's magnificent biography restores the good. Some mystery remains as to how the KGB broke him. Someone said he looked as though he had descended from heaven to the TV studio, rather than having come straight from the hell-hole which was the Lefortovo gaol. Another who saw the interview said he “looked like a condemned man.” Bullough could not trace any copy of the interview. One certainty, though, is this. As I wrote in my obituary for *The Guardian* when Fr. Dmitry died in 2004, “The greatest shame in this episode belongs not to Fr Dmitry, but

to the duplicity and brutality of the KGB itself.” The triumph is that, over the next ten years, it would be the Christian faith which grew, while the power of the KGB to break it waned.

At the age of 26 Fr. Dmitry had been imprisoned for eight and a half years for allegedly writing an anti-Stalinist poem; subsequently, following ordination to the priesthood, he claimed that no week of his life passed without harassment by the KGB. In 1975 both his legs were broken in a horrific car accident, almost certainly engineered by the authorities. Worse, he was constantly criticized, even betrayed, by his own church leaders. A letter from his bishop accused him of “systematic inclusion in his discussions and sermons of political material of an anti-social character, including tendentious criticism of the life of our state.” These are the same bishops, Bullough tells us later, who now justify their conduct of church affairs during the Communist period. Faced with further imprisonment, Fr. Dmitry simply caved in.

Oliver Bullough has written two books in one, seamlessly interwoven. He tells Fr. Dmitry Dudko's story fully and in detail, but at the same time his field researches lead him to the places where his subject lived, worked, and was imprisoned. Simultaneously he records his impressions of Putin's dying rural communities, drowning in alcohol and a world removed from that of Moscow's oligarchs. His characters leap from the page: he is a fine writer. In an interview last year, published in the *Church Times* of London, Bullough claims not to be a believer. Be that as it may, few Christians have written about the Russian community of faith with more sympathy and insight. ♦

**Canon Dr. Michael Bourdeaux**, *president of Keston Institute, Oxford, England, and a contributing editor to the East-West Church and Ministry Report*

The greatest shame in this episode belongs not to Fr Dmitry, but to the duplicity and brutality of the KGB itself.

