



EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT

FALL 2002

VOL. 10, No. 4

Religious Instruction in Russian Schools: The Debate Heats Up

Mark Elliott

"Why should history be without Cyril and Methodius, without Sergius of Radonezh?" Russian Deputy Minister of Education Leonid Grebnev posed this question on 10 October 2002 at a conference on the subject of religious education in schools. A growing number of Russian officials, as well as the Russian Orthodox Church, believe religious education should be part of the school curriculum. Grebnev, for example, argues that "Secular education can include knowledge of religion as part of culture."¹ For his part, Patriarch Alexei II also tries to overcome the serious reservations of ordinary Russians: "We are not raising the question of introducing classes on the scripture and [Orthodox] religious teaching in high schools. We recognize and understand that 70 years [of atheist teaching] have left their mark and today the scriptures would not be accepted." Instead, in May 2002, he recommended a course on "Orthodox culture or Orthodox ethics."² The Patriarch must be pleased that in October 2002 state authorities proposed just such a course in Orthodox culture as an addition to the school curriculum, one that would include "the history and fundamentals of the traditional faith." In

addition, the state is proposing that Orthodox priests serve as instructors and that "a state standard for a specialty in theology" be prepared for "full-fledged work in secondary educational institutions."³ Nevertheless, as the accompanying survey results indicate, the public remains fearful of the possibility of ideological indoctrination in the classroom.

In the following articles, Fedor Kozyrev and Irina Bill note both the perils and promise of religious education in schools, Svetlana Kuleshova and Igor Ponkin ardently champion the same, while Elena Miroshnikova takes strong exception. ♦

Mark Elliott is editor of the East-West Church & Ministry Report.

Notes:

1. "Ministry of Education: Study of Religions Does Not Violate Secular Character of Education in Russia," *Mir religii*, 22 October 2002.
2. Mara D. Bellaby, Associated Press, 23 May 2002.
3. Kirill Vasilenko, "Law of God on First Reading; Secular Authorities Are Ready to Return Religion to the Schools," *Vremia novostei*, 11 October 2002.

Most Muscovites Oppose Religious Education in Schools

The majority of listeners questioned by radio station "Echo of Moscow" thinks that religious education should not be introduced into schools. Seventy-one percent hold this opinion while 29 percent of survey participants think religious education should be taught. In all, 3,143 telephone calls were received during the survey.

Reprinted with permission from Paul Steeves, PDS Russia Religion News (www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews).
Translated from "Radio 'Echo of Moscow' Listeners Oppose Introduction of Religious Education into Schools," *Mir religii*, 22 October 2002.

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Religious Education in Russian Schools

Fedor Kozyrev

Our future depends on our success in combining the idea of a pluralistic democratic state, as formulated in the Constitution, with the spiritual ideals and traditional religious values forming the basis of the great union of various cultures, peoples, and creeds which is Russia.

Since a federal law on education was passed in 1992, government agencies have interpreted it as prohibiting the teaching of religion in state schools. Yet this position has been changing rapidly. On 24 April 2001 a roundtable meeting, "Religious Education in Russia: Problems and Prospects," was held at the parliament of the Russian Federation. The final document produced from this meeting was considered a breakthrough where the importance of spiritual education in schools was concerned. Participants agreed that spiritual upbringing and religious education in Russia's schools should be given priority. They agreed in principle that the secular character of Russia's state school system should not exclude education based on a religious outlook.

In many respects, our future depends on our success in combining the idea of a pluralistic democratic state, as formulated in the Constitution, with the spiritual ideals and traditional religious values forming the basis of the great union of various cultures, peoples, and creeds which is Russia. Perhaps, then, this is an opportune time for the majority Russian Orthodox Church, jointly with other religious denominations and creeds, to become an independent, full-fledged partner in education and the spiritual consolidation of our society.

Historical Roots

Russia has lived through a long reign of state-supported atheism and the effects of this history on society's attitudes toward religion cannot be underestimated. As a consequence of Russia's Communist history, citizens are wary of any penetration of the church into public life, especially as it relates to religious education in schools. Parents are often afraid that some new ideological control may enter schools under the guise of religious education, and that children may once again be told what is and is not permitted. This kind of distrust naturally leads to resistance among professional pedagogues against the inclusion of religious education in Russia's school programs.

Also, there have never been theological departments in Russian universities, as there are in Western Europe. With European education forced on Russia by Peter the Great, seminary theology and academic science found themselves on different levels of public life. This development resulted, to a considerable extent, in the isolation of clergy from public life and the polarization of spiritual and secular principles in Russian culture. Today, despite a great number of intellectuals

joining the clergy, this separation is still in place in both public and clerical consciousness.

Hazards of Indoctrination

While it is still too early to estimate the future extent and form of religious education in Russia's schools, there is some danger that ideology will enter schools under the guise of religious and spiritual education. The likelihood of such a scenario is confirmed by the increasingly close cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the Moscow Patriarchy. For example, a new concept of moral upbringing and spiritual education has been developed on the order of the Ministry of Education by the Orthodox Church-sponsored Pokrov Institute. The official position of the Russian Orthodox Church concerning religious education is reflected in its recently adopted social doctrine, which reads, "From the Orthodox viewpoint, it is desirable that the whole system of education be built on religious grounds and be based on Christian values."

While expressing its respect for secular schools and its preparedness to build a relationship with such schools on the basis of respect for the freedom of man, the Orthodox Church believes that "the forcing upon students of anti-religious and anti-Christian views and the affirmation of the monopoly of the materialistic view of the world is inadmissible." However, this well-substantiated position does not provide any answers as to whether or not the Church finds admissible the forcing upon students of Christian ideas and views.

A report prepared in November 2000 by the Pokrov Institute attempts to substantiate on the basis of domestic pedagogical tradition the moral admissibility and social usefulness of religious education, regardless of students' free will. The aim, noted the report, was to promote the spiritual consolidation of Russia and the instilling of patriotism in her students. The authors of the report seemed to omit, however, the issue of how this proposed indoctrination was compatible with the principles of freedom of conscience, tolerance, and pluralism. According to this new concept, the basic principle and objective of moral upbringing and spiritual education is attaining the likeness of Christ. It may not be clearly realized that the tactless enforcing of a system of religious values in a multi-denominational and multi-religious democratic state may result in the profanation and depreciation of the values one is trying to transmit. This approach may also result in turning religious education into a means of indoctrinating

students, forcing upon them a rigidly regulated system of values, rather than a means for students to develop their own abilities and to broaden their outlook.

A critical revision is also needed of both the methods and overall principles of pre-Revolutionary religious education. Despite the fact that religious education has been in the hands of the Russian Orthodox Church for centuries, there has been a universal explosion of ungodliness, the desecration of churches, and ill feeling towards the Church. Today, neither the leaders of the Church nor religious pedagogues display the will to analyze old mistakes and bring the principles of spiritual education in harmony with the realities of contemporary pluralistic society. At the same time, Russian society has received too serious a lesson of skepticism and nihilism and has been too much inoculated with European enlightenment to accept bold religious indoctrination. That is why many parents, even Orthodox believers, are not likely to allow their children to be indoctrinated in school in the spirit of Orthodox patriotism in the way similar to indoctrination in Marxism-Leninism.

“Spirituality Without Indoctrination”

Many people in Russia find the current irreligious condition normal. Yet the number is growing of those who realize that the deliberate impoverishing of the spiritual world of a child, which inevitably results from lack of familiarity with religion, can never be the means of protecting the child's freedom of conscience. It will be a great loss for Russia's children if either the path of indoctrination or an irreligious school education is pursued. In the former case, while trying to preserve national identity and the consolidation of our society, we potentially lose democratic principles and freedoms. In the latter case, while trying to preserve freedoms, we lose all connection with our national spiritual tradition and, along with it, the ability to understand the spiritual identities, cultures, and historic legacies of other peoples. Such are the extremes. I believe that the best path lies somewhere in the middle.

In whatever way the organization of religious education in Russian schools is developed, its future depends on whether it will become truly professional or subservient to some political cause. These realities are already understood by many teachers, priests, and religious believers of various denominations and creeds. A movement of pedagogues and believers whose motto is “Spirituality without Indoctrination” has already appeared in St. Petersburg. This initiative brings together teachers of humanities and methodologists from the city's leading universities and high schools together with priests and other church

leaders. Their work includes promoting and introducing various programs of religious education in schools in order to maximize students' knowledge of religion without infringing on their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Participants in the movement believe that the alternative to indoctrination is not the absence of religious education in schools, but rather, the consistent and well-considered introduction of it. They also clearly understand that an attempt to pass religious education in school into the hands of the Russian Orthodox Church will not cause any reconciliation. In fact, it may have the opposite effect.

A Call for Balance and Nuance in Russian Pedagogy

Russia needs to develop its own domestic school of religious pedagogy, which, while coordinating its activities with clergy, should remain consistently secular. On the one hand, we must use the experience of religious education accumulated by secular schools in democratic countries. On the other hand, we must rely on our country's own pedagogical and spiritual resources, such as correlating foreign experiences with the historical, cultural, and religious peculiarities of Russia and attaining cooperation between traditional denominations and creeds.

Since much of Russia remains Orthodox Christian and because Christian Orthodoxy is Russia's ethnological core, this fact must be reflected in programs of religious education. Religious education should never be abstract and separated from tradition. And there is no need to try and achieve the “equality” of religions. Of course, children should not be deprived of a chance to get acquainted with religious traditions other than their own and should never receive a distorted or partial view of other traditions. We must also make sure that students belonging to religious minorities can receive religious education based on their own traditions. Taking Russia's historic experience into account, school programs should also pay attention to atheistic views. There is nothing wrong with having our children receive impartial knowledge of the ideas of irreligious Humanism and Communism.

The question we must ask (and answer) is whether the exploitation of religious feelings toward political and social ends is permissible and, if so, to what extent. This exercise includes a clear evaluation of the phenomenon of indoctrination. If, while answering the above questions, the public and professional pedagogues become divided and unable to find common ground, then in accordance with the essence of pluralism, several pedagogical schools and trends must be developed. In such matters forcible unification has no place. ♦

It will be a great loss for Russia's children if either the path of indoctrination or an irreligious school education is pursued.

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Excerpt reprinted with permission from EEF-NET, the Newsletter of the Team on Education and Ecumenical Formation of the World Council of Churches 10 (April 2002): www.wcc-coe.org; and the International Association for Religious Freedom, Religious Education in Schools: Ideas and Experience from Around the World (Oxford: IARF, 2001).

Religion in Public Schools: First Protestant, Now Orthodox

Irina Bill

If educators choose the path of indoctrination, the teaching of religion and ethics curriculum will lead only to a loss of democratic principles and freedoms.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, and especially after passage of the 1990 law on freedom of conscience, people showed increased interest in religion, moral values, and national cultural traditions. Such a phenomenon is quite understandable because the ideology of socialism had failed.

In the early 1990s, with Marxism out of favor, the Russian Ministry of Education made the decision to introduce religious studies in Russian schools by means of curricula stressing Christian ethics and morality. With the help of American sponsors and Dr. Alexander Abramov, a Moscow publisher, secondary schools were supplied with the *Gospel of Mark*, the *Book of Proverbs*, and Alexander Men's *History of Religion* in several metropolitan areas. But small cities and rural areas were left without help due to fiscal constraints.¹

High officials from the Russian Ministry of Education also approached Western Christian educators for help. The response was a collaborative effort of 85 Western mission groups called the CoMission, which instructed Russian public school educators in the teaching of Christian ethics and morality.² The Protocol of Intention signed by the Russian Ministry of Education and the CoMission provided for a five-year partnership to develop ethics and morals curricula for Russian public schools. The CoMission was to teach those Christian beliefs that were common to all Christian denominations, but its curriculum represented a distinctly Protestant approach to Christian ethics and Scripture. This fact led a discontented Russian Orthodox Church to assert that the state should prohibit Western missionary activity in Russia as a means of helping it reestablish its privileged place in Russian society.

It is an interesting fact that Russians identify themselves as Orthodox adherents without necessarily being believers. In fact, many nonbelievers, who regard the Orthodox Church as a symbol of Russian culture and national pride, claim they are Orthodox.³

Today many Russians consider themselves believers, yet only two to three percent regularly go to church.⁴ This fact should be reflected in a new program of religious studies.

In 1997, under the influence of the Orthodox Church, President Boris Yeltsin signed a new law restricting non-Orthodox religions and foreign missionary activity in Russia. The West, especially the U.S., regarded this act as a direct violation of democratic and religious freedoms.

From the early 1990s on we have observed the decentralization of the system of education. School curricula are being revised, new electives and local initiatives in education are being encouraged, and private schools are appearing. Thus the system of education has become more flexible and there is a favorable situation to introduce religious education as an elective.

The success of an educational program focused on the spiritual and moral upbringing of Russian youth will depend on implementation. If educators choose the path of indoctrination, the teaching of religion and ethics curriculum will lead only to a loss of democratic principles and freedoms, as mentioned by Fedor Kozyrev. Furthermore, we can expect resistance to religious education from both parents and children. Above all, it is most important that the classes be voluntary. ♦

Irina Bill, who now lives in New Hampshire, is a former instructor of English at Zaporozhye State University, Zaporozhye, Ukraine.

Notes:

1. Dick Scheuerman, "Christian Classics for Russian Schools," *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 4 (Winter 1996), 12.
2. *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 8 (Summer 2000), 1-6.
3. *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 10 (Winter 2002), 13.
4. Yale Richmond, *From Nyet to Da: Understanding the Russians* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1996), 29.

“A Time to Cast Away Stones and a Time to Gather Stones Together.”

Ecclesiastes 3:5

Svetlana Kuleshova

It is easier to forbid than to create, to make something new. This might be a reason some “zealous” leaders forbid even pronouncing the word “religion” in the schools. But what can you do with the history of Russia? How can one understand the literary and cultural heritage of the country apart from religion? Studying the lives of famous scientists and thinkers of Russia and reading the works of our classic writers who were believers, students learn the values that have been the moral foundation of our society for more than ten centuries.

These values were recognized as true even in the years of Soviet rule, but they were considered the values of Communist ethics. In an essay, one of my students quoted a sentence that her grandma had repeatedly used since the student’s childhood. The girl was amazed when I showed her it was a verse from the Bible. She never realized that her grandma had taught her a Bible verse. I have seen

the same quote on a classroom wall, but without reference to its source.

Reaping the bitter fruits of ideology that are still being planted in the school, many teachers are afraid that religion could become another ideology forced down from the “top.” Yet more and more teachers are coming to understand that religious values are critical in the moral upbringing of students. Without waiting for the official introduction of the course in schools, teachers are introducing students to the laws that their great-grandfathers and great-great-grandfathers lived by. They teach them to love, to forgive, and to be compassionate.

It is time to gather stones together. ♦

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How can one understand the literary and cultural heritage of the country apart from religion?

Religion in Russian Schools: Taking a Lesson from France

Igor Ponkin

One of the most widespread stereotypes in Russian society today is the identification of secular education with obligatory atheist (antireligious) or a nonreligious (agnostic) orientation. This stereotype exists as a result of inertia in society’s thinking produced by the epoch of state atheism and persecution of religious associations in our country. It is useful to turn attention to the experience of France on this matter.

Several years ago France came to a paradoxical conclusion about degrading tendencies in the development of the national system of education. French society was faced with a situation where pupils in private Catholic and Protestant colleges graduated much better prepared for life in French society and culturally more developed than pupils of state schools. It was thought that this was, to a considerable degree, the result of the implementation of state policy directed at isolating religious associations from the state system of education and the elimination of traditional religious

components from its culture. Today in France both high governmental workers and prominent French scholars speak of the necessity of implementing in state schools the principle of culture-conforming education (educational content that corresponds to the national culture), using humanities curricula based on spiritual and moral traditions and values.

In February 2002 the Ministry of Education of France published “Teaching Subjects Dealing with Religion in Secular Schools.” This interesting and substantive report analyzes the damage done to the national system of education as a consequence of its nonreligious nature and separation from national culture. French society is realizing more and more the threat of a collective break in the national and European memory when the insufficiency of religious and cultural education does not permit one to understand either the façade of the cathedral at Chartres, the works of Tintoretto, Mozart’s masterpiece “Don Juan,” or Aragon’s “Passion Week.” The report calls special

The basic idea of teaching religion in secular schools consists not in replacing secular education with religious education, but in giving pupils of state educational institutions the possibility of becoming civilized persons.

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Taking a Lesson from France (continued from page 5)

attention to the fact that as soon as Trinity becomes for people just the name of a Paris Metro station, and Pentecost holiday becomes a simple date on the calendar, there occurs a vulgarization of everyday life, a degradation of the national culture, a degradation of society itself, and a loss of historic consciousness.

Society is being moved by a false fear to the destruction of civic solidarity and ignorance of national history, culture, and faith. The basic

idea of expanding and deepening the teaching of subjects dealing with religion in secular schools consists not in replacing secular education with religious education, giving the latter some special status, but in giving pupils of state educational institutions the possibility of becoming civilized persons in their own national culture, thereby protecting their right to choice and free discussion. ♦

Edited excerpt reprinted with permission from Paul Steeves, PDS Russia Religion News (www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/re/news). Translated from "Is Religion Necessary In Secular Schools," Nezavisimaia gazeta, 2 August 2002.

Second Thoughts on Religious Education

Elena Miroshnikova

The problem presented in [Fedor Kozyrev's] essay is the dilemma faced by religious and political leaders of how to teach religion to Russian students with the aim of promoting spiritual consolidation and maintaining Russian national and cultural identity, while at the same time preserving the constitutional principles of freedom of conscience, including freedom of religion. The first of these two goals is likely best achieved by emphasizing Russian Orthodoxy, but this hinders the second goal, fostering students' "ability to understand the spiritual identities, cultures, and historic legacies of other people."

Can Russian Orthodoxy and Freedom of Conscience Coexist?

Fedor Kozyrev believes that the solution to this seemingly irreconcilable dilemma lies somewhere in the middle. He advocates a religious education program in public schools that would teach religion without indoctrinating students. In order to do this he believes that a secular institution of religious pedagogy needs to be created—headed by academics rather than the Russian Orthodox Church. It would develop a system of teaching various religions that is tailored to fit the religious and legal context of Russia today, while meeting the religious and social needs of society. Since Russian Orthodoxy lies at the center of Russian spirituality, it must unapologetically be presented as such in the religious curriculum. By devoting parts of the instructional program to religions other than Russian Orthodoxy, Kozyrev believes that the religious freedom of students from other religious traditions would be protected. While the goal of such a program would ultimately be political (the promoting of Russian Orthodoxy as a means of connecting Russian students to their cultural and national roots and thus strengthening the self-identity of Russia), the religious freedom of all

students would supposedly be respected and guarded against indoctrination through the teaching of a variety of religious traditions.

In Violation of the Russian Constitution

I understand the seriousness of the dilemma presented by Kozyrev, but I do not fully agree with his solution. His plan violates Russia's Constitution, specifically Articles 14 and 28, which state:

- Everyone shall be guaranteed the right to freedom of conscience, to freedom of religious worship, including the right to profess, individually or jointly with others, any religion, or to profess no religion, to freely choose, possess, and disseminate religious or other beliefs, and to act in conformity with them.
- The Russian Federation shall be a secular state. No religion may be instituted as state-sponsored or mandatory religion. Religious Associations shall be separated from the state, and shall be equal before the law.

The suggested religious education program favors Russian Orthodoxy over other religions and thus violates Article 14. In theory, since religious classes would not be mandatory and would be offered as part of an overall "secular" program, they look as if they will not violate students' freedom of conscience. But, given the priority of Orthodoxy in the program, the potential for students from minority religions to feel slighted and to have their consciences violated is high, and thus Article 28 is also breached. Moreover, Kozyrev's proposal does not specifically prohibit religious instruction, in Orthodoxy or other traditions, that seeks to inculcate faith rather than present only objective facts about various religious traditions. Such a program violates both articles, especially since Kozyrev's plan calls for using Russian Orthodox priests to carry the load in providing the instruction. We fool ourselves to

Even if the program remains genuinely optional, the pressure on students to participate will be enormous and the program will thereby be so closely aligned with the Russian Orthodox Church that it becomes a program of indoctrination into Russian Orthodoxy.

think that Orthodox priests will present all material in a completely objective and neutral fashion. In addition, I anticipate that considerable pressure will be exerted by Orthodox officials to make the program mandatory for all students. But even if the program remains genuinely optional, the pressure on students to participate will be enormous and the program will thereby be so closely aligned with the Russian Orthodox Church that it becomes a program of indoctrination into Russian Orthodoxy in the name of "religious education."

With Respect to Minorities

Russia is a vast nation and, despite the overwhelming presence of Orthodoxy, numerous religions are actively practiced on Russian soil—at least 60 at the present time. Islam and Protestantism, in particular, are growing at astounding rates. In spite of the increasing presence of religion across Russia, however, agnostics and atheists still comprise about 30 percent of the Russian population. Members of these groups—religious and nonreligious—fear that a program of religious education might cause their children to be "indoctrinated into a rigid system of outward semblance of values" rather than be presented with a more global religious outlook that will broaden their children's religious perceptions and equip them with the knowledge to make their own religious choices.

The Orthodox Presence in Public Education

Notwithstanding these concerns, it seems that some leaders in Moscow and the regions, together with officials from the Russian Orthodox Church, ignore the Russian Constitution and work feverishly to implement a program of religious education in the public educational system. They are assisted by the rigorous efforts of the Department of Education of the Russian Federation. Together they have so far been successful in achieving their aims. Already, for example, public school students are required to take a course in "The Basics of Russian Orthodox Culture." In addition, they have established theology departments in many state universities. More extensive penetrations into the public school system, such as those proposed by Professor Kozyrev, will bring them their final victory.

Mandatory Orthodoxy

It should be mentioned, of course, that there is considerable opposition to these efforts across Russia. Since the end of the Soviet era, more than a decade ago, there have been conferences, seminars, religious gatherings, and various appeals to the government opposing these illegal practices. But these demurrers, including a highly critical special report issued by the Department of Justice, are like voices crying in the wilderness. The latest

activities of the Russian government confirm this fact. On 10 October 2002 in Moscow the government held a conference on the forms and methods of religious instruction in Russian public schools. Many officials from the Russian Orthodox Church were in attendance. The central idea emerging from the gathering was that religious education must become a mandatory subject in public schools, but paid for by the "secular" state. This notion, in the way it so preferentially treats Russian Orthodoxy, is actually quite close to the practice in contemporary Germany whose constitution (Article 7) mandates religious education in public schools. The eight religions in Germany that qualify as "corporations under public law" receive preferential treatment to the virtual exclusion of many minority religions in the public school curriculum. This obviously discriminatory arrangement is widely criticized within modern Germany but it persists nevertheless. If proposals like Kozyrev's are adopted Russia will move swiftly toward an arguably even more discriminatory model than that in Germany: One religion (at most four, if Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam are grouped with Orthodoxy as the favored "traditional" religions of Russia, as in the preamble to the 1997 "On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations"), not eight, would be favored over others.

A Clear Threat to Freedom of Conscience

I am not opposed to religious education. Some instruction about religion is needed even in the public school setting. An education without some exposure to the role of religion in the lives of human beings throughout history is indeed incomplete. But any proposal, such as that of Professor Kozyrev, that calls for inculcation of faith rather than merely presenting objective facts about religion, or that so clearly prefers Russian Orthodoxy over other religious traditions, is unacceptable for today's Russia. The Constitution must be respected. Its separation of church and state is the primary guarantor of religious freedom for all Russians. The public schools and universities should provide a primarily secular education because this is the best way to realize all citizens' right to freedom of conscience, especially in a multi-cultured country like Russia. Religious education that has faith as its goal should be the responsibility of the churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, and other houses of worship, as well as schools and universities that are religiously affiliated. Any attempt by the Russian government to wrest this responsibility from institutions of faith at government expense threatens the freedom of conscience of all Russians. ♦

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Any proposal, such as that of Professor Kozyrev, that calls for inculcation of faith rather than merely presenting objective facts about religion, or that so clearly prefers Russian Orthodoxy over other religious traditions, is unacceptable for today's Russia. The Constitution must be respected. Its separation of church and state is the primary guarantor of religious freedom for all Russians.

Forgiving or Forgetting?

Rethinking the Soviet Past: An Orthodox Christian Perspective

Inna Naletova

The closer man comes to God, the more he sees himself as a sinner.

Bishop Kallistos Ware

The priest Aleksandr Men highly valued the wholeness of the Russian church, its continuity and integrity, viewing it as something more important than its politics.

Today, after more than ten years of reforms, one can see a move in Russian society towards a rethinking of the past, giving rise to a recovery of symbolism from the old order to connect to the new. The Orthodox Church, the only institution of the Russian Empire that survived the social transformations until the present, plays the role of a bridge, bringing into modernity a nostalgia for the past. During the Soviet era the Orthodox Church served the regime as an instrument of pressure and control. In spite of this, today it possesses a significant social authority and evokes respect and trust. In 2001 the All Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion reported an increase in respect for religion in Russia. Since the early 1990s public polls have demonstrated a high level of trust in the church. The church is trusted more than professional organizations, the intelligentsia, political parties, or the Duma.

How can the church be trusted in light of its previous obedience to the KGB? How can we accept its claims to authority in the context of current efforts to build democracy and a civil society? The church's reemergence appears particularly alarming to those observers who view it as a remnant of Russian totalitarianism and a legacy of the old empire.

The Search for Forgiveness

In order to understand this development, let's first remind ourselves that forgiveness has the power to recreate society and heal its distorted moral order. One can even say that there is a certain mystery in forgiveness. It can eradicate, or at least soften, the harmful effects of the past by awakening a sense of the mutual bonds between people, a sense of common moral commitments shared by offenders and offended. Forgiveness resolves seemingly irresolvable tensions by appealing to the human core of social life, transforming painful memories of the past—not on the level of material reality, but on a higher level on which religion rather than reason speaks to us.

The transcendent core of forgiveness is visible in the behavior and decisions of many individuals in post-Soviet Russia. A few years ago, for example, *Nezavisimaia gazeta* published astonishing material about a group of Orthodox believers from Leningrad who, in the 1970s, secretly gathered in private apartments for prayer and discussion but were discovered and severely persecuted. For several years they suffered in prisons and labor camps, receiving neither protection nor support from the church. It is striking that, later, those who survived persecution could have used the freedom of perestroika to create an independent Orthodox community separate from the Moscow Patriarchate. But they chose to return to the mother church. By returning to the Moscow Patriarchate they forgave the church for turning its back on them and they did so unconditionally.

One can find interesting thoughts about this in the writing of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who personally suffered persecution and exile and who strongly disagreed with the church's political submissiveness, but insisted on the importance of the church in modern society. The church, which he described as "far from unshackled, riddled with informers in official positions, and limited in all forms of civil rights," nevertheless continued to exist. Another Russian thinker, the priest Aleksandr Men, highly valued the wholeness of the Russian church, its continuity and integrity, viewing it as something more important than its politics. The fact that the church survived the Soviet era, he used to say, proves that the church is not a human but a divine creation.

The peculiar feature of the present situation in Russia lies in its paradoxical duality. The church is seeking forgiveness from people but, at the same time, people are seeking forgiveness from the church. Society, having rejected religion, now performs this essentially religious act of self-reflection and forgiveness by coming to terms with its past. The truth and respect that the church evokes in Russia can be explained as an articulation of the need to recreate the moral bond that holds society together to forgive the past. The church becomes a symbol of this bond, a symbol of a unity beyond worldly circumstances.

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Thoughts on the Current Situation in the Moscow Patriarchate: *Hypocrisy, Servility, or Complete Indifference to the Fate of Religion?*

Father Georgi Edelstein

The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. (Matthew 23:2)

The Corruption of the Spirit

For some decades now our [Russian] society has been seriously ill. Contrary to the night-and-day propaganda of our secular and church mass media, the decay is not rooted in economic, political, ecological, or other external factors. The most important point is that we suffer from an illness of the spirit that is unsettling and destructive of heart, soul, and mind. A century and a half ago the diagnosis was stated unmistakably: "Not flesh, but spirit is corrupt today" (Feodor Tutchetv). Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn made it clearer at the end of the twentieth century: "People have forgotten God; that's why all this [happens]." In the twentieth century corruption multiplied one-hundred-fold. And this, only Christ can heal.

The Church's Failure to Repent

But our official Orthodox Church structure—the Moscow Patriarchate—is even more hopeless than all our society. The Moscow Patriarchate is still a little island of Brezhnev-Chernenko stagnation without any sign of recovery. There are two major reasons for its illness. First, up to the present, our church has not repented of any of the abominations of the past half century: our close cooperation with a cannibal regime, our servile eulogies to that monster of humankind Stalin, our villainous praises of "the peaceful foreign policy of the Soviet Union" that were obligatory in Easter and Christmas pastoral letters, our false witness and slander against the whole assembly of new martyrs and confessors of Russia, our complicity with the KGB in the Lvov criminals' "council" that abolished Eastern Rite Catholicism in Ukraine and drove interdenominational relations in Ukraine to a dead end, nor our justification of manifold Communist and KGB crimes, including the execution of captive Polish officers at Katyn, Poland, in 1940.

The Church teaches us that God's love is

limitless, but He does not forgive everyone for everything (Matthew 12:32). Forgiveness presupposes realization of one's sin and repentance for it. The Apostle Peter "went out and wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75); the wise thief on the cross repented; the tax collector repented; the prostitute repented—and all were forgiven. But the second thief did not repent, Herod did not repent, and Judas did not repent. Who can say for sure that all of them are forgiven? None of our bishops have repented. If in previous decades we were hiding behind our puny excuses that we were "forced," that "they made us do that," that with our lies and compromises we "saved the church," today we dare not shift blame onto external causes and circumstances.

From Persecution to Careerism

When the Bolsheviks seized power they dreamed of the physical liquidation of the majority of priests. ("All the trouble comes to us from the pope and the kulak; we should cut the fat belly of parasites with a bayonet," wrote a poet who received an apartment in the Kremlin beside those of Lenin and other Communist bosses.) They dreamed of making slaves of those who remained alive. The major instruments of conviction and indoctrination of believers in the 20s and 30s were mass executions, concentration camps, and felling timber in forced labor. In the 20s, 30s, and 40s, it is not hard to understand the Renovationist Movement, "the red popes," and the compromises such as those made by Metropolitan Sergei. You cannot require complete heroism and martyrdom from people. But in the 70s, 80s, and 90s we were not threatened by German Mausers or the Solovki Gulag. We sold out to Communists for a mess of porridge: to climb the career ladder, to ride in shiny, black-lacquer limousines, to take trips overseas, and to eat caviar and salmon at our banquets. We became not slaves, but lackeys. We voluntarily served satanists and became the nuts and bolts of the devilish machine of the Communist state.

Second, we are seriously ill because we rejected

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The Moscow Patriarchate is still a little island of Brezhnev-Chernenko stagnation without any sign of recovery.

[Church leaders] failed to do what was expected of them, yet they preserved the church. The latter, according to an Orthodox understanding, is an achievement of greater value than an individual's personal perfection.

A History of State Interference with the Church

To begin with, some historical details are necessary. It is not a gross exaggeration to say that traditionally the Russian Orthodox Church developed a tendency toward submissiveness to the state. The Byzantine idea of secular and religious "symphony" encouraged the church's friendly, rather than critical, attitude toward the state. In January 1918 Patriarch Tikhon issued an encyclical condemning the revolutionaries. But a few years later he was forced to pledge allegiance to Communist authorities.

Metropolitan Sergei, following Tikhon, also tried to reach a bargain with the atheist government to protect the church from persecution. Despite all his efforts, the Communist assault on the church continued. By the beginning of the Second World War only four bishops in Russia remained in office. By the time of Khrushchev the church had become part of the state apparatus. Up until perestroika, very few church appointments could be made without KGB permission. The collaboration seemed unavoidable because the alternative was annihilation and martyrdom, leading scholars to call the Soviet period "the saddest chapter in the history of the Russian Church." (See Walter Laqueur, *Black Hundred: The Rise of the Extreme Right in Russia* [New York: HarperCollins, 1993]; and an interview with Fr. Georgi Edelstein, "Chekisti v riasakh," *Argumenty i facti*, 36, 1991.)

Acceptable and Unacceptable Compromises

The belief in the importance of the church may be undermined by consideration of the price paid for its preservation. The price may be too high and a line has to be drawn between what are acceptable and unacceptable compromises. "We sinned," admitted Alexis, "but for the sake of the people." But what is the limit of acceptable sinfulness? Who can establish this limit? Cooperation with Communists is viewed by Orthodox not only as a disgrace to their church, but also as a challenge to preserve what can be preserved and to learn, when faced with hardship, how to compromise and still remain Christians. "To become a priest [in the Soviet era]," explains Metropolitan Pitirim, "involved considerable personal risk. You have to have courage to commit yourself to this path." There were such people in the church. Admittedly, they failed to do what

was expected of them, yet they preserved the church. The latter, according to an Orthodox understanding, is an achievement of greater value than an individual's personal perfection.

One of the most challenging results of perestroika was the necessity for the church to create a commission investigating the details of the church hierarchy's relations with the KGB. Such a commission was indeed created but, as Gleb Yakunin reports, it did not bring any satisfactory results. The Moscow Patriarchate explains:

The commission was created not in order to condemn the incidents of contact with representatives of authority (which possibly had connections even to the KGB). Such contacts in and of themselves could be used for both good and evil. Whether they actually were used to harm the church and people, the commission was unable to determine.

It was indeed difficult to establish whether the actions of its clergy were to be condemned just because of their connection with the KGB. Thus, one clergyman was known for his attempts to "impress upon religious circles in the West the need for positive action in support of the peaceful initiative of the Soviet Union." Despite the fact that secular society in Russia and abroad tends to evaluate this and similar acts negatively, the church hesitated to render judgment.

The church of Russia avoids a legalistic approach to its recent past, not because of its inability to evaluate its past, but because it believes there are better instruments for dealing with sin. These instruments, I would stress, can be found not only inside the church in its beliefs and sacraments, but also outside, in gestures of apology and forgiveness.

It is also important to note that forgiveness is not granted on the promise of reform. As a matter of fact, we do not see many changes in the contemporary Russian church. It remains firm in its loyalty to tradition. The rest of society also remains as "unchurched" as it has been in the past. Forgiveness does not change the observable social conditions, but it does change something in its past. ♦

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all the decisions and definitions of the All-Russia Local Council of 1917-18. Renovatianist adherents declared it "bourgeois" and "reactionary" and shut it down. But we forget its work at our peril. The Council's definitions are the constitution of our church, the cornerstone of our canonical being. None of the later councils discussed or dismissed the statements of that council. After 1918 we had no councils in the true meaning of the word. The meetings of 1943, 1945, and 1970, which were called councils, were a mirror reflection of the empty-talk sessions of the Supreme Soviet, which always voted by unanimous consent, following the will of the back-stage puppeteers. The decisions of these "councils" were made and edited long before council members sang "Today the Holy Spirit's grace has brought us together." All the issues of the councils' agendas were decided by Communist organizations that were hostile to the church.

All church "documents" of the Soviet period were the product of joint cooperation between church collaborationists and bureaucrats of the nation of militant atheists. They are interesting only to illustrate the dispositions of the epoch and cannot have any force in the Orthodox Church today. None of our hierarchs have yet told us—and without a doubt will never explain—the work of the Council on Religious Affairs which, as we always believed, seemingly "forced" our hierarchs to lie and deliberately make decisions harmful to the church. They will not tell us this because church and state collaborators loved each other tenderly and worked together hand in hand like brothers.

More Sins of the Hierarchs

The senior hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate completely removed laymen and lower ranking clergy from any decision making in the church, rejecting *sobornost* [*koinonia*/spiritual communion], which is the foundational principle of Orthodoxy. All decisions were made by the Holy Synod, which was formed illegally in very flagrant violation of the 1917 Council. Archbishop Ermogen (Golubev) wrote about this more than thirty years ago. The Synod was actually analogous to the Politburo of the ruling Communist Party. Fortunately, the Politburo has vanished, but its analog is still alive and well and is not going to die. The spirit of the strictest mystery veils all its work. It totally deserves the nickname "mitropoliburo," which it received many years ago.

It is not a secret to anyone that in the years of Soviet rule the KGB and the Ideological Department of the Communist Party made all decisions concerning career advancements for

church hierarchs. This was one means of suppressing the church because the worst were allowed to advance. Almost all our present regular members of the Holy Synod were put in the highest church ranks in the years of the severe persecutions of the Khrushchev anti-religious campaign and their names are commonly known.

Courageous Voices Suppressed

Archbishop Ermogen wrote about one such smart-aleck who became metropolitan of Kyiv and a regular member of the Holy Synod only because during Khrushchev's outrage he closed more than 100 churches in a single diocese, closed a cathedral in another, and liquidated this diocese itself. But Ermogen did not allow the godless to close any of the churches in his diocese and that is why the Holy Synod (not government bureaucrats!) punished him; they gave him no choice but to retire. But even in the monastery they did not allow him to rest. The Holy Synod called the archbishop before a session presided over by the current Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexii II. He insisted that Ermogen answer clearly and directly: "Can you as a bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church and a citizen of the Soviet Union allow your 'inquiries' to be used in the dirty struggle against the Soviet Union and our Church?" After this session Alexii addressed certain state organs and insistently asked them "to invite Archbishop Ermogen to Moscow and have a conversation with him to quench his fire."

It was very important for Alexii "to quench the fire" of another Orthodox dissident, Boris Talantov, a teacher in Viatka. He dared to state that in the Soviet Union the law on freedom of conscience was being violated: "The first hierarchs of the Church: Metropolitan Pimen, Metropolitan Nikodim, and the most holy Alexii are coworkers in the dirty plot," he wrote. "The responsibility for the massive closing of churches lies with the Moscow Patriarchate together with the [government] Department of Russian Orthodox Church Affairs." And again, "The highest princes of the Church—Nikodim, Pimen, Alexii—directed and direct all work of the Patriarchate. From their activities and speeches you can see the role of the Patriarchate in the anti-religious campaign of 1959-64." For this "evil slander" Talantov was sentenced to three years in a gulag labor camp and died on a hard prison bed. In this irreconcilable argument, without a doubt, I take the side of Metropolitan Kirill, Archbishop Ermogen, Fr. Nikolai Eshliman, and layman Boris Talantov against Metropolitans Sergii, Pimen, Nikodim, and Alexii.

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We sold out to Communists for a mess of porridge: to climb the career ladder, to ride in shiny, black-lacquer limousines, to take trips overseas, and to eat caviar and salmon at our banquets.

Western Complicity

Unfortunately, I have to admit that for decades very many “progressive” church leaders of Europe and America actively supported our “princes of the Church” and sowed the lie and false information about “freedom of conscience” in the U.S.S.R. all over the world. None of them have repented up to the present.

A Need for Cleansing

For more than 14 years now the whole world has been captivated by “the regeneration and healing process in the Orthodox Church in Russia” and questions, “Should we forgive or forget?” Our hierarchs served the KGB with zeal, were toadies of the Communist regime, slandered the new martyrs and confessors of Russia, and bathed themselves

in unaffordable luxury, “eating the houses of the widows.” Did they “save the Church?” Are they our heroes whose deeds do not need to be forgiven? I contend that their “heroic deeds” will not be forgotten. Many years ago Professor A.V. Kartashev wrote, “There is a repulsive caricature of false harmony [and] false union behind the Iron Curtain. Everything that transpires there needs to be dismissed and cleansed.” Kartashev was mistaken: While the Communist dictatorship fell, the Patriarchate has not been cleansed. It safely survived a miraculous moment in its history and remains as it was shaped by Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev. And we, the members of the Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church are quite satisfied with this Orthodox parody on regeneration and healing according to the Communist recipe of day before yesterday. ♦

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The “Orthodoxation” of Russia

Sergei Markedonov

An active discussion is underway regarding the transfer to the Russian Orthodox Church of lands belonging to it before 1917. A meeting between the keepers of throne and altar, President Vladimir Putin and Patriarch Alexis II, became the center of attention. And all this has occurred against a backdrop of a stormy discussion of the introduction into the curriculum of “Foundations of Orthodox Culture” which is already being vigorously taught to spiritually weak souls in Moscow, Smolensk, and other provinces.

Without an effective market economy, Russia will be doomed to play catch-up with Portugal and Brazil. The market realities have been recognized by even the leaders and activists of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and smaller “leftist” associations. For the better part of the Russian Orthodox Church, this is not such an obvious good. Has anybody heard approving words from the lips of hierarchs about privatization and liberalization of prices, to say nothing of entrepreneurship, personal success, and wealth as positive factors? The view of the events of the 1990s as the “fall of a great state” dominates the statements of church leaders. But, after all, it is to a great extent thanks to the democratization of the past 10 years that the Russian Orthodox Church gained the social status it possesses today.

The church institutions of Spain found the strength to repent for cooperation with the regime of Franco. European Catholics were able to work out the principles of “theology after Auschwitz”

and have critically reevaluated their role in the tragedy of the Holocaust. Alas, reflection is not the strong suit of the contemporary Russian Orthodox Church. Our hierarchs, who made their careers during the Soviet period, do not want to repent for cooperation with the Communist—not simply cannibalistic but also atheistic—regime. They are happily engaged in a search for ideological opponents and they succeed in finding them in the person of competitors on their own religious field—Catholics, Protestants, and “sectarians.” This is where church isolationism, xenophobia, and defensive tendencies arise.

The possibility of going to an Orthodox church, a mosque, or a synagogue should be exercised by each individual at the prompting of his own conscience and not from a wise bureaucrat or religious hierarch. The attempt to replace godless atheism with “orthodoxism” imposed from above will have only one consequence: the growth of atheistic sentiments and a rejection not of church attendance but of religion as such. ♦

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Edited excerpt reprinted with permission from Paul Steeves, PDS Russia Religion News (www.stetson.edu/~psteves/relnews). Translated from “Dangers of Church Power; Plus the Orthodoxation of the Whole Country,” *Vremia MN*, 31 July 2002.

The view of the events of the 1990s as the “fall of a great state” dominates the statements of church leaders. But, after all, it is to a great extent thanks to the democratization of the past 10 years that the Russian Orthodox Church gained the social status it possesses today.

On Orphans, Spiritual Restoration, Repentance, and Religious Legislation

AMERICAN ORTHODOX, DANA AND SUE TALLEY, INTERVIEW FATHER GEORGI EDELSTEIN AT HIS HOME IN KARABANOVO, KOSTROMA REGION, RUSSIA.

Father Georgi: I know people suffer everywhere, but it's impossible for me to help them. I think it is my duty to do as much as I can for these whom I can reach. My congregation is one of the poorest in our diocese and still we manage to do something and I'm very thankful for people in other countries who very often give me money on Christmas or Easter to do something. I was in the United States and received money and now again I can do something in my church, make a new iconostasis [icon screen], and I can help orphans.

Dana Talley: I don't know how your little parish is able to do what it does [for orphans].

Father Georgi: There are many problems. However, I think it would be very easy to "adopt" these 25 children. Let the children stay here in this village, in this orphanage. Let them know they have a godfather or a godmother in the United States who will send two or three letters a year, congratulating them on Christmas, Easter, or their birthday. Send the letter to me and I will go to the orphanage and give the kids any present the 'parent' tells me to give—chocolates, anything. Even if they don't send money, let them send a card or letter to the kids, letting them know that they have somebody who cares for them, who remembers them in prayer on Easter or Christmas. I'll be thankful for money, but if it is not possible, it is more important to have contact. Let him know there is somebody else who loves him, cares for him—that's all.

Dana Talley: You are always mentioning such positive things that we can do pragmatically in fulfilling the commands of Matthew 25. I think the most telling thing you have said is that we need not sit in the church and wait for people to come to us. We need to go to them.

Father Georgi: Why are you quoting me? It's Jesus that told us so. He sent His apostles, His disciples, and He sent every Christian to do it—didn't He? If you open the gospel, read what Jesus told you and me, and all priests, and do it. There is only one way to be a Christian and we read it on the Sunday of the Last Judgment. He didn't ask what confession you belonged to and what language you speak and how high the iconostasis is. He asked only, "What did you do? How did you help your neighbor?"

Dana Talley: We speak a lot about building the church physically, but not much about building the Church spiritually.

Father Georgi: We must do both. If there is no building here, people don't come; if they don't participate in

the service, if they don't confess, if they don't take Holy Communion, they can't be Christians. I can teach them only when they are together, when they are members of this church, so it was absolutely important to me to restore the building. For me, as a priest, I was very proud to restore the building, but I began to realize that it was far more difficult to restore souls.

Dana Talley: What do you think about this [1997] law concerning religious freedom? Many are confused about it. Some think it is a good thing because they say that so many Protestant missionaries seem to come who have greater financial resources and feel the new law "levels the playing field" so to speak. Others oppose. Unfortunately, there is a confrontational kind of thing, resulting in disrespect between Protestants and Orthodox. Do you think Russia should have this law?

Father Georgi: I think the best decision is to make the law as short as possible. I do not object to this particular law. During the years I have been here in this village I have invited all denominations and will allow any missionary to speak to my congregation.

Dana Talley: Why are you for the law?

Father Georgi: I am not for this law. This law is aimed against the Russian Orthodox Church more than against any foreign missionaries.

Dana Talley: That's quite a sentence!

Father Georgi: I insist it is directed against us, Orthodox believers. It is an admission that our church is weak and cannot oppose those missionaries.

Dana Talley: However, this law makes it more difficult for some people to come to Russia.

Father Georgi: Well, you either rely on the Spirit or on legislation. I am obedient to my bishop and to my patriarch, but that does not deprive me of my right to criticize my patriarch and my bishop; and I tell them about it openly and I write about it in my articles.

I am ready to invite any missionary to this or neighboring villages, to the orphanage, to the prison, anywhere, and if they want to speak or give Bibles to people, I will only be there to approve, to interpret. We can cooperate in anything, but we cannot participate in the same service because the regulations of my church do not allow me to do so. We prayed together today and took Communion together because we are Orthodox Christians, but I can't do it with an Anglican or a Baptist. They invited me to do it, but I can't; it is not my personal decision. It is the decision of the Councils. I can't do it and call myself an Orthodox Christian.

Sue Talley: The participation in your parish in the Divine Liturgy was excellent, even though everything but the sermon was in Slavonic.

Father Georgi: Most of the people take Communion either once every two weeks or once a week. I don't

For me, as a priest, I was very proud to restore the building, but I began to realize that it was far more difficult to restore souls.

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On Orphans...

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insist on this; it is not obligatory for everyone, nor is it prohibited. To me this is between you and Jesus; it is for you to decide and nobody has the right to interfere. Only, I explain to them what Communion is, what confession is, and then tell them to decide; there can't be any more regulation than that.

Dana Talley: There has been a lot of difficulty with absenteeism in Russian Orthodox Churches. I'm not sure why. There seemed to be a great rush when the Millennium [1988] happened. I don't see the same rush to the church now that I saw years ago.

Father Georgi: I think there is more than one reason for that, but the main one is this: How did Christ begin His ministry? What was His first word? "Repent." What did John the Baptist and the disciples say? "Repent!" Did we repent? No, we didn't. Who will repent in our society? The Communists? Well, some did repent; they did say they had been wrong. But my church did not repent. We cooperated with the Communists for so long; we have been deceiving the whole world.

I'm not blaming anyone. Most of our bishops were compelled to do it, one way or another. You know, Communists were very clever in their propaganda, and the state machine was very hard on people. But the time came to speak up, when we received freedom and suddenly found out we were devoted to this Communist system, with all our bodies and souls. We are simply unable to tell the truth. We are unable to repent. One must be very courageous to repent. We can't do it. We haven't done it. What is required, to my mind, is "We did this, this, and that. We cooperated with the KGB." We went all over the world to pro-Communist meetings, we organized them here, and we blamed those American warmongers, you know, Ronald Reagan or someone else for every war everywhere, but we never noticed what was taking place in our own country.

Our Patriarch Alexei insisted—15 years ago, maybe 13—that there were no political prisoners in our country. Who can believe it today? Metropolitan, and now Patriarch, Alexii praised our previous constitution. To my mind his duty is to say, "Excuse me; I will not do it anymore." And none of us will ever blame him for what he did.

Let me tell you a story: About ten years ago I was invited to teach Latin in our school in Kostroma. I taught for three months, maybe four, and then found out there also was a teacher of religion there. I asked my pupils, "Who is the teacher of religion?" and I found out that he was the former teacher of atheism! We were in the same building, but in different departments. So I asked the principal of the school if we could have a round-table discussion and suggested we sit and discuss religion with the students. He said, "No." So I suggested that one semester I teach Latin and the religion teacher teach religion, and the next semester, I teach religion and he teach Latin. The principal said, "Impossible! He doesn't know Latin!" I said, "Does he know religion?"

Sometimes people think that religion is something

you go to school and learn. In fact, it is very easy to teach someone to be a Christian. People came to Jesus and asked, "What shall I do to be saved?" What is Christianity? What should I do? Love God and love your neighbor. That's all. If you want to be a Christian I can tell you how in five minutes. All the law and the prophets are contained in this simple statement: Love God and love your neighbor. If you say you love God and not your neighbor, you are an atheist. And if you love only your neighbor and not God, you are also an atheist! Did anyone ask Jesus, "What do you mean by loving God?" No, they asked Him, "Who is my neighbor?" For the rest of your life you will learn the details, the commentary on these two commandments. I don't think 100 years is enough. It's very simple and very complicated at the same time.

Dana Talley: The Secretary of External Affairs of the Office of the Patriarch said that the way an American can help is to pray for and send money to the Office of the Patriarch so we can help the people.

Father Georgi: It's much easier to bring a container and just unload it in Moscow and caress yourself and say you did a good deed.

Dana Talley: You are saying that the Soviet system is, in fact, living and doing well within the Church.

Father Georgi: Isn't it? I'm still convinced that my church today is the only [remaining] island of Communist society. It's a "reservation" where this system organized by Stalin exists just as it was 20 or 30 years ago. I think Father Alexander Schmemmann was one of those courageous people who spoke up and told the truth about Patriarch Pimen when he spoke in the United Nations and said, "In the Soviet Union there are no poor, there are no needy, and therefore the Church does not go in for social welfare activities. The system takes care of us here. It is quite enough."

Dana Talley: I believe we have enough of an interview to write a book!

Father Georgi: It can be reduced to five minutes—all of it. The essential message is this: "Tell the truth." That's all.

Dana Talley: But if you do that, very likely, on your way to church, someone with an axe will get you in the back of the head. (*Editor's Note: Reference here is to the unsolved murder of Father Alexander Men on the outskirts of Moscow in September 1990.*)

Father Georgi: That's right. It's very dangerous to be a Christian. Really. Rather than kill, let's have a conversation. Let's discuss things. Let's see what is positive and what is negative about Father Men's books, for example. I invite anyone to discuss it. Invite anyone in the Father Men camp and I am ready to speak to them. Why? That's the only way to obtain any results. Or there can be another way. The other way is, "Let's kill Father Men. Let's go burn his books. Let's annihilate him." You call that Christianity?

Sue Talley: Actually Father Men's death has generated a lot more interest in his books than there ever was before.

Dana Talley: Young non-Orthodox Russian Christians say to us, "We know Father Men's books."

Father Georgi: Well, there are a lot of things he said that I disagree with. Very often we argued. I can't

It is very easy to teach someone to be a Christian. People came to Jesus and asked, "What shall I do to be saved?" Love God and love your neighbor. That's all. If you want to be a Christian I can tell you how in five minutes. For the rest of your life you will learn the details, the commentary on these two commandments. I don't think 100 years is enough. It's very simple and very complicated at the same time.

say we quarreled, because he had a very good sense of humor. It was very difficult to quarrel with Father Men! We disagreed on many points, but we were personal friends. I think one of the best preachers and perhaps the best teacher of Orthodoxy—of Christianity—in Russia at that time [late 1980s] was Father Men. But the organizers of theological academies—why didn't they invite him to teach? Only because they were afraid that he could be the best professor, the most beloved, the most educated, the most brilliant professor, and the pupils would immediately see how intellectually poor the other teachers were.

Dana Talley: So you think it is primarily jealousy that caused his death?

Father Georgi: No, not quite that. For 21 years they didn't allow me to become a priest. Do you think that is jealousy? No. They were not allowed to ordain certain people, were not allowed to invite really gifted or talented professors to the theological academy. Why? It is very easy to grasp that the state wanted to reduce the role of religion in our country. Therefore, they separated the priest and the people, ordained only the worst, and promoted only the worst of our bishops. This was one of the means of this anti-religious propaganda.

Dana Talley: How do you stop this cycle that seems to be ongoing even today? What can be done to reverse this problem?

Father Georgi: What was the cry of the Baptist in the wilderness? "Repent." That was his cry. "Repent." Don't think we are the sons of "Holy Mother Russia" and we belong to the "most Orthodox" church in the world. [Instead,] repent and tell the church: "Stop deceiving people, telling lies."

Dana Talley: God sends you people to help—you didn't ask them to come, but God sends them to you. Yesterday in church you said one shouldn't stay home and wait for people to come, but here you are in this remote place and people are just showing up! What a mystery it is.

Father Georgi: It is not a mystery; it is a movement in both directions. If you go toward God, He will come more than halfway to meet you. ♦

Dana and Sue Talley are professional musicians and members of the Orthodox Church in America. They both hold the position of assistant professor of music at Nyack College and the Alliance Theological Seminary, New York City campus.

It is a movement in both directions. If you go toward God, He will come more than halfway to meet you.

Key Challenges Before the Post-Soviet Church: A Synopsis

David Johnstone

The Church in Central and Eastern Europe emerged from the long night of Communist propaganda, manipulation, oppression, and often outright persecution battered but alive. Although more than a decade of relative freedom has passed, many serious hangovers from the past remain that need prayerful attention.

- a) **Healing of past wounds.** Under Communism government interference in church life, appointment of leaders, dispensing of privileges, and persecution caused division in nearly every denomination between the legal and illegal or registered and unregistered. Those divisions are still evident. Pray for humility, confession, restoration, and renewal. The division between non-Pentecostal and Pentecostal Evangelicals has hampered their witness.
- b) **The overcoming of an inferiority complex among Evangelicals.** Their severe repression and denial of education and professional openings under Communism have left them marginalized and often ineffective in society. Many leaders are reluctant to adapt in the face of cultural and generational change. As a result, many congregations appear irrelevant and unable to address twenty-first-century needs. Evangelicals could have a vital role in restoring moral, ethical, and spiritual standards in a society that has lost its way.
- c) **The lack of open, appropriate evangelism.** Since outreach was banned in the past, new opportunities in the 1990s were often missed or misused. Some denominations and networks have grown, but others

have stagnated. The growth of the early 1990s has tailed off. Discipling of seekers has been disappointing. Pray for Holy Spirit inspiration, innovation, and faith for growth in the twenty-first century.

- d) **Handling relationships with the dominant Orthodox Church in Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Belarus, and Russia.** Orthodox efforts to marginalize, discredit, and even eliminate other religions and minority Christian ministries have led to discriminatory legislation in these countries.
- e) **Handling links with the global church.** After decades of isolation, the shock of relating to Christian bodies from other lands has been often traumatic to both sides. Expatriate bodies need sensitivity and wisdom to learn from the many mistakes of the 1990s. Foreign missionaries have gained a negative image—especially when much aid, help, and involvement were on a short-term basis with little cultural sensitivity, linguistic ability, or spiritual discernment. Pray for long-term cooperation and mutual appreciation, with more support of local initiatives.
- f) **The training of a new generation of leaders.** All more structured theological education was controlled or banned. In the 1990s, numerous new seminaries, Bible schools, and theological education-by-extension programs sprang up across these lands. Increasingly, these are indigenously led and are maturing. Much help is needed to make them more viable and effective and have the resources to give effective training. ♦

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Reprinted with permission from Patrick Johnstone, Operation World (Bromley, England: OM Publishing, 2001): 54-55.

"... Of Such Is the Kingdom"

Father Georgi Edelstein

Editor's Note: The following is an excerpt from the transcript of an interview by American Orthodox musicians, Dana and Sue Talley, with Father Georgi Edelstein, Kostroma Region, Russia.

Dana Talley: What kinds of gifts are appropriate for orphans?

Father Georgi: That is an interesting question. At one time we received an excellent supply of jeans and nice clothing. I gathered the poorest children in the orphanage and in the village and passed them out to them. In a couple of days some of the boys came to my church and gave the things back. Other boys, who came from more well-to-do families, but who could not afford things that came from the United States, were teasing the boys and saying, "Well, you are beggars and the priest went especially to America to beg for you. Maybe your American uncle will give you something else if you join the priest and go there and beg." And, of course, the orphans felt humiliated.

So we organized the children into eight groups according to their age and said there would be a competition to run from one church to another and back. That was for the boys of 16 or 17, others were to run a shorter distance, and kids of seven or eight were to run only 100 meters and back. Kids could take what they wanted first place, second, and so on. That gave us the possibility to give more to the needy without making the children feel beggarly.

It sometimes happens that a priest not only teaches, but he learns things that one never learns in seminary. When the competition was over I went out of the church and heard a girl crying bitterly. Her grandmother was dragging her home, but she didn't want to go. The grandmother explained she was the second in her group, but was accidentally overlooked for a prize. Well, she was very upset, and I told her, "Oh, but your prize is in the church. Let's go there." So we went, and there were 15 or 20

dolls there—Barbie among them. At that time every girl in Russia was dreaming of a Barbie. So I said, "Just choose any of them and take it." So after looking them over carefully the girl took a dirty old doll with one arm loose, and something else missing, and she said, "I'll take this." But I said, "There are better dolls here." "No," she said, "I prefer this. This one looks like my child." I asked her to explain why and she said, "Well, Father, you teach us to take care of the poor and the miserable and I feel that this doll needs me more than Barbie. Barbie is happy, but this doll is miserable. I'll sew on her arm and give her a good dress."

I met the girl in two days and, I am sorry to say, I tempted her. I said, "Maybe you'd like to play with Barbie and take her." She looked at the dolls attentively but indifferently and said, "I was right. My girl is not beautiful, but she looks happy now and I am sure she will love me as much as I love her." I was trained as a priest to understand such things, but I think that if you gave me the possibility to choose anything material, I would always choose the best. This girl didn't and I think any priest in Russia can tell you hundreds of such stories—how we always learn from our congregation. ♦

Father, you teach us to take care of the poor and the miserable and I feel that this doll needs me more than Barbie. Barbie is happy, but this doll is miserable. I'll sew on her arm and give her a good dress.

RESOURCES

Hanson, Philip and Michael J. Bradshaw, eds. *The Territories of the Russian Federation 2001*. 2nd ed. London: Europa Publications, 2001.

Part One consists of authoritative articles by the editors on Russian regional politics and the place of the regions in the national economy. It also provides a list of key chronological events in Russian history. Part Two, the heart of this reference work, contains individual chapters on the history, geography, and economic and political status of each of Russia's 89 regions (*oblasts*) and autonomous republics and districts (*okrugs*). Each regional entry includes a map that includes major cities.

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Birmingham, AL 35229

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