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Religion and the Struggle for Russia's Future

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There are good reasons for suggesting that the modern age has ended. Many things indicate that we are going through a transitional period, when it seems that something else is painfully being born. It is as if something were crumbling, decaying and exhausting itself, while something else, still indistinct, were arising from the rubble. ... Today, this state of mind, or of the human world, is called post-modernism. For me a symbol of that state is a Bedouin mounted on a camel and clad in traditional robes under which he is wearing jeans, with a transistor radio in his hands, and an ad for Coca-Cola on the camel's back.

Václav Havel

(Remarks at Independence Hall, Philadelphia, 4 July 1994)¹

On a cold Sunday morning in January 1994, Fr Georgi Kochetkov conducted services, for the last time, in the cathedral of the former Sretensky Monastery in Moscow. As the huge crowd of people gathered in the church could bear witness, Father Georgi represented the latest and most promising attempt to reform the Russian Orthodox Church and to bring it closer to the Russian people. Soon, however, he would learn of his transfer to a much smaller church, badly in need of repair, in the same section of the city. This order of Patriarch Aleksii II would cut at the heart of Kochetkov's activities. It would also further incite a controversy that was to become one of the most heated in religious circles in Russia.²

Fr Georgi Kochetkov is among the leading voices of reform within the Orthodox Church. An 'urban missionary', who came up within the ranks of the Church, Father Georgi became convinced several years ago of the need to speak more directly to the social and spiritual problems of the large numbers of people then flocking into Russian churches in the last years of the communist state. He understood that the Church had an unprecedented opportunity to reach out to people searching for a new vision of life. But he also knew that this opportunity would soon pass unless the Church made some fundamental attempts to become more accessible, to make its message more understandable to the people.

In the neighbourhood of this former monastery, Fr Georgi created a new kind of community of people who worked and worshipped together. In these difficult times in Russia, when family life and communal ties have been shattered, he developed in the centre of Russia's largest city a substantial group of people who supported each other, providing charity to the most needy among them and emotional help to those whose lives had been uprooted. But the main focus of Fr Georgi's community

revolved around the new church liturgy, which he instituted among his followers. Rather than using the old language in the liturgy, he performed it in modern Russian.³ Thus Fr Georgi used the vernacular to achieve a new, more direct, less mystifying, more personal contact with his congregation.

Fr Georgi's community grew very rapidly as word of its activities circulated in Moscow. But as the community continued to gain popularity, it generated a severe reaction among conservative members of the Orthodox clergy, who were joined by the political right-wing press. Both groups attacked Fr Georgi's innovations as dangerous experiments; they charged that such reforms would undermine the Orthodox Church and split the clergy, and that the liturgical changes compromised the Church's mission. In the late autumn of 1993 these political and religious conservatives published in the newspaper *Russky vestnik* two letters castigating Father Georgi and his followers. The letters asked Patriarch Aleksii II to discontinue Father Georgi's activities before he proceeded to tear the Church apart.

In early 1994 the patriarch yielded to the pressure of the conservatives. He prohibited Fr Georgi from performing the liturgy in modern Russian in the cathedral, and announced that he would deprive him of his church rank should he continue to do so. In February, Fr Georgi was transferred to another parish in suburban Moscow, to a much smaller church, incapable of receiving his large following.

Fr Georgi continued to conduct the liturgy in his church in the Russian language and in the summer of 1994 he remained constantly at the forefront of discussions within the Orthodox Church. In several ways his case exemplifies the conflicts and dilemmas that the Church, and more broadly religion, faces in its attempt to play a major part in the rebuilding of Russia. Some within the church hierarchy see the basic task of the Russian Orthodox Church as the recovery of its tradition and its memory after the terrible assault of the communist government on the spiritual foundations of Russian society. Others believe that the Church must draw much closer to the people and, like Fr Georgi, see its very survival as dependent on its ability to make its teachings more accessible. The conflict over the language of the liturgy is depicted as a struggle between liberals and conservatives, between those who want to make the Church more innovative and responsive to social issues, and those who aim to protect and secure the teachings and forms they see as sacred.⁴ Fr Georgi's case testifies to the narrow limits on reform within the Church and also the political pressures that are often brought to bear on its leaders.

In order to observe this struggle at first hand, I visited Moscow in the early summer of 1994. I sought to identify some of the major sources of renewal and hope, to clarify the obstacles standing in the way of reform, and to define the major problems that the Church faces in the rebuilding of Russian society. The Church provides, for me, a prism and a focus for viewing a society that will continue for some time to find itself in the midst of rapid religious, intellectual, and social change.

In this essay I will examine the political and social position of the Church in the new order. After a brief look at the Church's past role in the state – in relation both to the people and to those in power – I will deal with the Church's current attempts to define its role in the rebuilding of community in Russia. I will approach this struggle from the perspective of three different people who are to varying degrees reformist. They are Dmitri Yefimovich Furman, a well-known sociologist of religion and an outsider to the Orthodox Church; Professor Andrei Osipov, a theologian and educator at the Church's main seminary at Sergiyev Posad (formerly Zagorsk); and Yelena Vladimirovna Panina, a believer, who, as leader of the newly-formed Russian Zemstvo Movement (*Rossiiskoye zemskoye dvizheniye*), tries to combine religious

theory and practice. Interviews with these individuals offer varied perspectives on the Church's present direction and the problems it confronts; moreover, they testify to the major role the Church will play in the reshaping of Russia, a point often ignored in political treatments. Whether the Church will foster a creative and open community or an authoritative and closed one is a central issue in the current struggle. As Russia tries to enter the global economy and rebuild itself from within it will have to deal with the issue of pluralism; what happens to its own cultural traditions in the process is a problem that the country will have to resolve.

Church and State

Historically the Orthodox Church has played an extremely important role in Russia's national consciousness and in shaping its identity. The Church is tied in to many of the major events in Russia's history, preserving cultural continuity in some of the country's darkest hours, especially during the devastating Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century, providing a sense of higher purpose to a people who carved a civilisation out of the dense northern forest, and integrating many of its rituals and forms into the daily life and practices of the Russian population. In his classic work on the history of Russian culture, *The Icon and the Axe*, James H. Billington sees the religious painting of the Church accompanying the axe as they thread their way symbolically through the story of Russian civilization.⁵ The Church thinks of itself as the vessel that holds the country together – its history, traditions, and identity – and to many church leaders breaking this vessel would lead to anarchy.

At the same time, the Orthodox Church always had a close relationship to the tsarist government, and often lent its support to that government's military pursuits and autocratic policies. The revolutionary parties at the beginning of the twentieth century exploited the Church's political ties to the state as part of their assault on state power. The Bolsheviks, in particular, viewed with disdain what they saw as the Church's antirationalistic, antiscientific basis; they saw religion as the opiate of the people. Committed to building a new society based on scientific, utilitarian education, they directed their attack against all religions, but primarily against the Orthodox Church.⁶ A few months after coming to power in 1917, the Bolshevik government passed legislation which outlawed religious activities apart from the performance of church services, forbade charitable work, and confiscated the Church's property. A major turn in the Church's relationship to the state occurred in 1927 when under great pressure church leaders agreed to accommodate Soviet power. In that year, Metropolitan Sergi signed a 'declaration of loyalty to the government': addressing himself to the Motherland, he said that 'your joys and successes will be our joys and successes, and your failures will be our failures'. Some would argue that under great personal and political pressure the metropolitan had to act as he did to ensure the Church's survival; but the costs of his 'declaration of loyalty' were very high. His *modus vivendi* with the Soviet state splintered the Church. In addition, as an Orthodox theologian has recently emphasised, it resulted in the 'gradual degradation ... of the professional status of the Church's ministers'.⁷

The extent of this degradation has been confirmed during the last few years as new information about the Church's relationship with Soviet authorities has come to light in the press. Some of the revelations have been sensational; they have suggested not only complicity between church and state officials but cooperation at the highest levels of the Church with the KGB. Such complicity allegedly took place throughout the Soviet period, even in the early 1990s when the political controls on the Church

were greatly loosened. In local towns and villages many priests, under pressure from the KGB, also provided information about their parishioners' private beliefs to the state security agencies.

As information about this cooperation and the betrayal of trust became public, it cast a dark shadow on the Church's efforts to play a major role in the rebuilding of Russia. As a Russian writer told me in the summer of 1994,

I can well understand the enormous political pressures that church officials had to endure; it may be that cooperation with the state was necessary to survival. But these church leaders could at least admit to complicity and ask public forgiveness for the betrayal of trust. The problem is that the Church remains totally silent about these revelations, and treats the compromises of principles as though they never happened. To me, such arrogant behavior is a great mistake.⁸

As the Orthodox Church seeks to rebuild itself internally, it faces another problem that many other institutions also confront. As long as the communist government existed the Church had a clear, well-defined enemy. In the last years of the Soviet state the Church stood as a major centre of opposition to communist power; religion and anticommunist sentiments were closely connected. But now that the old enemy is gone the Church must live in a different environment demanding new and more complicated kinds of skills. To some people in the Church, this is the best of times; there are unprecedented opportunities for spiritual leadership. But to many others, as the outcry against Fr Georgi Kochetkov suggests, this is the worst of times. The Church is having difficulties in choosing its direction, and the present uncertainties make this latter group often wish for a simpler, more secure environment and even for the restoration of the Church's former ties to the government.

While the Church has historically played an important part in shaping Russia's national consciousness, the question after more than 70 years of communist rule is whether it has the vision, courage, resources, and energy to play this role again. To tackle this question, I sought the perspectives of three different individuals, all of whom are vitally concerned with religion and its role in the rebuilding of Russia.

Religion and Society

Dmitri Furman is one of Russia's leading sociologists of religion, a field entirely neglected during most of the Soviet period. As a student of sociology he spent most of his career researching and writing about religion and society in the United States. Like another major scholar Sergei Filatov, his former student and present colleague, Furman has in recent years brought his talents to bear on the situation in his own country, and he intends to spend the remainder of his career on the subject of religion and society in Russia. He is the author of a brilliant study on Stalinism and religion and an editor, with Filatov, of the recently published *Demokratiya i religiya* (*Democracy and Religion*), a collection of penetrating, provocative and valuable articles about religion in Russia in the early 1990s.⁹ He and Filatov have brought to this subject the passion, research skills and hard-minded pragmatism that it has lacked for most of the 20th century.

In his earlier study of Stalinism and religion, entitled 'Stalinizm i my s religioznoi točki zreniya' ('Stalinism and us from the religious point of view'), Furman examined the roots of Marxism, in Western Europe and in Russia. He argued that in its early development Marxism simultaneously carried seeds of both rationality and

faith, and while on the one hand this ideology offered a creative approach to many issues, it also contained the possibility of promoting dogmatism. In Western Europe, the intellectual, creative elements in Marxism replaced the dogmatic ones; but in Russia, according to Furman, the dogmatic features of Marxism predominated. This phenomenon can best be explained by considering Marxism in Russia as it should properly be understood – as essentially a religious movement. Marxism moved into the spiritual vacuum left by the Church. The Bolsheviks were rapidly transformed from an underground party into the ruling elite of the country. This revolutionary Marxist party offered an ideology that spoke to the dreams of people, who had been torn from their previous life and had lost their belief in divine justice. These people were ripe for a religious adoption of Marxism; and, Furman argues, as has happened many times in history, a ‘passionate faith created its own proof of its righteousness’: a belief in the inevitable victory of the revolution, an aspiration to open up the road to happiness and social justice, and a hope of creating a paradise on earth. Such tendencies led the despotic elements in Marxism to predominate. While Marxism attempted to destroy religion, it adopted many of its features. Quoting the Russian novelist Saltykov-Shchedrin, Furman claimed that ‘when one destroys the old building and shows that it was built on sand, one must be careful not to construct a new one on the same sand’.¹⁰ In 1988–89, when he wrote this study, Furman warned of the danger of a similar process again developing in Russia; the crumbling of the foundations of the Soviet state had opened up a spiritual vacuum, and created the opportunity once more for dogmatic movements to emerge.

The Institute of Sociology, for which Furman serves as codirector, has completed a major survey of religious attitudes and ethical values in present-day Russia. Researchers in the Institute used fifteen Russian towns and cities as their sample and conducted extensive interviews with more than two thousand people from all walks of life. The data collected in these surveys are to be published in book form. The Institute conducted the last such survey in the late 1980s. Furman knew that the most recent materials would yield a different picture, reflecting the revolutionary changes that the country had experienced since then; but, he told me, he was still greatly surprised at what the evidence did show and what the trends now emerging appeared to be.

In a lengthy afternoon conversation in his office in the Institute of Europe in Moscow Furman shared some of the results of the surveys and his thoughts about them.¹¹ His data revealed that people who held the strongest religious commitments, as measured by the frequency of their church attendance, were those who were also the most supportive of authoritarian, nationalistic political parties. ‘We found a surprisingly high correlation between people who attend religious services at least once a week and those who hold chauvinistic social and political values’, he said. Furman believes that the ethical roots of democracy in Western Europe and in the United States are intertwined with religion; but the correlations he found in Russia between religion and national chauvinism do not promote democratic values. Instead of liberal attitudes, they tend to support conservative ones.

In addition, Furman’s materials show that the number of people who identified with Orthodoxy reached a peak at the end of 1991 and since then has actually declined. These data support the view of the Church as a focal point of opposition to communism, an opposition which greatly increased in the year that the Soviet state collapsed. The survey also found little evidence of any growing attraction to Protestant religions, although Protestant groups do have support among the middle stratum of Russian society. What Furman’s surveys clearly reveal during recent years

is the growing number of people who are attracted to what he calls 'eclectic beliefs', which involve interest in phenomena such as science fiction, mysticism, Satanism, the occult, the transmigration of the soul and Asian religions. Furman told me:

Frankly I do not know what this means: whether we are witnessing the gradual emergence of a pluralistic society with widely disparate religious and personal beliefs, or whether this is evidence of something much more problematic: an attempt to escape reality, to flee from this world. At the moment I do not know how to interpret these processes, nor do I really understand them; all I am able to do is identify some of them ... these trends are not just Russian phenomena; they are taking place on a global scale, even in the United States, although not to the same degree as in Russia.

Furman's own research focuses on the new ethics of work that are emerging in Russia. He finds the recent data on this subject extremely troubling; his surveys reveal social and moral chaos and deep uncertainty among many segments of the Russian population. The development of a capitalist economy in Russia, he had assumed, would produce different attitudes to work than did the old socialist system; among the new entrepreneurial groups he expected to find personal discipline and a commitment to one's work, something akin to Weber's Protestant ethic. But his data in fact revealed the opposite characteristics. The people who preferred the western model of economic organisation also comprised the group that most preferred not to work at all. A very high percentage of people in this group responded that as soon as they made enough money to support the style of life they wanted they would immediately stop working. The group which saw work as a positive value and which best fitted the western ethical model turned out, in the survey data, to be people identified with the old communist and socialist values.

The Institute's researchers also tried to measure changing views of morality, as revealed in sexual ethics, and again the data yielded unexpected results:

In our recent polls we discovered a very high percentage of people who considered prostitution as a normal act and saw nothing morally wrong with this form of sexual activity. We also found a high correlation between people who had a positive attitude to prostitution and people who were favourably disposed to capitalism. Concerning other kinds of sexual behaviour, such as homosexuality, our data showed much more conservative attitudes. But to me it is shocking that many people now consider prostitution to be an acceptable form of sexual behaviour.

The polls also revealed a high correlation between Russians who found bribery to be acceptable and those who identified politically with democratic values. 'Many people now consider bribery to be a very normal kind of economic activity,' Furman said, 'when we asked them why, our respondents repeatedly replied that "It is a simple fact of life."'

During the past year, Furman told me, he had spent a great deal of time thinking about the meaning of these results. What he had *not* found, he emphasised, was the emergence of new working ethics and standards of behaviour similar to the economic and social patterns that the sociologist Max Weber associated with the emergence of capitalism in the West. Furman refuses to draw ultimate conclusions from the recent surveys, however.

It's very easy to interpret these data emotionally and to find in them evidence of a great crisis. But I would prefer not to characterise our situation in these terms. The major problem is what kind of society can be created from this social base. Can a stable political order emerge in such a context? Again, I find that to be highly unlikely, because our data show little evidence of stability, of a solid core of beliefs, of a world view.

Furman speculates that what we may currently be witnessing is a major transition, a technological shift, whose boundaries are much larger than Russia's.

Humankind may rapidly be approaching a time when the old questions are losing their meaning, when they do not measure accurately the social values to which they are supposed to relate. It may well be that life is shifting in some direction that we cannot clearly judge. I would not like to seem to be a person who has every answer; too much is unclear to me. We cannot see some of the main trends that are going to be important in the technological age into which we are rapidly moving.

Furman's words recall the remark by Václav Havel, president of the Czech Republic, in Philadelphia in summer 1994 about the symbol of the Bedouin with the Coca-Cola advertisement. 'I see all this', says Furman, 'as proof that something is being born, that we are in a phase where one age is succeeding another, where everything is possible, because our civilisation does not have its own spirit, its own aesthetic.'

The evidence of social chaos in Russian society manifested in Furman's data provides ample opportunity for extreme nationalistic appeals. The strong showing by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy in the 1994 elections and his continuing popularity furnish dramatic proof of these attractions. Furman stressed to me that he takes very seriously the sentiments underlying Zhirinovskiy's movement – the primitive, powerful currents, the boisterous patriotism, the antisemitism, the antagonism towards the outside world, the simplistic message – that play directly to the frustrations and sense of chaos shown in the Institute's data.

The portrait of the Church that one gains from this leading Russian sociologist is an extremely pessimistic one. On the one hand, the Orthodox Church lacks the inner strength and vision to deal effectively with the social problems it now faces. On the other, it seems to be realigning itself with whomever is in power. The leaders of the Church do not understand the new open religious environment, and they are uncomfortable operating in it, as Fr Georgi Kochetkov's case reveals. Moreover, Furman is deeply troubled by the political relationship he sees developing between Russia's political leaders and the Church. Rather than becoming an independent body capable of standing apart from the government and exercising a critical voice the Church is steadily drifting back towards its traditional alliance with the government. For Furman this trend has features of both the tragic and the comic, and they are not positive ones for Russia's future.

It is a striking thing to me how far the new leaders – President Yelt'sin, Rutskoy, and others – are trying to show their strong religious affiliations. But if you observe them closely you see that they have very little religious experience; they do not even know how to light the candles in the church. I have even seen Zhirinovskiy trying to light the candles with his cigarette lighter!

In addressing Russia's current problems, the Orthodox Church, according to Furman,

continues to seek state stability as its primary goal, 'irrespective of the price. It was always the major element in the Church's ideology. State stability was much more important than Jesus Christ himself.' An outsider to the Church, Furman is severely critical of its capacity for leadership, willingness to innovate, and ability to relate to Russia's changing conditions.

In his analysis of Russian society Furman is more sober than he was in 1988–9 when he wrote his study of Stalin and religion. While he continues to express suspicion of organised religion he also sees the great dangers of a spiritual vacuum in society. As a scientist, interested mainly in the gathering of quantitative data, he is reluctant to go beyond what his concrete data reveal; but his words suggest a great deal about him as a person. As a scholar who worked for many years in the educational establishment of the Soviet Union he has had to adapt to a rapidly changing economic and social setting and to transform himself and his agenda in the process. The qualities he values are similar to those expressed by 1980s-style democratic socialists in Western Europe. He exhibits a fear of western capitalism and particularly its assault on the cultural foundations of Russia. Yet he is also searching for social stability, and his search for 'values' emphasises the need for a pro-work ethic. He wants to see President Havel's Bedouin with a briefcase in his hands. If Russia is to adjust to the technological society he sees emerging on a global scale, it must foster such an image, and the Church at present shows little promise of fulfilling this need.

Dmitri Furman's analysis offers one perspective on the Church and Russia's changing social conditions. To gain another interpretation, I turned to the Church itself, and an insider's point of view on the major problems Russia faces. I particularly wanted to observe this different perspective from the monastery of St Sergi at Sergiyev Posad, which for most of Russian history served as its chief monastery and the religious centre of Russia's civilisation.

The Struggle within the Church

Located 44 miles to the northwest of Moscow, the monastery at Sergiyev Posad was founded by one of Russia's greatest religious figures, St Sergi of Radonezh, who in the fourteenth century went into the wilderness seeking simplicity and closeness to the people. Until recently the monastery served as the residence of the patriarch. Russia's leading monastery, a citadel of church learning, it always enjoyed the patronage of the tsars. Under the Soviet state, its activities were under the government's watchful eye, its top officials appointed directly by the Communist Party.

On a rainy Saturday morning in June 1994, I travelled to Sergiyev Posad on a train crowded with people going to their country dachas for a long holiday weekend. As a Russian historian trying to reach a better understanding of the making of Russia's early religious civilisation I had made this trip many times before. On this particular morning, as I left the train and walked up the long hillside to the monastery, the blue and gold cupolas of the cathedrals in the monastery were spectacularly visible in the soft mist. I understood why this is one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen. Its architecture – its mixture of tall, slender spires and massive onion domes – is clear testimony to the spiritual principles that developed in the northern wilderness.

The Theological Academy of the Moscow Patriarchate located in the monastery trains priests and Andrei Osipov is one of its top officials. A specialist in world religions, Professor Osipov is one of the Church's foremost theologians and teachers. When I met him he was head of the department of graduate studies and chief editor

of a new journal, *Bogoslovsky vestnik*, named after a famous theological journal which the Bolshevik government banned in 1919. Over the previous two years Professor Osipov had given many public lectures on Russian religion and philosophy, which had drawn large and enthusiastic audiences. He was playing a prominent part in the Church's efforts to recover Russia's spiritual traditions.

Osipov told me about the Church's role in the rebuilding of Russia.

The most important problem we are confronting at the moment is the very deep social and psychological pain which our people suffered during the last seventy years and continue to experience. Our fundamental task is to speak to this suffering, to hold up a different vision of the world, and to provide our people, who are forced every day to deal with this psychological pain, with a deeper sense of purpose.¹²

Professor Osipov's views recall those of the great Russian eighteenth-century religious philosopher Grigori Skovoroda. Osipov argues that the history of Russia is marked by the conflict between two basic forces in nature: those that aim at suppressing the spiritual elements in human beings, and those that seek to enrich and give greater expression to such elements. 'At the moment the conflict between these two opposing principles is very sharp in our society', he maintained, agreeing with Dmitri Furman about the intense psychological and social struggle to find new beliefs. His approach is quite different, however. 'Currently', he said, 'we find ourselves in a situation dramatically different from the system that has existed for the last seventy years, yet in many ways the conflict between the basic forces remains the same.'

Osipov is not optimistic about the Orthodox Church's ability to respond effectively to the unprecedented opportunities now available.

Currently we have the chance to participate very actively in both the social and political life of this country, to open schools, to rebuild our monasteries, and to influence significantly our culture and our education in general. These possibilities raise a very important question: how might we take advantage of them? Extremely capable, skillful people are needed to deal with these challenging tasks, but such people are lacking in the Church.

Much of the difficulty lies in the speed with which the recent revolution overtook the Church and in the deficiencies in the Church's educational system.

We have not had time to train our priests properly. Monasteries are reopened, but we lack sufficient numbers of well-trained priests to serve in them. We have made priests of people who are poorly prepared, and this shortcoming is seriously affecting the internal life of the Church. It is crucial that the people in such positions have both an excellent education and a deep spiritual life.

The kind of education that he envisages includes study in depth of the scriptures, the history and sacred texts of the Church, the lives of saints, and Orthodox theology – in other words, a thorough and traditional religious education. Such study will take considerable time; it cannot be done overnight, and yet the demands for priests to fill the new positions is nearly overwhelming.

The Academy at Sergiyev Posad has the reputation of being the most conservative of Russia's three main seminaries. Its location near Moscow, its significance as the

residence of the patriarch and its close relationship with the political power have historically given the monastery at Sergiyev Posad the role of chief preserver of the Orthodox tradition. The establishment at the Academy has proved extremely reluctant to reform the Church; it has viewed with suspicion new voices expressing the need to modernise Orthodox thinking and practice. I asked Osipov about Father Aleksandr Men', the most powerful preacher of this generation and a major reformer, who was murdered in 1990. During the Gorbachev period Fr Aleksandr became a celebrated figure who had the ability to make the teachings of the Church accessible to the people. Osipov responded that he did not consider the results of Fr Aleksandr's efforts at reforming the Church to be significant. Fr Aleksandr and his followers, he claimed, represented the fringes of the Orthodox Church, because his ideas have never appealed to the mainstream of Orthodox believers. Osipov did not think the influence of the deceased priest would have long-lasting results.

Professor Osipov's response would provoke strong disagreement among many reform-minded members of the Church, who see in Fr Aleksandr Men' one of the greatest voices of church reform in recent times. His books continue to sell thousands of copies in Moscow and in other major Russian cities – evidence of his brilliant writing style and his spiritual appeal. But Osipov's answer testifies to the anxiety with which members of the Theological Academy view such major proponents of change within the Church.

Later in our conversation Professor Osipov made remarks suggesting that, beneath its calm veneer, and despite its conservative tradition, the seminary has recently experienced a great deal of controversy among its leadership. The problem of the language to be used in the liturgy and the issue of Fr Georgi Kochetkov had sparked heated debate among the officials at the Academy. Osipov told me that in recent months the leadership had been deeply divided. One camp inside the Academy had been entrenched in its belief that the whole Orthodox tradition, in both content and form, must be preserved in the original. To change the language would be to change the essence of the Church's message. But another group had been arguing forcefully that unless the internal spiritual life of the Church becomes more accessible to the population the current quest for spiritual meaning could well bear tragic results. As an expert on religion has put it in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 'unless the Church presents its message in understandable form it literally risks having its theology become an inaccessible secret for the majority of the people.'¹³

The question of modernising the language of the church service is not a new issue. It was discussed widely in ecclesiastical conferences in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On one of the last occasions the subject was discussed before the 1917 Revolution one of the hierarchs of the Church argued that the Old Church Slavonic language must be preserved; its beauty he maintained, occupied no less important a place in the service than did the icons, incense, music and sermon.

As Professor Osipov's comments suggest, the dispute over this issue is deeper than just the question of language. On another level it is a struggle between 'liberals' and 'conservatives' within the Church. On the one hand are those like Fr Georgi Kochetkov who see the social role of the Church in much broader terms than in the past. For them, modernising the language is essential to the rebuilding of community. On the other hand, the 'conservatives' see their opponents as undermining sacred traditions, and they wish to keep these traditions intact. Osipov himself admits that he has often stood 'between these two fires' currently raging inside the Academy. He believes the Church must draw closer to the people; but while it makes its message understandable and relevant to a population in great need of spiritual sustenance and

meaning it must find a way of preserving its traditions.

Osipov agrees with Dmitri Furman that Russian culture today is chaotic, and especially the spiritual culture of the people. He cannot see 'any new framework or model for the development of the culture that is emerging. It is difficult to know what is being shaped here. ... The role of the Church is to foster the love of beauty', by which he means love, peace, compassion, and the 'spiritual joy inherent in all of God's creation'; this, he says, is the mainstream of Orthodox Christianity.

The Church should show the people that it does not take away the joy of life but opens up this joy to people, and shows them where the real joy of life lies. And if the Orthodox Church is able to present this message, it will contribute to overcoming the chaos and to establishing the framework of a new culture.

Professor Osipov supports reform within the Church, but his idea of reform is a limited one, relating mainly to language and the forms of worship. When I asked about movements within the Church that speak directly to the new social conditions that Russia faces, he reacted sharply and defensively. He questioned my use of the word 'freedom'; the Church, he said, has always supported the concept of an internal, spiritual freedom, and this kind of freedom exists independently of any external political and social factors. But if one speaks of freedom in a legal, secular sense, Osipov argued, in Russia what exists at present is an unprecedented religious pluralism. Osipov is clearly uncomfortable with such an unlimited concept of freedom, which gives wide scope to any group to articulate its message. Many of these groups, he claims, are antihuman, 'kill the soul, isolate the individual from the community', and preach hatred and dissension. He believes that such groups have greater opportunity to operate in Russia than they do in Western Europe or the United States, and he wants the state to place limits on freedom of expression.

Professor Osipov is essentially a conservative, and he is alarmed at the rapid erosion of Russia's unique qualities, especially its sense of community and the human relationships that underlie this community. 'It will be tragic if Russian culture just reproduces the worst aspects of the West', he maintains.

Unfortunately, what we are doing now is accepting not the best, but the worst aspects of western culture. This influx is accepted by the government. Why is this happening? Why the attraction to the pornography, violence and criminal aspects of western culture? Partly because our government focuses only on the pragmatic, material desires of the people and ignores their deepest spiritual needs.

As I left the enclosed corridors of the Theological Academy at Sergiyev Posad and came outside into the light, the sun had broken through, leaving the morning's rain-drops shimmering on the long branches of the fir trees and the rich green grass in the courtyard. I was reminded that to this very monastery came the famous Russian warrior Prince Dmitri Donskoy, on the eve of his epic battle with the Mongols in 1380. The old church buildings and the richness of nature here speak clearly to many of the central events of Russian history, relating to both religion and power, that have unfolded around this location. The beauty of the monastery and also its association with state power are a vivid reminder of the many conflicting masters that religion has served; the tension between creativity and stability is deeply embedded in the Church's past. A similar tension between the moral and ethical depth of its teachings

and its rigidity and fear of innovation marks its present.

Past and Present

While the current instability holds many uncertainties, it also invites new and fresh approaches to the world Dmitri Furman described as coming into being. The present period begs for creative attempts to solve social problems, to combine the old with the new, especially in the rebuilding of communities in the countryside, which many people see as the key to Russia's future. Russians need the rebirth of movements from within their own society and cultural traditions. In 1994 one of the most promising of these attempts, then only in its infancy, was the Russian Zemstvo Movement led by Yelena Panina.

The name of Panina's organisation is rich in historical meaning. In the half-century before the Revolution of 1917 the *zemstvo* movement developed into the most comprehensive and ambitious effort in Russian history to modernise the countryside. Created during the reign of Alexander II in 1864, the *zemstva* were organs of local self-government whose purpose was to involve Russian society more actively in running their own affairs. The *zemstva* focused mainly on education, social services and agrarian improvement; they served as the seedbed from which emerged radical-democratic and liberal-democratic political parties early in the twentieth century. The promise that these institutions of local government held was undermined by the First World War and the Revolution. Recently, and in a new form, the *zemstva* have re-emerged.

I met Panina in the main offices of the new Russian Zemstvo Movement on Kalinin Prospekt. She is an extremely engaging person – effusive, brimming with energy, and representative of a generation of young professional people who are trying to rebuild Russia. Her organisation was created in December 1993 with the strong backing of President Yel'tsin, she told me, but was only now beginning to put its programme into action.¹⁴ This programme had three main components – education, economics, and religion – and treated all three as interrelated parts of its mission. The movement saw the transformation of Russia as beginning at the grass roots, and to that level was directing its main efforts.

At that time the Zemstvo Movement's Board of Directors comprised an impressive array of influential people from different fields, all of whom had experience of provincial Russia. In addition to Panina they included Yuri Petrovich Batal', vice-president of the Russian Engineering Academy; Metropolitan Kirill of the Moscow Patriarchate; Roman Semenovich Popkovich, chairman of the Association for the Administration of Towns in the Moscow region; Nikita Sergeevich Mikhailkov, president of the Russian Cultural Foundation; and Vladimir Ivanovich Sedov, president of the 'Russian Club' of the city of Nizhni Novgorod.¹⁵ Trained as an economist, Panina herself is copresident and coordinator of the Moscow Confederation of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. Panina told me that her mother and father were teachers of Russian language and literature in a small town near Moscow; her grandfather served as a village doctor – a family background that gives her a 'personal identity with the aims of the organisation' she heads.

The Zemstvo Movement's charter defined its primary goal as 'the regeneration of the moral foundation of Russian society and the rebuilding of state and local government'.¹⁶ A central aspect of this task was to be 'the expansion of human rights for the purpose of achieving the economic, political, and intellectual-spiritual well-being of Russian society and the improvement of the standard of living of the Russian

people'. Since the collapse of the Soviet state several plans have emerged to deal with Russia's economic crisis, but few programmes have focused on its cultural crisis. The years of Soviet power witnessed a war on Russia's cultural heritage, on the intelligentsia, and on cultural creativity; as one of Russia's greatest scholars of ancient history has pointed out, Soviet policy led to a 'cultural despair' that nearly destroyed one of the world's greatest cultures.¹⁷ A top priority, this same historian has emphasised, must be to reconstruct the culture of the provinces; it was from the provinces that Russia's greatest talent came; they seem to have provided a foundation and a resource from which originality flowed. Panina's organisation had a similar vision of the most important task facing the country – to rebuild Russia's towns and villages and to reconstruct local organisations and services that were devastated by Soviet power. As Panina emphasised many times in our discussion, the first requirement in such a task will be to recreate the spiritual and moral foundations of the towns and villages, to revive local spiritual traditions and to combine them with new practical issues; such a combination of the old and the new offers the best method for overcoming 'cultural despair' and backwardness.

In an interview several years ago, before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Metropolitan Kirill spoke about the Church's role in the revitalisation of the countryside. 'The Church', he emphasised, 'is not a political party, it does not have a political platform, it does not express political or class interests. But it does bear witness to the most essential elements in rebuilding the community – the spiritual and moral principles that underlie the community.'¹⁸ In her discussion with me Panina repeatedly stressed the part that the Church and religion must play: they must help re-establish respect for the individual human being and inculcate the importance of human dignity as essential for the rebuilding of the community. She saw religion as crucially important, but not the old centralised framework of religious observance and interpretation, rather a decentralised religion, more responsive to regional concerns, and ultimately more pluralistic. She echoed Fr Georgi Kochetkov in her commitment to bring religion closer to the people.

In dealing with Russia's current problems the movement had focussed on several practical tasks. Like the original Zemstvo Movement, the new organisation saw as its first task the gathering of statistical data on provincial Russia. 'Our government doesn't know very much about life in local towns and villages', said Panina. 'We have certain images of it, but little concrete information that would give us a clear, objective picture.' She also underscored the importance of local self-government; her organisation was seeking to cultivate local initiative and to give the residents of towns and villages a much greater voice in local government than they had had previously. It was also aiming to strengthen the educational system, health services, welfare agencies, agriculture, banking and insurance, and other vital public functions.

In contrast to the practice during much of the Soviet period, when emphasis was laid on 'the most powerful' and 'the very largest', Panina's organisation aimed to give much more importance to 'the structure of the small' and to socio-economic activity on a small scale – to small towns, local traditions and ecological concerns. It aimed to encourage small businesses rather than gigantic industrial plants. Panina was concerned to attract business capital and small enterprises to Russia's towns and villages, a goal she sought to accomplish through the organisation of which she was copresident, the Confederation of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. As far as she was concerned this was crucial: during most of the twentieth century capital and talent have moved in the opposite direction, toward the large industrial centres, leaving the small towns as backwaters of Russian civilisation. The Zemstvo Movement was

seeking to redirect that trend.

A hierarchical political and social structure has predominated throughout Russian history, and while the nineteenth-century *Zemstvo* Movement was a liberal attempt to break down the barriers between social classes, in practice the gentry typically played the leading role in the provinces.¹⁹ Panina was aware of this problem; but she continued to emphasise that Russia's present crisis can only be solved by a movement that involves all socio-economic classes and that rebuilds the community on a new basis. She insisted that the hierarchical model of society will no longer work; it will not serve the complex, decentralised economy that Russia must create. She emphasised social integration and interdependence. The first issue of the Movement's newspaper gave a great deal of attention to these principles, calling for cooperation and unity rather than conflict and the promotion of group interests.²⁰ The Movement's charter laid stress on mutual dependence at all levels from the village to the international community.

Within a few months of its creation at the end of 1993 the Russian *Zemstvo* Movement had established strong roots in the cities of Petrozavodsk, Krasnoyarsk, Kaluga and Krasnodar and had organised branches in more than one hundred Russian towns and villages.²¹ The revitalisation of the countryside involved religion for, as noted above, the *Zemstvo* Movement defined strengthening the spiritual life of the people as a task on which its ultimate goals were dependent. The Movement did not believe that its goals were achievable overnight, in a crash programme to deal with Russia's formidable internal problems. Rather it was seeking to inaugurate a long-term programme of cultural development. Nor did it focus on one particular aspect of life only, but instead stressed the connections between religion, economics, education and politics. Its emphasis on combining the old and the new and on decentralisation held promise of promoting a more pluralistic vision of religion and economics than Russia has known in the past.

The Movement aimed eventually to elect its representatives to the state parliament and to shape both the making and implementation of government policy. However, it was not very clear what the future of the Movement would be. Some people in the Movement embraced strong nationalistic ideas, and wanted to push the movement towards nationalistic politics.

Conclusion

It is extremely difficult to discern Russia's future course clearly because, as this essay has shown, powerful elements are working in opposite directions. For more than 70 years the Soviet system aimed to consolidate society around a central core of beliefs; for many people, as the editor of *Kontinent Igor'* Vinogradov has emphasised, this ideology replaced religion.²² The collapse of communism led to spiritual emptiness and to the search for new ideals, yet, as Vinogradov notes 'the political authorities are still underestimating the importance of the spiritual needs of our society'.

The individuals discussed here represent three different perspectives on the role of religion in the struggle to shape Russia's future. On one level these individuals are similar in that they all show how rapidly the transformation of Russia has already proceeded. Dmitri Furman is in a field of study that is still relatively new in Russia; his work shows the importance now given to measuring and analysing the aspirations and beliefs of society. Andrei Osipov bears witness to the struggle within the Church to recover religious traditions that were heavily assaulted during the Soviet period.

Yelena Panina represents a real mixture of ideals: embedded in the past but also new. Yet their three perspectives identify the central problems Russia faces very differently. For Furman the chaos and fragmentation of Russian society is the key issue, and the need to redefine its work ethic is the most essential concern. For Osipov the problem of religious education – traditional, Orthodox, hierarchically based education – is the main issue in rebuilding the community. For Panina, reconstruction of the country requires beginning at the level of the units she sees as fundamental, the small towns and villages, where reforms are likely to be easier to implement than in the big cities and the large industrial organisations. The sociologist Furman is pessimistic about the role of religion in general and of the Orthodox Church in particular in rebuilding the community. 'When I look at the Church and its publications', he says, 'I find little that is interesting or creative and new'. Osipov, by contrast, believes that the strengthening of Russia's spiritual life is essential for the transformation of society. Panina is hopeful that her Zemstvo Movement will promote the development of civil society and a parliamentary order. In laying the foundation for this human rights are central, and here she sees religion as a crucial contributor. Her ideas are similar to those expressed by Czech President Havel in his Philadelphia address in summer 1994. Exploring the origins of human rights, Havel emphasised that they are rooted in the 'awareness of our being anchored in the Earth and the universe, the awareness that we are not here alone nor for ourselves alone but that we are an integral part of higher, sometimes mysterious entities against whom it is not advisable to blaspheme', and that 'this forgotten awareness is encoded in all religions'.²³

The programmes of these three individuals highlight the problems, obstacles and opportunities currently facing the Church. As it tries to find its proper role, the Church mirrors the struggle taking place in Russian society. A prominent segment of the church hierarchy and most of its priests see the Church's main mission as preserving the past and seeking to recover what has been lost in the Soviet period. They see modernisation and reform within the Church as a threat. Increasingly, according to Igor Vinogradov, 'this group is trying to reestablish the Church's former connections with state power and to the government'. But the Church also has within it a group of people who see its future role and purpose in very different terms. The 'reformers' are often hidden from view, but their importance should not be underestimated. They are represented by priests like Fr Georgi Kochetkov and his followers in Moscow, and by some forty young Orthodox priests who protested at the patriarch's decision to remove Father Georgi from his parish. Published in the newspaper *Segodnya*, their petition strongly advocated the need for reform within the Church. 'What the Orthodox Church needs most of all', says Sergei Filatov, a scholar of religion and a believer who is close to the reformers, 'is more democracy, more openness, and more willingness to compromise; its fear of innovation and desire for security greatly undermine its effectiveness.'²⁴

More than a century ago Fedor Dostoyevsky wrote the chapter 'The Grand Inquisitor' in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov* about the meaning of freedom. As he showed brilliantly, freedom in the religious sense – the kind of freedom that Jesus offered – is extremely difficult and painful. What people most crave, he argued, is not freedom, but miracle, mystery and authority – the elements that the Grand Inquisitor promised them. The current attempt to reform the Church from within and to redefine its role in Russian society entails a similar conflict between freedom and authority. The issues that Dostoyevsky raised in his novel are vital issues in the Russian Church today.

Notes and References

- ¹ Vaclav Havel, 'The new measure of man', *The New York Times*, 8 July 1994, p. 15A.
- ² Details of the Kochetkov incident are discussed in an interview with Fr Georgi Kochetkov, Aleksandr Kopirovsky and Aleksandr Kyrlezhev, conducted by Igor' Vinogradov and Sergei Yurov, in July 1994: 'Vstrecha v redaktsii Kontinenta', *Kontinent*, no. 3, 1994, pp. 207–19; further details were provided to me by Igor' Vinogradov, chief editor of *Kontinent*, in an interview in Moscow, 14 June 1994. See also Philip Walters, 'Current developments in Russia and the response of the Russian Orthodox Church,' Niels C. Nielsen, Jr. (ed.), *Christianity after Communism: Social, Political, and Cultural Struggle in Russia* (Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1994), p. 99.
- ³ Aleksandr Kyrlezhev, 'Ponimayet li bog po-russky? Spor o yazyke bogoslužheniya', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 21 April 1994, p. 5. The texts and prayers used in the liturgy were skilfully translated by a member of the community, Sergei Averintsev, a leading philologist, stylist and poet very much respected in both the scholarly and religious circles of Russia.
- ⁴ *ibid.*
- ⁵ James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1996), pp. 27–37.
- ⁶ Treatment of the difficult and controversial relationship of the Orthodox Church to state power in the Soviet Union may be found in: Philip Walters, 'A survey of Soviet religious policy', Sabrina Petra Ramet (ed.), *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993), pp. 3–30; Igor' Yakovenko, 'Pravoslaviye i istoricheskiye sud'by Rossii', *Obshchestvennyye nauki i sovremennost'*, no. 2, 1994, pp. 47–56; Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: A Contemporary History* (Croom Helm, London, 1986), pp. 251–84; and Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Orthodox Church under the Soviet Regime, 1917–1982*, 2 vols. (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1984).
- ⁷ Igumen Innokenti, 'Deklaratsiya mitropolita Sergiya i sovremennaya tserkov', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 29 July 1992, p. 5; an English translation of this article may be found in *Russian Studies in History*, vol. 32, no. 2, Fall 1993, pp. 82–88.
- ⁸ Igor' Vinogradov, interview with the author, Moscow, 14 June 1994.
- ⁹ D. E. Furman, 'Stalinizm i my s religiovedcheskoi tochki zreniya', Kh. Kovo (ed.), *Osmyslit' kul't Stalina* (Progress, Moscow, 1989), pp. 402–26; S. B. Filatov and D. E. Furman (eds), *Religiya i demokratiya: na puti k svobode sovesti* (Progress-Kul'tura, Moscow, 1993).
- ¹⁰ Furman, 'Stalinizm i my...', p. 426.
- ¹¹ Dmitri Yefimovich Furman, interview with the author, Moscow, 6 June 1994.
- ¹² Andrei Osipov, interview with the author, Sergiyev Posad, 11 June 1994.
- ¹³ Kyrlezhev, 'Ponimayet li bog po-russky?', p. 5.
- ¹⁴ Yelena Vladimirovna Panina, interview with the author, Moscow, 14 June 1994.
- ¹⁵ 'Rukovodyashchiye organy Rossiiskogo zemskogo dvizheniya', *Zemsky vestnik*, no. 1, May 1994, pp. 4–5. In my interview with her Panina also mentioned that, unlike that of the nineteenth-century Movement, the governing board of her Movement included six provincial governors. Her Movement aimed to avoid the conflict between provincial governors and the *zemstva* that had marked its predecessor. Panina also pointed out the need for religious education in schools established by the *zemstva*; such classes, she said, would be voluntary rather than a compulsory part of the curriculum, but she stressed the importance of religious instruction in rebuilding provincial life.
- ¹⁶ 'Ustav obshchestvenno-politicheskogo ob'yedineniya "Rossiiskoye zemskoye dvizheniye"', *Zemsky vestnik*, no. 1, May 1994, pp. 4–5.
- ¹⁷ D. Likhachev, 'Kul'turnoye odichaniye', *Izvestiya*, 29 May 1991, p. 3.
- ¹⁸ 'Beseda s Kirillom, arkhiepiskopom Smolenskim i Vyazemskim', D. E. Furman and O. Mark (Smirnov) (eds.), *Na puti k svobode sovesti* (Progress, Moscow, 1989), p. 121. Metropolitan Kirill is one of the cochairmen of the Russian Zemstvo Movement, and as

Panina noted in her interview 'he has been a main figure in the movement from the beginning.'

¹⁹ See Roberta Thompson Manning, 'The zemstvo and politics, 1864–1904' in Terence Emmons and Wayne S. Vucinich (eds), *The Zemstvo in Russia: An Experiment in Local Self-Government* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982), pp. 142–46, 165–68.

²⁰ Yelena Panina, 'U Rossii svoya sud'ba', *Zemsky vestnik*, no. 1, May 1994, pp. 14–16, and Grigori Gerasimenko, 'Opyt zemskogo samoupravleniya', pp. 19–22. Legislation on provincial government was at that time still in the process of formulation. In September 1994 the Russian Zemstvo Movement sponsored and organised a conference in Saratov, attended by members of both government and parliament who presented draft legislation for the administration and development of the provinces. Panina and other members of the Russian Zemstvo Movement offered commentary on these plans, trying to shape the new laws to fit their vision of provincial needs.

²¹ Panina, 'U Rossii svoya sud'ba', p. 15.

²² Igor' Vinogradov, interview with the author, Moscow, 14 June 1994.

²³ Havel, *loc. cit.*

²⁴ Sergei Borisovich Filatov, interview with the author, Moscow, 15 June 1994.