

**IDEOLOGY OR ISOLATIONISM? RUSSIAN IDENTITY AND ITS INFLUENCE
ON ORTHODOX-CATHOLIC RELATIONS**

PART III: POPE JOHN PAUL II AND A PROSPECTIVE VISIT TO RUSSIA

by Catherine Clare Caridi

Catherine Clare Caridi (Roman Catholic) has graduate degrees in both Canon Law (J.C.L., Catholic University of America) and Russian Studies (M.A., Georgetown University). She practices law and teaches in Northern Virginia. Her regular column on canonical questions can be read online at Catholic Exchange (www.catholicexchange.com).

Introduction

In Part I of this article, I discussed the notion of Russian-ness, and the fact that a traditional facet of being Russian has been membership in the Orthodox Church. Because of this historical connection, the Western-style notions of freedom of conscience which came with the collapse of the Soviet Union are challenged by the Russian Orthodox hierarchy, as contrary to Russian traditions and to historical notions of Russian identity. For this reason, consequent legislation restricting religion freedoms in Russia have often been publicly supported by the Moscow Patriarchate.

In Part II, I focused particularly on the activity of the Catholic Church in Russia, and its renewed ministry to Catholics in a territory where it had been underground for decades. It was seen that the at-best cool attitude of Russian Orthodoxy toward public practice of the Catholic faith in Russia is related to the Orthodox leadership's view that historically, Russian Orthodoxy alone is the traditional faith of all ethnic Russians. In contrast, the expansion of Catholic ministry and social outreach within Russian territory is consistent with Catholicism's ecclesiological view that one's faith is not tied to one's ethnic background or place of residence. The fact that these two viewpoints stand in opposition to each other is especially evident with regard to the question of proselytism among the Russian people. The Russian Orthodox hierarchy accuses Catholic clergy of engaging in proselytizing in Russia—a charge which the Catholic Church firmly denies.

Now, in the third and final part of this article, I give a case study in point, a concrete instance in which all the history, culture, politics and theology discussed previously can be seen to influence the outcome of a particular issue in the world of contemporary Russian Orthodox-Catholic ecumenical relations. Before his death in 2005, Pope John Paul II was anxious to travel to Russia, one of the few countries of the world which he had never visited

as Pope. While he could have visited the country in his capacity as political head of the Vatican City State, he insisted that he wished to travel there as head of the Catholic Church. As such, it was always his practice to obtain first the agreement of a nation's religious leaders, and Patriarch Alexei II of Moscow declined to give it, citing as his reason the problem of proselytism by Catholics among the Russian people. The first section of Part III will address this issue in further detail, and describe some of the negotiations that have become public between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches concerning a papal visit to Russia.

The second section will examine a major reason put forth by the Pope for his desire to visit Moscow: he wished to return the ancient and historic icon of Our Lady of Kazan, which had disappeared from Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution, and had later come into the Pope's personal possession. Assertions by the Moscow Patriarchate, that this was merely an excuse being leveraged by the Pope to gain entry into Russia, were in part fueled by conflicting findings about the authenticity of the icon belonging to John Paul II, and the consequent significance of its return to Moscow.

The conclusions which I hope the reader will draw from this extended discussion may by this point be evident, but I will nevertheless end by drawing some brief inferences, in broad terms, concerning the possible long-term means by which some sort of solution to this unfortunate situation may be found.

The Well Traveled Pope

Few are unaware that Pope John Paul II, after his election to the papacy in October 1979, quickly became the most widely traveled Pope in the history of the Church. Before his death in 2005, he visited 129 countries outside Italy, and "was said to have been seen by more people than anyone else in history."¹

The Pope did not limit his travels to countries with predominantly Catholic, or even Christian, populations. He visited a number of non-Christian nations, such as Syria, Israel, and Japan; and a planned trip to Mongolia in 2003 was cancelled only due to John Paul's failing health.

In his unique role as both a spiritual leader and the head of an independent country, Vatican City, the Pope's protocol for an official visit to a foreign country had two parts. The

¹ "The Church Loses its Light," *Washington Post*, April 3, 2005, p. A34.

first requirement, of course, was an official invitation from the political head of state, but John Paul also refused to travel anywhere without the permission/invitation of the head of the country's predominant religion or church. In this way the Pope strove to avoid any appearance that he was entering the country for the purpose of "stealing" souls away from an already established national faith.

So long as the Soviet Union was controlled by the Communist Party, which officially espoused atheism, there was naturally no expectation that the Pope would receive an official invitation from Party leaders to visit the country. But with the collapse of communism and the concomitant re-birth of religious freedom, it was hoped that such a visit could ultimately be arranged.

And an invitation from Russia's political leadership was not long in coming. The Pope was actually first invited by Gorbachev, still head of the Soviet Union, during his historic visit to the Vatican in 1989. Subsequent and multiple invitations to visit Russia came from both Presidents Yeltsin and Putin, the last during a presidential visit to the Vatican in November 2003.

Ironically, however, John Paul now had the required invitation from the head of state, but was unable to obtain approval for a visit from Patriarch Alexei II.² In 1996 it appeared that both Moscow and the Vatican were coming close to an agreement concerning a papal visit and a meeting with the Patriarch. But the arrangement fell through, and the reasons proffered for the breakdown seem to depend on one's perspective. Catholic sources have asserted that "the main obstacle to that meeting [between John Paul and Alexei] was the re-emergence of Russian nationalism and Patriarch Alexei's evident identification with the political alliance of conservative-nationalists in his country."³ In contrast, Metropolitan Kirill, in a November 2003 press conference in New York, mentioned that "in 1996, an agreement had been reached between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Vatican concerning a meeting... it was all arranged... the Pope and Patriarch would sign a mutual

² See, e.g., "'Vatikan: Vizit Papy Rimskogo v Rossiiu nevozmozhen,'" February 23, 2004, http://lenta.ru/russia/2004/02/2/cardinal_Printed.htm, in which Cardinal Kasper addressed the general reason why the Pope had not yet visited Russia: "My ne mozhem sdelat' eto protiv voli Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi. Etot vopros dolzhen obsuzhdat'sia s Moskovskim Patriarkhatom."

³Dominik Morawski, "Towards Moscow," *Inside the Vatican*, June/July 1999, p. 16. The author indicated that he had "base his report on an authoritative study by Russian Orthodoxy specialists in the Vatican." A year later, Morawski wrote that "According to reliable Vatican sources, the Patriarchate suffers from a sort of 'inferiority complex' in regard to the Catholic Church, and especially the charismatic John Paul II. The complexity of the present situation, in fact, derives from intrinsic weaknesses in the Moscow Patriarchate. The Vatican will have to wage a delicate psychological battle before establishing a normal reciprocal relationship with its Orthodox sister Church in Russia." "Why the Orthodox Veto?" *Inside the Vatican*, July-July 2000, p. 19.

declaration... but not long before the planned meeting, the Vatican struck out of the agreed-upon text those very conditions upon which depended our future relations.”⁴

Subsequently, whenever pressed for an explanation for the Russian Orthodox Church’s refusal to give its approbation to a papal visit, the Moscow Patriarchate cited difficulties with the Catholic Church’s missionary activities in Russia⁵, as evidence that it would not be appropriate for the Pope to visit the country at this time. As Alexei himself expressed it in an interview with Great Britain’s *The Tablet* in February 2004, “I myself also need to justify meeting the Pope. If I simply meet with him in front of TV cameras, then there will be no concrete improvement in our relationship. My flock will not understand me. That is why we are saying that such a meeting must be preceded by concrete steps to improve the relationship between our Churches.”⁶

At his death on April 2, 2005, Pope John Paul II had made official visits to a number of countries which had been part of the Soviet Union, including Georgia (November 1999), Ukraine (June 2001), and Azerbaijan (May 2002). He had also begun to forge closer ties with other Orthodox leaders in Eastern Europe, perhaps most notably with Patriarch Teoctist of Romania. But he had not traveled to Russia. Patriarch Alexei had never given his approval for a papal visit.

An “Excuse” for a Papal Visit? The History of the Icon of Our Lady of Kazan

While the Pope no doubt would have liked to visit Russia simply in order to meet with Catholic clergy and laity there, as well as to meet and discuss ecumenical relations with members of the Orthodox hierarchy, he began quietly and diplomatically to make it increasingly clearer that he had an even greater object in view. John Paul also wished to come to Russia so that he might personally return the Icon of Our Lady of Kazan to the Russian Orthodox Church.⁷

⁴ “RPTs gotova obsudit’ vozmozhnosti vstrechi patriarkha s papoi,” November 13, 2003, www.gazeta.ru/lenta_body.shtml. (My translation.) Kirill did not mention what the “conditions” were that the Vatican had changed.

⁵ See, e.g., “Prezident otvechaet za tserkov’,” http://religion.ng.ru/printed/facts/2003-07-02/1_president.html: “...Patriarkh Aleksii II i drugie oficial’nye litsa v Moskovskoi Patriarkhii zaiavliayut o nesvoevremennosti vizita Papy v Moskvu v sviazi s protivorechiiaami mezhdu Tserkvami iz-za missionerskoi deiatel’nosti (prozelitizma) na territorii Rossii...”

⁶ Paul Vallely, “‘Still Waiting for Goodwill’: The Tablet Interview with Alexei II, Moscow’s Patriarch,” February 14, 2004, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/cgi-bin/register.cgi/tablet-00853>.

⁷ While there may have been no official, public statement from the Vatican to this effect until a later date, the Pope himself made his intention clear during various meetings at the Vatican with both Russian religious leaders and political officials, including President Putin. See, e.g., <http://orthodoxeurope.org/print/7/1/37.aspx>: “On January 25, 2002, Pope John Paul II received Metropolitan Pitirim [of Volokolamsk] and Bishop Hilarion [of Kerch] in

The account of the history of that particular image of Our Lady of Kazan⁸ which, for over a decade, had remained in the Pope's private chapel in the Vatican, could almost have been culled from a detective novel, for its past is full of uncertainty and intrigue. Its long and circuitous journey from Russia to Rome, and John Paul's repeated attempts to return it to Moscow, could be seen as emblematic of the rocky state of relations between Russian Orthodoxy and Catholicism since the end of the Soviet Union.

The very origin of the icon, found amid the ruins of a house in Kazan that had burned down, is said to have been miraculous, for a nine-year-old girl reportedly found the icon in 1579 after the Mother of God appeared to her in a dream and told her where to dig among the ashes. When miraculous healings began to take place before the icon, Tsar Ivan the Terrible had a monastery constructed on the site where it had been found, both to commemorate its discovery and to house the original icon. A number of copies of the icon were made and taken to other cities in Russia, where some of them also became connected with reports of miraculous cures.

Consistent with the interplay between Orthodoxy and Russian national identity, the Icon of Kazan became connected with major historical events in the history of Russia. When, for example, Russian forces liberated the country from Polish and Lithuanian invaders in 1612 "easily, without a great battle,"⁹ the icon was being carried with the Russian army. "The Kazan Icon of the Mother of God was again used as a 'Victory Banner' by Tsar Peter the Great in his battle against the forces of Charles XII of Sweden. The victory climaxed in the celebrated battle of Poltava in 1709."¹⁰ Later the icon would accompany General Kutuzov into battle against Napoleon in 1812.

audience. In its course, the Pope of Rome expressed the wish to meet His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia to hand him over the Icon of Our Lady of Kazan." <http://english.pravda.ru/society/showbiz/47906-0>, March 29, 2003: "...following an audience with the Pontiff, Sergei Mironov, of the Russian Federation Council, said... Pope John Paul II had confirmed his intention to return the Icon of Our Lady of Kazan to Russia."

⁸ For a pre-revolutionary Russian history of the icon, the miracles it worked and its connection with Russian historical events, see, e.g., *Skazanie o Iavlennoi Kazanskoj ikone Bozhjei Materi* (Moskva, E. Konovalov, 1907). For a widely cited account by a Catholic priest who was directly involved in the icon's purchase and preservation by the Blue Army, see Mowatt, Archpriest John J., *The Holy and Miraculous Icon of Our Lady of Kazan* (Fatima, Portugal: Byzantine Center Domus Pacis, 1974). Undoubtedly the most thorough and accurate account of the icon's disappearance after the Bolshevik Revolution and its 20th-century journey leading to the Vatican has been published by Tatarstan journalist Dimitri Khafizov: "Sviatoe znamenie Rossii," *Pravoslavnyi sobesednik* 1/4 (2003), pp. 92-147, also found at http://www.religio.ru/relicoc/138_print.html. The author was involved in two documentary films on the subject, produced by studios in Russia and in Germany; and has also published a book about the icon, printed in Tatarstan, which is unfortunately unavailable in the United States. He was a member of the official Tatar commission authorized to negotiate with the Vatican for the return of the icon to Russia.

⁹ "...legko, bez bolshogo boia." *Skazanie*, p. 24.

¹⁰ Mowatt, p. 8, erroneously gives the date as 1790.

Even during the relatively early years of its known existence, the location where the original icon was kept was already being changed often, as different Tsars ordered it to be moved at various dates between cathedrals in Kazan, Moscow, and St. Petersburg. At the same time, numerous copies of the icon continued to be circulated throughout the country and since they also often came to be regarded as miraculous, confusion subsequently arose as to which was the original. Accounts that attempt to trace the history of the original icon do not always agree, and their conclusions as to where the original is now often vary. The *Skazanie*, for example, notes that after the Russian military victory in 1612, the original icon was at one point in a church in Lubyanka (in Moscow); then was taken in 1630 to a cathedral named after it in Kitai-Gorod (now on Red Square, in Moscow); and after Peter the Great's victory was removed to St. Petersburg, where over the course of several years it remained in several different churches, until a cathedral named after the icon was built by Tsar Paul I in the early 1800s specifically to house it.¹¹ The St. Petersburg icon had, meanwhile, been covered with a jeweled oklad, which the Russian Imperial Government in 1900 estimated to be worth over 35,000 rubles.¹² Four years later, the St. Petersburg cathedral was broken into by thieves and the icon disappeared.

But meanwhile, other priceless, heavily bejeweled versions of the icon had come also to be considered the original, which would suggest that the one stolen from St. Petersburg might have merely been a copy. With the passage of the centuries, there were three main versions of the icon, any—or none—of which might in fact have been the original: the one housed in St. Petersburg, one in the cathedral on Red Square in Moscow, and one in the original church in Kazan.

With the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Russian churches were all too frequently stripped of their icons and other artistic valuables, which were either destroyed or sold abroad to finance the new government. Presumably for this reason, the icon in Moscow's Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan disappeared in 1918.

Khafizov notes that the icon which was later in the Vatican was included in a sale of artwork that was organized by the Bolsheviks in either 1919 or 1920: "In the first years of

¹¹ *Skazanie*, Chapter VI, pp. 38-41. To cite another, much more recent example of a historical account of the icon, "S momenta poiavleniia ikony v Moskve ee istoriia stanovitsia zapitannoi. Chast' istochnikov utverzhdaet, chto ... podlinnik... byl vodruzhen v khrame na Krasnoi ploshadi. Drugie soobshchayut, chto original ostavalsia vse-to vremia v Kazani." "Nenaprasnyi i nesluchainyi dar," http://lenta.ru/articles/2005/07/22/kazan/_Printed.htm . The author does not even mention the third possibility that the original was in St. Petersburg.

¹² Mowatt, p. 8.

Soviet power, i.e., between 1917 and 1935, many valuable works of art and antiquities, the background and history of which it is impossible to trace, were taken abroad out of Russia.”¹³ It appears that the Kazan icon which was included in the 1919/20 art sale may have been the one from the Moscow cathedral.

Whether or not the icon found a buyer at this sale is unclear. Given the fabulous number and size of the jewels in its oklad,¹⁴ it would undoubtedly have attracted attention from potential buyers less interested in the icon itself and its religious and historical significance, and more in its jeweled covering. What we do know is that a London jeweler named Norman Weiss somehow obtained the icon in 1928, and immediately offered it for sale. He does not seem to have found a buyer for many years, possibly because of his high asking price.¹⁵

The icon was purchased 1950 by wealthy British adventurer and art collector Frederick Albert Mitchell-Hedges, who took it to his castle in Berkshire, England. There, Russian emigres were able to see the icon, and while some were apparently convinced, based on their own memories, that it was the icon which had disappeared from St. Petersburg 50 years earlier, others were equally adamant that they had seen this very icon in the cathedral in Moscow. It should be noted that black-and-white photos still exist of both the icon that had been in St. Petersburg, and the one in Moscow. The St. Petersburg icon, while similar, can in fact be seen to differ significantly from the icon owned by Mitchell-Hedges.

When Mitchell-Hedges died in 1959, his adopted daughter Anne inherited the castle and its contents. Khafizov asserts that one of her father’s last wishes was that the icon be made accessible to the Russian Orthodox Church, but that it not fall again into the hands of the communists.¹⁶ Anne Mitchell-Hedges subsequently offered the icon for sale to Russian Orthodox believers in the United States for \$500,000, allegedly only the value of its jewels. The Russian Orthodox Bishop of San Francisco, John Shakhovskoi, arranged that an internationally known expert on iconography be permitted to examine the icon in England.

¹³ Khafizov, para 2. (This and all following English quotes from this work are my translations.)

¹⁴ During the 1960s, a California art conservation firm examined the icon, and reported that its jeweled covering contained “663 diamonds totaling about 80 carats; 158 rubies, about 35 carats; 32 emeralds, about 220 carats; 6 sapphires of about 30 carats; and about 150 pearls.” Khafizov. Writing in the 1970s, Mowatt noted that “in 1972, several hundred more precious stones plus more than one thousand more pearls have been added to the Kazan Icon here in Fatima.” p. 16.

¹⁵ Khafizov notes that “Ia dumayu, chto-to bylo sviazano s vnushitel’noi summoi, kotoruyu prosil za nee trgovets.... On terpelivo zhdal svoego pokupatel’ia—bogatogo chudaka ili fanatichnogo kollektionera.” Para. 6.

¹⁶ “Odnim iz poslednikh zhelanii pokoinogo Mitchell-Khedzhesa bylo to, chtoby po vozmozhnosti, sviataia ikona stala dostupna Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi, no pri etom ne popala by snova pod kontrol’ kommunistov.” Para. 27.

The art historian compared it to known details about the three Kazan icons from St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Kazan, and among his findings he noted that its dimensions differed from those of the icon that had been in Kazan.¹⁷

Russian Orthodox believers in the United States spent years trying unsuccessfully to raise the sum required to purchase the icon from Mitchell-Hedges. In 1970, when it became apparent that Mitchell-Hedges was arranging to sell the icon to a private art collector in Texas, the U.S. branch of the international lay Catholic organization called the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima stepped in and agreed to purchase the icon for an unspecified sum.¹⁸

What was specified from the start, however, was the Blue Army's intention behind their purchase. The icon would be held indefinitely on behalf of the Russian people, until the political situation in the Soviet Union had changed and it would be possible to return it to the Orthodox Church in Russia, where it rightfully belonged.

Under high security, both because of the icon's tremendous monetary value and because of concerns that a robbery might be attempted by the Soviet government, the icon was transferred to Fatima, Portugal, the site of the Blue Army's international headquarters. It was installed in a Byzantine-style chapel there, to await its ultimate return to Russia.

But in the 1990s the icon vanished without explanation from the chapel in Fatima where it had been held for over 20 years. For a number of years its whereabouts were not publicly known—until a combination of rumor and quiet remarks made by Pope John Paul II revealed that it was now in his private chapel in the Vatican.

How had the icon come to be in Rome? In 1993, after the collapse of the Soviet Union had led to new religious freedoms in Russia, the Blue Army had secretly signed over the icon to John Paul II, who became its legal owner. This was done with the understanding that the Pope himself would best be able to negotiate its return to the Orthodox Church in Russia. According to Khafizov, “this was not the individual initiative of somebody in the Pope's entourage. His Holiness himself requested that they bring the icon to Rome, because he wanted personally to take it back to Russia.”¹⁹

¹⁷ “Obraz Kazanskoi Bozhiei Materi, poiavivshiisia v Anglii, vo mnogom sovpadaet s sokhranivshimisia opisaniiami ikony, ischeznuvshei iz Kazani, no razmery ee vse-taki neskol'ko inye...” Khafizov, para 35. The author, a Russian Orthodox believer, is convinced that the icon in the Vatican was the one that was housed in the Kazan cathedral in Moscow until shortly after the 1917 Revolution, and that it is in fact the original icon found in 1579.

¹⁸ The actual purchase price was never publicly disclosed, and estimates vary widely, starting as low as \$100,000. Khafizov, however, insists that “mne ona izvestna tochno do tsenta: tri milliona dollarov SSHA.”

¹⁹ Ibid.

Again, no public, official statement to this effect was made from the Vatican. Instead, the Pope clearly preferred quiet diplomacy. He was eager to restore one of Russia's most precious icons to its Orthodox hierarchy as a fraternal gesture of good will.

In contrast, the Communications Office of the Department for External Church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church issued a very official press statement on May 19, 2003.²⁰ Noting that a recent examination of the icon in the Vatican by art experts from the Russian Federation Ministry of Culture had determined that the icon "is a 18th-century copy" of the original, the statement described it merely as "one of many which were in the liturgical usage and were illegally taken out of the country in the years of upheavals." Many such icons had already been returned to Russia, and therefore "the attempts to link the returning of this icon with the question of a visit of the Pope of Rome to Russia are astonishing, the more so that the Vatican has not negotiated such a visit with the Russian Orthodox Church." Repeating previous assertions that the Catholic Church first had to renounce proselytism in Russia, the statement added that "the Vatican's policy is aimed at aggravating the existing problems."

Once again, negotiations were at an impasse. The Moscow Patriarchate downplayed the historical significance of the Kazan icon in the Vatican, and continued to refuse to approve a papal visit to Russia without the Catholic Church first renouncing its proselytizing practices.

Not everyone in Russia agreed with Patriarch Alexei's position. Attempts by the president of Tatarstan (the capital of which is Kazan) to establish dialogue with the Vatican were the subject of public criticism from the Moscow Patriarchate in the same year. Noting that ecumenical dialogue between the two Churches "was in no need of a mediator," the spokesman for the Patriarchate asserted that "some in Russia don't want to see the Pope come to Russia, and to Kazan in particular."²¹

In August of the following year, Itar-Tass reported that Patriarch Alexei told President Putin that since the Kazan Icon in the Vatican "is one of many copies, not the original miracle-working image that disappeared at the beginning of the 20th century," "for

²⁰ <http://www.russian-orthodox-church.org.ru/ne305196.htm>.; see also Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's account, <http://www.ukrweekly.com/Archive/2003/220307.shtml>. The proposed papal visit in 2003 would have taken place on John Paul's return from a planned trip to Mongolia—a trip which was in any case cancelled for health reasons.

²¹ http://www.lenta.ru/russia/2003/06/16/shaimiyev/_Printed.htm : "Dialog mezhdru Russkoi pravoslavnoi i Rimsko-katolicheskoi Tserkviami ne nuzhdaetsia v posrednikakh.... Nekotorye v Rossii ne zhelayut priezda v Rossiyu, v chastnosti, v Kazan', Papy Rimskogo...." (My translation.)

that reason there is no need for the pope himself to bring it.”²² It is interesting to note that from this point on, any mention by Orthodox sources of the Kazan icon in the Vatican invariably describes it as a “spisok,” or a copy.

Shortly thereafter, Pope John Paul for the first time made a public statement about his intention to hand the icon over to the Russian Orthodox Church.²³ But by now it had become clear to the Pope that, between his increasingly serious health problems and the intransigence of the Moscow Patriarch, a papal visit to Russia was not going to take place. Instead, John Paul arranged that a delegation of members of the Catholic hierarchy, led by Cardinal Walter Kasper of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, would return the icon—which the Pope said had become “dear to me personally, since she became the witness of all my daily troubles”²⁴—to the Orthodox hierarchy in Moscow on August 28, 2004.

On that date the icon was formally handed over to Patriarch Alexei II in a ceremony in the Cathedral of the Dormition, in the Kremlin. Accompanying the icon was a letter to the Patriarch from the Pope, noting that he was sending the Catholic delegation with the icon “in joy and in sentiments of communion that animate me and that have animated my Predecessors...the Mother of God, in her holy icon known as “Kazanskaya,” has reunited around her the Orthodox faithful, as well as their faithful Catholic brothers from other parts of the world...”²⁵

In response, Alexei thanked the Vatican for this “symbolic act” of returning to Russia “one of the late copies of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God,” adding that now he awaited from Catholics “more meaningful” steps toward regularizing relations between the two Churches.²⁶ Proselytizing was mentioned yet again as a key problem hindering ecumenical relations.

The icon was not taken either to the Kazan Cathedral on Red Square, or to the Cathedral in St. Petersburg. According to press reports, it was moved for the time being to

²² Quoted in the *St. Petersburg Times*, August 17, 2004, http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=1311.

²³ “Papa Rimskii Ioann Pavel II segodnia spervye publichno ob’iavil o namerenii peredat’ Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi spisok ikony Kazanskoi Bozhei materi, kotoraiia khranilas’ do sikh por v lichnykh pokoiakh pontifika.” “Papa Rimskii poobeshchal vernut’ Rossii ikonu Kazanskoi Bogomateri,” http://lenta.ru/world/2004/08/22/icon/_Printed.htm

²⁴ “...eta ikona ‘emu ochen’ doroga,’ poskol’ku ona ‘stala svidelitsei vsekh ego kazhdodnevnnykh trudov.’” Ibid. (My translation.)

²⁵ Quoted in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, October 16, 2004. (My translation.)

²⁶ “Moskovskii Patriarkhat poblagodaryl Vatikan za ‘simvolicheskii akt’ vozvrazheniia v Rossiyu ‘odnogo iz pozdnikh spisokov Kazanskoi ikony Bozhei Materi’ i teper’ ozhidaet ‘bolee znachimykh’ shagov, napravlennykh na uregulirovanie otnoshenii mezhdu Tserkvami.” “RPTs zhdet ot Vatikana ‘bolee znachimykh’ shagov,” September 1, 2004, http://www.lenta.ru/russia/2004/08/26/church/_Printed.htm. (My translation)

the house chapel at the Patriarch's residence in Moscow, and the Patriarch suggested that it might in the future be taken to Kazan, to the monastery currently being reconstructed on the site of the discovery of the original icon.²⁷

Almost a year later, on July 21, 2005, Alexei took the icon to Kazan, where he took part in celebrations to observe the 450th anniversary of Kazan's Orthodox eparchy. In a ceremony in the cathedral within the Kazan Kremlin, in the presence of Tatar President Shaimiev—who had been chastised two years earlier by Orthodox officials for his attempts to help engage the Vatican in regular ecumenical dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church—the Patriarch handed over what was, in official press releases, termed “a copy of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God.”

In the numerous reports on this event found on the Moscow Patriarchate's official web-site, there was no mention of the fact that this icon had been returned to Moscow by the Catholic Church.²⁸ While the Patriarch did take this occasion to mention dialogue with those of other faiths, his speech was directed entirely to the Muslim population of Tatarstan, to whom Alexei gave assurances that “Muslim-Christian dialogue is a primary inter-religious activity of the Russian Orthodox Church.”²⁹ As was seen in Part I, the term “Christian” was in this context plainly synonymous with “Orthodox.” The Patriarch also cited, as an example of successful inter-religious dialogue with Islam, the fact that a new state holiday had been established, commemorating the 1612 victory of Russian forces, carrying the Kazan Mother of God, over “foreign occupiers”³⁰ — Polish and Lithuanian Catholics.

²⁷ “Spisok ikony Kazanskoi Bozhiei materi budet poka khranit'sia v domovom khrame rabochei rezidencii Aleksiiia II v Chistom pereulke. 'Potom budem reshat'. Esli budet vosstanovlen monastyr' na meste iavleniia chudotvornoi ikony v Kazani, obraz mozhet byt' peredan emu.” “Delegatsiia Vatikana peredala Aleksiiyu II Kazanskuyu ikonu Bozh'ei materi,” September 1, 2004, http://www.lenta.ru/russia/2004/08/28/icon/_Printed.htm

²⁸ See, among others, “Sviateishii Patriarkh Moskovskii i vseia Rusi Aleksii II peredal gradu Kazani spisok proslavlennoi ikony Bozhiei Materi,” <http://www.mospat.ru/print/trips/id/9758.html>; and “Akt o peredache chtimogo spiska Kazanskoi ikony Bozhei Materi Kazanskoi eparkhii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi,” <http://www.mospat.ru/print/week/id/9759.html>.

²⁹ “Segodnia musul'mansko-khristianskii dialog iavliaetsia odnim is prioritnykh napravlenii mezhreligioznoi deiatel'nosti Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi.” “Slovo Sviateishego Patriarkha Moskovskogo i vseia Rusi Aleksiiia II posle Bozhestvennoi liturgii v Blagoveshenskom sobore Kazanskogo Kremliia.” <http://www.mospat.ru/print/appearances/id/9760.html>

³⁰ “Zamechatel'nyim primerom vzaimoponimaniia pravoslavnykh i musul'man stal fakt podderzhki initsiativy vvedeniia novogo gosudarstvennogo prazdnika—Dnia narodnogo edinstva, kotoryi promyslitel'no sovpadet s dnem prazdnovaniia Kazanskoi ikony Bozhiei Materi ustanovlennym nashei Tserkov'yu v chest' pobedy nad inozemnymi okkupantami v 1612 godu.” Ibid.

Conclusion

While the Moscow Patriarchate and the Vatican have been talking with each other once again since 2004, no one can honestly describe the relationship between the two Churches as a good one. Communications continue to be characterized by, on the Orthodox side, a mistrust that Catholics can easily construe as hostility and defensiveness; and on the Catholic side, by a very public display of openness that Orthodox can construe as a sense of superiority. While the hierarchy of each Church officially describes the other as a “sister” Church, and they continue to congratulate and wish each other well on feast days and other special occasions (such as the election of Pope Benedict XVI in April 2005), relations remain cold, even if no longer actually frozen.

But the Russian Orthodox Church’s position vis-à-vis Catholicism is not only consistent with its position toward other faiths which appear to be attracting believers from among the Russian population—it is also indicative of the disagreement that has once again come to the fore in Russia about the Russian identity. What does it mean to be a Russian? What should be Russia’s relationship to the West, both politically and culturally? And how much freedom can (and should) Russia accept without its citizenry developing into a body that is so diverse that it is no longer recognizable as uniquely Russian?

These are questions that have been debated by Russians for generations, and the fact that the terms “Slavophile” and “Westernizer” long ago became part of Russia’s vocabulary provides proof that the arguments became standard ones that are still far from settled. With the demise of the communist regime and the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russians now face the question of where to establish the parameters of their newfound freedom. The initial rush to embrace any and all facets of Western political democracy and economic capitalism has been tempered, in the minds of many, with the realization that some of the consequences of freedom appear to be eroding the populace’s sense of Russian-ness. So long as a significant percentage of Russia’s population sees this as a problem, the battle between openness (primarily to the West) and a striving to maintain cultural traditions will continue. The difficulties seen between Russian Orthodoxy and Catholicism are a symptom of this battle that is being fought, not so much between Russians and non-Russians, as among the Russian people themselves. And until Russians can establish as a body what their position toward other faiths should be, and how much freedom Russian citizens should have to act in accord with their consciences, the historical pattern of alternating periods of openness and restriction

(seen earlier in this paper) will continue, not only toward the Catholic Church, but to those of other faiths ministering within Russia's borders as well.

The Russian Orthodox Church, as an institution with tremendous historical and cultural importance to the Russian people, must establish its position on this question within the framework of Orthodox theology. And the hierarchy may find itself obliged to occupy a position within the country that is historically less socially important than in the past, but one that is consistent with its theological understanding of the teachings of other Christian but non-Orthodox Churches. Additionally, given the questions and persistent rumors regarding the infiltration of the Church by the Soviet government, care should be taken by Orthodox officials to show the public that the Church's position on this issue is in fact being driven by theological, rather than political motivations.

Meanwhile, Catholics ministering within Russia's borders must constantly be mindful of this ongoing discussion among Russians about the Russian identity and the role of non-Russian cultural elements within the country. As Catholicism has learned to adapt to the cultural conditions of countries throughout the world in the past, its leadership must now be similarly aware that the methods and means employed in Catholic ministry in European countries may well be entirely unsuited to Russia's environment, and that Russians' initial embrace of all things Western does not imply that Russia is simply another European country, that will automatically accept Catholicism as part of its culture like the rest. Catholics should not forget that remembrance of historical military conflicts between Catholic Poland and Orthodox Russia may very well still color the attitudes of Russians toward the Catholic Church—a Church that was headed until recently by a Pope who described himself publicly as a “son of Poland.”

In general, it is important ever to keep in mind that the standpoint of each Church, of Russian Orthodoxy and Catholicism, is grounded in both centuries of historical events that have shaped a particular cultural mindset, and a theological perspective that developed in great part from that very same historical and cultural framework. Neither side, in other words, can be expected simply to change its mind, as if its current stance on ecumenical relations is merely one of several equally plausible positions. If the two Churches are to reach some sort of common accord, both will be required to inch forward, gradually and slowly, in order to meet somewhere at a middle point which is currently the position held by

neither one. This implies that each Church's viewpoint will have to change, at least somewhat, and neither will in the end achieve everything that it now desires.

Making such concessions will be difficult enough even under the best of circumstances and with all the parties involved having the best of intentions. But no compromise will ever be reached if the leadership of either Church fails at least to try to appreciate the theological position and cultural heritage of the other, because without some degree of mutual understanding, any agreement will be impossible. And without a sincere desire on the part of each to strive to understand the other, so as to begin to work together rather than as competitors or enemies, any consensus will likewise remain elusive.