

**RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY FACES ISSUES OF THE DAY AND OF THE CENTURY - CHURCH AND SOCIETY, RELIGIOUS PLURALISM, MARTYRS AND MISSION.**

by Walter Sawatsky<sup>1</sup>

*Walter Sawatsky, the editor of REE since 1997, is Professor of Church History and Mission at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart IN, as well as consultant on East/West for Mennonite Central Committee. His doctorate is in Russian history. He has contributed numerous articles to historical and missiological journals in recent years on issues of proselytism, ecumenism, and theological education.*

The bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), under the leadership of Patriarch Alexei II, took a series of actions at their Council in August 2000 that were of such broad import that they must be seen as an agenda statement for a new decade, if not a new century. There was a decision on the canonization of Tsar Nicholas II's family, as "passion bearers", on the grounds of the manner in which they submitted to their executions. Two major official statements on social doctrine and on ecumenism and religious pluralism were presented and approved. A long list of 20<sup>th</sup> century martyrs during the Communist era were named. That is, after more or less a decade of work and some internal debate, Russian Orthodox leaders were addressing the most serious traumas and testing of the 20<sup>th</sup> century while proposing a teaching and practice stance for the new Russia. The statements were unprecedented and their content and implications are so major that there must surely be wide ranging discussion and debate within ROC circles and Russian society as a whole. This paper seeks to present a critical overview of what is at

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<sup>1</sup>An earlier version was presented at a panel on Russian Orthodoxy After the Bishops Council of 2000 at the November 2001 convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies. This revised version, presented at the annual meeting of CAREE in March 2002, was changed to provide brief summaries of the arguments of two other panelists (Professors Tom Bird and Alex Agadjanian referred to below) in order to draw attention to the way in which major decisions of the August Sobor were interrelated.

stake, especially with reference to relationships to other churches, both inside Russia and internationally.

## I. THE JUBILEE COUNCIL IN CONTEXT

Although meetings of the synod of bishops of the of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) became more regular after 1990, the Bishops' synod of 1994 was memorable for the way in which major differences, virtual fissures within Orthodox leadership, were so prominent that the council nearly acted to withdraw from the ecumenical movement. On the other hand, it was also at this meeting that there was a call for developing teaching materials in missiology for seminarians, and to launch a major new mission initiative. Also in 1994 Metropolitan Kirill of the External Church Relations Department appointed staff to begin drafting a social doctrine.<sup>2</sup> When the bishops gathered for their Jubilee Sobor in August of 2000 the divisions between conservatives and liberal or ecumenical churchmen were still a major point of alignment, but the ROC leadership was not contemplating drastic actions in either direction. Instead the Jubilee Synod met with a self-consciousness of a new millennium beginning, a sense of urgent tasks in society to which they must address themselves positively, and that therefore a compromise between the contrasting ideologies that various bishops supported would be found.

Hence it was readily acknowledged that the conservatives secured a modified canonisation of the last Tsar, Nicholas II, plus a long list of martyrs of the Soviet persecutions were named. Metropolitan Kirill and his Department of External Relations of the Patriarchate secured surprisingly easy passage of a lengthy "social concept statement" that certainly broke new ground for Orthodox social ethics. In addition, the bishops approved a lengthy statement on religious pluralism, formally titled *Osnovnyi printsipy otnosheniia russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi k*

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<sup>2</sup>According to a statement by Met. Kirill as reported by Irina Melnikov, "On Divorce, Abortion and Cloning" Segodnia 1 November 2000, in English translation in PDS Russia Religion News November 2000, (<http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0011a.html>.)

*inoslaviu* [Basic Principles for the Relationship of the Orthodox Church to Other Faiths].<sup>3</sup>

It seems prudent to sketch out the larger contextual framework for this subject before addressing issues raised by Professors Bird and Agadjanian, or developing the main points of the pluralism theme. We are faced with a curious pre-history that must be seen to recognize the truly major significance of ROC actions in August of 2000. To my knowledge there has never been a comprehensive statement on social ethics by the Russian Orthodox church, or any other part of Orthodoxy.<sup>4</sup> Some readers will recall the discomfort with which the late Father Florovsky addressed the broadly held assumption that Orthodoxy lacked not only a social doctrine, but appeared not to care about society.<sup>5</sup> I found myself thinking back to the time in the 6<sup>th</sup> century when Emperor Justinian in the 6<sup>th</sup> Novella articulated the desired relationship between the temporal and spiritual rulers of what came to be known as Byzantium. He thought in terms of the Kingdom of God as already partially realized in a Simfonia of common commitments and specified a division of duties between the Pentarchy of bishops/patriarchs and the Emperor as a kind of secular bishop. That Simfonia relationship was restated by Patriarch Photius in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, more so on behalf of churchly and theological interests, in the Epanagoge. Have we now reached the stage, where that Simfonia theory of church

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<sup>3</sup>I am relying on the Russian text as it appeared in <http://www.russian-orthodox-church.org.ru/s2000r13.htm>, the official web-site of the Russian Orthodox Church. “Inoslavie” should etymologically be related to “Pravoslavie”, thus contrasting “right praise” with “strange/foreign praise”. I have chosen to translate it as “Other Faiths” so it fits better into common terminology about dialogue with Other Faiths that can mean “other Christian confessions”, as it does in this document, or to Inter-Religious dialogue with other religions.

<sup>4</sup>Met. Kirill was quoted by Irina Melnikova as explaining that the “doctrine is not a transitory document and while it may not be of interest to uninformed people, for theologians it is even radical because the church has never before formulated its views on social questions.” (*PDS Russia Religion News*...1 November 2000).

<sup>5</sup>For example his essay of 1950 on “The Social Problem in the Eastern Orthodox Church”, reprinted in *Christianity and Culture*, Vol. 2 of the Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, Belmont MA: Nordland Publishing Co., 1974, 131-142.

and state, which has for many centuries been totally unsuitable for the realities of Orthodoxy's place in totalist governing institutions such as the Ottoman or Soviet Empires, has now been replaced with a social doctrine that addresses the realities of the context from a recognizably Orthodox perspective?

The year 2000 marked the beginning of a major 33 year initiative in Russia known as *Khristianstvo (Christianity) - 2000*. This initiative has not attracted much popular attention in the West so far, but its imaginative vision and capacity for deeply impacting Russian society reminds one of the foundation building impact of the ten year program launched by Cardinal Wysinski in Poland in the early 1960s, in which the Light and Life movement and the Worker's Solidarnosc union thereafter make sense. *Khristianstvo - 2000* seeks to engage thinking church leaders with other societal leaders by means of conferences, study projects, in order to address major issues from a Christian perspective. The many topics addressed in the Social Concept statement will no doubt become themes for the year as *Khristianstvo - 2000* proceeds toward its climax in 2030-33 when focusing on the life of Christ.

## **II. RESPONSE TO THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE AND CANONISATION ASSESSMENTS**

A key point that Tom Bird highlighted in his systematic review of the religious, social and political aspects of the decision approved at the Jubilee Synod of 2000 to declare Tsar Nicholas II a "holy passion-bearer" helps us account for the logic linking the Social Doctrine statement, the Religious Pluralism statement and the Canonisation. At issue was the healing of the division between the ROC and the Russian Orthodox Church [Outside Russia] (ROCOR). ROCOR's three-fold critique of the ROC was the latter's fateful declaration of loyalty and subservience to Soviet power in 1927, a stance referred to as Sergianism. Secondly there was ROCOR's anti-ecumenical stance, and its Monarchism, especially its wish to have

the Patriarchate canonize the Imperial Family.<sup>6</sup> The August 2000 synod therefore was a deliberate response detailing a social doctrine (much more extensive than mere church-state relations), a nuanced ecumenism, and a restrained acknowledgment of the passion-bearing of the Tsar and his family when executed, that was in the tradition of Saints Boris and Gleb. Would the ROCOR respond with overtures to reconciliation? Tom Bird quite rightly doubted that unity would follow, though ROCOR's Council of Bishops meeting October 14, 2000 declared that the new social doctrine "in essence cancels out the 1927 "Declaration" of Metropolitan Sergious by acknowledging the supremacy of the commandments of God over those demands of temporal powers..."

Since then ROCOR has been struggling internally between the stance of the supporters of the new primate Archbishop Lavr and that of the aging former Met. Vitaly, who resigned in July of 2001, then attempted to retract and began appointing new bishops. It is a struggle between the "unreconciled" and the "pacifists" (those seeking the peace of the church).<sup>7</sup>

This is why, in our attempt to assess the Jubilee Sobor's major actions it is necessary to examine each action as a theological issue to see how serious was the theological work, and to clarify the social and political dynamics as well. For example, since 1991 Russia has been seeking to reconstruct civil society without consensus on the cultural, intellectual and moral basis for doing so. A necessary question therefore is to ask whether the ROC will lead well in demonstrating the value of Orthodox intellectual theological culture for grounding the desirable modern society Russia wants to be. That is different from simply asserting that Russia was traditionally Orthodox and needs to revert to some status quo ante in its civil society quest. Patriarch Alexei stated at a news conference on November 5,

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<sup>6</sup>Thomas Bird, "St. Nicholas II: Religious, Social and Political Aspects of Canonization", AAASS panel on Russian Orthodoxy After the Bishops Council of 2000, Arlington VA November 2001., p. 7.

<sup>7</sup>See for example, "Unreconciled Vitaly Replaced by Cautious Laurus" *Obshchaia Gazeta*, November 7, 2001. English translation at <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0111b.html>.

2001 that “there is not a single church, including the Russian foreign church [meaning ROCOR], that can depart into isolation. We live in this world and we should, and we will deal with people of other confessions and religious beliefs.”<sup>8</sup>

Alex Agadjanian titled his assessment of the Social Doctrine statement as both “breakthrough to modernity” and “apology of traditionalism”. Agadjanian views the Social Doctrine (SD) as “first official, though indirect ... response to independent theological modernism of Christian East ... mainstream trends in Western culture... postmodernity as a whole”. His primary intent, in recognizing the unique genre of the SD, is to examine the “grand vistas” evident in the document “(through a long section on its ‘Vision of the World’), to identify the major contemporary challenges as perceived by the ROC and how to rate the responses - the stance on specific social doctrines - on a scale of “innovation-conservatism”.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the broad theme running through is the observation that the SD seeks to provide a “justification of the world as a legitimate object of the Church’s specific activities.”<sup>10</sup> Since this places the drafters in opposition to the world-resisting strategy associated with black clergy or Russian monasticism, and more so on the side of the white clergy, including locating the SD somewhat in the lineage of the Church Reforms of the 1860s, of 1905 and of later renovationists [though neither Agadjanian nor the document make any mention of the *Iz pod Glyb* writings of the 1970s, curiously],<sup>11</sup> Agadjanian in essence draws attention to the way in which - on many new social challenges - the SD offers creative, new (borrowed?) responses, whereas the conservatives get their satisfaction in the stances taken on church, nation and on military service.

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<sup>8</sup>*PDS Russia Religion News*, November 2001 (.../relnews/0111b.html)

<sup>9</sup>Alexander Agadjanian, “Breakthrough to Modernity, Apology of Traditionalism. Russian Orthodox View of Society and Culture.” (AAASS panel on Russian Orthodoxy After Bishops Council of 2000, Arlington VA Nov. 2001) p. 3.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>Known in English translation as Alexander Solzhenitsyn, ed. *From Under the Rubble*. (London: Collins & Harvell, 1975.)

Surely there are two responses to the SD of the ROC that are of special interest. One is the implicit dialogue within the ROC leadership that is accounted for in the way the SD was put together, and in the way the SD became a point of discussion. One particularly striking, nearly promising feature, was the initial response of ROCOR, suggesting that the SD represented an abandonment of Sergievism toward a stance of conditional subservience to a state, therefore a major barrier to reunification of ROC and ROCOR seemed to be removed. The subsequent interactions reveal how tricky such a re-union will be. Secondly, the Russian Duma itself began a ‘reading’ of the SD in April of 2001, intending to finish it by January 2002. That is, the SD is to provide a key point of reference for the current development of social policy by the state, and the renewed effort to articulate policy vis-a-vis the churches. (I will return to this point later by summarizing a major critique of the emerging state social policy, as articulated by the most prominent Baptist leader in today’s Russia, Iurii Sipko.)

The other response of particular interest here is the way in which other Christian traditions are beginning to respond to the SD. Although Agadjanian resorted to speaking of a “western” intellectual response, he ended up describing a liberal Protestant philosophical tradition as representing the West, not necessarily so recognized by other members of Western Protestant theology. That is, we probably need to await how ‘readers’ of the SD approaching it from Reformed, Lutheran, Free Church, Anglican, etc. perspectives would highlight key features. Agadjanian utilized the recent big *Catechism* of the Roman Catholic Church as somewhat like in genre to the SD, in order to contrast a more world embracing strategy he found in that Catechism with the retention of a world-resisting strategy in the SD.

I am not at all sure that is persuasive, on two grounds. For one, all Christian traditions have necessarily found themselves incorporating the ‘in this world but not of this world’ stance recommended by Jesus, hence world resisting or world embracing descriptors always required nuancing. Secondly, the recent shifts in emphasis of Catholic social doctrine as noticed in Papal statements and encyclicals in response to the post 1989 bipolar world are not part of the Catechism. In a recent

set of essays conveying Catholic theological discourse on this issue in Hungary, the key themes that emerged were ‘solidarity’ and ‘*sozialstaat*’, the latter signaling concerns for framing social doctrine within a state or society that had abandoned its Marxist postulates, but retained a strong sense of obligations to maintain a social net to support the needy, not surrendering them to the vagaries of unbridled capitalism.<sup>12</sup>

As noted above, ROCOR detected some affirmation of a prophetic stance toward misuse of state power when needed, but that is not quite the same as placing ROC within the trajectory of Christian churches speaking prophetically and calling for justice, as a way of contributing to a democratization of society. American Orthodox ethicist Alexander Webster has published two books in which he addressed Orthodox social ethics that would be true to the longer tradition. In *The Price of Prophecy* he distinguished between a *transfigurative morality* that should shape how the church behaved ethically, and a *civilizing morality* to be applied in working cooperatively with other societal forces toward the common good.<sup>13</sup> In light of the way Russian and other East European Orthodox leaders had essentially served as propagandists and collaborators for the Soviet authorities, Webster found the prophetic voice in either the civilizing or transfigurative sense wanting. In a later work, Webster then pointed out that Orthodoxy did not have a well developed justifiable war doctrine, as the West had developed it through its crusade ethic, then drew on the characteristics of Kievan Rus as defined by Fedotov decades ago, to show how Orthodoxy could recover a pacifist ethic that was more theologically rooted (in the love of God, in kenosis, etc.) than was Protestant pacifism that he

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<sup>12</sup>J. Michael Schnarrer, hsgb. *Solidarität und Sozialstaat*. Wien-Budapest: Verein zur Förderung der katholischen Soziallehre, c/o Institute für Ethik und Sozialwissenschaften der Universität Wien, 2000.

<sup>13</sup>Alexander Webster, *The Price of Prophecy: The Eastern Orthodox Churches on Peace, Freedom, and Security*. (Washington DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1992. p. 7f.

regarded as too instrumentalist.<sup>14</sup> Such limited references to American Orthodox ethical writing are intended to point to the degree to which the SD relied quite explicitly on western arguments for just war when rejecting a pacifist option.<sup>15</sup>

### **III. THE ESSENCE OF THE ROC STATEMENT ON RELIGIOUS PLURALISM OR ECUMENISM - *What it Says and Fails to Say***

Perhaps the most essential point to make about the 13 page statement of *Basic Principles on the Relationship of the ROC to Other Faiths*, is to observe the timing. There was some obvious parallelism with the appearance of *Dominus Jesus*, including the way in which the theological foundational statements had the effect of setting clear limits - perhaps recreating barriers to dialogue - before moving into specific themes where the nuancing signaled how far specific dialogues or relationships had moved. In the Russian Orthodox case, the statement on ecumenism is that of a national church - though much of the theological foundation section seeks anchoring in the patristic tradition - not a panOrthodox document yet. In addition, this document clearly responds to the anti-ecumenical voices and concerns about proselytising in Russian Orthodox 'canonical territory' by reasserting that Orthodox is the true church, that the only model for overcoming the fragmentation of Christianity to consider is one of repentance, conversion and recovery of unity within the one Orthodox church.

Yet once those tones have been enunciated so unequivocally, the real point of the document seems to be to explain to those anti-ecumenists the self-conscious, highly nuanced policies of ecumenical dialogue to which it calls. Allow me to summarize the essentials of the 'unity we [ROC] seek' as articulated in the basic principles, then address more critically precisely where the document seeks to

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<sup>14</sup>Alexander Webster, *The Pacifist Option. The Moral Argument Against War in Eastern Orthodox Theology*. Bethesda MD: International Scholars Publications, 1998. pp 243-64.

<sup>15</sup>See section VIII "War and Peace", whose tone is rather different from the long opening section on II. Church and Nation and III Church and State.

locate present ROC relationships with other Christians - there is really nothing on inter-faith dialogue - that was the primary concern of *Dominus Jesus*.

### ***Basic principles of Christian Unity***

The opening section “The unity of the Church and the Sin of Human Division” declares that the church is one, holy, catholic (sobornaia) and apostolic. It is the one body of Christ, one head (Christ) and one Spirit that provides the dynamism and unites all into the one body. The church overcomes the barriers of race, language, class, it overcomes enmity and alienation. The church has an ecumenical character, is a eucharistic community. The unity of the apostolic church is based on apostolic succession from the holy apostles. Where there is the bishop, there are the people.

A further set of principles (20 in the first category alone) spell out that ‘only in connection with a concrete congregation’ can one participate in the church; and to be excommunicated was to be excluded from the eucharistic community. Then follow the recognition that over the centuries not only were individuals excommunicated, but also there were schisms, even within Orthodoxy. In tones reminiscent of *Dominus Jesus*, Section 1.15 states that salvation is possible only through the church, but those who are no longer in union with Orthodoxy [i.e. the Church] should not be viewed as totally without blessing, just without the claim to fullness. Sections 1.16 and 1.17 become more precise in noting that the signs that unite with non-Orthodox are those who acknowledge the Word of God, who believe in Jesus Christ and who show sincere piety. These provide the basis for seeking a Christian relationship, but Russian Orthodoxy differentiates in how it relates to other churches. That includes the acknowledgment of not confusing true Orthodoxy with ‘the national cultural tradition’, nor should Orthodoxy when claiming to be the true church in its teaching, structure and spiritual practice ignore its tragic shortcomings, or idealize some past. This section concludes by mourning the historical tragedy of schism, declaring that Christian division is an ‘open wound’ of the body of Christ.

That leads to arguments for striving for restoration of Christian unity, first by examining models for unity to be rejected.<sup>16</sup> That included rejecting ‘invisible unity’, or viewing the differences as merely cultural. The road to unity is to be seen as a Divine gift, it must be experienced at its deepest in the Tainstvo (Mysterium), and in the essentials of a lived faith.

There follows a major section on Bearing Witness to Non-Orthodox as primary motive for involvement in ecumenism. We might observe that this sets up proselytism toward Orthodoxy as the only stance for its ecumenical involvement. Nevertheless, the fourth section (11 points) does indeed present a developed theology of dialogue. Dialogue must be more than two monologues, where the partners do indeed seek to understand, are open to fellowship, to find a common theological language, BUT temporary agreements of compromise along the way are not possible. The section includes detailed proposals for study centers, exchanges of scholars, and cooperation on numerous social service projects of an ecumenical nature.

The fifth section sets clear parameters for participation in inter-Christian organizations, urges greater priority to theological dialogues, but also encourages involvement in local and regional church councils.

#### ***Relations to NonOrthodox within Canonic Territory and Rules of Behavior***

This section presumes but does not specifically delineate the actuality of ROC ‘canonical territory’. But within that territory, it seeks to coordinate cooperation with ‘other traditional confessions’, but with agreement not to proselytize each other. As to various other foreign confessions, point 6.3 distinguishes between those with a trinitarian and christological faith from those other ‘sects’, affirming the right of such Christian groups to teach the faith to those “that have traditionally belonged to them”. In any case, so the 7<sup>th</sup> section, Orthodox

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<sup>16</sup>One wonders whether this was a response to Harding Meyer, *That All May Be One. Perceptions and Models of Ecumenicity*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999 (in German as *Oekumenische Zielvorstellungen*, Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), a most instructive and handy guide to numerous models.

individuals should conduct themselves with respect, avoid offending, and seek to be accurately informed, not repeating old stereotypes.

In short, what we see is a plea for continuity and possible progress in ecumenism, by reminding the bishops what the theological basis for unity must be, and what the self-limiting goals of the great variety of involvements must be. Thus it is easy to note the internal contradictions, including on understandings of proselytism and canonic territory or ‘whose people are they’ notions. Assuming this document will not remain the final formulation, a charitable reading helps one see the pleading for recognizing the marks of true Christian faith in the other, to seek to understand better, etc.

### ***Historical Appendix - as Definitely more than a Curiosity***

The appendix, representing nearly 60% of the document as a whole, is in many ways the most interesting to ecumenists from other traditions, for it represents an assessment of the state of numerous bi-lateral dialogues, and of the relationship of the ROC to the WCC, which “was always difficult.” As appendix (*prilozhenie*) it is somewhat ambiguous, whether the formal approval of the document at the August 2000 Sobor applied to it as well. There are three basic parts: a short historical survey and summary, a review of bi-laterals, and a recounting of the ROC-WCC relationship from a current ROC perspective.

The introduction seeks to anchor present developments in a much longer history. The ROC first entered into dialogue with other confessions at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century - no details are given or cited. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century theological dialogue began with the Anglicans, Old Catholics and “PreChalcedonians” [now referred to - so also later in the document - as Oriental Orthodox]. The most important work for developing a theological basis for dialogue was done by the Petersburg-Rotterdam Commission between 1892 and 1914, between the ROC and Old Catholics. Having listed specific dates for bi-lateral dialogue, the appendix then provides short summaries, and sometimes an assessment of each.

With reference to dialogue with the Oriental Orthodox, the document notes preliminary talks since 1961, official talks since 1985, but skips the resolution on

full-communication.<sup>17</sup> It moves on to cite ROC statements of 1997 that stress a spirit of fraternity and mutual understandings, then cites statements from 1990 (Chambessy) and the 1999 Holy Synod to affirm continuation of theological dialogue, especially along the lines of a common Christological formula. In short, restraint in the relationship, but not rejection as called for by the Mt. Athos monks.

The statement reviewing relationships with the Roman Catholic Church notes that this church is recognized as having preserved apostolic succession, but differences in tradition and spiritual experience have occurred. Without mentioning the 1965 lifting of anathemas between Rome and Byzantium, the appendix stresses that the two major topics of dialogue are the uniate question and proselytism. At present, the most immediate form of interaction will be to strengthen regional ties between dioceses, and with Catholic Bishops Conferences.

In a much longer section on the long story of dialogue with the Anglicans the writers pointed out that by 1976 agreements on seven issues had been reached, the Anglicans resolving to recite the Nicene Creed henceforth without the Filioque insertion. Yet not long after it became clear that there was not much resonance in the Anglican world for eliminating Filioque, but there emerged deep problems in relationship when the Anglicans began ordaining women, which “is alien to Church Tradition”. Dialogue with Old Catholics and Lutherans get summaries with less advocacy to continue, though one point noted without commentary, is that ROC dialogue with Lutherans in the GDR raised the question of “Two Kingdom” theology (the Lutheran relationship to the state).

The second half of the appendix on participation in the ecumenical movement begins as the story of a century. It is important to distinguish, so the document, between the ‘ecumenical movement’ and ‘ecumenical contacts with Orthodoxy’. There follows a long section on why contacts must be seen as a way of

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For a helpful delineation of the story of the dialogue toward full communion and lifting of anathemas between Oriental and Eastern Orthodox, see Ion Bria, *The Sense of Ecumenical Tradition. The Ecumenical Witness and Vision of the Orthodox*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991.

witness, but not as recognition by Orthodoxy of other churches in a full ecclesiological sense. Specifically the Toronto declaration of 1950 paved the way for eventual joining with the WCC after 1961, so that now the majority of Orthodox churches are part of the WCC. Nevertheless, the protestantizing ethos of the WCC has remained a constant problem for Orthodox, who resist framing the problem of Christian unity in terms of inter-denominationalism. Hence the ROC maintains a position of “constructive criticism” toward the WCC, having decided in 1997 to remain as member but succeeded a year later with other Orthodox churches to get the 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly to approve a special commission for relations with the Orthodox.

#### **IV. WHICH DEBATE WILL MATTER MOST?- CHRISTIAN MORALITY FOR RUSSIAN STATE RE-FORMATION TODAY**

With the new millennium, the Russian Duma and the press began discussions about how to develop a policy for church-state relations when seeking to establish or articulate basic values for a secular state. Two drafts of a doctrine of church-state relations for a secular state became known.

On Oct. 10, 2001 Iurii Tsipko, then vice-president [now President] of the Russian Baptist Union, in an article in *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, weighed in with a carefully thought through statement. Whereas he had long held the view that the state did not need a church-state doctrine, just as they did not need a council for religious affairs, largely because of his commitments to separation of church and state, he had now come to see the necessity of a state doctrine of church-state relations as “necessary step in the development of democracy”.<sup>18</sup> The primary point of his article is to address the contrasts in the two drafts of such a doctrine that have been put forward.

Though the paper merits detailed analysis, for our purposes here it is useful to point out that his main anxieties have to do with a failure by the drafters of the

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<sup>18</sup>Iurii Tsipko, “Two Doctrines and Seven Principles. Russian Baptists on Alternative Drafts of Church-State Relations”, *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 10 October 2001, in English translation at <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0110c.html>.

statements to present an assessment of the historical experience of relations (tsarist and Soviet), and to avoid the generic definitions of religion that are to serve equally for Buddhism, Islam, Orthodox and contemporary Protestants, like his community of Evangelical Christian Baptists. When discussing the seven main principles that the two doctrines have in common - a secular state, legal equality of religious associations, and related principles of oversight that he hopes will not again be forms of “interference”, his most telling remarks are that “there is no openness in our society”. And perhaps most to the point, the press in writing about the topic, is “preaching a single confession and thereby is affecting citizen’s frame of mind”. At points the press reveals an aggressiveness that must be regarded as “in some violation of the article of the laws forbidding incitement of antireligious discord...” Assuming also that as seems likely, a resurrected council of religious affairs will be staffed not by atheists, but by “our Orthodox brethren”, Tsipko wonders “Will there be room for us on the “canonical” territory of our homeland.”

### **A Final Comment**

This returns us to the question of the relevance of the Social Doctrine and Religious Pluralism statements for complicating the discourse. Key players whose perceptions of the desirable direction of the discourse are very different when the players are the Russian Orthodox (meaning more than the bishops), or when they are the shapers of state policy, or when they are the other believers and persons of no faith in Russian society. Let us hope the discussion will be extensive and inclusive.

Let us also keep in mind, however, that we are living in a world learning to think globally, including the global expression of Christianity, that now makes the categories of Orthodox and Catholic/Protestant much less relevant, in particular the notion of canonic territory. These ROC documents do not really address the complex of issues to face at an international level. Let us hope that the time for thinking from a global perspective will not tarry as long as have these nevertheless welcome statements on church unity and church in the world.



