TITLE: THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT: Considerations on Continuing Relations

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SUMMARY

Even though the rupture between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement, anticipated (once again) for late February 1997, never came to pass, many West European Christians -- of both main-line denominations and diverse Orthodox communities from Oxford to Istanbul -- remain no more sanguine about the immediate future than they have been about the recent past.

In contrast, this essay considers it clearly positive that the dialogue between all the parties concerned -- however often at odds with one another and just as frequently under fire from internal factions -- is still on course. It alludes also to several structural features and ideological principles that are likely to influence the Moscow Patriarchate, the central and permanent authority of the Russian Orthodox Church, to continue and perhaps even enlarge upon its current policy of "participation" in ecumenical venues well into the opening decade of the Third Christian Millennium.

INTRODUCTION

As some hundred and fifty prelates of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) descended from around the world on Moscow's Danilov Monastery in late February, 1997 to attend the biennial Episcopal Council, Christians from other main-line denominations and fellow Orthodox from far-off Oxford to distant Istanbul looked on with apprehension.1

In the end, the threat of an imminent withdrawal by Russia's largest confession -- claiming some forty percent of the country's 149 million inhabitants -- from future ecumenical exchanges at home and abroad never materialized.2 Advocates of the measure -- for the most part, a vocal, ultra-nationalist fringe of hierarchs and their extra-mural lay allies who for years have branded contact with other religions a "heresy" -- lost the day.3

Instead, the Council went on record and, however cautiously, pledged itself:4

to continue meanwhile the participation of [our] representatives ... in the work of international Christian organizations, noting the particular importance of ... Orthodox witness in the present-day Christian world divided by sin.

As at the previous Council in late 1994, moderate voices had once again prevailed.5 Their success, it is widely believed, owed much to the patient intervention of Aleksiy II, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, the Church's supreme ecclesiastical authority, and widely considered in the West a friend of the ecumenical movement.
Of course, this year’s Council statement is unlikely to please all the disparate forces who, whether “by sin” or out of some other circumstance, contribute to the fractures of today’s Christian world. But its chief merit is that it will keep all sides talking -- from anti-ecumenists within ROC to the many pro-ecumenists abroad who not unreasonably fear that decades of inter-church dialogue may be on the verge of coming easily undone.6

To keep talking! This, indeed, seems to be the most likely direction that all the concerned parties are likely to take. At least, over the short run.

Over the middle run, the course of future collaboration between European Christians and the ROC is any body’s guess. But, it is absolutely certain that those ties -- shaped significantly until recently by Cold War constraints -- will end up having to be refashioned. They will, moreover, have to take into account the broad political and religious changes now taking place in the new Russian Federation, as it seeks to restore its influence over neighboring states, and the role ROC is clearly intent on playing in that process.7

ROC AND THE NEW RELIGIOUS REALITIES AT HOME

For the moment, however, it would do well to step back from both the recent Council and the tantalizing art of second-guessing the future and instead look again more realistically at ROC: its current situation, let alone its ambitions, is not so easily dealt with, as most observers would agree.

Since the passage of the 1990 Soviet Law on the Freedom of Religion and Conscience -- a piece of sweeping legislation which grants all citizens full religious liberty, expression, and practice and is still in force throughout the Russian Federation8 -- ROC has had to face up to an unrelenting crisis on three over-lapping fronts.

First, its historic monopoly, real or imagined, as the unitary faith of all Russians has irrevocably given way to a “free market” in religious goods. The flood tide of new (and not so new) faiths that deluged the country is now legendary. ROC continues to denounce what it describes as wide-spread and unfair religious “proselytism” by other Christian bodies (and new age credos) and their apparent disregard of Orthodoxy’s claim to historic precedence. Moreover, ROC’s evident inability to keep pace with the competition may in part explain why much “revisionist” thinking about ecumenism (and thus far unsuccessful amendements to the 1990 law of religion as well that would restrict the freedom of most other confessions) has been taking place within the highest circles of the Moscow Patriarchate itself.9

Second, the end of state control over the Church was also the end of state subsidies, however small and morally costly these may have been.10 The current financial crisis is further exacerbated by the uninterrupted return (by federal and local authorities) of churches, monasteries, chapels and other ecclesiastical properties. The cost to repair them, however, soars sky-high daily as market
prices in Moscow and other large urban centers in Russia come to equal those of London, Berlin and New York.

At the same time, ROC's intense search for new sources of revenue has necessarily had to reach out to both the private and public sectors; its bid for state subsidies is a matter of record. Its ready embrace of some donors, such as the Mayor of Moscow in the reconstruction of Christ the Saviour Cathedral and others for a variety of projects, has brought upon it charges of being all too eager to trade in influence in order to restore Orthodoxy's status as the official state religion or to "sell its soul" to some West European philanthropies for easy handouts of Deutschmarks and dollars. Moreover, press charges in late 1996 alleging that the Metropolitan Archbishop who heads the Patriarchate's all important Department for External Church Relations may have been trafficking in imported cigarettes and liquor under the guise of "humanitarian aid" has probably been the most serious blow to the Church's prestige since several of its current hierarchs were charged with collaborating with the KGB, the former Soviet secret police.

Third, while ROC has been zealously sizing up the social order, it has yet to implement a comprehensive pastoral plan to face up to its greatest challenge at home: the pervasive secularization of contemporary Russian society. Whatever remnants of religion official atheist policies failed to uproot under Communist rule, the rapid enracination of market forces and the total diffusion of consumerism -- abetted by national mass media, anchored in global communication systems -- are sure to undermine them further.

In fact, for all of ROC's claims to be one with Russia's culture, participation at Sunday services is as insignificant in Moscow and St. Petersburg as it is in Paris and Sao Paulo -- some three to five percent of all nominal believers, at best. Of Moscow's ten million inhabitants, only 55,000 of the 120,000 who had gathered outside the capital's 185 churches -- according to city police reports -- actually attended the midnight Easter vigil in April 1997. Moreover, superstition is widespread and on the upswing as readers of palms, tarot cards and tea leaves seem to offer a surer hold over the future than the promises of Christianity. Youth and intellectuals who rushed in large numbers to conversion in the late seventies and early eighties appear to have far fewer successors in the nineties.

If these difficulties point to any momentary conclusions, two are worth venturing. On the one hand, the crisis of the Church may be fundamentally generational. Current hierarchs whose priestly careers are anchored in the Soviet era carry a liability that has simply been impossible to cast off completely, while all but the very young adhere to values and survival strategies, honed under Communist tutelage, that neither lend themselves easily to religious fervor nor are so readily transformed. Perhaps, then, an entirely new generation is needed to surmount the odds, to appropriate the Church anew, and in time to render it a more vital place in Russian society and in the hearts of the people than it apparently enjoys today.
On the other hand, at no time could ROC's contacts, so assiduously cultivated among other Christian confessions over the last six years as a full-fledged participant of the Christian ökumene, be put to greater advantage than at present.

**ROC AND THE WORLD NETWORK OF "PARTICIPATING" RELIGIONS**

Indeed, whatever the crises at home, it must be acknowledged that by Spring 1997 ROC had definitively entered the world-wide network of trans-national religions, those that operate across political and economic frontiers, transferring manpower, resources and ideas with mixed consequences for the changing balance of power (a topic that has been revealingly explored in a recent volume edited by S. H. Rudolph and J. Piscatori, *Transnational Religions and Fading States*). Suffice to say here that whatever ROC's ties were before the collapse of the Soviet state (and there were several of note and intensity), those it enjoys today with religious movements around the world are not only far more extensive, but they are also essentially irreversible.

How so? Nowadays, it is participation -- rather than membership -- in the panoply of ecumenical institutions (such as the World Council of Churches (WCC), and perhaps of increasingly greater importance for the Russian Church -- and state -- the Conference of European Churches), in the permanent and on-going encounters among confessions, and even in the impromptu exchanges between them, that defines and legitimates a faith as "a religion of our times." Konrad Reiser, the WCC's General Secretary, recently put it lucidly:

> The ecumenical movement goes beyond the boundaries of the WCC. And the churches involved in this movement are not necessarily all members of the WCC. We discover more and more that our ecumenical partners and co-workers very often represent non-member churches.

In contrast, fundamentalists of most persuasions, some currents of Evangelicals and Pentecostals, and several independent Christian communities in Africa are not so considered. This distinction -- between "insiders" and "outsiders" -- is, moreover, widely and clearly accepted, even if only informally expressed.

Moreover, ROC participates today in this network qua a main-stream confession in its own right (and no longer as the "religious arm" of Soviet foreign policy, as it once did, or certainly was viewed as doing). Consequently, to break such ties now and forfeit its new-won rank as a full-fledged "insider" (simply to wind up in the company of religious "outsiders" -- or "outcasts." in the opinion of some) would fly in the face of ROC's current interests on at least two counts.

First, such a breach would seriously diminish its roles as an interlocutor of the Russian state with regard to the "religious politics" of Europe and as broker for Russian society with respect to
other religious bodies operating within national borders (such as the Moslem communities whose 22 million nominal adherents comprise the second largest faith in Russia). Moreover, to do so would likely cost ROC the invaluable support of many of the émigré and Russophile Orthodox believers in parishes and dioceses beyond the confines of the former Soviet Union, especially those in Western Europe and the United States, who consider the ecumenical dialogue to be one of the most fecund developments to have emerged out of contemporary Orthodoxy outside the former USSR and communist bloc. 25

Second, major Western denominations have made ROC "an offer" that it has found as difficult to refuse (as it does to enforce). They have repeatedly gone on record to eschew all forms of proselytism and, in effect, recognize the national boundaries of Russia proper (and of Belarus and Ukraine, too) — in conformity with ROC's own concept of "canonical territory" — as the "exclusive religious domain" of Orthodoxy. 26 Some denominations have even gone so far as to back that commitment with good works, among them the allocation of fixed resources for the Orthodox clergy and faithful — to be expended exclusively by the hierarchy for needs that it alone determines — for the duration of ROC's current crisis. 27 However generous, some such offers have been said to come "with strings attached" (an allegation that may partly help to explain the intensity of ROC's current campaign to obtain permanent sources of funding exclusively within Russia).

**ROC'S LEADERS: THE POLITICS OF "CONTINUING THE DIALOGUE"**

But, to see only the constraints of breaking with the wider Christian world is to underestimate the long-standing commitment to ecumenism propounded by both the current ROC leadership and the Orthodox world as a whole. (Unfortunately, the latter's importance goes generally underestimated, or, is more often than not, because of internal divisions along theological and national lines, frequently dismissed as lacking force).

ROC'S current leaders -- from Aleksiy II to members of the Holy Synod, which consists of himself and five permanently sitting Metropolitans, and a variably rotating number of prelates -- are all experienced ecumenists in their own right. With the participation of ROC's representatives at the World Council of Churches' 1961 General Assembly in New Delhi and their surprise appearance a year later in Rome at the opening session of Catholicism's Second Vatican Council, there has been practically no major ecumenical event since which the Russian Church has not attended. 28 More often than not — by one or more members of the current Holy Synod.

Moreover, despite ROC's "distress" (inquiéitudes) over Vatican support for the Greek Catholic Church in the predominately Orthodox Ukraine 29 and its "growing anxiety" with largely Protestant "innovations" at successive WCC assemblies (inter-communion, the ordination of women, inclusive Biblical language, relationships to non-Christian religions), 30 the Patriarchate has consistently championed ecumenism.
In the words of one of its officials:11

the Vertex of the Russian Orthodox Church rejects ... extreme anti-ecumenical views, reaffirming anew that our participation in the ecumenical movement was dictated, above all, by considerations of usefulness to the Church. [And despite the negative tendencies that have become apparent with time], that has not triggered any need to walk out of ecumenical structures, but to the contrary, as His Holiness, Aleksiy II, had cause to tell the Bishops’ Council [in 1994], 'the time has come even for our Church to aid the ecumenical movement ...'

Credit must also be given to the leadership for ably guiding that policy through the straits of virulent internal opposition. At the recent Bishops’ Council (1997), much of the hostility was diffused -- and not merely placed on the back burner -- thanks to the Report of ROC’s Synodal Theological Commission which squarely placed the issue of ecumenism within the larger context of pan-Orthodox relations with other Christians.12

Nor should this be misinterpreted as a maneuver to stall for time, since as of today no prospect for any imminent world-wide encounter of Orthodox Churches is likely to take place, despite the hope of many that such a Council be held by the year 2000.13

As was noted, the pan-Orthodox world is not without divisions of its own. The most notable took place in 1996 when the Russian Orthodox Church omitted for the first time in history the prayers from the liturgy for the Ecumenical Patriarch (Istanbul-Constantinople) — historically considered by all Orthodox as the "first among equals." In dispute was the Estonian Orthodox Church whose pre-war autonomy the Russian Church initially refused to see restored.14

But, it has been precisely the Ecumenical Patriarchate which had promoted Estonia’s cause that has long endorsed Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement.15 Whether then the several existing Orthodox forums other than a world council will end up furthering or hampering the cause of future "participation" is difficult to predict.16 Also difficult to foresee is the impact on anti-ecumenical forces throughout the Orthodox world of the totally unanticipated decision of the Georgian Orthodox Church on 20 May 1997 to sever its ties with the World Council of Churches, a step that a spokesman from the Moscow Patriarchate averred would not reverse ROC’s February decision to retain its membership.17

But, difficulty in laying out Orthodox options, is also symptomatic of the entirely uncertain state -- many call it, the "crisis" -- of ecumenism in West Europe today. Indeed, Protestant and Catholic communities, once the mainstays of inter-confessional dialogue and cooperation, are fast shrinking in membership and in financial surpluses. Their contributions to the World Council of Churches (as well as to their own local churches) have sharply fallen off, while the important work
of the Council is expected to be drastically reduced budgetarily and in manpower in the coming
years ahead.38

Moreover, discussions have been underway for a decade on how best to redefine the very
nature of the ecumenical enterprise; on how to enlarge it so that it might accommodate the diversity
of confessions without sacrificing unity -- without exacerbating, in Konrad Reiser's words, an
already existing "world of divisions and disintegration."39

But perhaps the difficulty inherent in shaping the future and staving off further "divisions and
disintegration" might prove compelling enough for ROC and other confessions to contribute to that
task. Precisely in this, as in all crises of transition, the opportunities to innovate are ever more
susceptible to all and any with vision.

That the task is also urgent is not simply because the Third Christian Millennium will shortly
be upon all Christians, but primarily because all Christians, the Orthodox in particular -- according to
a spokesman for the Ecumenical Patriarch, His Most Holy, Bartholomew_I -- are "convinced that the
unity of the Church is an inescapable imperative for all ..."40 Nor is it less of an imperative for
Pope John Paul II who, as the Patriarch of the West, issued the Catholic Church's appeal for
Christian Unity in a 1995 Encyclical Letter, entitled Ut Unam Sint (That All May Be One).41

And so too has it been for Aleksiy II, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. In his 1994-
1995 Christmas Message, broadcast to the listeners of Vatican Radio, he implied that the "scandal"
of Christian disunity -- as Christians have come to refer to their differences and divisions -- could
become a "scandal" of the past:42

... important are the new efforts of the Churches with regard to reestablishing the unity
of all Christians, [and] a frank renewal of inter-confessional dialogue. The mystical unity
of the Church like the Body of Christ must drive Christians -- on the threshold of the
great Jubilee [the Millennium] -- to overcome divisions and schism, to exclude every
form of proselytism, to collaborate as brothers for the glory of God.

Whether Christians of the diverse confessions will in fact so collaborate, or how effectively
they might do so, likely depends in the end on how earnestly they take to heart the words of their
spiritual leaders or, rather, perhaps how strongly they hold the Patriarchs to their word.

Between now and the convening of the next Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church
in 1999 -- many will be listening carefully; whether many more will be speaking out remains to be
heard.43
ENDNOTES

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1. From 20 February until 07 March and again from 12 March until 11 April 1997, the Author of this essay conducted interviews in London, Oxford, Paris, Geneva, Rome, Istanbul, Freising, and Königstein im Taunas with officials of various Christian confessions who are concerned in one way or another with the current direction of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Those concerns will be discussed in several forthcoming articles.

However, the single most salient preoccupation, expressed frequently in entirely independent interviews, and likely precipitated by the convening in Moscow between 18 and 23 February 1997 of the biennial Episcopal Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, had to do with the likelihood of a rupture in otherwise long-standing ecumenical relations between ROC and its European interlocutors.

This essay — a highly personal view, and in this respect, somewhat of a departure from the Author’s customary commitment to that highest canon of good reportage of having his interviewees tell their own story -- is an attempt to put that “preoccupation” in perspective, suggest that over the short-term no such rupture is likely, and spell out the reasons why to promote one may not be in the interests of ROC.

2. “Russian Orthodox Church in Figures,” Metaphrasis (Moscow), 1 (68), March 1997 -- an English language Religious Information Service, independent of, but close to the Orthodox church (its e-mail address is: mf@glasnet.ru) -- is worth citing in full: “Patriarch Aleksiy II presented to the Episcopal Council basic figures characterizing the present state of the Church, according to which, as of February 1, 1997, the ROC had 124 dioceses with about 18 000 parishes. There are 390 monasteries and convents, 242 of which are in Russia, 89 in Ukraine, and 57 in other countries. The episcopate consists of 146 hierarchs, including 122 diocesan and 24 vicar bishops. Outside the ROC canonical territory there are 7 dioceses, 172 churches, 9 monasteries and sketes.”

3. The best rendering of these positions is found in an essay by a member of the Church’s Department of External Church Affairs, Fr. Georgij Zjablicev (transliterated into English as Georgiy Zyablichev), “Il problema ecumenico nella Chiesa ortodossa russa in relazione al sinodo del 1994,” also in Concilium, XXXII: 6 (1996), 138-149.


For reporting on this Council that also reflects the concerns of West European religious institutions over the present course of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), see the articles by Gerd Striker, “Bischofssynode in Moskau,” Glaube in Der 2. Welt, 25:3 (1997), 6-7, and “Okumene im Wartestand,” Herder Korrespondenz, 4 (1997), 182-186.

In both articles, Striker refers to the event -- erroneously -- as a Bishops’ Synod, instead of a Bishops Council. The latter rendered in Russian as the “Archereyskiy Sobor.” According to canon law, the Council should be convened every two years; the last was held between 29 November and 2 December 1994 and its results were published as Archereyskiy Sobor Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi - Dokumenty Doklady (Moskva: Izdatel’stvo Moskovskogo Patriarchii, 1995).

Canonically, there also exists a Holy Synod, comprised of the Patriarch and five Metropolitans. This serves as an executive arm of the Church and an interim decision-making body; it meets at least four times a year and only their sessions can be properly described as synodal meetings. Their most recent was held in Moscow on 17 April 1997.

A succinct summary of the Council can also be found in “Moscou: assemblée plénière de l’épiscopat russe.” SOP (Service Orthodoxe de Presse), hereinafter cited as SOP, 216 (mars 1997), 2-3.
5. The results of the 1994 Council can be found in Archerevskiy Sobor, cited above.

6. The state of ecumenical relations in general and the tensions between ROC and West European Protestantism in particular are dealt with in the issue dedicated to the current religious situation in Russia, G2W, Glaube in der 2. Welt, 24:10 (1996), 13-30.

For the perspective of the World Council of Churches and a frank discussion of the present crossroads, see all of the articles contained in The Ecumenical Review, 49:1 (January 1997), "WCC - Common Understanding and Vision."

7. As of late April 1997, the Russian Federation has been engaged in up-scaling its bilateral relations with the former Soviet Central Asian republics, now the independent states, of Kazakhstan, Tadzhikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, (to say nothing of a series of recent agreements and compacts with the neighboring Slavic Republics of Belarus and Ukraine and former members of the "Communist bloc" such as Slovakia).

In all of the former -- sometimes referred to as the "Near Abroad" -- there are sizable Russian ethnic populations who are most uncomfortable -- as the segment of the BBC program, entitled "Along the Silk Road," broadcast on 28 April 1997 made clear -- with their new downgraded status as a mere ethnic minority, instead of that of a once hegemonic cultural and political overseas elite.

In the interim, as the Russian state attempts to "re-negotiate" its ties to the new republics, the ROC has openly championed the cause of Russians "abandoned" in the Near Abroad.

At the Patriarch's recent divine service in the Russian Cathedral of Tashkent, celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the Russian presence in Uzbekistan, attendance was overflowing and loud speakers had to be set up outside the premises to satisfy the throng's eagerness to take part. As the BBC observer reported, the Church was perceived by all as the "one Russian institution that had not forsaken them."

For other dimensions of ROC's systematic efforts to rebuild for itself a major role in post-Soviet Russian society, now in conjunction with, now independently of, the state, see Ralph Delia Cava, "Reviving Orthodoxy: An Overview of the Four Factions in the Russian Orthodox Church," Cahiers du Monde Russe, (Paris: Winter-Spring, 1997). Pp. 51.

8. ROC's efforts to alter this law, granting itself advantages over other confessions, have been incessant since 1991; one of the latest overviews is by one of Russia's authoritative -- and controversial -- journalists covering religious affairs today, Jakow Krotow (in English transliteration, Yakov Krotov), "Das Ringen um die Religionsfreiheit -- Rußland in den Jahren 1992 bis 1996," G2W, Glaube in der 2. Welt, 25:1 (1997), 16-25. For the best on-going coverage, see the work of the Moscow-based journalist, Larry E. Uzzell, of the Keston News Service, available on-line via: Keston_Institute@cin.co.uk

9. Perhaps one of the clearest official statements about the limits of ROC's participation within the World Council of Churches is found in the address pronounced by Metropolitan Kyriil of Smolensk and Kaliningrad and President of the Moscow Patriarchate's powerful Department for External Church Relations at the June 1995 inter-Orthodox consultation on "The Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC," see Metropolitan Kyriil, "Orthodox Relations within the World Council of Churches," The Ecumencial Movement, the Churches, & the World Council of Churches, ed. George Lemopoulos (Geneva and Bialystok, Poland: WCC & SYNDESMOS [1995?]), 47-54.

For an account of the most recent censure of members of "ecumenist" factions within ROC who enjoy close ties to Roman Catholic and Protestant groups, see KNA [Kirche Nachrichten Agentur], "Katholizismus und Orthodoxie: 'Neue Eiszeit' Aus Moskau?" 4 (22 Januar 1997), 12.


10. This is a debatable point. According to a late 1996 letter to the author from the noted Russian church historian, Dimitri Pospielovsky, there is evidence that ROC was required to turn over its revenues from the sale of candles and icons to the Soviet state overseers of religious institutions. It is also widely known that ROC benefited from state-
subsidized air travel, hotel accommodations and other services whether extended to the innumerable visiting church delegations from abroad or to members of ROC on mission abroad. None of the latter now appears to exist.

11. See the Address of the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, convening in Moscow from February 18-23, 1997, to "His Excellency Gennady Nikolayevich Seleznev, Chairman of the State Duma Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Deputies of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," especially the excerpt:

"Unfortunately,... taxes continue to burden (and in fact, promise to burden even more) church structures and enterprises run by the church for charity purposes. Donations to the Church are in some form[?] returned to the Church. This is precisely the principle underlying the world-wide practice of tax-exemption for religious organizations. Besides, one should not forget that the financial situation of the Russian Orthodox Church, like that of other traditional religions in Russia, is being aggravated by the urgency calling for a speedy restoration of the national property, which was ruined at the time of persecutions, and which is now in the ownership of religious organizations;" cited in HTTP-ROC/sobor09e.htm#1.

12. One of the recent private benefactors of the Patriarchate is Milan Panic, the Serbian-born, American businessman and owner of the multi-million dollar ICN Pharmaceuticals. For a description of his visit to Moscow in April 1997 to lobby the Russian parliament and "smooth the way for a promised $200 million dollars worth of [ICN] investment in regional factories" and to donate $200,000 in free medical supplies to ROC, see Erin Arvelund, "Medicine Man: The Many Masks of Milan Panic," The Moscow Tribune (22 April 1997), Page III.

13. On this count, the Moscow Patriarchate's position is unambiguous. It was most recently restated in the Address of the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, convening in Moscow from February 18-23, 1997, to "His Excellency Gennady Nikolayevich Seleznev, Chairman of the State Duma Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Deputies of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation;" the relevant text is as follows:

"We find it most regretful that the present law on the Freedom of Religions and the new draft of amendments to this Law both fail to register the fact that for one thousand years the Russian Orthodox Church has formed the historical, spiritual and moral identity of the Russian nations, or that the greatest majority among this country's religious population are her members.

"The Council draws your attention to the practice in many European countries of mulated [sic; a formulated?] special status to given confession because of its role and authority, which by no means, undermines the principle of religious freedom there. Such is the case with Bulgaria, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Finland, Sweden, to name just a few.

"We affirm that our Church recognizes the positive value of the principle of equality of all religious associations before law. But, unfortunately, in certain circles of our society this principle is misinterpreted so as to present all religions and confessions identical in their significance and power. This interpretation while not reflecting the real situation either in Russia or in Europe as a whole, leads to the discrimination of traditional religious associations with a large number of followers. We are sure that legal recognition of the role of the Russian Orthodox Church and that of other traditional religions will help preserve the spiritual, moral and cultural foundation of our society.

"Among the problems of continuous concern for the bishops, priests and the multi-million flock of our Church is the continuing unrestricted activity of destructive pseudo-religious organizations and foreign missionaries who are bringing new division to Russian society. We think that the draft law in its present form takes far too timid measures which are incapable of bringing us to a practical solution of this problem. In this connection, we believe it necessary that the legislation should provide certain concrete norms to regulate the establishment and activities of foreign religious organizations and their representations. It is likewise important to strengthen provisions dealing with the protection of individuals and society against the destructive activities of pseudo-religious structures;" cited in HTTP-ROC/sobor09e.htm#1.

14. In an interview to Pravoslavnyi Sankt-Peterburg, 3 (1997), entitled "I believe in the future of Russia," Patriarch Aleksiy II explicitly noted that a new bill before the Duma (which the Church had had a hand in drafting), aimed at altering the 1990 law, "...does not contain any provision for a state religion. This is not provided for in the current constitution of Russia and the holy leadership of the church itself, as I frequently said, does not strive for its [own] establishment as a state religion."
As to the charges made primarily against the Roman Catholic foundation, Kirche in Not/Ostpriesthilfe, located in Königstein im Taunus, Germany for its offer to pay the salaries of $1,000 US dollars per year to 6,000 Orthodox priests and their families in Russia -- for ten consecutive years, see the discussion later in this text. For some of the background, see Ralph Della Cava, "Religious Resource Networks: Roman Catholic Philanthropy in Central and East Europe" in Transnational Religion and Fading States, edited by Susan Rudolph and James Piscatori (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 173-211.


16. This is not to say that ROC has taken no action. Indeed, reflective of its concern is the "Decision of the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church [February 1997] On Relations with the State and Secular Society," particularly Section 13 which states: "It is imperative to warn the state and its citizens against the detrimental obtrusive propaganda of vice, of an immoral and criminal way of life, of violence, of ethnic, religious and cultural strife. Extremely deplorable is the fact that such propaganda is paid for by tax-payers, Orthodox Christians among others, whose conscience is suffering because of that. It is important that such propaganda by the mass media, audio, video and computer production should be limited legally and administratively and through the adoption of professional codes of honour. In connection with the current work of the State Duma on the draft laws 'On the reproductive rights of the population' and 'On the restriction of the circulation of the production, entertainment presentations and services of sexual character,' and in regard with [sic] the introduction of sexual education in some schools, which can radically worsen the moral atmosphere in society and harm the integrity of the human personality, especially among children and youth, the Holy Synod should consider this matter with a view of formulating the church position as soon as possible to be then presented to the legislative and executive power bodies of Russia." HTTP-ROC/sobor09e.htm#l, italics added.

17. Statistics for Orthodox and Roman Catholic Sunday church attendance for 1996 are found in Ralph Della Cava, "The Roman Catholic Church in Russia, The Latin Rite: A Five Year Assessment -- Towards a 'Native' Russian Church?" Harriman Review (Fall-Winter 1996), Pp. 35. Also in Stranitsa (Moscow), 2:2, (Spring 1997).

For the 1997 Easter services, the Moscow Militia reported that of some 120,000 persons who flocked to the capital's 185 working churches, "only 55 thousand were actually able to get into the church buildings and the remainder had to stand outside;" the Militia also reported a certain decline in Easter activity: last year, "more than 165 thousand persons attended Moscow's churches;" see "Posle Paschi" [After Easter], Moskovskiy Komsomolets, 29 April 1997 (English translation by orthonews@rver.ucsd.edu). The population of Moscow is approximately ten million.

18. According to a telephone poll conducted by the Center for Sociological Research of the Moscow State University and reported in an article in Nezavisimaya Gazeta (February 27, 1997), entitled "What Do the Russians Really Believe In," "poll participants who identified themselves as 'committed' Orthodox (i.e. 66% of those questioned), 47% expressed their belief in magic, spells, the Evil Eye, 'pagan polydemonism,' Orthodox fetishism (the persuasion that icons, crucifixes, religious images and relics have a defensive power against evil forces), astrology, karma, astral bodies, pantheism and cosmosmism. According to the survey, participants combined these neo-pagan beliefs with traditional Orthodox elements. Some 42% of those questioned claimed to believe in the immortality of the soul, 41.5% in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, 40% in Divine Judgment and 32% in the existence of the devil;" as reported by CRTN - The Christian Radio and Television Network (an on-line religious news service situated at 100064.3642@Compuserve.com, and hereinafter cited as CRTN)

Also see, "Satanism is Becoming Epidemic among Russian Teenagers," Metaphrasis, 1 (68), March 1997.

On the decline of youth interest in particular and on the decline in overall religiosity, especially towards Orthodoxy, in general, see Andrej Danilow (transliterated into English as Andrey Danilov), "Die Zeit des Enthusiasmus ist vorbei," G2W, Glaube in der 2. Welt, 25:5 (May 1997), 14-19; see the entire issue which is devoted to the Russian Orthodox Church, its internal rifts, and situation within society.

20. It should be remembered that ROC not only took part in the various Assemblies of the World Council of Churches beginning with that of New Delhi in 1961, but from the early 1970’s it renewed its presence as a “trans-national” religion in its own right by the Patriarchate’s increasingly more active intervention in its dioceses and parishes outside the Soviet Union. But the telling difference between then and now is that legitimation as a world confession, as an acceptable trans-national religion, is accorded by the entirety of confessions “participating” in the network of world faiths. See the ensuing paragraphs in the text.

21. The World Council of Churches is the paramount, post-war example of an ecumenical institution, while the regularly planned encounters organized since 1967 by the Roman Catholic Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity with other confessions are expressions of “permanent and ongoing encounters,” while the discussions which took place in 1996 between representatives of the Moscow Patriarch and the Ecumenical Patriarch, the world Orthodox Primate, over their differences with regard to the autonomy of the Orthodox Church of Estonia exemplify “impromptu exchanges.” Together, they delineate the “network of legitimacy.”

22. It is worth reading the fuller text, contained in an address delivered in June 1995:

“The ecumenical movement goes beyond the boundaries of the WCC. And the churches involved in this movement are not necessarily all members of the WCC. We discover more and more that our ecumenical partners and co-workers very often represent non-member churches. Should we look for a status for these non-member churches in the life and work of the Council? A modus operandi has been developed for our relations with the Roman Catholic Church. But new possibilities... with... other non-members occur: the ‘Evangelical’ world, Pentecostal churches and communities of the African Independent Churches are some examples;” see Konrad Reiser, “Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC: Introductory Thoughts,” in The Ecumenical Movement, the Churches, & the World Council of Churches, ed. George Lemopoulos (Bialystok, Poland: WCC & SYNDESMOS [1995]), 25-35, esp. 29.

23. As Dr. Konrad Reiser’s text in the footnote above also makes clear the boundaries between “insiders” and “outsiders” are always in a state of flux.

24. ROC’s role as an “arm of Soviet foreign policy” is a highly controversial issue; a recent attempt at sober and frankly sympathetic assessment is Adriano Roccucci, “L’esperienza della Chiesa ortodossa russa durante il regime sovietico,” Concilium, XXXII: 6 (1996): La santa Chiesa russa e il cristianesimo occidentale, Giuseppe Alberigo e José Oscar Beozzo, eds., 73-94.

25. One of the most authoritative voices of the Russian Orthodox community abroad is Nicolas Lossky, Professor of Church History at the Orthodox Theological Institute of Saint Serge in Paris, and a leading proponent of ecumenism. In a recent article, he concluded that the most fecund contribution of the Russian Orthodox emigration abroad has been its “very serious commitment to the ecumenical movement, be it in bi-lateral or multi-lateral dialogue;” in “Fecondità e contraddizioni dell’emigrazione russa,” Concilium, XXXII: 6 (1996): La santa Chiesa russa e il cristianesimo occidentale, Giuseppe Alberigo e José Oscar Beozzo, eds., 95-102, 102.

26. For documents establishing the Roman Catholic position, see Information Service (The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity), especially issues 81 (1992:III-IV) and 83 (1993: II), (Rome, Italy), passim.

27. Examples abound. Among the most prominent are: the World Council of Churches’ Eastern Europe Office of Programme Unit IV-Sharing and Service, established in Bialystok, Poland in 1996; in April 1993, the national German Bishops Conference established Renovabis, a special office for Solidarity with Eastern Europe; and in February 1994 the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland set up an analogous agency of its own, called “Hoffnung für Osteuropa” (Hope for East Europe).

28. See the account of this by one of the Vatican’s more celebrated executors of its “Ost-politik,” Vienna’s retired Franz Cardinal König, “Relazioni ecumeniche con le Chiese ortodosse dell’Est: una prospettiva viennese,” Concilium, XXXII: 6 (1996), 102-121, 114: while the Patriarch of Constantinople had refused to attend, the Russian delegates showed up on the second day! Also see the assessment by one of the ROC observers at Vatican II, Vitalij Borovoj.
29. The current ROC position (as of mid-December 1996) is found in "Moscow: rencontre patriarcat de Moscou-Vatican," SOP, 214 (janvier 1997), 8-9. In the aforesaid meeting, ROC not only called it "an imperative necessity" to "regularize" Catholic-Orthodox relations in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, but also expressed its criticism of the formation of a Catholic network of ecclesial communities of the Latin Rite throughout Russia "which the Patriarchate of Moscow interprets as an act of proselytism contrary to the ecumenical overture undertaken by the two Churches;" 8.

On 18 January 1997, representatives of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches (the latter represented by members of Orthodox Theological Institute of Saint Serge in Paris) issued an "Appel pour la continuation du dialogue entre l'Église Catholique et l'Église orthodoxe," the text of which is reproduced in SOP, 215 (février 1997), 20-22. Whether this "appeal" is related to the attenuated relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Vatican is not clear from the document. The Orthodox signatories, although Russian in expression, are recognized as a community of worship under the Ecumenical Patriarchate (Istanbul-Constantinople).


30. These are spelled out in no uncertain terms by Metropolitan Kyril, "Orthodox Relations within the World Council of Churches," The Ecumenical Movement, the Churches, & the World Council of Churches, ed. George Lemopoulos (Geneva and Bialystok, Poland: WCC & SYNDENMOS [1995?]), 47-54, esp. 49-50. He rightly notes that many such "innovations," especially with regard to "sexual family ethics and ... the support of the so called sexual minorities [homosexuals and lesbians] ... cause great offence and discomfort for many Catholics... as well," 50.

It is not ROC and Roman Catholicism alone that have trouble with these issues; they have also been at the heart of considerable turmoil within many US mainline Protestant denominations; see Mary Leonard, "Religion: Cross Currents," Boston Globe, 04 May 1997.


32. According to the Report of the Synodal Theological Commission, it was proposed "to put for inter-Orthodox consideration the whole complex of questions connected with the participation of representatives of the Orthodox Church in contacts with the non-Orthodox world;" and that was accepted by the Bishops' Council; see the "Decision of the Bishop's Council of the Russian Orthodox Church on the Report of the Synodal Theological Commission [23 February 1997]" [http://ROC/sobo09e.htm#l], italics added.

For an earlier discussion of this document, see "Moscou: l'Église russe s'interroge sur le rôle du COE [Conseil Oecumenique des Églises]." SOP, 213 (décembre, 1996), 8-9.

33. In sharp contrast, ROC is actively involved in convening for sometime "before the end of this millennium its own Local Council (Pomestniy Sobor), in reality, a form of general church council, the highest legislative body of ROC, short of a pan-Orthodox world council. It would involve some 800 delegates from all the Russian dioceses around the world and its dates primarily depend on the completion of the large auditorium in the basement of Christ the Saviour Cathedral, still under construction, according to Archbishop Serge, Chancellor of the Moscow Patriarchate, "Moscou: entretien avec le nouveau responsable de la chancellerie du patriarchat de Moscou," SOP, 213 (décembre, 1996), 7-8.

34. This "unfortunate break in communion" was widely reported; the account by Patrick Henry, "Holy War," The Moscow Times, 13 April 1996, was especially complete.

In the minds of West European Orthodox, this split, apparently "healed" at the moment, should serve as a "salutary warning," in the words of Kallistos Ware, Auxiliary Bishop of Great Britain (of the Ecumenical Patriarchate), "to the Orthodox Church as a whole" about a controversy in which "no principle of faith or dogma is involved. This has been a quarrel about power of jurisdiction and ecclesiastical boundaries;" see his "The Estonian Crisis: A Salutary Warning?," Sobornost (Oxford), 18:2 (1996), 59-68.

For an appreciation of the views of the current Ecumenical Patriarch, see Olivier Clement, "La Vérité vous rendra livre" - Entretiens avec le Patriarch oecuménique, Bartholomée Ier (Mesnil-sur-l'Étréée, France: J.-C. Lattès-Desclée de Brouwer, 1996). There is one major problem with this work: there is often no clear line between the actual (textual) opinions of the Patriarch and the narrative of the author.

36. A series of Inter-Orthodox Consultations have frequently been held around the time of the world assemblies and other meetings of the World Council of Churches; there are also irregular gatherings of "the Primates of the Most Holy Orthodox Churches," the most recent of which was held in the Phanar (Istanbul) on 15 March 1992 and which was attended by fourteen prelates, including the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia.

Regrettably, the once regular bi-lateral meetings between the Moscow and the Ecumenical Patriarchates have not been convened recently. The scheduled attendance of both Patriarchs, however, to the European Conference of Churches, to be held in Graz, Austria in June 1997, may prove the occasion to resume them.

37. See Andrei Zolotov, "Georgian Orthodox Church to Leave WCC and CEC," ENI, 26 May 1997, as distributed by Orthonews (news@holy-trinity.org).


On the financial crisis within German Catholicism, by far the richest of Europe’s churches and the mainstay of Roman Catholic philanthropy in many parts of the world, see Klaus Nientiedt, "Kirchen unter Sparzwang," *Herder Korrespondenz*, 51:2 (Februar 1997), 55-57.

The decline in church membership and charitable contributions has been widely reported in the US and European press; one example is Marlise Simons, "Neglected Churches are Given New Use In the Netherlands," *New York Times*, 10 March 1997.


41. The Pontiff's appeal was not addressed, as it has been noted, only to Catholics but expressly in the Pope's words "to you, my brothers and sisters of the other Churches and ecclesial Communities;" see "Comments on the Encyclical Letter Ut Unam Sint of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II on Commitment to Ecumenism," *Information Service* (The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity), 89 (1995/II-III), 83-87.

42. Quoted in Fr. Georgij Zjablicev (transliterated into English as Georgiy Zyablichev), "Il problema ecumenico nella Chiesa ortodossa russa in relazione al sinodo del 1994," also in *Concilium*, XXXII: 6 (1996), 138-149, italics not in the original.

43. The question of ROC's constituency has yet to be explored. Beyond the approximately 12,000 priests, the exact number of active laity (miranye), of national and grass-roots organizations, and of an "Orthodox public opinion is
difficult to determine, and so too whatever role these agencies might play in promoting or curtailing ROC's ties to the ecumenical movement.

The death in 1995 of Metropolitan Ioann of St. Petersburg and Ladoga silenced the strongest critic of ecumenism within the hierarchy and to some extent the circle that had formed around him.