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How Russians See Us: Jesuit–Russian Relations Then and Now*

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‘A Vintage Jesuit Religious Order ...’

An article appeared in 1994 in *Izvestiya*, a newspaper priding itself on new-found objectivity. It told of the twilight adventure of a postsoviet journalist. Following a lead, he stumbled on a pack of Russian neo-fascists, their lair stuffed with weapons, dogs, swastikas and *Mein Kampf*, besides ubiquitous young men sporting the current rage among Muscovite machos – *maskirovka* (camouflage uniform). A common battle cry binds the squad: ‘Thrash the Yids, the Reds and the Democrats!’ Their main activity: organising ‘work therapy’ for the ‘human debris’ of today’s poverty-ridden Moscow – the tramps whom they have lured to their ‘territory’ with promises of bread and shelter. Aleksei, a defender of Moscow’s White House during the siege of October 1993 and a law graduate of Moscow State University, introduces himself as their ‘*Fyurer*’. Innocently, he describes his ‘*orm*’ – a name derived, according to him, from the ancient Nordic peoples to define their ‘*veche*’ or public council. And what could this have to do the Society of Jesus? Allow friend Aleksei to explain: ‘We’re not a political party. We’re rather a vintage Jesuit religious order.’

Needless to say popular misconceptions of the Society of Jesus are rampant even among the well-educated fringe – historians, philosophers, sociologists – of postsoviet society, who generally know very little about organised religion. Causes are the educational system and the reference books which accompanied the Soviet student from cradle to grave. The authoritative *Slovar’ sovremennogo russkogo yazyka* (*Dictionary of the Contemporary Russian Language*), published in 1956 by the Soviet Academy of Sciences, offers its definition of ‘Jesuit’: ‘a member of a Catholic monastic order, a militant ecclesiastical organisation, serving as a bulwark of the pope and reaction.’² Quotations illustrating the word’s usage follow. One is from the memoirs of Aleksandr Gertsen: ‘Stroll through Cologne and look at the sturdy battlements, the Romanesque churches and the College of the Jesuits, those sinister warrior monks guarding this frontier of papism and the Reformation.’ Definitions of the word’s derivatives *iyezuitizm*, *iyezuitsky*, *iyezuitstvo* and *iyezuitsvovat’* include *hypocrisy*, *two-faced behaviour*, *craftiness*, *pretension* and *treachery*. Nor did reference materials published under other communist regimes employ different ideological clichés and socio-economic–political jargon, even when regimes quarrelled and sulked. The Soviet dictionary’s Albanian counterpart defines the Jesuit even more compactly: ‘...njeri shumë i djallëzuar, i keq dhe i egër’ (‘a very devilish man, evil

*This paper was originally delivered as a talk at Champion Hall, Oxford, in November 1994.

and savage').³ The less scholarly *Karmanny slovar' ateista* (*Atheist's Pocket Dictionary*), published just before *perestroika*, is more detailed and still more fanciful. It names the Italian *La Civiltà Cattolica* as the Society's main organ of publication and the Roman Gregoriana as its centre where 'new cadres' are ever being formed. It estimates the Society's membership as more than 34,000 (actually it was about 25,000) and its income at about five billion dollars. Finally, it claims that the order owns businesses and banks in several countries.⁴ In 1955 the Academy of Sciences published D. E. Michnevich's 'history' of the Order. The tone is apparent from the first words of the introduction which define the Order as 'the bulwark of the blackest reaction, of the most inveterate obscurantism, of the most foul immorality'.⁵

Given the general paucity of information about religion and the ideological prejudice of what was available, is it so odd that Führer Aleksei considered the Society of Jesus – that secret international cell of militant conspirators (incidentally, a word without pejorative connotations in Soviet parlance) and wild warrior-monks capable of employing any means to subject the world to the sway of the pope and his fascist cohorts – a positive role-model of his own organisation? Unfortunately, he is not alone. Many Russians misconceive, to put it mildly, the Society of Jesus. Often it is linked with those two other bogies of Russian popular fantasy, Masonry and World Zionism. After years in an ideological straitjacket the postsoviet press indulges to excess its proclivity for the paranormal. Esoteric reporting had a field day with the Society's renewal on Russian soil after a two hundred-year absence. 'Here in Russia Only Mature Adults Will Learn How to be Spies,' proclaimed one headline four days after two Jesuits had taken up residence in Moscow. It hypothesised a solid network of Jesuit schools to be set up throughout Russia. Another article, based on 'archival research', stressed the fact that Jesuit schooling was gratis ('... a four-course breakfast and five-course lunch': an incentive for hungry young Russians!). It predicted that for the fifth time in history, the Society was about to 'conquer' the Russian educational system.⁶ 'Are Jesuits really trained to spy on each other?' queried a reporter.⁷ One year later, the Orthodox bishop of Magadan claimed six hundred Jesuits to be about their business all over Russia. Actually, there were only twenty-seven.

Before examining the current situation in some detail, let us take a brief look at how Russians and Jesuits have interacted in the past: in prerevolutionary Russia, in the emigration and in the Soviet Union.

In Holy Russia

Jesuits came to western Belarus', Ukraine and the Baltic States during the first century of the Society's existence. From that time their presence continued without much interruption until the incorporation of these territories into the Soviet Union. In the Russian interior and in regions farther to the east Jesuit activity was more sporadic and confined to isolated episodes. Its moment of glory occurred when Catherine II, otherwise an adamant Voltairian, preserved her 'chers coquins, les jésuites' from papal suppression, since she felt their conservative views would pacify local Polish patriots. Even this very unusual and providential episode need not be unduly emphasised, confined as it was to the Empire's western borderlands which were dominated by Polish culture, to the St Petersburg salon aristocracy and to isolated corners of Russia – Siberian Tobol'sk, the Caucasus or the Kalmyk of the Volga – where Jesuits served Roman Catholic Germans and Poles.

Perhaps the more discreet Czech Jesuits of the Petrine era, with their stone church and school complete with Orthodox pupils in a corner of Moscow, christened 'iyezu-

vitskaya' by local residents, allowed the fathers to meet the citizens of Holy Russia, until then hermetically sealed from the West. A particular fruit of this mission was the vocation of Aleksei Ladyzhensky, 'zapadnogo papezhskogo raskola monakh' ('a monk of the western papist schism')⁸ to use the expression of the imperial authorities. Ladyzhensky, a Russian nobleman, was probably the first of his countrymen to join the order. He entered in Rome while pursuing his studies abroad – a privilege granted but to a chosen few. He died in 1756, a Siberian exile, captured by the Russians in Lithuania.

Russian nineteenth-century thinkers – westernisers, slavophiles, panslavists, anarchists and Marxists – assume a pivotal role as the direct forerunners of soviet and postsoviet culture. No aspect of their activity exceeded the importance of the associated flourishing literary movement. Jesuits were no strangers to the pages of Russian novels and essays. Pushkin, the slavophiles Samarin and Khomyakov, the delicate romantic Tyutchev, the literary giants Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, all mentioned them. The advocate of church union Vladimir Solov'yev corresponded with the Russian Jesuits of Paris, as did Kireyevsky, Leskov, and even Gertsen. In Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, the Jesuit Chernikovsky – his name is emblematic of the colour of his soul: black – incites the Pretender Dimitri to betray his faith and homeland. In *Haidamaky*, a poem by the Ukrainian poet Shevchenko, a Jesuit has turned the bandit leader Honta's children into Catholics – an act which merits instant retribution and the slaughter of the innocents. Both Pushkin and his lesser-known Ukrainian counterpart view Catholicism as national apostasy. Its most pernicious instrument is the Society of Jesus. A recent French study noted: 'Il faut dire d'emblée que cette image littéraire du jésuite est négative. Elle est même tout à fait et unanimement négative!'⁹ Fedor Dostoyevsky, more responsible than any other for the unfavourable image of the Jesuit in Russian literature, thought it just to put Jesuits together with anarchists and nihilists, and so they appear in the *The Idiot*. For the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* all were offspring of the decadent West, for whom Christ was a mere transcendental concept. In the words of Ivan Karamazov, Dostoyevsky's mouthpiece: 'Don't think I'm off to join the Jesuits, the men who are correcting His [Christ's] work.' In his 'Legend of the Grand Inquisitor' Dostoyevsky attributed characteristics to the protagonist – hunger for power, deceptiveness, a noble end justifying evil means – popularly associated with the government of the Society. Dostoyevsky's vision of the Jesuit as machiavellian manipulator stuck deep in the Russian psyche during the Soviet period and beyond. (Nevertheless, he knew, unlike several of our Soviet contemporaries, that the Spanish Grand Inquisitor was a Dominican and never a Jesuit.) A fervent Russian nationalist, Dostoyevsky was especially upset by the defection of Ivan Gagarin to Roman Catholicism and the Society of Jesus: '... the full-blooded, ancient Prince Gagarin, having become a European, deemed it necessary not only to embrace Catholicism but straightaway to leap over to the Jesuits.'¹⁰ Gagarin's dogged defence of Roman Catholicism as not conducive to revolution and tolerant of the powers that be probably did more than anything else to earn the ire of Dostoyevsky, the ex-revolutionary, since the latter stressed Catholicism's supposed link with socialism, atheism and world revolution.

Lev Tolstoy, frequently at antipodes with his noted counterpart, drew a differently nuanced but hardly more positive Jesuit portrait. Tolstoy set his novel *War and Peace* in the Napoleonic era, creating a vast panorama of Russian society. Historical figures – Alexander I, Minister Speransky and Generals Kutuzov and Bagration – interact with characters who never existed. The novelist did not forget the group of Petersburg Jesuits, nor their protector Joseph de Maistre. Pierre Bezukhov's wife, the

profligate Princess Hélène, tossed like a fragile bark amidst stormy seas by one western fad after another, finally takes up a particularly nasty one – Roman Catholicism. Enter a Jesuit – the instrument of her conversion:

... at one of those brilliant affairs Hélène used to give at her dacha at Kammeny Ostrov, a certain fascinating M. Jobert was presented to her; a man no longer young, with snow-white hair and brilliant black eyes, ‘un Jésuite a robe courte’, who walked for a long while with Hélène among the illuminations in the garden ... conversing with her of the love of God, of Christ, of the heart of the Mother of God, and of the consolations afforded in this life and the next by the one true Catholic faith ... Hélène was touched ... A dance to which her partner fetched Hélène away cut short her conversation with her future ‘directeur de conscience’, but the next evening M. Jobert came alone to see her, and from that day on he was a frequent visitor. One day he took the princess into a Catholic church, where she fell on her knees before the altar ... The fascinating middle-aged Frenchman laid his hands on her head, and as she herself described, she felt something like a breath of fresh air, which seemed wafted into her soul. It was explained to her that this was ‘la grâce’.¹¹

Princess Bezukhov’s real motives for conversion precluded Gallic ‘affectivité’. Catholicism meant annulling her marriage with the hated Pierre and a new amorous liaison. Neither did M. Jobert act out of pure altruism since conversion and annulment, according to Tolstoy, came at the price of ‘a round sum for the benefit of Jesuit institutions’.

This portrait of the urbane but slick, pious but self-seeking, grasping and somewhat twisted Jesuit is reflected in the image drawn by the Russian émigré philosophers and theologians who were forced to leave Russia for the West.

In the West

Ejected from Russia by the revolutionary cataclysm, Orthodox intellectuals arrived in the West penniless and humiliated. In France, the final or temporary goal of many, they found themselves confronted with the Roman Catholic monolith, which was stripped of temporal power but still relatively wealthy, influential and stable. Many Russians did not feel welcome in their new homes. Often, they felt shunned by the Catholic community – an impression not rarely justified. An impartial witness, the Belgian Jesuit Paul Mailleux, noted that a Russian bishop wishing to hold Christmas services in a Catholic church in Brussels during the 1920s was refused permission by the local ordinary. He was later accommodated by the Anglicans.¹²

The Russian presence in the West stimulated budding Catholic interest in Orthodoxy. Unfortunately this interest could hardly be defined in contemporary terms as ‘ecumenical’. It resulted in the ‘Unionist’ movement. Its immediate aim was reuniting the Orthodox with the Roman Catholic Church. The Orthodox would eventually equate ‘reunion’ with absorption. Characteristic were the ‘centres’ established in areas with a large Russian émigré population – Istanbul, Paris, Vienna, Brussels, Estonia and eastern Poland. Usually they included a small chapel, and a school or cultural centre, administered by a ‘Russian-rite’ Jesuit or secular priest of usually non-Russian ethnic origin. Jesuits were among the first involved in the movement. Russians noted their presence with mixed admiration and suspicion.

In an article devoted to the problem of relating Christianity to secular culture Pavel

Florensky, an early inspirer of the Russian religious renaissance, claimed that Jesuit attempts at ‘inculturation’ were based on a lie:

The academic and cultural achievements of the Jesuits may well deserve our admiration for attempting to generate a Christian culture for Christianity. Nonetheless they are completely mistaken. They create nothing genuine and are capable only of constructing pavilions of the type used to house art exhibitions ... such false culture can only fool witless apprentices ...¹³

In 1922 the theologian and sophiologist Sergei Bulgakov set sail from the Crimea, a hapless refugee, but longing to see Constantinople, the Second Rome from which Orthodoxy originally came to Russia. It was quite a disappointment. Bulgakov was disgusted by the slovenliness of contemporary Greek liturgical practice and appalled by the filthy churches. Most of all, the Greek clergy’s aversion to Roman Catholics distressed him, since it conflicted with his concept of the Church’s universality as expressed in his article *U sten khersonisa*: ‘They tell me that on one particular holiday they invite the representatives of all the religious faiths to meet the patriarch – even Jewish rabbis – but not the Catholics.’¹⁴ The Greek clergy were altogether too ‘Oriental’ for Bulgakov’s taste, like ‘Muslim mullahs’ sipping Turkish coffee and munching sweetmeats. Russians were different: ‘The Greeks are not Europeans; we are Europe ... we are Catholics, westerners by cultural orientation. Naturally we feel closer to any western Christian than we do to them, and especially to Roman Catholics, who are nearer and dearer to us than these sneaky Oriental bonzes ...’¹⁵ How unfortunate that it was a Jesuit – the Russian-educated Stanislas Tyszkiewicz, in charge of the Eastern-rite centre in Istanbul – who caused Bulgakov to rethink his philo-Catholicism:

Count Tyszkiewicz visited me and made a really negative impression ... The whole time he played the fool. He’s really not very clever and repulsive in a Polish way (‘po-pol’ski protiven’) ... It was clear to me that a person such as he, in spite of all his fervour, was out to ‘seduce’ Russians ... To be brief, it’s not unity but a trap ... and so very many Tyszkiewiczzes are sitting about in Rome. Once again that awful question arises: why are the papacy and Jesuitism historically the same thing? ... Until now I was convinced that Dostoyevsky was completely wrong [in his anti-Catholicism] ... and now I wonder ...¹⁶

Tyszkiewicz, born in Ukraine of the old russified Polish nobility, soon left Constantinople, eventually reaching Rome where he taught Oriental Theology. He remained rather intransigent, refusing to refer to Russian dissidents as ‘Orthodox’ and defining their ecclesiology as ‘un mélange tragique d’éléments catholiques et de principes révolutionnaires anti-chrétiens’ or ‘une maladie spirituelle et ecclésiale’ whose very existence foreboded ‘un danger sérieux pour l’Eglise’.¹⁷ Tyszkiewicz’s ideas seemed anachronistic already in the 1950s, and the cantankerous Jesuit complained of feeling isolated in the Russicum, or – as he so deftly put it – ‘excommunicatus toleratus, parfois vitandus’. Still, he continued his amicable correspondence with Bulgakov and even with the Grecophile and very orthodox Georges Florovsky, later rector of St Vladimir’s Seminary in New York.

Other Jesuits, however, were more open to dialogue with the Russian emigration. They no longer merely wished to convince the Orthodox of the truth of the Roman

Catholic position. In 1950 at the Jesuit boarding school for Russian boys in Meudon (France) an incident occurred which set a precedent. The director invited an Orthodox priest to celebrate a liturgy ‘in antiquo sacello byzantino’ – actually a refectory – for non-Catholic pupils unable to attend services in Paris. Fortunately, the decision of Émile Herman, rector of the Oriental Institute in Rome, was not to consider this minor sensation a violation of the strict regulations forbidding ‘communicatio in sacris’, although the judgment of other Roman experts was less tolerant.¹⁸ A later superior of the Jesuit community at Meudon revealed at a gathering of past alumni (among whom were several Russian Orthodox clergymen) how the fathers, when annually asked by Roman non-Jesuit authorities to submit the number of conversions to Roman Catholicism among the student body, reported a higher incidence than was the case.

Across the ocean in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, Jesuits and Russian Orthodox theologians were able to engage in honest dialogue through participation in confidential discussions organised by the Russian Centre at Fordham University in New York. Aleksandr Shmeman, an émigré clergyman currently popular in today’s Russia for his writings on theology and liturgy, took part, acknowledging the anti-Catholic feeling present in Orthodox communities, especially among former Uniates, and deploring the anarchy rampant in the émigré churches.¹⁹

Nevertheless, in 1956 a ruling of the Society’s Superior General still forbade Jesuits to describe the *ecclesia sic dicta orthodoxa* in their publications as Orthodox. Instead the terms ‘dissidents’ or ‘separated brethren’ should be employed. The word Orthodox in reference to them should appear only in quotation marks. The need for such a reminder indicates how much progress has been made since then. The 1960s and 1970s produced the first contacts between members of the Society of Jesus and the Russian Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union.

In the Soviet Union and in Rome

In all the heavy tomes written by Vladimir Lenin, the founder of the Soviet state refers only once to the Society of Jesus. Interviewed by Wilhelm Herzog, a pseudonym for the left-wing Julian Sorel, he mentioned – not at all negatively – the Society’s founder. He credited him with inspiring his decision to learn Spanish:

At the end of our talk, I couldn’t help ... observing that the Bolshevik Party in its organisation and discipline ... was very similar to the Society of Jesus ... At first I feared Lenin would take umbrage at my comparison or think it completely unfounded. Instead, he said: ‘That’s strange. What made you think of that?’ ‘I’ve studied Ignatius of Loyola a bit. An extraordinary person and a first-rate mind.’ ‘I thought so too,’ interjected Lenin. ‘You know what I did as an emigrant in Zurich? I learned Spanish to read him in the original. He was a fantastic organiser and a brilliant author.’²⁰

Anecdotes like this explain why articles appeared in the post-*perestroika* gutter press claiming that Feliks Dzerzhinsky, the son of Polish Catholic petty gentry, had the Society of Jesus in mind when he created the Cheka, the forerunner of the KGB.

Stalin, on the contrary, had little good to say of the Jesuits. Describing his time spent as a seminarian in Georgia, he condemned the ‘Jesuitical methods’ used by the Russian Orthodox seminary administration. ‘Don’t the Jesuits have any positive qualities?’ a German interviewer asked the Generalissimo. ‘Yes, they are systematic and work steadily toward the realisation of bad ends. But their basic methods – sur-

veillance, spying, peering into other people's souls, mockery – what could be positive in all that?"²¹ It is ironic that precisely these 'basic methods' were among Stalin's own favourites when liquidating class enemies.

Michel d'Herbigny, gifted Orientalist and personal confidant of Pope Pius XI, was one of the first Jesuits to deal with the Soviet authorities. He tragically underestimated their hostility towards Roman Catholicism and the Society. During one of three ill-fated voyages to the Soviet Union he met Shmidovich, a government official, who promised the intrepid Bishop of Ilium a bright future for the Society in the new Russia. Immediately, in 1926, d'Herbigny dispatched two Jesuits, Schweigl and Ledit, to Odessa to establish a Catholic seminary. When the bishops secretly consecrated by him were arrested, it was obvious that d'Herbigny had been deceived by the wily Shmidovich. D'Herbigny's activities were well documented in secret police reports and his name figures in their newly-accessible archives. It has often been conjectured that the much maligned Bishop of Ilium was responsible for a machiavellian attempt to take advantage of the '*tabula rasa*' created by bolshevik persecution of the Orthodox Church for the conversion of Russia to Catholicism. Whether d'Herbigny ever expressed this idea in private exceeds our competence. In print, it appeared as the brainchild of Chrysostom Bayer, a Bavarian Benedictine, in an article he wrote for the *Bayrischer Kurier* in 1930.²²

During the Second World War a few Jesuits entered the Soviet Union as clandestine missionaries. Usually their adventures ended with arrest, imprisonment and eventual extradition. While Cizek, Leoni, Bourgeois and Alagiani left published accounts, another of their number, Viktor Novikov, did not. As an ethnic Russian, he remained in the Soviet Union after spending time in the camps. Eventually he embarked on an unusual career for a Jesuit in pre-*perestroika* times. Let us listen to his own words (written in Latin):

In the Year of the Lord 1954, after I was set free, I was sent to the city of Belebei (in the Bashkir Antonomous Republic), where I have been living ever since. At first I helped in a medical school, and later became a Latin teacher there. This is still my job. There is no one else here who knows any Latin.²³

Novikov claimed that he was named 'Exarch of Siberia' by Sheptits'ky, the Uniate metropolitan of L'vov. He had little occasion to care for his flock. Contacts with clergymen, Roman Catholic, Uniate and Russian Orthodox, had been harmonious in the camps, but the Protestant fundamentalists had been 'stubborn fanatics'. Most significantly, his time in the gulag had tempered his vocation: 'Life in the camps was a continuation in practice of the spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.'²⁴ Other Jesuits in Stalinist Russia were not as fortunate as Novikov. The report of a Belgian nun from the Russicum archives amply illustrates the dangers:

A Jesuit father whose name was unknown came back from Siberia intending to exercise his sacred ministry in Lemberg (L'vov) ... One night he was called to see someone who was ill and next day he was found with his veins cut, dead. Motive? They said he had preached about the existence of God.²⁵

Paul Mailleux, a Belgian Jesuit, lived his entire life in the West but as rector of the Russicum in Rome facilitated contacts between the Society of Jesus and representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate. Mailleux claimed he owed his Russian vocation to a poorly attended talk on the Oriental Churches delivered by Sheptits'ky in Brussels: 'Je me souviens encore des premières paroles du Métropolitaine: "Si le public bruxellois

savait l'importance du sujet que je vais traiter, il serait venu beaucoup plus nombreux pour m'écouter." Mais il n'avait cependant pas perdu son temps puisqu'il m'avait intéressé à sa cause.²⁶ Another ironic turn of fate willed that supporters of the candidature of Sheptits'ky's successor to the post of Ukrainian Catholic patriarch emerged as Mailleux's most vehement detractors, branding him the 'Red Pope' in the ultra-nationalist press and considering him opposed to their own political goals.²⁷

Contacts between the Society and representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate began during the Second Vatican Council. Clergymen from the Soviet Union were invited to attend the sessions. Relations improved thanks to Jesuit pioneers in ecumenism. The American John Long, the present rector of the Russicum, is a prominent example. In 1964, Mailleux became responsible for the Russian apostolate within the Society and remained as Russicum rector for over 10 years. Consulted as an expert on Russian affairs by the chief promoters of the new *Ostpolitik*, he was one of the first contemporary Jesuits to visit Moscow as a guest of the patriarchate. He had an exceptionally good personal rapport with Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad, and welcomed the first of ten clerical students sent by the patriarchate to study at the Russicum. The Spanish Jesuit Miguel Arranz was in turn invited by the patriarchate to lecture at Leningrad Theological Academy. He became the first Jesuit to teach at a Russian Orthodox institute in the Soviet Union. Later, Superior General Pedro Arrupe twice visited the Soviet Union at the invitation of the Moscow Patriarchate. Among Orthodox hierarchs, Nikodim of Leningrad became known as one of the most vocal supporters of the Society. He himself completed the Ignatian exercises at Villa Cavaletti and translated Jesuit texts into Russian. It is said that he even carried them with him in his pocket. Whether his attachment to the Society exceeded distant admiration is a matter for future research. Privately, Mailleux often spoke of the double loyalty required of the 'Russian Jesuit': an affinity to the Moscow Patriarchate in addition to the primary loyalty of the Jesuit to the Roman pontiff. His biographer praised him for working actively toward long-term ecumenical goals but criticised him for too easily disregarding the ambiguities of dealing on a diplomatic level with a church then in the clutches of avowed atheists.²⁸ When the present Patriarch Aleksii, then archbishop of Tallinn, visited Roman Jesuit institutions in 1968 he was obliged, like all Orthodox bishops living under the Soviet regime, to compose a report for the authorities – a document recently made public. Although he claimed Mailleux wished to place the whole of the Russicum at the disposal of the patriarchate, he did not flinch from calling the Russian College 'a nest of serpents which hiss but cannot bite'. Whether the bishop's words revealed his actual thoughts is uncertain. Aleksii and his contemporaries were forced to tailor their dossiers to the taste of party ideology in order to gain privileges for their own church.

Before dying in 1954, the French Jesuit Philippe de Régis, a veteran of missions in Eastern Poland and South America, bequeathed to future Jesuits destined for the 'Russian apostolate' a strangely prophetic spiritual testament. He called it *Le Travail futur*. De Régis looked ahead to the then unforeseeable future — to a time when Russia would throw open her doors to missionaries, whatever their faith. He categorically opposed all those setting out to 'conquer' Russia for Roman Catholicism:

... Car la tentation pourra être grande, le jour où la Russie s'ouvrira, de se précipiter en ce vaste champ d'apostolat et de le regarder comme un terrain vierge à défricher. Alors on brûlera du désir de 'convertir' ce peuple ... cette activité provoquera la réaction, violemment hostile, des milieux orthodoxes. Le clergé se sentira menacé ... Il se mettra en garde contre les

‘loups revêtus de peaux de brebis’ ... Voilà le fossé creusé ... entre les deux moitiés de chrétienté ... qu’il s’agissait de ramener à l’unité ... et non de dresser l’une contre l’autre ... Pour cela, une seule méthode s’offrira à nous: celle de la collaboration fraternelle et désintéressée avec l’Eglise russe orthodoxe dans l’oeuvre d’éducation et de formation de ce peuple ...²⁹

Future contacts between Jesuits and Russian Orthodox should according to de Régis be based on mutual tolerance, along the lines of the advice once given to him by a Russian Orthodox bishop: ‘... à son avis, c’était la souffrance supportée en commun pour le Christ qui devait purifier le plus puissamment nos Eglises et les orienter sur le chemin de la tolérance et de la collaboration fraternelle, première étape vers l’union.’³⁰

1992: The Reestablishment of the Society in Russia

The reestablishment of the Society on former Soviet territory was made possible by the events of 1991: the fall of communism, the end of the Soviet Union together with the consequent independence of the constituent republics and finally the establishment of the democratically oriented Commonwealth of Independent States. Present-day Jesuit organisation derives from a double source: the prewar Lithuanian province and the structures which directed the Society’s ‘Russian apostolate’ outside Soviet frontiers.

After independent Lithuania was annexed by the Soviet Union during the Second World War Lithuanian Jesuits automatically became Soviet citizens. Several, after spending time in the camps, worked in exile as secular priests in far-flung Central Asia. After *perestroika* and Baltic independence Jesuits belonging to the reestablished Province of Lithuania and Latvia emerged from the underground. Today a few serve in parishes on formerly Soviet territory outside Lithuania. Non-Lithuanian clandestine Jesuits in the postwar Soviet Union, such as Viktor Novikov, were nevertheless members of the Lithuanian province, although officially there were no Jesuits in the whole of the Soviet Union. Several younger Jesuits of non-Lithuanian origin – including Josef Werth, apostolic administrator of the newly-created Siberian diocese – completed their formation in the Lithuanian Soviet Republic as members of the underground novitiate, although during the 1980s another clandestine novitiate functioned in Central Asia.

Outside the Soviet Union Jesuit structures often changed depending on current needs and possibilities. In 1952 the *Missio Orientalis*, created to oversee Jesuit missions among the Orthodox inhabitants of Eastern Poland (Albertyn) and directed by the superiors of the Northern Polish Province, was dissolved. The ‘*Ramus Orientalis Societatis Jesu*’ was formed to replace it. Its scope was limited to the noncommunist world. The *Ramus* did not deal specifically with Russians but with all the ‘Eastern rites’, although emphasis was placed on the Slavic churches. In 1964 non-Byzantine elements were removed from the *Ramus*. It was renamed *Delegatio pro ritu Byzantino*. Superior-General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach wished to renew its specifically Russian character. In 1985 he modified its structure and renamed it *Delegatio pro rebus Russicis*.

The reopening of sealed frontiers and the new law on freedom of conscience and religious organisations, passed on 1 October 1990 by the Supreme Soviet, demanded drastic changes. The new situation exceeded the competence of the *Delegatio* and called for on-the-spot decisions. On 21 June 1992 the superior general created the

Independent Russian Region for non-Lithuanian Jesuits working on former Soviet territory. The region includes about thirty members. Fifteen are Russian citizens but not necessarily ethnic Russians. On 13 October 1992 the Society of Jesus became the first Roman Catholic religious order to be officially recognised by the Russian state authorities as a legal personality.

The problems of the Russian region are as variegated as the ethnic regions into which it extends: Moscow and the Slavic republics, Siberia and Central Asia. There exist only two real Jesuit communities – in Moscow and Novosibirsk – where a few Jesuits lecture at university level; the others work in local parishes. The region includes five novices and about the same number of scholastics.

Jesuits in a Religious Mosaic

Fostering ecumenical relations with those of other faiths remains a top priority – especially since the former Soviet Union was a mosaic of different religions. The Baltic States were necessarily excluded from the newly formed ‘Region’ but they were a part of the Soviet Union. The majority of Lithuanian Jesuits work in predominantly Roman Catholic Lithuania; Latvia and Estonia, historically under the influence of Prussia and Sweden, are predominantly Protestant. Fundamentalist sects of Protestant inspiration are active all over the former Soviet Union and the Russian Orthodox authorities find them even more troublesome than the Catholics. They spread quickly and are generously supported by their fellow-believers in the West. In Central Asia, Islam is dominant. Western Siberian cities are similar in their religious makeup to European Russia, but there are Buddhists in the East and the influence of shamanism and the nature religions is alive in the taiga, where Jesuits still fear to tread.

Scientific atheism as such has officially died. A few people still obstinately declare themselves atheists; but an atheist outlook tends to appear impossibly dépassé, at least in the large cities where religion or at least religiosity is in vogue. Men of the cloth arrayed in priestly collar might feel less the target of anticlerical sneers in central Moscow than in Paris or even Rome.

Nevertheless the residue of seventy years of antireligious ideology taints the *Weltanschauung* of the *homo postsovieticus*. As one Jesuit serving in a parish in Kazakhstan recently observed: ‘(People here) think in stereotypes. They think that the church is a benighted and backward institution ...’³¹ Another working in Belarus’ described the rather more insidious effects of Soviet morality – a morality which preached ‘class war and not love for one’s enemies’:

... people here (are) corrupted by communism, they were turned into stooges. The authorities didn’t even have to send spies to our chapel. The parishioners themselves reported everything that went on. The police lied to the people, telling them ‘If you don’t inform us about everything, your priest might well go to prison.’ So, these simple people thought they were doing good when they tattled everything their priest did.³²

Ecumenically speaking, contacts between Jesuits and Russian Orthodox within the former Soviet Union remain a priority but likewise a sensitive issue. In an interview with the Soviet press agency ‘Novosti’ the Jesuit superior-general supplied guidelines for future Jesuit-Russian Orthodox relations:

The Society of Jesus ... owes a debt of gratitude to the Russian people ...
The contemporary political scene offers the possibility of better collabora-

tion not only on a pastoral level but also in publishing and education ... Jesuits are ready to maintain good relations ... (with the Russian Orthodox Church) in the same spirit of The Second Vatican Council as when they were formed ... Having had much experience in education and directing institutions of learning, the Society is ready to offer its contribution, always within the limits set by the Russian Orthodox Church, attentive to its needs and structures ...³³

On other occasions the superior-general has stressed his awareness that most Russians are Russian Orthodox. The Society's aim is to help that church to fulfil its historical mission to the Russian people. In the past few years Jesuits have enjoyed fruitful contacts with Russian lay intellectuals in Moscow and Novosibirsk. Philosophy courses offered by professors of the Gregorian University in the latter city have stimulated interest. Russian intellectuals frequently note the openness of worldly-wise and even streetwise western Jesuits, who share their academic interests, and the simplicity of contact with them, and contrast their own clergymen, whom they describe as 'cloistered', 'naive' and even 'primitive'.

A Moscow Jesuit reports assurances of good faith and collaboration not only from Orthodox priests and laymen but from representatives of the patriarchate, who are usually so sensitive about what they view as the 'dangers' of 'the new evangelisation.'³⁴ Usually these 'dangers' are generated at parish level when ethnic Russians from unbelieving, nominally Orthodox families ask to be received into the Roman Catholic Church. Several Jesuits serving in parishes throughout the former Soviet Union have reported Orthodox opposition in cases such as these. A Jesuit in Kazakhstan tried to answer Orthodox objections:

It's a fact that ethnic Russians are attending Catholic churches. At our Russian language Mass, about half the faithful are ethnic Russians – people who never heard anything about God or the faith ... When they come to see me, I always ask them to decide first whether they want to be Catholic or Orthodox Christians ... I once told an old woman that if she preferred to confess her sins to the Orthodox priest, she should go there to confession ...³⁵

A related issue concerns the use of Russian as a liturgical language — a cause defended by members of the Society all over former Soviet territory. In newly-independent and ostentatiously anti-Russian Lithuania, where the Russian sign over the exchange bureau at the station has been replaced by one in English, the Jesuit church in Vilnius continues to celebrate one of its Sunday Masses in Russian:

... we have many mixed families living here (in Vilnius)... some of our parishioners, especially those from Belarus', sent their children to Russian schools ... In one of our Jesuit churches before the war we already had services in Russian. We want to continue this tradition ... (Certain people) don't frequent either Lithuanian or Polish services ... But they come to those in Russian.³⁶

This problem is especially acute among Volga Germans, from whom a significant number of Jesuits from the former Soviet Union trace their origins. The youngest generation has all but forgotten the German dialects of their forbearers.

Ethnic Conflicts, Islam and the West

Every region of the former Soviet Union where Jesuits are present is torn by ethnic conflict. Moscow basks in its recovered 'Russian' identity and the times of Aleksei Mikhailovich, Peter the Great's half-westernised but still very pious father, are back. In the western Slavic republics, the situation is complex. In Ukraine, where two Jesuits attend the Latin-rite parish at Khmel'nitsky, west of Kiev, conflicts between Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox and the Uniates are commonplace. Latin-rite Catholics in Ukraine are usually Poles, who are disliked by the Eastern Slavs. Younger people are Soviet-educated and mostly Russian-speaking. Kazimierz Żylis, a Lithuanian Jesuit formerly stationed at Vinnitsa in Ukraine, has noted ethnic conflict involving Poles and Greek-Catholics who before state recognition of their church attended Latin-rite services:

... the Poles wanted nothing in Ukrainian. They stressed the fact that it was a Polish church and if the Ukrainians wanted to sing in Ukrainian they should attend the Orthodox church ... That was how the older generation thought. The younger people were indifferent. It's all the same – in Polish or in Ukrainian – as long as prayers are being said in church.³⁷

At first, Żylis knew neither language and said Mass in Latin. Later he gave his sermons in what he termed 'peasant language' – a mixture of all three.

Conditions in neighbouring Belarus' are only superficially simpler. Jesuits tend a parish in provincial Indura, near Grodno on the Polish border. Since parishioners are mostly Poles, everything is Polish. The dividing line between Pole and Belarusian is less clear than that separating the former from the Ukrainians. Likewise, there is a significant Belarusian presence within the Latin-rite community.

Siberia is unique. Jesuit presence is confined to Novosibirsk, but Josef Werth, apostolic administrator for the entire Asiatic part of the Russian Federation, is himself a Jesuit of German origin. Siberian Catholics are mostly Germans and Poles and recent reports speak of increased tension between the two. Werth, a native of Central Asia, has noted that cooperation between the two groups is fairly recent even in Kazakhstan. Before Catholics were able to build churches, each group retreated into the exclusiveness of its own ethnic ghetto.

Pastoral life in Central Asia seems most fascinating of all. A few Jesuits have parishes in Northern Kazakhstan, in Pavlodar and Tselinograd. Another is stationed in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. Another serves in Dushanbe – the city of the moon – capital of Tajikistan. Only Turkmenistan, where the number of Catholics is very small, is without Jesuits. Most Central Asian Catholics are ethnic Germans, forced to abandon their homes on the Volga during the Second World War. Attempts to create a German Autonomous Region were foiled. Emigration continues to reduce their numbers. Poles and Ukrainian Uniates, lacking their own priests, likewise attend Latin devotions. The predominant religion of Central Asia is Islam. All republics are ethnically Turkic except Tajikistan, which is culturally related to Iran. How do Jesuits in Central Asia view the current Islamic revival? One Jesuit, born in Kazakhstan to a German family, has voiced some trepidation:

People, Germans for instance, are afraid of the Kazakhs ... Islamic fundamentalists would like to chase all unbelievers out of these countries. In Tajikistan, they are talking more and more about officially observing Islamic holidays. Friday would be our weekly day off. It will be difficult for Christians when Sunday is no longer observed.³⁸

Naturally, Muslims oppose the conversion of Central Asians to Christianity, just as Orthodox oppose the conversion of ethnic Russians to other faiths.

Tajikistan, with its ethnic and linguistic affinities with revolutionary Iran, poses a special problem. In a recent interview Azam Hanal, a Tajik Islamic leader (*khatib*), claimed that 95 per cent of Tajiks are Sunni believers and revealed a desire to implement the Iranian model. Overtly anti-Russian, the *khatib*, recently back from Teheran, voiced his disapproval of the Turks, who he said feverishly build mosques but at the same time slavishly adhere to western social behaviour patterns. Only Iran allows Islamic men and women, equal partners conscious of their particular roles, to build an Islamic society.³⁹

How do Jesuits of the Russian Region view the West and western religious attitudes? '(Central Asian Germans) think westerners regard religion as an obligation and not as a basic human need,'⁴⁰ observed a Jesuit in Dushanbe. A colleague in Belarus' found his Church too lenient – and not only in the West.

Yes, I know – the Poles have the best system of religious instruction in the world. And so what? They have a high level of divorces and abortions ... Even here in Belarus' the Church is too lax ... In 1984 I met my first drunkard. I called him into the presbytery, told him to get on the table and gave him twenty strokes with my belt. Afterwards, I always saw him in church ... Yes, now we are a postconciliar Church. But here and in the West the reforms were too hasty ... When Lefèbvre appeared, many priests in Lithuania were quick to rally around him ...⁴¹

Others are convinced of the need for reform and proceeding along the path of the Second Vatican Council. However, western religious thought seems to them too abstract and western moral attitudes too permissive. Given the difference in mentality, western Jesuits, according to their Russian region brethren, might find adjusting to life in Russia too demanding, although those who leave their comfortable homes in the West for an uncertain future are worthy of admiration. Local candidates are more desirable since they are familiar with the gruelling Soviet system and know local conditions. Unfortunately they tend to lack perspective and are less able to persevere in a changing society. All those hoping to work in Russia should listen to warnings. A week after the Society received official state recognition, the prestigious *Literaturnaya gazeta* published a humorous verse called 'Jesuits': 'Despising culture and science/Inspiring hatred and fear/Jesuits warmed their hands/At the pyres of their prey'.⁴² Old attitudes die hard.

What can Jesuits do for Russia today? Richard Wagner's opera *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* ends with the verse 'Even should the Holy Roman Empire dissolve in mist/For us would yet remain holy German Art.' The poet is speaking of the preeminence of cultural and spiritual values over changing political structures. The future involvement of the Society of Jesus in Russia will be of a spiritual and cultural nature, which will preclude any involvement in Russian political affairs. Perhaps here lies the essence of the Society's mission to another Empire today.

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