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A Modern-Day Saint? Metropolitan Ioann and the Postsoviet Russian Orthodox Church

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The modern world tends not to produce many saints – or at least, not ones officially recognised by organised religions.¹ And yet the reactions in 1997 to the deaths of two very different women – Diana Princess of Wales and Mother Teresa of Calcutta – showed that modern industrialised societies, despite their largely secular culture, still need saintly figures. The devotees of Mother Teresa regarded her as a living saint and on her death urged the Roman Catholic Church to disregard convention and canonise her immediately. Diana's death, more disturbingly, engendered an instant hagiography of a misunderstood princess who had devoted her life to 'helping others', and turned her into a candidate for popular, if not official, sainthood.

The purpose of opening a paper about the Russian Orthodox Church with remarks on Princess Diana and Mother Teresa is to illustrate the fact that, despite the apparent paucity of candidates, modern, secular societies still need saintly figures. Organised religions are aware of this. Pope John Paul II has presided over a huge proliferation in Catholic canonisations, creating 276 new saints as of 1995 (although not all of them twentieth-century figures). Some of these canonisations, like those of the founder of the conservative *Opus Dei* movement, Mgr Escriva de Balaguer, and Edith Stein, the Jewish-born nun killed at Auschwitz, were politically controversial.² Moreover, in March 1999 the Pope bowed to popular pressure for the canonisation of Mother Teresa by waiving the normal requirement for five years to have elapsed before the start of an investigation into a candidate's saintliness. The designation of a saint, then, has political as well as spiritual consequences.

In recent years the Russian Orthodox Church has also added to its tally of modern saints. Its position has been rather different from that of the Catholic Church, because until the early 1990s it had been unable to canonise the so-called 'New Martyrs' – Orthodox Christians who were executed in the Bolshevik struggle against the church. Since 1992, however, it has canonised numerous church leaders in apparently methodical fashion. The first group of new saints (canonised in 1992) included two metropolitans executed shortly after the 1917 Revolution; whilst the group canonised at the Bishops' Council in February 1997 included three bishops who died during the Great Purge of 1937.³ Despite the new freedom to canonise victims of the Soviet regime, however, naming new Russian Orthodox saints can still be a politically sensitive business. Nowhere was this better illustrated than in the fiasco over the burial of Nicholas II in 1998.

In February 1998 the Holy Synod refused to endorse the conclusions of a Russian State Commission which had confirmed that, according to DNA evidence, the human

remains found near Yekaterinburg were those of the last tsar and his family. The Synod acknowledged only that the bones had probably belong to ‘victims of the state that wrestled with God’ and therefore to ‘martyrs, confessors and passion-bearers whom our Church canonise today when their identity, biography and hagiographic materials have been established’.⁴ The investigation of the ‘Yekaterinburg remains’ brought to a head the simmering controversy over the canonisation of Nicholas II. This was a sensitive issue because canonisation would be interpreted as the church’s endorsement of autocracy. The religious criteria for canonisation were also dubious, since Nicholas was not known for his saintly or ascetic life. A year before the Synod’s decision about the authenticity of the remains, the Bishops’ Council of February 1997 had resolved to refer any decision on canonisation of the tsar’s family to the next Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church (the church’s supreme governing body). In fact, however, the decision to declare Nicholas and his family ‘holy passion-bearers’ was taken at the Bishops’ Council in August 2000.

The delay in canonising the tsar was ostensibly influenced by the church’s desire ‘to promote civic peace and accord’, as the patriarch put it in his televised address marking the burial of the bones in July 1998. The church was anxious to avoid canonising the ‘wrong’ bones, thereby making them into false holy relics. Official press releases did not mention, however, that the church wanted to avoid seeming to endorse autocracy; and also that it was anxious to avoid conflict with the New York-based Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (founded by émigrés after the Revolution). The hostility between these two branches of the church had originated in their differing attitudes to the Soviet regime; but the postsoviet Russian Orthodox Church also feared that its parishes in Russia might defect to the Church Abroad if they were dissatisfied with the Moscow Patriarchate. The Church Abroad had canonised the Imperial Family in 1981 and did not accept the conclusions of the investigation into the Yekaterinburg remains, maintaining that contemporary accounts from White investigators about the complete destruction of the bodies were authentic. In July 1998, then, the bones were interred in unnamed coffins in the Peter and Paul Cathedral in St Petersburg, whilst most members of the church hierarchy and the Romanov family joined the patriarch in a requiem service for the tsar and his family in Moscow.

A potentially even more controversial candidate for canonisation is Metropolitan Ioann of St Petersburg and Ladoga – one of the Russian Orthodox Church’s own hierarchs – who died in 1995. Ioann epitomises the need for popular modern saints, although he upheld a distinctly unmodern tradition within Russian Orthodoxy. The controversy over his legacy has revealed fierce internal disputes in the Russian Orthodox Church between its conservative and liberal wings.⁵ Supporters of Ioann believed that ‘the light of his spiritual guidance touched Russian souls, illuminating the gloomy horizon of contemporary Russian history’. He was, they said, ‘a humble, unexact person’ who ‘became the link which united contemporary Russia with its ancient historical and religious tradition’.⁶ Ioann’s critics, however, described his work as ‘a sort of “catechism” of pseudo-Orthodox messianism, Black Hundredism and Nazism’.⁷

Metropolitan Ioann was born Ivan Matfeyevich Snychev in October 1927, the fourth of five sons of a peasant family in south-western Ukraine. In 1933 the region was devastated by the famine that was a consequence of the collectivisation campaign, and the family moved to stay with relatives in the Orenburg region south of the Urals. The Snychev parents were vaguely religious, keeping icons in their home and attending church occasionally. In fact, religious belief in Russia remained

widespread in the 1930s, despite the state's attacks on the Orthodox Church. According to the 1937 census, which, for the first and last time in Soviet statistical gathering, asked citizens about their religious beliefs, 42.3 per cent classed themselves as Orthodox, whilst 42.9 per cent said they were 'unbelievers'.⁸ Moreover, as peasants the Snychev family were able to maintain religious belief because popular religion tended not to be dependent on clergy or churches.⁹

In 1943, shortly before his sixteenth birthday, the young Ivan Snychev had a religious experience that set him on the path to a career in the church. (The story became part of the hagiography of Metropolitan Ioann.) After serving briefly in the Red Army, he became a sexton in a local church where in 1945 he met the newly-appointed bishop of Orenburg, Manuil Lemeshevsky. Manuil – an ascetic, scholarly man, born in 1884, who had been in a labour camp and exile between 1933 and 1939 – became the youth's spiritual father and patron. Ivan was tonsured in 1946, taking the name Ioann. By choosing to enter the celibate black (monastic) clergy, rather than the (married) white clergy that fed the priesthood, Ioann had joined the estate that exclusively supplied the Russian Orthodox Church's leadership. When Manuil was imprisoned again in 1948, Ioann entered the Saratov seminary and then went to the Leningrad Theological Academy. He became private secretary to Manuil in 1957 after the latter's release and assisted him in his extensive research on Russian twentieth-century Church history. In 1960, when Manuil became archbishop of Kuibyshev (now Samara) on the Volga, Ioann went with him, and thereafter rose steadily up the church hierarchy in Manuil's footsteps. He became bishop of Kuibyshev and Syrzan in 1965, taking over from the ailing Manuil who died three years later. In 1976 Ioann became an archbishop; he was awarded a doctorate in church history in 1988 for a series of lectures at the Leningrad Theological Academy; and in 1990 he became metropolitan of Leningrad and Ladoga, succeeding Metropolitan Aleksii (Ridiger) who had been elected Patriarch Aleksii II. Until the move to Leningrad, then, Ioann had spent virtually all his church career in Kuibyshev.¹⁰

Ioann's career was fairly typical for a churchman of his generation. He was too young to have suffered the most serious religious persecution of the 1930s. He began his career during the postwar years when the Russian Orthodox Church had achieved some equilibrium in its relations with the state and had been cajoled into supporting the secular Russian chauvinism of the time; and he rose to the very summit of the church hierarchy at a time when the church was beginning to function more freely. Ioann's appointment as metropolitan of Leningrad – the third most senior post in the Orthodox Church – was somewhat surprising, for the diocese had generally been awarded to figures of more dazzling intellect and presence. One factor in his appointment might have been his record of firm opposition to the Soviet authorities' interference in church affairs during his time as Bishop of Kuibyshev. Another view is that the church wanted an approachable and popular metropolitan, rather than the aloof figures usually associated with the Leningrad diocese.¹¹ It has also been suggested that Aleksii wanted a 'quiet', biddable, person to replace him as metropolitan of Leningrad.

If this last reason was the one behind Ioann's appointment to the Leningrad diocese, the plan backfired. Ioann's relations with the Patriarchate in the last years of his life were strained because his controversial political stance generated much unwelcome publicity.¹² Largely unknown outside the church until late in 1992, when the first of his articles advocating a xenophobic, often antisemitic, conservative Russian religious nationalism was published in a national newspaper,¹³ Ioann became

a recognised intellectual leader of the Russian nationalist movement in the last years of his life. He was also adored by large numbers of the faithful and by much of the priesthood, especially in St Petersburg. Liberal priests and the religious intelligentsia, however, suggested that he had caused colossal damage to the Russian Orthodox Church.¹⁴ Ioann's popularity presented an immense problem for the other members of the church hierarchy. They could not openly condemn him, despite his extreme chauvinism, because they needed to maintain a semblance of unity among church leaders, and feared that his followers might defect to the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.¹⁵ Silence on the subject of Ioann's views, however, betokened approval. In early 1993, then, the patriarch issued clandestine instructions to the head of the Moscow Patriarchate's publishing department that Ioann's articles should not appear in official publications, because they had 'elicited an ambiguous reaction in public opinion'. Ioann's supporters revealed this instruction in an open letter to the patriarch that urged him to defend a more conservative position.¹⁶ In fact, *The Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* did publish one of Ioann's articles in its second edition for 1993 – presumably the patriarch's instruction had reached the editors too late for the article to be withdrawn.¹⁷

The ban on Ioann's articles in the church press, however, did not affect the publication of his work in other journals, and in 1994 the patriarch again attempted to distance himself and the church from Ioann's views. 'You must remember', he said in an interview to *Moskovskiye novosti*, 'that whatever high position His Grace Ioann occupies in the church hierarchy, he cannot speak on behalf of the church. That right belongs to the Local and Archbishops' Councils. [...] The Russian Orthodox Church is free of racial prejudice. [...] And I repeat: the opinion of one hierarch is still not the opinion of the church.'¹⁸ Despite the patriarch's evident displeasure, Ioann continued to publish in any periodical that would accept his work, including some of the most offensive examples of the gutter press.¹⁹ The patriarch maintained his tacit disapproval to the last and did not attend Ioann's funeral, but the church leadership seems to have felt unable to express active opposition to Ioann for fear of offending a large constituency of believers.

Ioann's views, then, were not official church policy, but they had broad resonance in the early 1990s when Russian society was seeking a new national identity to fill the void left by the evaporation of Soviet ideology. Some intellectuals turned to the Russian Orthodox Church for the comfort of moral absolutes when the certainties by which they had lived during the Brezhnev era crumbled, and substituted church doctrine for the old Soviet ideology which, like some incarnations of Orthodoxy, drew much of its strength from the idea that Russia was surrounded by hostile forces.²⁰ Such people often manifested what one liberal Russian Orthodox writer has described as a 'neophyte complex': 'the desire to display one's exceptional loyalty to the church, the search for one's own identity, and the seduction of nationalism and messianism'.²¹

Ioann spoke directly to this constituency. He saw Russian history in cosmic terms, and recognised little difference between the tenth century and the twentieth: both were equally present to him, and he interpreted both in terms of the eternal struggle between Russia and her enemies. His published works included a history of Russia that portrayed the country as the victim of hostile, alien powers since its inception.²² Proof of this victimisation, he said, could be found in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This notorious early twentieth-century forgery purports to be a Jewish blueprint for global domination through the subversion of traditional values. Ioann, however, claimed that the *Protocols* must be authentic, because recent events in Russia bore

out their predictions.²³ Nevertheless, Ioann believed that Russia, with Moscow as the 'Third Rome', was the guardian of the true faith and was destined to rescue the world from the forces of evil that dominated the late twentieth century. By returning to the teaching of the Orthodox Church, Russia could resist these evil forces and their doctrines of materialism, liberalism and democracy. Russia would resume instead its traditions of *derzhavnost'*, or great power status, and *sobornost'* – a doctrine suggesting a strictly hierarchical society functioning in perfect harmony and unanimity of purpose.

Committed antisemites have used the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* since they first appeared to prove that the Jews are behind the apparent chaos of the modern world.²⁴ For Ioann, Jews were merely one of the forces arrayed against Holy Russia, together with Freemasons, the West (particularly the USA), and the western 'heresies' of Protestantism and Catholicism. As one might expect, Ioann was fiercely antiecumenical. Ecumenism, he said, in his last recorded lecture, delivered to students of the St Petersburg Theological Academy, was the 'ideological basis of "mondialism", the foundation for the concept of the "new world order"'. ('Mondialism', meaning 'globalisation', was a fashionable term in the early 1990s amongst Russian nationalists who inherited it from the French *Nouvelle Droite*). 'It is precisely this unified false religion' (ecumenism), said Ioann, 'that will spiritually underpin the fundamental destruction of sovereign nation states and the union of all mankind into a single superstate with a global government at its head'.²⁵

Between 1992 and 1995 Ioann published at least seven books and countless pamphlets and articles. More books appeared after his death. It is highly doubtful that Ioann alone wrote all this. In fact, it seems to be an open secret in church and intelligentsia circles that Ioann's works were largely composed by his aides. This is not in itself an unusual situation for public figures. What is unclear, however, is how much influence the metropolitan had over what his staff were publishing under his name. Ioann's chief political aide was his press secretary, a former submarine officer called Konstantin Dushenov.²⁶ In 1992 Dushenov had helped to edit an open letter from Ioann to the St Petersburg authorities protesting about the activities of foreign religious sects in the city. Dushenov managed to get the letter published in the pro-communist national newspaper *Sovetskaya Rossiya*,²⁷ and Ioann then offered him permanent employment as his press secretary. *Sovetskaya Rossiya* published four more of Ioann's articles before the end of 1992; and the following year Ioann and Dushenov agreed with the paper's editors to produce a regular insert entitled *Rus' pravoslavnaya*. Further articles followed, together with a series of five books produced by a St Petersburg publisher whose owner was one of Ioann's admirers. The proliferation of Ioann's publications was managed by the 'Press Service' that Dushenov formed. This, like the post of press secretary, was not an official church body. It comprised three or four close collaborators, including Dushenov and his wife, and eight to ten regular contributors, together with a number of academic specialists who could be called upon for extra material. It tried to regulate the reproduction of Ioann's articles in brochures and pamphlets throughout Russia, but this was virtually impossible: Dushenov estimated in 1996 that there were at least 1,400 such publications. The Press Service's funding remains obscure. It received no church money, but it may have been subsidised by sympathetic businessmen, and presumably derived some income from its publications.

People who knew Ioann have questioned his intellectual abilities and the likelihood that he could write the pseudo-scholarly works of Russian history published under his name. One of Ioann's teachers from the Theological Academy claimed that

the only book Ioann had written himself was his doctoral thesis on schisms within the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1920s and 1930s, for which he had 'inherited' most of the material from Metropolitan Manuil.²⁸ The volume of publications released under Ioann's name in the early 1990s would be extraordinary for any author, let alone an elderly and infirm one with full-time duties as a senior churchman. It is noteworthy that in the recording of his speech against ecumenism to the students of the St Petersburg Theological Academy, Ioann is clearly unfamiliar with some of the technical terms, such as 'mondialism'. Dushenov, naturally, denied that he had written Ioann's works for him. He likened the Press Service to a politician's speech-writing team, but nevertheless insisted that Ioann had been solely responsible for the concept and the final form of his works.

Ultimately, whether or not Ioann did write this material himself has been largely irrelevant to his image. He may have been only a figurehead, but he led an important constituency of extreme conservatives within the Russian Orthodox Church which, since his death, has insistently demanded his canonisation. Moreover, the publications associated with him have provided an infrastructure within which his followers have been able to pursue their political agenda. The *Rus' pravoslavnyia* inserts appeared in the national newspaper *Sovetskaya Rossiya* every fortnight from 1993, less frequently in 1994 and 1995, and again fortnightly from 1996 when Ioann's death released the Press Service from its duties associated with the metropolitan's public functions.²⁹ The personal relationships between Ioann, Dushenov and various leading figures in the Russian nationalist movement also strengthened the associations between the conservative wing of the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian secular nationalism. These links were never formalised, since Ioann refused to accept membership of any political party or movement, but they can be traced through interviews and close reading of the publications. For example, leading figures in the nationalist movement who attended the meeting between Ioann and the editors of *Sovetskaya Rossiya* in 1993 to discuss the publication of *Rus' pravoslavnyia* included the leaders of the National Salvation Front (the most important nationalist movement of the time), and editors of two major nationalist periodicals, *Den'* and *Nash sovremennik*.³⁰ The Press Service also had important associations outside the Orthodox Church. It seems to have offered a ghost-writing service for secular nationalists, amongst them the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Gennadi Zyuganov, and the former Russian vicepresident and leader of the *Derzhava* movement, Aleksandr Rutskoy.³¹ These links were clandestine, but the striking similarities in phrasing and content between Ioann's works on Russian history and those of Zyuganov point to a more than coincidental connection.³² In addition, Dushenov stood (unsuccessfully) for election to the State Duma in 1995 on Rutskoy's party ticket. He admitted that he had contested the election because the Press Service would have benefited from the perks of office and the connections within the political establishment that were associated with a deputy's seat.

The ways in which Ioann's saintly image was manufactured by his followers after his death reveals how his canonisation – whether officially or as a popular saint – might affect the current tensions between liberals and conservatives within the Russian Orthodox Church. Ioann seems to have published almost as much posthumously as during his life. In 1997 and 1998 his St Petersburg publishers brought out five more books. These included Ioann's correspondence with his spiritual children, extracts from the diaries he supposedly kept throughout his life, his liturgical compositions, and his followers' reminiscences. In addition, some six months after his death, the Press Service published a paperback entitled *Pastyr' doby* (*The*

Good Shepherd) with which the campaign to canonise Ioann really began. This book was a compilation of biographical material and photographs, official obituaries, Ioann's correspondence, some of his articles, and reminiscences by members of his household. The *Rus' pravoslavnaya* newspaper published special editions about Ioann to mark significant anniversaries in his life and began to hint that the late metropolitan ought to be canonised. 'The reminiscences of those who knew Ioann well,' the paper said, 'suggest the image of a rare person who had attained the merits of genuine holiness.'³³ Criticism of Ioann's works by Vladimir, the new metropolitan of St Petersburg, had to be seen 'against the background of the ever-increasing reverence for the late Metropolitan Ioann as a confessor and undoubted saint of God'.³⁴ Moreover, according to Dushenov, the more Ioann was criticised, particularly for the 'doubtful authenticity' of his works, the greater his 'popularity in the church, even including proposals to canonise the late prelate as an outstanding Saint of God'.³⁵

The campaign to recognise Ioann's sainthood seems to have been orchestrated by the Press Service and an associated group, the Society to Promote the Memory of Metropolitan Ioann (*Obshchestvo revnitelei pamyati mitropolita Ioanna*). The Society was formed in May 1996 at a meeting in St Petersburg, chaired by Dushenov and attended by members of the Press Service, the editorial board of *Rus' pravoslavnaya*, local priests and devotees, and members of a local monarchist group. The Society's declared aims were to publish a complete collection of Ioann's works and to have a monument to him erected. Various memorial evenings were also arranged, although these should be seen within the secular Russian literary tradition rather than the church's hagiographic framework.³⁶ The Society's immediate task was the publication of *Pastyr' dobry*.³⁷ When this book came out, an article in *Rus' pravoslavnaya* described it as a saint's *zhitiye* or life story. Ioann had, apparently, forbidden his associates to spread the rumours of his miraculous powers during his lifetime. Now such stories were coming to light. 'Surely', wrote the reviewer, 'we could read about such things only in the Lives of the ancient saints, by whose prayers withered branches flowered in the wilderness.'³⁸

Among the most frequently recounted miracles in the literature about Metropolitan Ioann was the following story, which has Biblical echoes. Ioann's doctor, Valentina Dyunina, said that Ioann had instructed her to buy five apple trees for the garden of his dacha. There were so many fine saplings for sale at the market that she was persuaded to buy a sixth. All six were planted and flourished until shortly before Ioann was due to visit, whereupon the sixth tree faded and withered. Dyunina confessed what she had done to Ioann, who ordered her to repent of her disobedience and blessed the withered tree. Shortly afterwards, it recovered and that year bore as much fruit as the other five trees.³⁹

Another well-publicised miracle concerned Ioann's own calling to the church. He told this story himself in interviews and a video documentary, and it was repeated in the Press Service's biographical material. On 1 August 1943 (an auspicious day, being the feast of St Serafim of Sarov and the eve of the feast of St Elijah), the 15-year-old Ivan went to a village dance.⁴⁰ Watching the revellers, he had a vision of demons whirling and twisting, and it was then that he decided to turn his back on the world and enter the church. This is how Ioann told the story to a Russian journalist:

Suddenly the sky became dark with clouds, all at once it was twilight, and it was as if shrouds had wafted in from every side. And behind those shrouds, the dancing couples no longer seemed quite like people, they

were like some sort of animals, covered in fine, curly fur, and stamping in pairs in front of each other. They emitted a foul smell, and a deathly cold. Then suddenly the shrouds fell away, and everything was normal: lads and lasses dancing. [...] But I couldn't stand it any longer. I got up and went out, through the gate. From that moment I abandoned worldly amusements and entered the spiritual life once and for all. It was, as we say, a 'calling'.⁴¹

Numerous other moments in the life of Metropolitan Ioann as constructed by him and his followers echo the tropes of Russian hagiography. Ioann as a child or youth was sometimes in trouble with the authorities and would on such occasions dream of an 'unknown woman' who would demand that his persecutors release him to her. This was, in fact, a vision of the Mother of God (the Virgin Mary).⁴² Ioann was ascetic in the extreme: his cassock was old and torn, but he scolded his housekeeper for sewing him a new one. He gave away all his money to the needy, and made his own furniture rather than spend money on new things. His own health was poor, but he would not buy nourishing food or scarce medicine. Instead, he believed that God would provide, and his needs were always met in miraculous fashion. He also healed numerous people, including his own doctor whom he saved from an operation to have part of her lung removed.⁴³ Similar tropes – including dreams and devils, personal poverty, manual labour and divine provision – are to be found in the most famous Lives of the Russian saints, for example the popular eleventh-century Life of St Feodosi, the abbot of the Kiev Caves Monastery, and the fourteenth-century Life of St Sergi of Radonezh.⁴⁴ Consciously or not, then, Ioann and his followers shaped his life-story within the framework of Russian saints' Lives.

Ioann's death is also interpreted within this hagiographic tradition. Ioann, like the medieval saints, knew that he was about to die and therefore refused to be accompanied by his doctor on what was to be his last public engagement, at a bank in St Petersburg.⁴⁵ The reception was attended by the mayor of St Petersburg, Anatoli Sobchak, and his wife, who both approached the metropolitan to be blessed. When Ioann stretched out his hand to bless Sobchak he suffered a heart attack and died shortly afterwards. Ioann's death was interpreted as a warning to Sobchak whose readiness to allow foreign sects to operate in St Petersburg had provoked Ioann's first published article.

One more aspect to the construction of Ioann's hagiography should be mentioned. In the Orthodox tradition, it is of paramount importance that a saint's authority be vouchsafed by a respected senior figure. Ioann was the protégé of Metropolitan Manuil, whose righteous life and scholarly achievements were beyond reproach, but who has not been canonised. In his biography of his mentor, Ioann claimed for Manuil (and, by extension, for himself) the mandate of St John of Kronstadt, a St Petersburg priest famous throughout the Russian Empire at the turn of the last century as a preacher, philanthropist and crusader for the Orthodox Church, but also an extreme reactionary and a supporter of the antisemitic far right.⁴⁶ In the early 1990s, after his official canonisation, St John of Kronstadt again achieved broad popularity in Russia and Metropolitan Ioann frequently quoted his namesake in his articles. Ioann's own connection with John of Kronstadt was subtly established through the intermediary of Metropolitan Manuil. Ioann wrote that Manuil, as a young man in 1909, had dreamed that John of Kronstadt (who had died the previous year) had appeared to him, blessed him, and healed him.⁴⁷ The reader is meant to draw the inference that, via Manuil, Metropolitan Ioann too had received the blessing

of St John of Kronstadt.

What was the purpose of creating this momentum to canonise Ioann? Presumably, some people genuinely believed that he was a saint. The well-publicised miracles, a magnetic personality, and his readily accepted attribution of all Russia's troubles to the machinations of her enemies were powerful motives for making Ioann into a popular cult figure. But there were other, more political, reasons to have him proclaimed a modern-day saint that become apparent on investigating the internal disarray of the Russian Orthodox Church. The conflict between conservatives and liberals – to use conventional terms – has grown more acute since the mid-1990s and threatens to undermine the church's ability to tackle the numerous urgent problems of contemporary Russian society. Several other hierarchs in the church, as well as numerous priests, and laymen such as Dushenov, shared Ioann's strict conservatism and his antiecumenical stance; and his canonisation would immeasurably enhance their arguments. It would also, however, be divisive because it would signify the church's endorsement of his political stance. In the Moscow Patriarchate, the issue was recently reckoned to be as sensitive as the possible canonisation of Nicholas II.⁴⁸ Now that this controversial canonisation has gone ahead, is it possible that the church hierarchy will also bow to pressure and canonise Ioann?

In the few years since Ioann's death, Dushenov and others have nurtured his political legacy. They have tried to use *Rus' pravoslavnaya*, in Dushenov's words, as a 'mechanism for Orthodox publicism' to 'awaken' the church.⁴⁹ Their main concern has been to force the Orthodox Church to withdraw from the ecumenical movement. From mid-1996 vitriolic articles in *Rus' pravoslavnaya* attacked the so-called pro-ecumenical tendency in the Moscow Patriarchate. The newspaper attributed this tendency to the influence of Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) of Leningrad (1929–78), chairman of the Department of External Church Relations in the 1960s. The '*Nikodimovshchina*', as *Rus' pravoslavnaya* called it, represented a sinister KGB conspiracy deliberately to foster ecumenical and pro-Catholic sentiment in the Russian Orthodox Church in order to undermine it from within through the inculcation of heretical (that is, non-Orthodox) doctrines. Ioann's followers have claimed that the Moscow Patriarchate in the 1990s is under the control of Nikodim's protégés, who include Metropolitan Kirill (Gundyayev) of Smolensk and Kaliningrad (b. 1946), the current chairman of the Department of External Church Relations, and Ioann's successor in St Petersburg, Metropolitan Vladimir (Kotlyarov) (b. 1929).⁵⁰

Defenders of Nikodim, on the other hand, have interpreted his proecumenical policies as a carefully-calculated tactic to preserve the church from the worst of Khrushchev's persecutions;⁵¹ and the church has officially celebrated the life and work of Metropolitan Nikodim, possibly as a response to the extremists' attacks. In September 1998, for example, the church commemorated the twentieth anniversary of Nikodim's death. The Moscow Patriarchate's official report of the occasion warned that:

The assessments of [Nikodim's] activities are not the same. Incompetent and unjust judgments of some people, who claim to belong to the church but do not know much about it, often distort the image of this prominent church hierarch and sow discord among the people of God. The solemn commemoration of Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad and Novgorod held on September 4–5 was the visible answer of his grateful flock and true admirers to the insinuations of ill-wishers.⁵²

In October 1997 the Holy Synod officially condemned *Rus' pravoslavnaya* for

attempting blasphemously to blacken the life of hierarchs and clerics, both living and dead, who had been obedient servants of the church.⁵³ Nothing chastened, the paper continued to accuse Metropolitan Kirill and Vladimir of numerous misdemeanours, including shady financial deals, trying to gain control over the church (Kirill, they said, wanted to be the next patriarch), and acting as the puppets of 'global powers behind the scenes' – a common phrase in Russian nationalist discourse that suggested a global, Jewish-directed conspiracy against Russia.⁵⁴ This dispute is still simmering, and it is likely that the Synod will in future discuss some form of sanction against Dushenov.⁵⁵ However, the Synod's censure of the extreme nationalists is not unanimous. Some bishops – about 15 of a total of approximately 70 (according to Bishop Nikon of Ufa and Sterlitamak) – support the Dushenov and Ioann line.⁵⁶

The question of the Russian Orthodox Church's attitudes towards ecumenism cannot, however, be reduced to a pro- or anti-Ioann stance. Some of the objections of Ioann's followers to Roman Catholic influence in Russia and to the Russian Orthodox Church's involvement in the World Council of Churches (WCC) are shared, albeit in less virulent form, by the mainstream church hierarchy who have recently begun to voice their own unease over ecumenical relations. The August 2000 Bishops' Council, for example, condemned other churches for pursuing missionary work in Russia. In May 1998 the Russian Orthodox Church persuaded other Orthodox Churches to send their delegates to the December WCC Assembly in Harare as observers only.⁵⁷ The authoritative Metropolitan Kirill spelled out the Russian Church's objections. The WCC, he said, had become heavily biased towards the extreme liberal wing of the Protestant Church. It had begun to focus almost exclusively on issues that had no significance for Orthodoxy, such as interfaith communion, feminist language, women priests and gay rights.⁵⁸ Indeed, ecumenism, if it is understood in these terms, represents a major problem even for liberal Orthodox churchmen. Similarly, Roman Catholic influence has been a genuine concern of the Moscow Patriarchate ever since Roman Catholic parishes began to open in Russia with the relaxation of restrictions on religion.⁵⁹

The church has repeatedly censured Ioann's disruptive followers, yet it must be careful not to alienate them. One tactic might be to suborn them by adopting some of their views. Kirill's criticism of the WCC could take some of the sting out of the nationalists' condemnation of the ecumenical movement. Another tactic might be to exploit one of the most widespread criticisms of Metropolitan Ioann – the suspicion that he was not the author of all the works published under his name. This would allow the hierarchy to preserve an image of Ioann as a 'good shepherd' who unwittingly sheltered ill-intentioned people.

Currently, however, Dushenov risks censure or even excommunication because of his immoderate attacks on some very highly-placed church leaders. Nevertheless, he and his collaborators are unlikely to desist and will probably continue to press for the canonisation of Metropolitan Ioann. This would give their campaign to reinforce conservatism within the church immense clout. However, whilst official canonisation will certainly not come soon, popular cults are an established phenomenon within Russian Orthodoxy and Ioann's image as a modern-day saint is largely complete. His politicised followers could well ensure that he causes considerable problems for the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church for some time yet.

Notes and References

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