Whence the Anger?

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by Georgi Chistyakov

Father Georgi Chistyakov is a biblical scholar, a priest serving in the parish of Saints Cosmos and Damian in Moscow, chaplain at the Russian Children's Hospital, and a much loved confessor. He is a member of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship. This essay appeared in Russkaya Mysl, Paris, October 10, 1996, and appears here in translation.

Today Orthodox religiosity includes, as an almost inseparable component, a struggle against Catholics and Protestants, an attempt to expose them as enemies of our faith and of Russia, as well as a complete rejection of ecumenism and of any openness towards other confessions. The very term "ecumenism" has become pejorative and an accusation of affinity towards it is seen as evidence of a certain betrayal of Orthodoxy. It is a given that our relations with Christians of other confessions have not always been smooth, we do not understand each other in everything, certain elements of Catholic or Protestant theology are not acceptable to us, but this does not mean that we must detest each other and consider all those who do not belong to the Orthodox Church akin to servants of the devil, as is proclaimed by authors of books and newspaper articles as well as broadcasters.

We are Orthodox. Why?

If St. Seraphim of Sarov saw a friend in everyone, then the Orthodox people today are besieged from all sides by enemies, heretics, and insufficiently Orthodox priests, bishops and even saints, among whom are Dimitry of Rostov and Tikhon of Zadonsk. One young person, fancying himself a theologian, and to tell the truth brilliantly educated, announced to me that he cannot agree with the views of the Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh and Father Alexander Schmemann, inasmuch as they, living in places which are highly-contaminated (this is what he said!) with various heresies, have diminished their keen perception of Orthodoxy. Where does such self-assurance and spiritual pride come from? "Everyone is wrong except us" they proclaim literally with every step. Where does this come from?
This chosen path of self-assurance has nothing in common with Orthodoxy. We did not elect Orthodoxy because it is the only correct teaching of faith, since correctness can only be demonstrated in the sphere of knowledge, but not in matters relating to faith which transcends into the realm of the indemonstrable. No. We elect Orthodoxy only as a way, known to us from the experience of actual people whom we trust absolutely, seeing them as our closest brothers and sisters. For me, these are Fathers A. Mechev, S. Bulgakov and A. Men', Mother Maria (Skobtsova), Metropolitan Anthony [Bloom], Archbishop John (Shahovskoy) and my grandmother. Loyalty to that path is not evidenced in declarations or oaths, not in the publication of anti-Catholic catechisms and pamphlets such as "Baptists: Our Meanest Enemies", not even in the organization of a kind of competition with Christians of other confessions, to prove the preeminence of one's faith.

No, and again, no -- our loyalty to Orthodoxy consists in the possibility that our very life becomes a testament of our righteous path and not only in words to show its correctness, exclusiveness and preeminence. And it is precisely a possibility, which does not cover up our weaknesses which we too possess.

At first Fathers S. Bulgakov and G. Florovsky, and later Metropolitan Anthony and Olivier Clement, attained world-wide reputation not because they proclaimed the exclusiveness of Orthodoxy, pointing out that only within it can unspoiled Christianity be found. No, they merely spoke about their faith and its potentialities, in no way opposing it to other confessions, and frequently not even touching upon the problems of other confessions in any degree. As far as the Metropolitan is concerned, he never speaks about Orthodoxy -- he speaks only about Christ and the way to Him.

But on the other hand, Ms. Perepelkina, author of the book Ecumenism: The Path Leading to Perdition, and the authors of numberless books and pamphlets in the same vein, never speak about the potentialities of Orthodoxy, they only call down all calamities to rain upon the heads of heterodox and ecumenists and, as far as the Orthodox faith is concerned, its readers can attain loyalty to it only through the fear of being destroyed by everything which is not Orthodox. Surprisingly, their writing style resembles the magazines Kommunist, Political Self-formation and others published under the aegis of the CC CPSU [Central Committee, Communist Party of the Soviet Union]. Their authors always saw enemies in everything and frightened their readers with calamities which would follow any departure from the Marxist-Leninist line.
Alas, I have not found anyone yet who came to Orthodoxy thanks to booklets of that type. On the other hand, I often found people who became Orthodox because they found new possibilities in our faith for themselves. Many (among Christians of other confessions) were attracted to the Orthodox faith by the love for icons, by our Church singing, by Russian religious philosophers or by Orthodox asceticism, by the Byzantine ritual, or by the examples of our saints. But no one yet has become Orthodox through fear, which the authors of booklets against ecumenism and such themes, try to instill.

When we proclaim that Orthodoxy alone remains faithful to the tradition of the Holy Fathers and that it is the only correct means of faith, we become, alas, not followers of the teaching of the Holy Fathers but of Suslov, Zhdanov, Andropov and other Party ideologues, those who imposed Marxism, insisting that it is the only correct and the only scientific world view. A monopoly of truth is really extremely dangerous, since it makes us rigid and cruel, but unfortunately, it is very convenient since it relieves us from the need to think, to choose and to assume personal responsibility for taking such and such decisions. I am not even saying that this simply and directly kills truth, since truth can only be free.

In the Circle of Enemies

The nature of totalitarian consciousness is such that it demands an enemy. I remember how on every page of a school history textbook it was pointed out that the young Soviet republic was always surrounded by enemies. The authorities, and along with them, ordinary people, were always threatened by spies, enemy agents, subversive activities, etc. Vigilant citizens more than once detained me on the Moscow commuter train to turn me over to the police because I was reading books in a foreign language -- and this led them to see me as an enemy. In addition to World Imperialism, a political enemy, it was necessary to have other enemies in the sphere of ideology who were found not only among a number of writers who for some reason did not experience sympathy towards Marxism or the idealist philosophers but from among all those who, in even the most minor thought, did not agree with the politics of "the Party and the Government."

The Soviet authorities, that inculcated in us a class hatred of its enemies, are no more, but the image of the enemy is still needed today. The ecclesiastical dispute between Moscow and Constantinople in the beginning of 1996 was nothing more than a quarrel between two sisters, as N. A. Struve correctly pointed out. And as he suggested, this would not have been too significant except for the reaction fomented by the communo-patriotic types of media. "Sovietskaya Rossija,"
Zavtra, Russkii Vestnik, as well as (which is especially sad) the Orthodox paper Radonezh with the similarly named youth organization, literally fell all over themselves rushing to prove that the Ecumenical Patriarchate fell away from Orthodoxy some time ago, that Vladyka Bartholomew for some time has not been the Constantinopolitan but a Turkish patriarch, that neither he nor his patriarchate has any influence in the Orthodox world, etc.

Simultaneously with this campaign the paper Duel, known for its anti-Semitic position (it was previously called "Al-Khods") published an article against the then reigning but now deceased, Patriarch Parthenius of Alexandria, which insisted that he was a Mason or in any event, he receives large sums from the Masons, that he is an enemy, a heretic, having for some time been torn from Orthodoxy, etc. One need not be an analyst to understand the purpose of this campaign: to tear the Russian Orthodox Church from the local Orthodox sister-Churches, to set it up against the whole Orthodox world (both in the East and the Russian parishes in the West) and to proclaim that only we are right, that all the other Orthodox Churches have fallen away and have become heretical -- it is precisely this line which is advanced by Ludmila Perepelkina's book, which says almost nothing about God but instead sees Satan everywhere, his acts and machinations, along with his countless servants, which include all of us Orthodox Christians abiding under the protection of the Ecumenical and the Moscow Patriarchates.

Where are the sources of religious intolerance?

This intolerance towards other confessions and proclaiming as Orthodox the complete hostility towards other confessions, seems to reflect the recent Soviet past, with its mandatory rejection of everything which is not ours, with its heralding of undreamed of enemies on the front pages of all newspapers without exception. However, this is not the case. In Russia, totalitarianism was able to sink such deep roots because the soil for it was prepared, it was ready before the revolution. The search for The Enemy was sufficiently characteristic for Russia in the period between the XIX and XX centuries. An eloquent example to this approach can be found in the book by Archbishop Nikon (Rozhdestvensky) about which I wrote recently on the pages of Russkaya Mysl. Vladyka Nikon sees enemies everywhere, especially among Jews, students, seminarians and even among admirers of the works of [a famous theater actress] V. F. Komissarzhevskaya. Thus the sources of religious intolerance should be looked for not in the psychology of Soviet times which we made our own, but alas, in the distant past.
It seems that this trouble can be found in the fact that for a long time, religiosity in Russia was expressed primarily in deep fear and trembling before "evil powers" and the attempt to somehow protect oneself from it. It is precisely this religiosity which N. V. Gogol' characterized in his "Evenings on the Farm near Dikanka" and in his other works.

In many eyes, the priest is seen as some sort of a benevolent sorcerer who comes to your house to sprinkle every corner without exception, with Holy Water and chase away all bad spirits, demons, little devils etc. For the same reason (to protect it from evil spirits!) a child is brought to him for Baptism. For the same reason he anoints the sick and covers the heads of penitents with a "little apron". Incantations, charms, amulets, little icons turned into amulets, all this, and not just in the distant part, played a significant role in the religious life of our forebears and even today attracts a large number of believers. Among the more or less cultured people the various wood-goblins, water-sprites, hob-goblins, house-spirits, etc. have lost their colorful folkloric aspect, but they continue however abstractly, to be the "enemy" and to hold a significant place in the religious life of the Orthodox person. In general, religion is seen as a struggle against Evil and not at all as a movement towards the Good; rather the Mystery (Taina) is seen as the magic act of the priest, which automatically protects us from evil spirits, but not as the graceful action of the Holy Spirit to which, as Fr. Sergei Bulgakov liked to point out, we must respond with our movement towards God.

The chief place in a religion of that type is occupied by Satan, not by God, as Fr. A. Schmemann regularly pointed out. This becomes a constant opposition to the devil but not at all a meeting with God.

This is how that kind of Christianity is formed which is not distinguished by what should be a natural thing for our faith, namely Christocentrism, but instead by inimicocentrism (from the Latin inicus, enemy) if we can be allowed that term. Centuries go by, the Church attempts to struggle against such a concept of her role in society but the victory is not hers, but rather in progress in the cultural sphere. Little by little the educated people at least, stopped believing in Evil Spirits but the tendency to look for Evil remains in human consciousness. Only its object had become secular - today it is no longer Satan or evil spirits but living people, the so-called "internal enemies, Jews and students" against whom the Union of Russian People and other comparable organizations then struggled.
After the Revolution and Later

After 1917 the situation changed once again. The thought process remained the same, i.e. it was inimicocentrist except that there was a different actual Enemy since the society's direction was changed. The Enemy became the landlords, the bourgeoisie, the priests and believing people, "the formers" (Byvshii) i.e. those who were able to use knives, forks and handkerchiefs correctly. The struggles against them were as determined and pursued with the same beastly methods as was previously directed against Evil Spirits. During the course of a little over seven decades of Soviet rule the intensity of the struggle against the Enemy did not diminish for a minute except that the nature of the actual victim changed.

This situation is strongly reminiscent of a photographer's studio of the Twenties where anyone could push their head through a hole and be photographed riding on an Arabian stallion or standing next to the Eiffel tower, etc. Later the Enemy became former exploiters, the nobility, the so-called "enemies of the people" (engineers, professors, party workers of the type of Rykov and Bukharin, the military like Tukhachevsky), later, the Jews and "stateless cosmopolites", then Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov, dissidents and again the Jews, etc. No matter who figured as the Enemy the struggle against them was merciless, "bloody, sacred and righteous", so much like the struggle against Evil Spirits in times past.

Finally the millenium year 1988 came. Russia turned its face anew towards the Orthodox faith, but again the mind-set did not change, it remained inimicocentric. In the changed situation the Enemy was uncovered surprisingly quickly. Now among the Enemy are the heterodox and ecumenists, in other words those among us Orthodox who won't live according to the inimicocentric thought process. And the struggle began once again. Just as uncompromising as always.

Logically the question arises; why are the new enemies the Christians of other confessions and not the atheists, which at first seems to be more natural. Actually, the answer is very simple.

In the first place, the atheists are different only in that they live not knowing that Jesus is amongst us, and they do not feel his presence -- but as you know, the new ideologues of Orthodoxy don't have a Christocentric consciousness either, therefore the barriers which would separate them from the atheists simply do not exist.

In the second place, and this is of no lesser importance: the atheists are "ours" and the heterodox are "foreign".
The fact is, that at some moment in the beginning of the nineties it became evident who are the new enemies -- everyone who is not "ours". This actually cropped up in all spheres of life. In the arts, which began to be defended against Western influence forgetting that Tchaikovsky, Pushkin and Lermontov and the Bolshoi Theater, and Bazhenov with Voronikhin, became prominent in Russia precisely because of this influence. In politics, where there is talk about some kind of a special non-Western path for Russia, even though we know too well that this "non-Western" variant is alas, the way of Saddam Hussein, Muamar Qaddaffi and other leaders of that ilk. There is no third place. In the religious sphere, no one considers that the struggle against confessions because they were brought into Russia from abroad in essence contains the germ of a struggle against Orthodoxy because it itself was brought in from abroad in 988.

To Stand Against "Not Ours" /Ne Nashi/

The general trend to oppose oneself against everything which is "not ours", can be seen in the move to proclaim the Church Slavonic language as sacred and to prove that without it Orthodoxy is impossible (the translation of liturgical texts in the XIX century was seen as something natural, now it is seen as a real departure from the Orthodox faith and the chief heresy of the day) -- but if one continues in this line we automatically proclaim Romanians, Arabs, Georgians, Americans and French as well as all the Orthodox in the West as non-Orthodox or in any case, as Orthodox of the "second level."

I recently bought a booklet titled "The Russian Orthodox Rite of Baptism." Why "Russian"? As far as I know (and this is confirmed by my Greek Euchologion) the Baptismal rite is the same in all autocephalous Orthodox Churches. But a brief perusal made everything clear -- in addition to the full rendering of the sacramental rite and a list of all the Orthodox churches in Moscow, this booklet contains exhaustive information about fortune telling and signs connected with a child's birth, as well as about incantations which are recommended for use in the event of the child's illness. Thus for example, in order to relieve the child of fright one should "blanch heather with boiling water and wash the frightened child's face and hands with the water over a bowl, then pour out the water in the place where he was frightened. Repeat three times at daybreak." There are a large number of such recipes. This is nothing more than outright paganism, magic and sorcery but unfortunately it is under the banner of the Orthodox faith in a book with the addresses and telephone numbers of each and every one of Moscow's churches. The value of all such "rites" lies in the fact that they are "ours". The book is published in the series "Our Traditions".
The very logic of the struggle against "not ours" is such that it inevitably (whether we want to or not) leads to complete isolation and stagnation in the sphere of the arts and politics, and in the sphere of faith -- to paganism, to an empty ritualism and magic, completely devoid of the evangelical spirit.

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The source of religious intolerance is paganism, which is incorporated with Orthodoxy and mixed with it, the non-Christocentrism of our thinking and our isolation from the Gospel and from Jesus. It just isn't clear, whether this is bad or good. Thus for example Oleg Platonov, an author whose *Scientific Method for the Formation of Russian National Consciousness* (M., Roman-gazeta, 1995) is available in the Church's book stores, believes that "by merging the moral strength of pre-Christian popular outlook with the power of Christianity, Russian Orthodoxy developed an unprecedented moral might" (p.27). From his point of view, the "moral might" of our faith is evidenced in that, in contrast to Christianity of other lands, in Russia it meshed very strongly with paganism, as he writes "it absorbed into itself all former popular views on good and evil" and thus became a Philokalia. Unfortunately he gives the word *philokalia* a completely different meaning than that used by Saints Theophan the Recluse and Paisiy Velichkovsky. For him this is not an asceticism which leads to the spiritual and moral growth of the person in God but something connected with paganism and its positive influence upon Orthodoxy. (I will point out parenthetically that the same author recently published in the paper *Russkii Yestnik* an article titled "The Myth of the Holocaust" in which he presents massive material to prove that the Jews in general, did not suffer in the years of World War II and that everything said about their mass destruction is nothing more than a myth.) I don't know what words can be found to describe Mr. Platonov's world view but I am afraid that we know those words from that War, which he invites us to see in a new light.

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It is not heterodoxy but paganism which poses a danger to the Orthodox faith in Russia today. Fortunately many people understand this. But Christ is always with us, amongst us, thus, if we believe in Him, we need not be afraid.

(Translated from Russian by A.S.)