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# RELIGION, STATE & SOCIETY

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## Editorial

Identification with a particular nation is a possibility for all churches. In the 1970s and 1980s the identification of the Catholic Church with national culture and aspirations in Poland and Lithuania was an important factor in the process of undermining communist rule there. In the postcommunist period such identification has generally been less edifying, partly as a result of two factors, to which Hoppenbrouwers refers in his article in this issue of *RSS*: the faltering religious revival in most post-communist countries, in the context of which the churches tend to reach out for old certainties; and lack of clarity about the identity of the real enemy now that militant atheism is no more.

In the latter context Hoppenbrouwers questions the validity of a number of assumptions made about, and also within, postcommunist Eastern Europe 'The idea that there is now a moral vacuum in Eastern Europe and that it is in the process of being filled with something of western origin, which is alien, is tempting but deceptive and untrue,' he writes. 'It is almost a fantasy of innocence. This scheme, with a passive, innocent and uprooted victim on the one hand and an evil, intrusive and overwhelming perpetrator on the other, is a mental pattern common to many a nationalist.'

The article by Senyk in this issue is an extended critique of excessive nationalism in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) today. She condemns 'national demagoguery' on the part of the UGCC hierarchy in connection, for example, with a jubilee pilgrimage: the sole purpose of such a religious event, she argues, 'ought to be to strengthen the faith and deepen the Christian life of its participants'. She regrets that the UGCC presents itself primarily as 'the one institution capable of preserving a developing Ukrainian culture and all things Ukrainian', and that it does so in language of hostility to other nationalities and confessions, when it ought to be preaching Jesus Christ as the Saviour of all. Ukraine today, she points out, is after all multiethnic and multiconfessional, like every country in Europe.

In his article in this issue Johnson introduces us to the views of the nineteenth-century Russian Orthodox philosopher Vladimir Solov'yev on the relationship between Christianity and nationalism. For Solov'yev, 'nationalism' is aggressive and intolerant of the 'other', while 'nationality' is the product of transformation of a natural given (national identity) through a Christian dialectic. The resulting synthesis is 'the transformation of tribal relations into a universal which is simultaneously particular: that is, a universal which is manifested by the specific national and cultural norms which make human society possible'; or, to put it another way, 'national egotism must be transformed into a substantial nationality with the entire human species as its end'.

Orthodox churches are particularly prone to identification with nations. In my own article in this issue I discuss the Orthodox concept of the autocephalous 'local'

church and show how in the process of the emergence of new states in the nineteenth century as Ottoman power waned in the Balkans the Orthodox churches in the area came to be identified with particular nationalities, a development which continues to this day to be condemned as 'phyletism' by the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Orthodox theologians today, says Johnson, could find much of interest in Solov'yev for the development of a contemporary Orthodox understanding of the political universe. In 2000 the Russian Orthodox Church took a first step in this direction when it issued the document *Foundations for a Social Concept for the ROC*. In his article in this issue Verkhovsky notes that the document condemns nationalism, but also notes that the ROC is unable to expel anyone for his or her political views and that 'Within the church, a large number of Orthodox brotherhoods and other groups espouse extreme nationalist ideological positions.'

Verkhovsky goes on to set the nationalism of such groups in a larger context. He identifies an increasing tendency towards 'Russian Orthodox fundamentalism', which is opposed to westernism, modernism and liberalism (the latter including democracy, human rights in their western understanding and even freedom of conscience). 'It is fundamentalism, not nationalism as such, which is the basic antiliberal and antimodernist phenomenon generated by the church.' Verkhovsky identifies a further factor provoking the proliferation of this fundamentalism: the accelerating processes of globalisation.

'The antiglobalist position of the Synod's leading members which has gradually taken shape in the last two years gives more freedom to fundamentalists and their sympathisers', notes Verkhovsky. Like Verkhovsky, Hoppenbrouwers and Senyk are also rather pessimistic about any amelioration of the malaises they identify, at least in the immediate future.

There may be signs of hope, however, in that the sentiments and policies of church hierarchs do not necessarily reflect the inclinations of ordinary believers. Senyk says that while the UGCC hierarchy holds the views it does there is little chance of church public opinion being able to express dissent, but she nevertheless doubts whether the mass of the faithful are sympathetic with their leaders' stance; and Hoppenbrouwers feels that it would be a mistake to assume that 'the convictions of theologians and church leaders... are reflected in the views of believers: large numbers of believers in fact adhere to the ideals of plural society, liberal democracy and human rights'.

Hoppenbrouwers is in fact rather sanguine about the long-term prospects for rapprochement in postcommunist Europe:

Given the increasing globalisation of the political-economic sphere... the establishment of [western-style] democracy seems to be not only inevitable but in fact essential. After all, the creation of an alternative political-economic free haven with cultural values exclusively of its own – if that were indeed possible – would reduce the postcommunist societies to the same isolation from the world scene which turned out to be fatal for them in the 1970s and 1980s.

## Notes on Contributors

**Janice Broun**, an Oxford graduate, is a specialist writer on religion in communist and postcommunist societies. She has had several articles published on Bulgarian religious affairs since the early 1980s, and book reviews on a wide variety of aspects of religious life in Central and Eastern Europe. She is the author of *Conscience and Captivity: Religion in Eastern Europe* (1988) and of six contributions to *Censorship: a World Encyclopedia* (forthcoming).

**Frans Hoppenbrouwers** was born in 1962. He works in Nijmegen for the Dutch foundation Communicantes, which organises theological exchange programmes and aid projects for the Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic Churches in Central and Eastern Europe. He writes on themes pertaining to the postcommunist rebuilding of these churches and their role in society.

**Lev Morev** graduated in 1952 from the Chinese Faculty in the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies. After a junior posting in the Soviet embassy in Bangkok (1952–54) he became the first to teach Thai in the Soviet Union. Since 1959 he has been a research fellow at the Institute of Oriental Studies. His main interests are socio-linguistic, ethnological and religious issues in Laos and Thailand, and he is the author of many books and articles on these subjects.

**Matthew Raphael Johnson** received his PhD in political philosophy at the University of Nebraska in 1999. His areas of specialisation are Orthodoxy and Slavophilism, ethnic nationalism and nationalist political thought. He is a recent convert to Orthodoxy. His first book, *Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality: Royalism in Russian History* is to be published in 2003. He is the vicechairman of the Foundation for Economic Liberty in Washington DC.

**Sophia Senyk** is professor of church history at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome. Her special interests are church life and monasticism in Ukraine, Belarus' and Russia; she has published numerous articles on these subjects. The first volume of her *History of the Church in Ukraine*, covering the period to 1300, was published in 1993, and *Manjava Skete: Ukrainian Monastic Writings of the Seventeenth Century* in 2001.

**Aleksandr Verkhovsky** was born in Moscow in 1962. In 1989 he was co-founder and editor-in-chief of the *samizdat* newspaper *Panorama*, and since 1991 has been a vicepresident of the Information and Research Center 'Panorama'. From 1994 his main interests have been political extremism, nationalism and xenophobia in Russia, and since 1997 the interrelation of religion and politics. He is the author of several books and articles on these subjects.

**Philip Walters**, a Cambridge graduate, obtained his doctorate at London University on the political and religious thought of the Russian Orthodox philosopher Sergei Bulgakov. Since 1979 he has worked at Keston Institute, since the early 1980s as head of research. He has published numerous articles on aspects of religious life in communist and postcommunist countries. He is editor of *Religion, State & Society*.