

Real Orthodoxy and Fake Orthodoxy



The Renovatianist 'Metropolitan' Alexander Vvedensky c.1925, looking like an actor in costume or a Uniat bishop - all the externals, but empty inside.

In recent generations, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, it became common in modernist circles of the Russian Church emigration to speak of 'captivity theology'. The term was used to refer to the influence of Roman Catholic scholasticism on Russian Orthodox academic theology. This influence grew out of the Counter-Reformation in Poland (the western Ukraine) in the late seventeenth century and became especially strong in Russia the nineteenth century.

It is clear that there was indeed a Roman Catholic influence on Russian academic theology, especially on the Orthodox teaching on the Redemption and also with regard to the term 'transubstantiation'. However, already a hundred years ago, before the First World War, that 'captivity theology' influence on academic theology, as also on iconography, was being overturned. By then, even Russian academic theology (and iconography) was beginning to return to the Tradition.

This meant the return to the living Orthodox Tradition, the totality of the inspirations of the Holy Spirit throughout nearly 1900 years of Church life. This return was led by Metr Antony (Khrapovitsky) of Kiev and a whole group of talented monks, such as Hieromonk Tarasius, who wrote an important book called 'The Turning Point in Ancient Russian Theology'. Many

of these gifted and highly-educated monastics were later martyred by the Soviets, for example the ecclesiologist Hieromartyr Hilarion (Troitsky).

Thus, Roman Catholic scholastic influence on academic theology was already dying out by 1917. Of course, the traditional sources of Russian Orthodox theology had never faded, for they lay in monastic and therefore parish and popular piety, that is, in Church Tradition. Only the leftist or liberal part of the intellectual elite had had the impression that all Russian theology was scholastic, simply because it did not live according to popular and monastic theology and piety, but only in their heads. In other words, they had divorced academic theology from real theology, which is based on the Tradition. And the further the intellectual elite moved from the sources of theology in Orthodox life, the closer they came to intellectual fantasy and so spiritual death.

It was very interesting to see how the liberal part of the intellectual class, most of which emigrated to Paris after 1917, continued even after the Revolution to attack the martyred Russian Church for its supposed 'Catholicisation'. Most significant was the fact that these liberal intellectuals, many of whom had been infected by Marxism or other German philosophies of Protestant origin, had also been contaminated by a pseudo-mystical Protestantism, an outgrowth of individualistic Protestant pietism. The death-rattle of their influence came as late as the period between the 1960s and 1980s. Symbolic of this was the book 'An Introduction to Liturgical Theology' by the late Fr Alexander Schmemmann, a book which was burned in Russia in the 1990s as heretical, though most found it so absurd as to be harmless.

The obsession with Protestant attitudes had become obvious in the eighteenth century with the Protestant-leaning Peter 1. By the early nineteenth century various unorthodox Protestant-based tendencies of a pseudo-mystical or occult sort, such as Swedenborgianism or freemasonry, had become widespread among many St Petersburg aristocrats. This was apparent among the elite, which later fomented the Russian Revolution of March 1917 and the abdication of the Monarch. It was this Revolution which caused such anarchy and paralysis that six months after it, the resulting chaos was ruthlessly exploited by the Bolsheviks in their coup d'état. The fact that this Protestant/protesting mentality was still alive among the children and grandchildren of that elite at the end of the twentieth century shows the depth of the original delusion.

Since the modernists, known to Russian Church history as 'renovationists', were fundamentally Protestants, with a whiff of occult theosophy, they viewed the whole of Russian Orthodox theology as Catholicised, that is, captive to Roman Catholic scholasticism. This merely displayed their ignorance of real Church life. What was taught in universities and academies was not theology, it was only a rationalistic game, 'theological science'. Real Russian Orthodox theology had never died, but, as we have said, was still lived on a daily basis in monasteries and parishes. This was where, of course, the intellectual elite never set foot, confined as they were to the upper-class salons of St Petersburg, where treachery to the monarchy and so to all Russia was hatched.

The essence of the renovationist tragedy was their towering pride. (Interestingly, before the Russian Revolution, many of the future renovationists used to meet in a building in St Petersburg, called 'The Tower'). They believed that they could 'improve on' the nineteenth-century year-old Church with their 'spiritual' and 'apolitical' views. In fact, of course, this was self-flattery, spiritual delusion, 'prelest'. Their views were not spiritual, they were anti-Incarnational, disincarnate, gnostic, emotional. In other words, they were the 'charismatics' of their age, victims of demonic self-delusion. This can be seen very clearly in the philosophy,

so heavily imbued with the occult, of the alcoholic Vladimir Soloviov, who later lapsed into Roman Catholicism, in the theosophy of Madame Blavatsky, or later in the anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner.

During the 1920s renovationism died out in Russia itself, despite the political backing of the murderous Communists, who treated the renovationist married bishops and fantasists as so many 'useful idiots'. But in the liberal emigration, the same gnostic spirit of renovationism continued in the speculations of the next generation of renovationist philosophers, like the heretic Fr Sergei Bulgakov, the left-wing philosopher Nikolai Berdiayev or the most peculiar views and eccentric visions of Evgraf Kovalevsky. They in turn affected the younger generation, born in Paris after the Revolution, who later moved to their spiritual homes in the Protestant cultures of the USA and England. It is they who have only recently died out.

Now we can understand why Russian renovationists so actively accused the Russian Church of being in thrall to Roman Catholic influence. It was because the renovationists themselves were in thrall to Protestant influence. When they talked about captivity, they were talking about their own theological captivity, their own loss of the Tradition. Today, their only real influence outside Russia is among a few grandchildren of Russian emigres who have lost their roots, and a few Non-Russian converts and, inside Russia, some eccentric intellectuals.

Now that in the twenty-first century, most of the renovationists are dead and many of their founding works forgotten and unread, we can begin to see this Protestant movement in its true historical and sociological context. It was the aberration of a small intellectual sect on the fringes of the Russian Orthodox Church. It was they who made their forlorn attempts, both inside and outside Russia, to take over the Russian Church. Their successes were temporary and only outside Russia, in France, England and the USA. In the long-term, the Church has continued despite their continuing lapses and aberrations outside Russia.

The above photograph of a long forgotten renovationist 'Metropolitan', who died outside the Church, and the photograph below of contemporary Orthodox grandmothers sum up the whole difference between real Orthodoxy and fake Orthodoxy, between the Tradition and what is not the Tradition. The grandmothers are true theologians because they pray with their hearts and live; the renovationists were mere fantasists, because they were captives of their own brains.



Elderly Orthodox grandmothers in the Ukraine in 2009.

A picture of the victorious and fragrant Eternal Rus, that survived and triumphed over all that the West threw at her, Bolshevism, Renovationism, Naziism and now Consumerism.