

The Profile of Russian Orthodoxy Rises in Western Consciousness.



Having long dismissed and ignored the Russian Orthodox Church as an irrelevance, some Western media are finally starting to realise that it has a significance well beyond the borders of the Russian Federation, itself covering nearly one seventh of the world. Its profile has risen particularly since the repose of His Holiness Patriarch Alexis II, even though the foreign-owned newspaper *The Times* accorded him a demeaning obituary which was full of untruths and slanders.

However, in Continental Europe the German newspaper *Rheinischer Merkur*, published in the former federal capital of Bonn, reported on 11 December that ‘the Orthodox Church is one of the most important factors in European politics’. ‘Western politics cannot imagine the inner strength of the Eastern Church’. Indeed, the newspaper proclaimed that the election of the new Russian Patriarch ‘will be felt on the whole architecture of Europe’. And in a lecture at the Sorbonne, the well-known Russian MP and geopolitician, Natalia Narochitskaya, has said that ‘the future of Russia is the future of Europe’, pointing out that Europe has no alternative to its Christian cultural roots – unless it is the empty culture of the failing dollar.

In a similar way, at a conference in Trento in Italy, Bishop Hilarion of Vienna has criticised Western society for abandoning Christian family values. He said: ‘In less than fifty years

traditional concepts of the family and sex have been overturned; they have given way to 'progressive' standards, founded on a liberal world view'. He spoke of the unprecedented 'social fracture' that has appeared in all the Western countries following the 'sexual revolution' and the 'feminism' of the 1960s. It is this, he said, that lies behind 'the radical transformation of family and sexual ethics'. He added that this has 'not only radically changed the face of Western civilisation but also created an insurmountable chasm between it and the civilisations where traditional family and sexual ethics have been preserved'. The virtual disappearance of families with several children, campaigns for abortion, the changes in the roles of men and women, their mutual subservience to economic constraints (both husband and wife being forced into wage slavery), the loss of a role for many men, all resulting in divorce and new attitudes to homosexuality and so falling birthrates, may lead to the possibility that Western Europe will die out.

Meanwhile, in Moscow it has been announced today (15 December) that the forthcoming Local Council of the Russian Church (27-29 January) at which the new Patriarch will be elected, will be different from all others both in its scale and its representation. First of all, with 203 bishops, over 800 monasteries and some 30,000 parishes, it can in no way be compared to the Council which elected Patriarch Alexis in 1990. Then the Russian Church consisted of only 40 bishops, 18 monasteries and 7,500 parishes. Secondly, the fact that all the bishops and other representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) will take part in the Council means that it will have a multinational aspect which it did not have before, even under the previous Patriarch, whose surname was von Ruediger and who was born of émigré parents in Estonia. (Indeed, this year's new ROCOR bishops, an Australian and two Americans, symbolise this). As a spokesman for the Russian Church, Fr George Riabykh, has said, now representatives of other nationalities, for example, French, Japanese, German and Flemish, may take part in the Council. Finally, there will be an increased representation from the monastic orders and the laity. And all of this will be taking place in complete freedom, unlike the Russian Church Councils of 1990 and 1917-18.

Archpriest Andrew Phillips