

faith in Europe

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We cannot call the Moscow Patriarchate a progressive force. In fact it is conservative. It constantly demonises the West. It shows xenophobic and anti-Judaic tendencies. It expresses strong support for a centralised authoritarian state. Even those bishops who are labelled as 'liberals' are not liberal in the western sense. They are simply more moderate exponents of the same ideas.

The centres of conservatism are the monasteries. The more conservative hierarchs have monastic roots. As far as the theological seminaries and academies are concerned, we should recognise a great difference between those in St Petersburg and those in Moscow. The former are located in the middle of the city, and the students are exposed to international contacts. The latter are in Sergiyev Posad, a long way from Moscow, and do not have these kinds of contact. The new generation of church leaders are products of the Moscow academy.

Monasteries run their own bookshops. The Valaam Monastery has a bookshop in St Petersburg. Recently a book was on sale there which denied the Holocaust. I arranged for some famous public figures to sign a letter of protest to the patriarch. The book was withdrawn. Soon after, I went to the same bookshop and enquired about the book. I was told that it had officially been withdrawn because 'wicked Yids' had written to the patriarch; it was no longer on display, but how many copies would I like? This shows that fundamentalism is strong at grass-roots level.

The Russian Orthodox Church has no political power but considerable reputation and influence in society. It has an important role in shaping public memory, and does so selectively. Extremists within the church condemn all periods

of liberalism in Russian history. They remember the period of perestroika not as a period of religious revival but as a period when foreign sects invaded Russia.

The book *Autocracy of the Spirit* by the late Metropolitan Ioann of St Petersburg has become a bible for extremists, and has never been repudiated by the hierarchy of the church. The argument in the book is that Russia has a special spiritual calling, and that as a result it has become the target of an international Jewish-led plot for extermination. In order to counter this threat a Russian Orthodox state should be established within the boundaries of the Russian Empire; among Russian leaders the book admires Ivan the Terrible and Stalin between 1943 and 1953.

The most widespread extremist newspaper is *Rus Pravoslavnaya* edited by Konstantin Dushenov. Much of its content is in violation of the Russian Constitution and arguably of articles in the Russian Criminal Code. All attempts to close the newspaper down have however stalled at high levels in the judiciary.

Many people in Russia claim to be Orthodox without necessarily being Christian. There is a general tendency to regard Orthodoxy as primarily a mark of being Russian.

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