

Elizaveta Volkonskaia's *On the Church:* A Russian Defense of Catholicism

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The recent changes occurring in the Soviet Union have raised once again the question of the role which the Faith has played and will play in the future of Russia. In this article, Professor Matual examines the work of a Russian woman who converted to the Faith and sought to defend the Church she loved in her homeland.

In 1888 the Behrs Verlag of Berlin published a book in Russian under the title *O Tserkvi: Istoricheskii ocherk (On the Church: A Historical Sketch)*. Though there is no indication of the author's identity on the title page, it was most likely written by the Russian aristocrat and Church historian Elizaveta Grigor'evna Volkonskaia (1838-1897).¹ A highly gifted and inquisitive woman, Volkonskaia had taken up the study of Greek and Latin in order to read the Fathers of the Church in the original languages. Eventually her studies led her to the conclusion that the Roman Catholic Church is the Church of the Fathers and consequently of the Apostles themselves. Renouncing Russian Orthodoxy, she became a Catholic in 1887. *On the Church* is a spirited defense of her adopted Church and the soundness of its teachings.

Volkonskaia begins with some general observations on the dangerous consequences of questioning the teaching authority of the Church. The first of these is a diminished awareness of the Church's divinity and a tendency to treat it as a subject of opinion rather than an object of veneration. In time, she says, the integrity of Christian teaching itself may be seriously undermined as a result.² Ecclesiological errors of this kind lead unavoidably to the second great danger she decries, viz., a distorted understanding of the Church's vocation. Toward the end of her book she explicitly compares the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches — to the detriment of the latter. In the West, so the argument goes, prayer is combined with action so that the Church and the Church alone stands as an unshakable sign of contradiction in the midst of a dechristianized world. The Russian Orthodox Church, by contrast, is content to submit to the power of the state and to feed on its largesse (310).³ The final evil which springs from any challenge to the ecclesiastical *magisterium* is, of course, the loss of Christian unity. Volkonskaia maintains that once the bonds among the faithful are broken, the very notion of unity is obscured until at length the necessity of reunion is denied and disparaged (42). The Russian Orthodox communion, she believes, has already reached this lamentable state, playing down the fact that East and West were formerly one and spurning all efforts to reconcile the two. In the author's view there could hardly be a more radical departure from the authentic deposit of faith and morals — and this on the part of an ecclesial community which has so frequently accused the Roman Catholic Church of deviating from the teaching of the Fathers and of inventing new dogmas at variance with the old.

The Catholic Church's defense against the perilous accusation of "innovations" has always rested on the principle of dogmatic development. For Volkonskaia, too, this principle is of seminal importance. She adverts to the fact, for example, that the Nicene Creed represents a significant "development" of the Apostles' Creed and that the Constantinopolitan Creed shows considerable additions to the Nicene (235). Her main arguments in favor of development, however, are confined to a chapter devoted exclusively to Vincent of Lerins and his famous maxim, "quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est" ("what has been believed everywhere, always, and by everyone"). Since this formula has often been used by the opponents of the Church to prove that its "innovations" are unjustified, Volkonskaia attempts to show that Vincent's words, far from undercutting the Church's position on dogmatic development, tend to strengthen it — especially when they are read in the context from which they are drawn. It must be remembered, she insists, that Vincent was not giving instructions to the *ecclesia docens* but formulating criteria by which he might distinguish between authentic teaching and the endlessly multiplying heresies of his day. He used the words *everywhere* and *everyone* not in an absolutely literal sense (otherwise there would be nothing left of the faith at all), but in reference to those persons throughout the Christian world

known for their orthodoxy and fidelity. The ultimate guarantor of true teaching, as he suggests at the end of his treatise, is the Holy See of Rome. As far as the word *always* is concerned, Volkonskaia concedes that the enemies of the Church have, at first glance, some cause to rejoice. But a careful reading of Vincent's arguments reveals that he did not believe that every doctrine should be understood and expressed in precisely the same way as it was when given to the Church by its divine Founder. On the contrary, development is both good and inevitable. Just as the limbs of a mature man are different in form from his limbs in childhood but remain in essence the same, so too does the Church's understanding of Christ's teaching deepen and mature without essential alteration. Vincent speaks of doctrines as seeds hidden in the infant Church which germinate in the course of time and produce mighty trees. It is not development he opposes, but *change*. A developing doctrine takes its growth from its own potential; a change occurs when one doctrine appears which directly contradicts an established doctrine. The enemies of the Catholic Church, including Russian Orthodox apologists, have long affirmed that what the *magisterium* proposes to the faithful as genuine teaching derived from Scripture and Tradition is, in many cases, a reprehensible emendation of the sacred deposit, i.e., change, not development. Volkonskaia takes the opposite view. As a defender of the West she asserts and, in most instances, convincingly demonstrates that every teaching of the Catholic Church, including the controversial "new" doctrines, is in perfect harmony with the faith of the apostles.

The specific doctrines Volkonskaia explicates and defends are the teachings concerning purgatory, the Immaculate Conception, the *filioque* (i.e., the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son as well as from the Father), and the papacy. Of these four topics, the last occupies the greater part of her book. The first three are treated in a comparatively brief and not altogether satisfactory manner.

On the subject of purgatory Volkonskaia cites the authority of the saints and of the Church Fathers, referring to St. Caesarius of Arles and St. Patrick in passing and quoting rather extensively from St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great. The scriptural passages she adduces are two: Mt. 12:32, in which Jesus refers to that sin which will not be forgiven "in the world to come," and I Cor. 3:15, in which St. Paul speaks of the man who will be saved "yet so as through fire." There is no reference to Mt. 5:25-26 ("Thou wilt not come out from it until thou hast paid the last penny"), nor, curiously, to 2 Mach. 12:46 ("It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead"). Volkonskaia does not even point out that the ancient and universally honored custom of offering prayers and suffrages for the deceased is the most compelling "existential" proof for the existence of purgatory. Since prayers for the souls in heaven are unnecessary while those for the souls in hell are useless, it is obvious from pious practice that there must exist an intermediary and temporary state of purgation. It is possible that Volkonskaia omits all this because she does not regard purgatory as an insurmountable obstacle between East and West. (Indeed, reconciliation was once reached on this very point at the Council of Florence in the fifteenth century.) Rather, she believes, as St. Basil the Great once intimated, that a psychological barrier results from the West's predilection for precise definition — a characteristic not commonly found in the East. In short, the disagreement over purgatory may well be resolved through the process of charitable and humble dialogue.

Volkonskaia has little to say about the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, and this is surely the weakest part of her apology. In what seems to be an outburst of bad temper she observes that throughout Church history heretics have been unanimous in their opposition to the cult of Mary (172). Yet this hardly applies to the Orthodox East, the assumed target of her criticisms, since the oriental Church has always had a great devotion to the Mother of God. Indeed, one of Volkonskaia's arguments in favor of the dogma's antiquity illustrates the point: she claims that belief in the Immaculate Conception originated in the East and was brought to the West by the Crusaders no earlier than the twelfth century (173). Later, on Russian soil, Dmitrii Rostovsky was to write two treatises on the Immaculate Conception in the *Cheti-Minei* (or saints' calendar) for September 8 and December 9. Apart from these brief remarks and some concluding words on the desirability of praising God through the Blessed Virgin, Volkonskaia is ineffective in answering the strictures of her Orthodox opponents. Indeed, the very brevity of her response gives the impression that she herself, a Catholic for only one year at the time of the book's appearance, was not completely convinced of every point of Catholic teaching.

The section on the *filioque* is far more extensive and more persuasively reasoned. Volkonskaia first reminds her readers that this addition to the Latin text of the Nicene Creed was made originally in Spain in the sixth century and was formally adopted by the Council of Toledo in 589. During the next three hundred years the East neither condemned its use nor disdained union with the West on account of it. In fact, the first ones to object to the *filioque* were the Monothelite heretics of the seventh century (161). To prove the orthodoxy of the dual procession of the Holy Spirit Volkonskaia cites the witness of several Church Fathers.

St. John Chrysostom and St. Cyril of Alexandria are mentioned along with St. Athanasius the Great, who said that the Son imparts the Holy Spirit, and St. Augustine, who wrote: “The Father is the Father of the Son, and the Son is the Son of the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son.”⁴ Volkonskaia fills four pages with “proof passages” from patristic writings and adds rather hyperbolically that she would need to compile a book ten times bigger than *On the Church* to hold all the pertinent citations (158). Her lengthy list of authorities concludes with the assertion that there is not the slightest evidence in patristic literature that the Church has ever taught the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father alone (158). In her opinion the only explanation for the controversy over the *filioque* is that Photius, invalidly installed as Patriarch of Constantinople, needed a pretext to rebel against the authority of the pope, who opposed his accession (161). Volkonskaia adds that after the Photian schism the East did not break off from Rome because of the *filioque*, nor did the West rebuke the East for not including it in the Creed. Church unity, fragile though it was, was thus maintained until the middle of the eleventh century, when still another dispute between pope and patriarch revived the quarrel over the *filioque* and brought on the deplorable split that continues to our day.

There would be little need to explain and defend the existence of purgatory, the Immaculate Conception, or the insertion of the *filioque* into the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed if still another teaching were not rejected by the East. That teaching, of course, pertains to the papacy — the primacy of St. Peter and his successors and papal infallibility. It is with good reason that Volkonskaia begins her book with some sharp criticisms of those who impugn the teaching authority of the Church. For with the loss of faith in the rock of the papacy, there is nothing to prevent the fracturing of Church unity and even the degeneration of doctrine itself. On the other hand, a strong belief in the infallible authority of the popes necessarily entails — for the logically thinking person at least — the complete acceptance of everything which the Church teaches. To Volkonskaia the papacy is therefore the core of the question. All the causes of division between Rome and Constantinople/ Moscow are in the end reducible to one: the place of Peter and his successors in the life of the Church.⁵

Because the papacy is inextricably bound up with every other doctrinal difference between East and West, Volkonskaia’s many statements on the topic are scattered pell-mell throughout the book. So numerous are they that *On the Church* might very well have been called *On the Papacy*. Unfortunately, their very abundance and diffusiveness make a step-by-step exposition of them somewhat difficult. For the purposes of this study, therefore, her material has been reorganized so that the arguments she derives from Scripture, Tradition, and history might be presented more clearly and understood more readily.

Volkonskaia’s defense of the papacy is essentially a reply to three accusations commonly made against it: 1) that the power of the popes grew out of the secular importance of pagan Rome; 2) that the unworthiness of certain popes shows the weakness of Catholic claims; and 3) that the papal primacy was unknown in antiquity (259). The first two are disposed of rather quickly. Volkonskaia reminds us that the ancient Christians regarded pagan Rome as the new Babylon. They were not at all impressed by its worldly splendor or its political and military might. What did impress them was the fact that St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, had established the Church there and that the bishops of Rome were his successors. In short, Rome’s importance to the Church stems from the primacy, and not the other way around (263). As for the second objection — that bad popes undermine all claims to primacy and infallibility — Volkonskaia counters with the common-sense argument that no authority would have any validity at all if it were nullified by the defects of those entrusted with it (264). This seems fair enough when applied to the question of the primacy. But what of infallibility? If it can be proven that even one pope has taught error, how can one speak of the pope’s infallible teaching authority? Several popes are usually mentioned in the polemical literature, but one among them, Honorius, is especially prominent since he was severely criticized by the fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council.⁶ Volkonskaia devotes a separate section to this difficulty. The problem, she says, comes from a faulty reading of Church history. The pope who approved the decrees of the council amended the denunciation of Honorius to make it clear that he was guilty not of heresy but of carelessness and neglect of duty. The unfortunate pontiff had failed to understand and then to repudiate the Monothelite heresy, allowing some irenic remarks in a letter to the Monothelite Patriarch of Constantinople to be exploited as a weapon in the hands of the heretics. Volkonskaia insists that Honorius’s crime was imprudence rather than the endorsement of error (96). Furthermore, a personal view expressed in a letter hardly qualifies in any case as an exercise of infallibility according to the dogmatic decree of the First Vatican Ecumenical Council. Honorius never taught heresy as universal pastor addressing all the members of his flock. The same is true of those other popes whose judgment was not always circumspect or whose behavior transgressed the moral law. Neither the primacy nor the doctrine of infallibility is threatened by

any of them.

The third objection of anti-Catholic polemicists is the most serious. At any rate Volkonskaia treats it as such. In fact, her principal goal in *On the Church* is to prove that despite all affirmations to the contrary there is abundant evidence that the ancient Church both knew of and accepted the extraordinary position of St. Peter's successors.

Since there are those who go so far as to deny the primacy of St. Peter himself, Volkonskaia adduces the usual evidence from Scripture. Aside from the fundamental text (Mt. 16:18) she cites Lk. 22:32 ("Strengthen thy brethren") and Jn. 21:15-17 ("Feed my sheep"). Oddly enough, no mention is made of the many other passages in which Jesus associates Peter with Himself and thereby suggests that Peter is to stand in His stead after His ascension into heaven. Volkonskaia does emphasize St. Peter's dominant role in the Acts of the Apostles, but her presentation of the scriptural evidence is rather scanty compared to the evidence she brings to her argument from the testimony of such Fathers as St. Ephrem the Syrian and St. John Chrysostom. She quotes St. Ambrose's dictum "Where Peter is, there is the Church" and shows that St. Cyril of Jerusalem regarded St. Peter as the head of the apostles.⁷ St. Cyprian of Carthage, whom Volkonskaia refers to quite frequently, asserts that Peter, on whom the Lord founded His Church, spoke "alone for all" and answered "with the Church's voice" (13).⁸ There are other quotations as well, but these are sufficient to support Volkonskaia's contention that the primacy of St. Peter is well attested in the written records of Christian antiquity.

The far more difficult task is to prove that St. Peter's successors in the See of Rome are heirs to his supremacy. Since the Bible neither proves nor refutes this belief, Volkonskaia turns again to the source with which she seems to be most comfortable: the writings of the Fathers, both Greek and Latin. Chronologically, one of the first is St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 107), who in his epistle to the Romans refers to the Church in Rome as that "which presides over charity," an apparent allusion to Rome's leadership in the distribution of alms and assistance throughout the Church (284).⁹ St. Irenaeus of Lyons, a Greek who was a disciple of St. Polycarp, who was in turn a disciple of St. John the Apostle, insists that all local churches must agree with the Church of Rome because of its preeminent authority (284).¹⁰ Irenaeus follows this famous statement of the Roman primacy with a list of all the popes from Peter to Eleutherius, who was reigning at that time. In addition to the evidence from patristic literature Volkonskaia mentions the numerous letters to the popes from both western and eastern bishops which confirm the exceptional prestige of the Apostolic See.

Even if the primacy and its hereditary character can be corroborated by the literary monuments of the early Church, there is still much controversy over the *type* of primacy the pope possesses. Is it one of honor only, or is it jurisdictional as well? In response to those who hold to a purely honorary primacy, Volkonskaia points to the epistle of Pope St. Clement I to the Corinthians (c. 96). Despite the ancient disciplinary tradition which forbade bishops to intervene in the affairs of other Church provinces or dioceses, Clement, bishop of Rome and third successor of St. Peter, sought to bring order to a rebellious local church on his own initiative. He was never condemned for this breach of etiquette; on the contrary, he was praised for it in the East as well as in the West. Not the least of his admirers were the Corinthians themselves. Volkonskaia observes that while most bishops were said to govern the Church in a particular city, the popes were said to govern the *Church* — without further qualification (25). Their jurisdiction, she claims, extended far beyond the walls of the Eternal City, as St. Clement's intervention in Corinth clearly demonstrates. The same conclusion, she says, can be drawn from the *Shepherd* of Hermas (early second century), in which the Church, in the guise of a woman with a mysterious book, says to the author: "You will make two copies of this book. One you will give to Clement [i.e., Pope St. Clement I] and the other to Grapte. Clement will send it to other cities, for this is part of his ministry."¹¹ The fact that the pope had the authority to send the book "to other cities" indicates to Volkonskaia that he had the power to do what no other bishop could because his jurisdiction included far more than the city of Rome (282). Whatever one may think of this argument, it is indisputable that throughout the earliest centuries of the Church's history numerous bishops, priests, and laymen, both orthodox and heterodox, had recourse to the Holy See to settle questions of doctrine or discipline. In this connection Volkonskaia mentions the journey of St. Polycarp to Rome in 157 to discuss the problem of the date of Easter with Pope St. Anicetus. Why, Volkonskaia wonders, would Polycarp, already an old man at that time, undertake such an arduous journey if he did not see in the bishop of Rome the visible head of the Church? (23) And why did the orthodox hierarchy and clergy of the East so often seek the protection of the popes when heretics, supported by the secular arm, afflicted the faithful with physical persecution? To Volkonskaia the reason is obvious. It is the same reason why no ecumenical council can be convoked without the approval of the pope or why its

decrees are invalid without his consent. While Orthodox authors consider the ecumenical council the highest teaching authority in the Church, Volkonskaia reminds them that when the first of the great councils convened in 325, “it found the authority of the bishop of Rome to be an existing fact” (291).

Volkonskaia does not always make a sharp distinction between the questions of papal primacy and of papal infallibility. In point of fact, she often treats the two as manifestations of the same reality. From a Catholic point of view her approach makes good sense since the primacy is meaningless without the charism of personal infallibility. But for some non-Catholics it is entirely possible to accept the jurisdictional primacy of the pope without adhering to the dogmatic definition formulated by the fathers of Vatican I. It would therefore be advisable to “disengage” the two strands of Volkonskaia’s thoughts on this question and deal with infallibility as a separate issue.

The two preliminary arguments in favor of the Catholic Church’s position on papal infallibility are both negative. Volkonskaia points out that it is inaccurate to claim that the teaching of Vatican I represents a change in the faith of the Church since the Church has never taught that the pope is fallible (244). Furthermore, it has never condemned infallibility as a heresy even when the eastern bishops had an opportunity to do so at the Council of Florence (247). Knowing that such arguments are not likely to convince everyone, Volkonskaia turns once more to the witness of the Fathers. Clement, Ignatius, and Irenaeus are quoted again with an oblique reference to St. Cyprian of Carthage, who believed that the disorders in the Church of his day were caused by insubordination to Rome’s authority (257-58). Volkonskaia also compares Leo XIII, the pontiff of her time, with another Pope Leo — the first of that name — and finds that they teach precisely the same thing on the subject of infallibility. No Protestant, of course, would take seriously any statement by a pope concerning his own authority, but Volkonskaia’s Orthodox opponents have little choice. Leo the Great is, after all, venerated as a saint, a Father, and a pillar of orthodoxy by both East and West. Surely a heretic would not write, as he did, that the Apostolic See is inaccessible to heresy because of the authority which Jesus conferred on St. Peter and which continues in each of his successors (276-77).¹² St. Cyprian said much the same thing some two hundred years earlier. Regardless of one’s opinion of the precise formulation of the dogma at the First Vatican Council, it is preposterous to claim that the infallibility of Peter and his successors was completely unknown to the ancient Church. It was precisely because of the Church’s belief in the infallibility of the pope that St. Irenaeus could urge all local churches to bring themselves into perfect harmony with the See of Rome.

As the tensions between Rome and Constantinople became more and more acute, and especially after the restoration of the empire in the West under the Frankish kings, eastern churchmen began to accuse the West of deviating from apostolic tradition in matters of ritual and discipline. Volkonskaia notes that the ancient Church never considered external differences between one community and another to be harmful to its unity. The complaints of Photius, Cerularius, and others were merely excuses for a constantly growing estrangement from Rome. In the light of the much more serious doctrinal disputes that occurred later, their criticisms seem fatuous and irrelevant today. Volkonskaia discounts them one by one, giving them only as much attention as they deserve. If Rome is “guilty” of changes in the liturgy, she shows that Constantinople equals its rival in this respect (216). The unleavened bread which provoked the wrath of the Orientals in the ninth century had been introduced in the West some three hundred years earlier without a word of protest during all that time (183). Differences in the administration of the sacraments, especially Baptism and Confirmation, are historically and culturally conditioned and in no way invalidate them. Speaking of Baptism specifically, Volkonskaia remarks that the Church has never rejected the practice of infusion, the most common manner of baptizing in the West, but has always opposed indiscriminate rebaptism, a common practice among the Russian Orthodox (206). Mandatory clerical celibacy is still another issue that divides the two great branches of Christianity. Once again Volkonskaia states that the Church has never formally condemned it but that it has always taken a dim view of a hereditary clerical class, one of the evils that have resulted from a married clergy in the Orthodox Church (201). Whether she is speaking of the different ways of making the sign of the cross, of the location of the altar in the church, of the use of holy water fonts, or of beards and long hair among the clergy, she defends the legitimacy of variety in matters of rite and praxis. To her mind, all the controversies over these important but non-essential things were nothing more than a smoke screen to cover up the fundamental division between Constantinople and Rome.

It is clear to Volkonskaia that the root cause of the final rupture was what she calls “the pagan notion of religion as part of the state,” a notion which extended the emperor’s rights to include even the souls of his subjects. In time this sacrilegious usurpation led to the formation of the “eastern state church” and the triumph of separatism (143). It was not long, too, before theological and ritual dissonances assumed a more concrete form. Squabbles over ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the Balkans and the arrogance

of the Patriarch of Constantinople (his use of the title “ecumenical,” for example) set the stage for the last act of the impending tragedy (140-41). Up to this point Volkonskaia merely echoes what many other Catholic apologists have said about the causes of the Great Schism. The peculiar feature of her apology is the large role it assigns to alleged Jewish intrigues aimed at subverting and dividing the Church.¹³ She summarizes her position succinctly: “Bringing Christians to the loss of a living faith in the God-Man is the ancient goal of the Jews” (108). In nearly every heresy that has scourged the Church she perceives their handiwork. They have, for example, constantly sought to undermine the cult of the Blessed Virgin, knowing, as Volkonskaia asserts, “that when the vessel of the incarnation is not respected, faith in the Incarnate One will not hold up for long” (107). They were especially active in the iconoclast heresy, urging the destruction of sacred images in order to “save” Christianity from the menace of militant Islam. Their real aim was, once again, to weaken belief in the incarnation — this time by deprecating the use of material objects in the Church’s worship and thereby demolishing faith in the goodness of matter (110). But the greatest accomplishment of the Jews, in Volkonskaia’s view, is the part they played in the destruction of Church unity. They made clever use of the mounting tendency in the East to oppose the authority of the popes and encouraged the caesaropapism of the Byzantine court in order to drive a wedge between Rome and Constantinople (108). Volkonskaia concedes, of course, that it was primarily bad Christians who brought ruin upon themselves, but not without the eager assistance of those whom she believes to be the Church’s perennial enemies. Since Volkonskaia adduces so much evidence in favor of the “new” Catholic doctrines, especially the primacy and the infallibility of the popes, she must explain why it is that the Orthodox are not convinced by the evidence. Why, in short, does the schism continue? The answer implied in so much of what she says is that the Greeks and the Russians positively *want* the schism to continue. She finds proof for this in what she considers the Orthodox Church’s tampering with the historical record in an attempt to keep the known facts away from its adherents.¹⁴ Such promotion of historical ignorance is motivated primarily, she claims, by “hatred of the Apostolic See” (306). Whatever, therefore, might serve to remove the barriers between East and West is concealed or distorted. Neither the acts of the ecumenical councils, nor the works of the Fathers, nor even the Sacred Scriptures themselves are spared. The examples of tampering Volkonskaia produces are not in all cases appropriate. Their chief merit is that they reveal her deep-seated suspicion that the Russian Orthodox Church, dominated by the tsarist autocracy, is simply not to be trusted.

At times Volkonskaia seems to have little hope that the humanly erected obstacles to Church unity will ever be overcome. The Russian Orthodox leaders, as she depicts them, appear to be men of bad faith determined to remain forever aloof from the call of Peter. In her own day, no doubt, this was quite often the case. But at the end of *On the Church* she expresses her firm belief that East and West can be one again through “the two inseparable pledges of Church reunification”: the Eucharistic Sacrifice and the veneration of the Mother of God. Surely, she says, those who offer the great Sacrifice of Love will in time be inflamed with the desire for a communion of faith and love among themselves. For her part, the Blessed Virgin will gather all her children, in the East and in the West, under her one mantle. “The Lord,” Volkonskaia concludes, “goes higher than all earthly barriers and deeper than all the divisive boundaries and compels souls to the restoration of unity, reawakening their faith in the ‘one, holy, universal, and apostolic Church’” (331).

NOTES:

¹Paul Mailleux, S.J., *Exarch Leonid Feodorov: Bridgebuilder Between Rome and Moscow* (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1964), pp.3-4. Mailleux suggests that Volkonskaia’s son Alexander may be the author, but the date of publication and his mother’s reputation as a specialist in Church history favor the view that she is the author. That, at any rate, is the supposition made in this article. It is indirectly supported by an authoritative dictionary of Russian writers published at the beginning of this century. See Semen Afanas’evich Vengerov, *Istochniki slovaria russkikh pisatelei*, 4 vols. (St. Petersburg, Akademiia nauk, 1900-1917), I, 628.

The aim of the present study is to examine Volkonskaia’s attitude toward the Catholic and the Russian Orthodox Churches. It takes into account neither the ecumenical spirit of the post-Vatican II period nor current scholarly literature on the subjects she treats.

²*O Tserkvi* (i.e., *On the Church*), p. 310. All subsequent references to this work will be given parenthetically in the text. In a book published in Paris one year after *On the Church* appeared in Berlin, the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solov’ev made the same indictment of the Orthodox Church. See *La Russie et l’Eglise Universelle* (Paris: Savine, 1889), xxxiv. There are many interesting parallels between his book and Volkonskaia’s. They will be noted wherever appropriate.

³Solov'ev makes his comparison with a series of rhetorical questions: "Where in the East is the Church of the Living God, the Church which, in every age, gives laws to humanity, which determines and develops the formulas of eternal truth to oppose them to the continual transformations of error? Where is the Church which works at reforming the entire social life of nations according to the Christian ideal and at leading them toward the supreme goal of creation — the free and perfect union with the Creator?" See *La Russie*, p. 6. This and all other translations are my own.

⁴*The City of God, Books VIII-XVI*, Trans. by Gerald G. Walsh, S.J. and Grace Monahan (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1952), p. 158. All references to the Fathers are based on Volkonskaia's Russian text and not on the originals. For Athanasius on the Holy Spirit, see his orations against the Arians in *Des heiligen Athanasius ausgewählte Schriften* (Kempton and Munich: Verlag der Jos. Köselchen Buchhandlung, 1913), I, 275.

⁵Solov'ev was of the same opinion. See *La Russie*, p. 20.

⁶Solov'ev claims that the "heresy" of Honorius was invented by the eastern bishops because they were so embarrassed by the great number of real heresies that had originated in the East. See *La Russie*, xliii.

⁷*The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (The Fathers of the Church)*, 2 vols. (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1970), II, 112.

⁸*The Epistles of St. Cyprian (A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church)* (Oxford: John Henry Parker; London: J.G.F. and J. Rivington, 1844), 157.

⁹*The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch*, trans. by James A. Kleist, S.J. (Newman Press, New York and Ramsey, New Jersey, 1946), p. 80.

¹⁰*The Writings of Irenaeus*, trans. by Alexander Roberts and W.H. Rambaut (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868), p. 261.

¹¹*The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. by Francis X. Glimm, Joseph M.F. Marique, S.J., and Gerald G. Walsh, S.J. (New York: Christian Heritage, Inc., 1947), p. 242.

¹²For some of St. Leo's pronouncements on papal authority, see his *Letters (The Fathers of the Church)*, trans. By Brother Edmund Hunt, C.S.C. (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1957), pp. 66, 108, 204, 243.

¹³A similar view of the Jewish role in Church history is taken by the Catholic historian William Thomas Walsh in his *Philip II* (1937; rpt. Rockford, Ill.: TAN, 1987), pp. 239ff.

¹⁴Solov'ev says the same thing and adds that such tampering is protected by Russia's rigid church censorship. See *La Russie*, p. 52.

He is a bridge between not just the Orthodox Church and Catholicism but a bridge between Russia and America. As a Catholic American, I first saw him 15 years ago on a cold December day in Moscow. Hilarion, then 33, was already a rising star in the firmament of the Russian Orthodox Church. He had done his graduate studies in philosophy at Oxford – rather rare for Russian Orthodox Church leaders. Hilarion had been sent to attend a special ceremony in the Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Moscow. It was a small courtesy extended by the Russian Orthodox leadership to the Catholics, who number only a few thousand in that great city of 17 million. The Catholic cathedral had been closed for 72 years, from 1920 until 1992. Among them was the Church of the Ascension, built by the Empress Helena on the site of the Savior's Ascension. On the feast of the Ascension, many processions would pass from the Holy Sepulcher to this church. Eyewitnesses relate that, on this day, so many lamps were lit on Olivet that the whole mountain appeared to be on fire. It is interesting to note the custom of the time to build churches on Olivet in such a way that the congregation could look above themselves into the very heavens into which the Savior ascended. In all, there were twenty-four churches on the Mount. The Mount of Oli