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B. Voskresensky: I ask your permission in public to use your findings in my psychotherapeutic work. My question to you is also professional but it may be of interest for the entire audience. You have briefly characterised the contingent of ‘occasional parishioners,’ above all, in terms of their social status and residence. Can you say something about their specific psychological features? To what extent are they open to communication, both daily and within catechesis? To what extent are they pertinacious, rigid or, on the contrary, lively and agile, etc.?

V. Yakuntsev: Of course, when one comes to catechesis, there is some anxiety in one’s state of mind. Why? Because the ‘false assurance of salvation,’ to which I have just referred, ceases to satisfy. The very syntagm ‘false assurance of salvation’ is of patristic origin. For example, it is used by St Augustine in his treatise *On Faith and Works*. He addressed presbyters and bishops on the issue that the practice of baptism without preparation started gaining momentum. In other words, somewhat surprisingly, this problem had already existed in those times. And further he writes, ‘we are guilty for giving people a false assurance of salvation.’ On the one hand, the church has sacraments. And there is an overwhelming belief that sacraments have the saving power by themselves: if one is baptised, one is already accepted by God and, in fact, can safely go about one’s business. On the other hand, there is an obvious feeling of dissatisfaction and anxiety, awareness that there are unresolved issues, which can be closed only when one really gets experience of communion with God and neighbour and puts it into practice in one’s church life.

Generally, ‘occasional parishioners’ are pertinacious and difficult to be catechised. It is the easiest for those not yet baptised, the fruits of their catechesis being better, whereas it is the hardest for parishioners partaking on a regular basis who come to catechesis to fill in gaps. It is they who face most difficulties because of having to relearn many things differently.

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D. Gasak: Among the critical aspects of daily parish life outlined by Vladimir Yakuntsev in his paper, there is a very important issue regarding the distinction between heresy and superstition. The New Testament revelation entered history as something unworldly. In ancient Christians' testimonies we often see an apology of Christianity as of a genuine faith in the uncreated God, a faith which is not vain and leads to genuine piety, saves man from hypocrisy and duality, establishes direct relationships with neighbours, with the closest ones. In addition, Christianity struggled against paganism viewed as a false faith, which does not make anyone a partaker of divine grace and heavenly things. At some point, however, Christianity no longer antagonised paganism. The former started being perceived and perceiving itself as a powerful social force. This was due to the establishment of a closer relationship between Christianity and secular authorities. Then a kind of relativism appeared in the church when it started upholding the values significant for the historical destiny of the people and state, of other public institutions, but not inherently of church origin. Subsequently, the success of the church's preaching started being evaluated by how many people attended religious services, etc. The church seemed to have forgotten its experience of inner confrontation with paganism. Although visible, man-made idols were overthrown, be it the sophisticated paganism of the Roman Empire or the popular paganism in Ancient Russia, Christians seemed to have forgotten how to detect the very essence of paganism.

Therefore, in the problem of superstitions, referred to by Vladimir Yakuntsev, I would highlight as the most important point the return to a natural, spontaneous religiosity, to an archetype, which is alive in any person just because s/he lives on earth, being a part of the natural world. It is human nature to seek such relations, which would guarantee a good life, prosperity and success without questioning one's attachment to earthly things, institutions etc. The issue on the consecration by the church of human's and society's life in history entails a wide range of problems, from the simplest ones, such as the consecration of material well-being, happiness and so on, to the church's presence in governmental and non-governmental institutions. To a certain extent, the church became a prisoner of these historical circumstances. Thus, the position expressed by the speaker in his paper is most probably to be accused of heresy and offence against the most sacred: how he dared to raise his hand against such a powerful stratum of culture, religious culture! It is considered Christian and Orthodox but actually is not. Of course, the paper did not in any way claim that, under the banner of struggle with idols, one should reject really great fruits of the Christian culture, as some extreme Protestants do who, for example, view icons as idols.

It is important to raise again and again the issue that Christianity is opposed by paganism. The latter is not only what existed before and now it is gone; it is

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not merely an archaic belief that once had the power and today has become a museum exhibit. It is still alive in humanity. They say, during carnival time Fr John Meyendorff used to repeat stroking his belly, 'I like Orthodoxy – it has so much paganism in it!'

S. Moldovan: Thank you very much for this special presentation and for the critical issue which I feel it addresses to us all, as believers, as members of the Church, and the contemporary Church. I would like to begin the few observations that I have, with a statement inspired by the idea of paganism. Perhaps I will shock by saying this, but not everything in paganism is bad. There is something positive in paganism. And you pointed out in your report an essential difference, but I think it should be considered in a certain way, namely, you said that what is positive in paganism is every man's need for God. Personally, I don't believe there is a man who would not seek God in one way or another. It's what you called "religious needs". And you made a serious difference between genuine faith and the religious need. Clearly, Christianity is based on faith, however, in one way or another, it answers also the religious need. It offers, actually, an authentic answer to this desire of every man to know God. We think of St. Paul at the Areopagus – the unknown God. I'm not a proponent of paganism nor of the religious syncretism that all are equally good, or that all are different paths to the same peak. But I do not think we can start somewhere other than from the need felt by every man, the imperious, deep need that guides him in one direction or another, until either he meets the true God or finds a way to commit suicide. In all sorts of passions, in forgetfulness of God, in the flee from God, in atheism, in crimes, etc. With regard to these Christians, to these baptized people but who are still confused. I would like to make a parenthesis to explain the difference between your situation and the situation in Romania. Due to the historical context, we almost do not have to do with non-christians. Almost all Romanian citizens are baptized. We find it very hard to see the difference between an authentic converted and someone who was baptized in childhood and, then, in a more direct or indirect way, becomes an active member of the Church. From this point of view our ecclesiastical life maybe is more full of what you called superstition, than the situation that is in your brotherhood which is based, as far as I can tell, in the utmost on converts. From this point of view the catechetical and pastoral situation in Romania has to do with this raw material. I would translate differently what you said. I would not call Christians or believers passersby, but infantile. I would resemble them with the children. Somewhere, St. Paul says "I can not feed you with solid food; I must give you milk", things very simple and elementary. I'm not convinced that the majority of these childish Christians are even sure of their salvation. Perhaps

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some of them have this feeling. Rather, I think, that is the Church the one trying to win them, maybe encourage them by telling them what God gives them for free, of what God grants without requiring them nothing. I absolutely agree with everything you said about the indispensable need of Christian commitment, that there is no salvation without this assault, without this effort. The Kingdom of God is taken with this effort because this effort makes us those whom God wants to bring them into His kingdom. But the problem is how to make these people to grow. From what they are, from this childishness, from the formal way of doing things through which they think they gain something automatically. It's a big problem and I do not have the pastoral experience as a priest, but I go back to something I said last night, which I regret it's happening so, namely, sometimes it is insisted very much on the issues of participation, integration in a liturgical life, and is neglected heavily the commitment to the Christian community, what we do, for each other. It is very common the situation in which the one who receives the Holy Communion does not know who was before him and who was behind him. We're anonymous Christians for one another. We have big churches, there comes a great number of faithful attending the Liturgy. Each satisfies or is looking to satisfy his religious needs, but we try to meet God Whom we do not see, and we do not care for the brother we see. And too little we are taught to take heed to the mystery of communion with the things that we have available – the mystery of the brother, as it is called sometimes – as a means, as mystagogical way of initiation into the knowledge of God. Personally I thank you very much for this material particularly beautiful, inspiring for what we do, including for our students from the faculty of theology. Thank you!

V. Yakuntsev: One can feel how much concern and pain are behind your words. Probably, such people cannot, nevertheless, be considered infants in Christ. This is an attempt to mitigate the situation, but one cannot always be an infant. Infancy is what is normally supposed to pass quickly. In Russia, as a result of efforts in reviving the church over the recent 25 years, the result has been achieved: there are virtually no more unbaptised persons. However, we have not managed to enter people into the church. Strange as it may seem, this situation is explicitly worse than it was before because it is almost unchangeable. When 'occasional parishioners' come to catechesis, usually these are people whose conscience has not fallen yet into deep slumber and thus gives them no rest. They feel something is wrong and want to change it. But such people are relatively few, while the majority has already been persuaded that living lukewarmly is normal, moreover, it is a sign of somewhat humility, understood as there is no need to pursue higher things in life, whereas someone who wants to live the Gospel is considered fool, snob or heretic.

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And anyone who sincerely aspires to really enter the church is under a great pressure of such ‘public opinion.’

Fr Vasile Bîrzu: The discussion is interesting. However I have some clarifications for a broader approach to the problem of salvation in an environment full of what are called superstitions. At the same time, the salvation in a pagan environment, as you said, and again, on how we share Christ, even if we do not share Him Eucharistically. In our country, the secularization brought by both capitalism and communism has destroyed the levels of a Christian conscience precisely expressed by the so-called popular superstitions or the Christian popular habits. Within a nation, the consciousness manifests itself on many levels. It is the ecclesial conscience that belongs to clerics and theologians who know very well the religious life, and this consciousness is almost inaccessible to a peasant. He structures in his religious universe, village or community some archaic habits, some at the limit with superstition, through which he lives his Christian religious conscience. For example, a cousin of mine, priest in a parish, told me how an old woman came with a fear, a religious tremens: if the alms, the memorial service that she brought was received by God, because she forgot a candle out of the 40, which she had to put on the ring biscuit. So the ordinary man expresses his religious faith precisely through this habit. And if we look at the habit of the memorial service or of the “bridges”, from the funeral, we find the whole ancient mythology, with the coin put to cross the bridge on the River Lethe, and so on. In my opinion, to snatch such a man from his archaic civilization and bring him into a very theological community means to kill him spiritually. That man will be uprooted, depleted, secularized and, given that I think you’ve suffered these profound transformations, through communism, was destroyed the civilization of the village. Forced industrialization, forced urbanization. Much of our Christian population lost this level of archaic religious conscience, at the level of which paganism with Christianity blended. There are some very interesting syntheses. It is the one that cultural anthropology and ethnology deal with, Christian or less Christian. From this perspective, however, we should distinguish: not everything we find in these superstitions is valuable in terms of Christianity, but it is a manifestation level of the religious consciousness that must be approached with pastoral tact, wisely, because it is still a way in which the Christian can manifest himself and remain Christian. When you uproot him from such a way, the phenomenon of Protestantism appears. You, for example, as an Orthodox Christian people, apart from this level of popular conscience, you have managed to achieve, by the great Russian religious writers, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and others, a level of cultural religious Christian consciousness. In Romania, we did not have this chance. The great

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writers were mostly, the enlightened, and they did not create Christian values put into the great novels or works of art. We need to understand this phenomenon of superstition manifestation from the perspective of what missiology says through the concepts of trans-culturation and inculturation. Therefore, you need to search, to study this Christian cultural anthropology. Form those habits, if not already in your culture. Because they are second barricade of Christianity existence. If we will strive to form only a strictly theological conscience, people that does not reach the high theological depth, when this will be taken from him, will be in the full vacuum. This is one aspect. The other problem, of salvation, also as a Gentile. In the life of St. Niphon Constantiana, a saint from the fifth century Byzantium, prays to God: What will happen to the pagans that did not know Christ? And they are given answer through revelation, that God will not lose them, if they have fulfilled the natural moral law. But they will not understand all mysteries of the kingdom of God because, not receiving the grace and lacking the personal experience of the relationship with Christ, they did not grow in Christ. You see, it's a much larger framework. God sees in this perspective for those who can not be saved by following the Christian way... I meditated often on the interpretation of the Apocalypse of Agathangelus, from Mount Athos. It's a book End of Man, by Nikodemos the Hagiorite. There he speaks in a very poetic language, metaphorically, about the abominable temple by which is meant the world wars, where human sacrifices are offered. How many, how are they saved? Maybe for those sacrificed in the temple of idols, the war, others pray, and from them, some are saved. The framework is much broader. We seek to understand exactly our theological environment or of a Christian fraternity. But the world is launched and assembled by God in some frames of salvation which works much wider. With every believer's Communion, we must consider that in the Liturgy we are caught in a motion in front of and in God. And even if a believer does not receive the Holy Communion in a Liturgy, I mean sacramentally, the icons are printed in him, preach is printed in him, The Pantocrator, with the cherubim, that are the image the soul, is printed in him and puts grace and deep divine order in man. The Church is more than only a simple sermon or Holy Communion. The building of the Church is a totally mystagogical symbol, which robs us into the kingdom of God.

V. Yakuntsev: The spiritual destiny of many people is not fully known to us. We know that God wants all people to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). This means there is, so to speak, a mysterious conversation between God and a person's soul from the very conception. But the Scripture says that there are only two ways. Accordingly, the man chooses between the two. You see, it is not about we should not believe in someone's salvation, arbitrarily

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set boundaries or condemn anyone. It is about not blurring the boundaries, and, apparently, this must be the church's concern. The church must bear witness to the way of life and the way of death! Without this witness, one has not a slightest chance to make this crucial spiritual decision of choosing between the two. It is obvious that people on earth live under very different circumstances. There are lots of those who have never met a living Christian in their lives. Nevertheless, all have only two ways to choose between. But where the church manifests itself, where a Christian is present, there should be bearing witness. One of the major problems we refer to in connection with superstitions is that bearing no witness, or doing it inappropriately, sets one's conscience at rest and lulls it into fatal sleep.

D. Gzgzyan: Echoing the words of gratitude, I will let myself offer constructive criticism. To be exact, my following remarks simply develop the topic. In my view, the time came long ago to start from the fact that there are different forms of religiosity as well as different forms of faith. It should come as no surprise. Faith, in the sense in which we must understand it in terms of the New Testament revelation, is a gift and responsibility. Consequently, faith is revealed not to everyone and not simply but on certain significant grounds, namely on the long history of relationship with God. Small wonder that multiple aberrations of faith are observed in countries and peoples, which have in their background no experience similar to the Old Testament but only the facts of mass baptism. What to do about it is another question, a much more complicated one. Sometimes I think – out of desperation, it is not in any way a recommendation – isn't it reasonable to put back idols of Perun or to reintroduce the Old Testament practices of virtuous life, but outside Christianity. Obviously, it is a utopia because it is impossible to trace a formal demarcation line and to bring the situation back to its original state. But one should proceed from these conditions.

We are accustomed to repeat the idea that people are not born, but become, believers (that is, faithful Christians). However, people are not born, but may become ideologically-charged, too. From my standpoint, what is most dangerous is not faith as superstition but rather faith as ideology. In this sense, all things we have listed here – clericalism, modernism, fundamentalism, self-sufficiency of ascetic feat, believing in the satanic origin of tax reference number and even in the validity of sacraments *ex opere operato* (the latter issue is debatable) – are destructive ideologies. Coexisting with superstitions is much safer. Human being is born superstitious because of one's religiosity. Unfortunately, we got accustomed to proceed from the idea that the word 'religion' must denote something undoubtedly good. But the question is: why on earth? All of us, in one way or another, are familiar with various religious practices. And yet we know very well that the

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history of the revelation is all about overcoming such practices. Believing in God the true Creator is not simply incompatible with them. Moreover, it means the primary act of overcoming these practices. (Overcoming what? This is the question).

If people are religious by birth, I think it is quite possible to admit the assumption that religiosity is an archetypal feature of human mind. But what kind of consciousness? In terms of the Bible, it is called the 'fallen' one. Superstition is an eternally slumbering archetype, which wakes up periodically. It is known in what situations it wakes up – when one loses control over the circumstances. It is also a quite standard cause. Therefore, we should not be surprised that Theophany water is *different* from the water blessed on any other day. For instance, I cannot put myself in the place of someone who thinks in this way. But if I want to understand what guides the mentality, which distinguishes between types of holy water, I must learn to somehow deal with this.

On the other hand, we are well aware that sometimes a certain need of non-religious nature suddenly arises within pagan cultures. Even by origin it is non-religious and is a form of overcoming the archetypal religiosity. In this connection, I like very much to recall an episode regarding a prayer of Socrates, 'O dear Pan and all the other gods of this place...' This is a prayer of gratitude, with a very strong moral message: 'May I consider the wise man rich.' Though Socrates, as everyone remembers, was brought up on the charges of 'corrupting the youth' because he taught to worship 'other gods,' false ones. The Socratic path is the path to the revelation. For some reason, early Christians had enough intuition, wisdom and enlightenment from above to consider people like Socrates to be 'Christians before Christ.' It is not merely a compliment, not merely an apologetic move but something more than that.

We are also not accustomed to discuss in these terms what goes on with us and might be with other people who seek God but do not find Him for various reasons or perhaps do not seek Him at all. The question is whether Socrates was a believer? From the Christian point of view, he was not. From the point of view of the pagan practices, traditional for that culture, he was not either. He would not go to the oracle of Delphi to learn about his destiny. He was not interested in that. But this was the man devoted to the truth. From this point of view, he is us much closer to us by faith than the categories of 'believers' listed by Vladimir Yakuntsev. My conclusion is this: we need to thoroughly reconsider the correlation between these notions and practices. When we speak of the church, it is time to stop thinking in terms of countries, peoples, etc. Seemingly, these reflections are supposed to bring us to this conclusion, too.

Second, the view was expressed that the Council of Trent (or even St Augustine) is to be blamed for all. I cannot but intervene on his behalf. I like him very

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much, do with me what you will. I do not support the idea of divine grace working forcibly, but it is fair to say that we have no constructive alternatives. Pelagianism is much more primitive, whereas the ideology of the Council of Trent is even more primitive. There is not a slightest trace of Augustinianism here. Therefore, all positive searches, both theological and spiritual, performed by Catholics, were Augustinian by origin, inevitably condemned by ultramontanists and sometimes expressly prohibited by special papal encyclicals. Thus Fr Sergius Bulgakov is right: we, Orthodox, of course, must overcome St Augustine's unilateralism, but for this we need to develop our own holistic teaching on grace. The fact that in our church some people believe Theophany water and water blessed on any other day to be different in terms of grace indicates that, on the one hand, we have no Orthodox teaching on grace, and on the other, this issue is not yet clarified in the refined academic theology.

One more thing regarding the 'Western captivity of Russian theology.' What an impossibly pretty phrase. Who captured whom? Sorry but the captivity was voluntary. As the poet wrote, 'your eyes captivate my soul.' Of course, I also consider it is the Council of Trent to be blamed (who else then?). By the way, many reflecting Catholics believe the same, so here we have nothing new to say. I am interested in something quite different: why the captivity was so massive? Why has the doctrine of the seven sacraments penetrated without impediment into the Greek Orthodox mentality? Generally speaking, at that time, it was no doctrine, still less a mandatory one, in the West. The Council of Trent just adopted it canonically with some distortions. However, in Peter Lombard's and Thomas Aquinas' versions, this is no teaching compulsory for all but only particular judgments. People have the right to express their private views. And those who are captivated by these views? Who is more responsible? Thomas Aquinas did not force anyone. Neither was there any enforcement to translate *Summa Theologica* into Greek. Why was it translated then? Out of curiosity.

It turns out that we are accustomed to label as the Catholic sacramentology is a certain layer of the church consciousness, located between the uneducated bottom and the mystical top, which has always been a feature of the Eastern Christian sacramental mentality. But did these higher revelations of Nicholas Cabasilas or Maximus the Confessor belong to the masses? Did those who regularly attended Hagia Sophia in Constantinople in the 11th century actually know what liturgy they were present at? Now we know it was the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, which replaced the Liturgy of St Basil the Great (apparently, after the victory over iconoclasm). But had regular parishioners of those times noticed it? Had they have any possibility to notice it? This is what I always think when it comes to the mentioned captivity, which undoubtedly took place, but not in the sense that an

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invader came and imposed his own conditions. Although, of course, it is fair to admit that if the Council of Trent had not taken place, everything would have been much better.

Fr Vasile Grăjdian: Regarding the catechisation. We, the priests and the Orthodox Christians believe that we are all, willy nilly, teachers, catechists. Were we, in our turn, a certain period of time, more or less, catechized. In an apostolic succession to the first catechist, point zero, that is Christ the teacher or the catechist *par excellence*. And then, when we have a crisis catechetical we go back, not as the Protestants, but we go back to see how He managed to be our model, of all, how did He do catechesis. And perhaps sometimes we reach a big and high humility. And in what sense? If God, the great catechist, had twelve disciples, one of them, after years of catechesis, when he was certainly in grace and spirit, this one, Filip, says: “Show us the Father”. He asks: “Who am I?” And Peter answers: “You are the Christ”; and, immediately, he says: “But, do not go to Jerusalem to get you killed”. Not to mention Judas. Total catechetical failure. So catechesis could be something really hard, in fact, very difficult, actually. This is how we should put this problem. What happens, in fact, when someone is catechized, and what happens next. Perhaps it is related to this humility of ours, if our Teacher showed us that there is something really hard, that it is about the freedom of man, about all this mystery of God’s image.

A. Kopirovsky: At the beginning, listening to Vladimir Yakuntsev’s presentation, I was very happy that he described all the collected data so consistently. Then I suddenly realised that something was wrong here. In my opinion, a substitution has occurred. The word ‘superstition’ usually refers to pretty innocent things. A black cat crossing one’s path means one has to go back; sneezing means one tells the truth, and so forth. These superstitions are partly funny and partly silly. It is known, however, that when a hare crossed Pushkin’s path, as he was riding on the horse to Petersburg to take part in Decembrist, he turned back because it was a sign of bad luck. In this case, thank God, he proceeded according to his presentiment. But of course, such things are not worth being taken too seriously.

And what Vladimir Yakuntsev identified as superstitions has nothing to do with black cats and hares. I think everybody in the audience was impressed by the quoted figures on the number of ‘occasional parishioners’ in our churches: 95-97%, maybe more. And if we pose the question seriously, then we should speak not of superstition but of another kind of faith, a false one. It is believed that something must be done with ‘occasional parishioners.’ For example, one should catechise them. But they do not want to be catechised – they are sure that they

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are fine. Rather, they attempt to catechise the catechist himself, to ‘scan’ him for heresies and knock some sense into him.

I think it is important to understand what feeds this ‘faith.’ Its origins are very deep. Fr Vasile recalled Dostoevsky, Tolstoy. One can also mention the writer Nikolay Leskov. One of his characters is a monk of saintly living who reflects on the Christianisation of Rus. He speaks of it very simply, ‘Vladimir made haste (that is, the grand prince Vladimir who baptized Rus), while the Greeks dodged a little, having baptised uneducated ignorants.’

Why should we take into account the words of a literary character? But, on the whole, this idea reflects the reality of what had happened. On the one hand, we celebrate the thousand-year anniversary of Christianity in Russia. But the problem of Christians not being instructed in their faith remains. The reason is that people, as Professor Moldovan correctly said, do not think about salvation at all. They have neither false assurance of being saved nor the very thought of salvation. They simply want to arrange their lives a little better with God’s help.

Here is one more example from literature, this time from the British one. C. S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* metaphorically compared the human being’s perception of God’s help with constructing a house, ‘You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.’ This makes the human being feel uncomfortable. One finds it difficult or even painful. It is not about minor things or superstitions but about the very living by faith.

It is quite possible that ‘occasional parishioners’ are being saved, perhaps more easily than many actual parishioners. But the tragedy is that they are being saved not because of their faith but rather in spite of it. They are being saved as sincere pagans but others view them as Christians! This is very regrettable. For example, thousands of people queue up for some relics or shrines, which origin is more than dubious. When the ‘gifts of the Magi’ were brought, one priest – not an ignorant, having a serious theological background, an admirer of Fr Alexander Schmemmann, not at all an ‘occasional parishioner’ – said to me thoughtfully, ‘The Christ Child played with these gifts...’ I was blown away. This is what was uttered by an educated person, suffering from fundamentalists and laughing over superstitions!

I want to emphasise that the situation is more serious than we think, not merely at the level of superstition, which can be corrected through catechesis or through something similar. It is important to properly set benchmarks in order not to waste the effort on trivia. We must address this issue because one cannot only talk about leaves without paying attention to roots.

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D. Gasak: Gradually we have come to the question of what Christianity is in today's world, how it is embodied not only in the doctrine but also in life. In my view, reflecting on contemporary Christianity, we can no longer operate with such global concepts as peoples, countries etc. Nevertheless, the historical vocation of Christianity remains actual up till now. Perhaps the view on this vocation should be changed focusing more on the life 'here and now.' The Gospel calls us to evaluate everything, including our faith and our Christian life, according to its spirit and fruit, and, talking about fruit, we must admit (if we are honest to ourselves and to God) that there is still so much to be done.

Let me offer you an example. Our Institute is located in this building since 1995, that is, for twenty years. Moreover, at the moment SFI actually manages it. Our housekeeping unit is responsible not only for the premises of the Institute but also for the whole building. We have to deal with the authorities, administering organisations and so on. Meetings of homeowners' associations also take place here, at the Institute. But for all these twenty years, only one or two of all the tenants came to pray with us. On the one hand, we remember, of course, that a prophet has no honour in his own country. But on the other hand, this example shows how difficult the Christian mission is. Although over this time the life in the house has become objectively better and calmer, it does not mean that we have got brothers in Christ among the tenants. It took twenty years to achieve the actual condition in this building from the economic and human standpoints. But we do not think we live forever and have much time ahead, do we? We do not have that time, let alone speak of a city- or a country-wide scale.

Fr Georgy Kochetkov: Thank you very much. Certainly, now we have broadened our topic very much. I absolutely agree that we brought up a vast set of issues on the fundamental position of the church, Christianity in today's world. These are serious problems not only in Orthodoxy but throughout Christianity on the whole and sometimes not only throughout Christianity, over which one can struggle for a long time. Probably it is reasonable to be discussed at a microscale, like here, not only at some major symposiums, which are, by the way, often fruitless. Microscale can be more fruitful and creative.

This context is always to be kept in memory and soberly evaluated. Triumphalism is entirely out of the question because the today's condition of Christianity is so unenviable in the world, especially in Orthodoxy. Now there are no even prominent theologians in Orthodoxy. One attempts to organise some artificial PR campaigns promoting the Mount Athos, shrines, icons or chants. All these started to penetrate the mass culture without going, however, in depth. Moreover, there are very few new things emerging, this fact showing us that creative processes in

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the church, that is, spiritual ones, have stopped. And this is a severe symptom. It is one thing to reproduce or to stylise after something that had existed in the past, and even our perception of the past is often imagined, whereas it is quite another thing to go ahead in today's conditions.

But still I would like to say about superstitions as such. Of course, there is no need to link this to the issue of paganism because, inevitably, one would have to say that paganism can also be different, not everything in it being malign. There are median things, such as culture or people. Can a people be considered a value? Yes, it can. This is not a Christian value but for us, Christians, it also makes sense. Culture is also not a purely Christian phenomenon, neither is religion, the religious side of Christianity. In this sense, there is nothing original in Christianity. Nevertheless, Christianity has something that does not belong to all of humanity by origin but has been brought to it. This is what the church is called to convey to all people. So I totally agree: the church should not be intertwined with paganism and not put pagan values first, as it happens quite often in the Orthodox church, where the above-mentioned common everyday values – work, family, health, recreation, entertainment – are what people put first. This is paganism because it has nothing to do with Christianity. We are not against family, health or job. On the contrary, we are happy when everything is fine here. But we must understand that any Christian does not put this first. A Christian should be able to sacrifice everything if on the other scale there is the confession of Christ. A Christian should be ready to sacrifice his/her family, health and job, to give it all up because there is something more important. This is what all Saints and the Gospel teach us: 'If anyone comes to Me, and doesn't disregard his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he can't be My disciple...' (Luke 14:26). But Christianity has adapted to this world, and, unfortunately, in Orthodoxy this adaptation is very often even blessed. Some priests openly say to lay people, 'why do you intrude into theology, it is none of your business; why do you participate in worship, it is none of your business either; it is the priests' duty; you should be preoccupied with your family and job, as you are laymen, worldly people belonging to this world.' This is a fundamental distortion.

Speaking of superstitions, first of all I should say about idols. Among those who come to catechesis one can often meet people who may be called 'occasional parishioners.' Sometimes they enter a church. Some catechumens are not 'occasional parishioners,' they never cross the threshold of any church, but 80-90% are baptised people. Some constantly attend the church but in fact they are 'occasional parishioners', even if they attend the services every Sunday, because they do not take part in and do not assume responsibility for anything in a given church.

Discussion

Certainly, all sorts of demons and idols are to be found here. At the very first stage we ask everybody who comes to catechesis: what are your idols, with what idols have you come? People's eyes go wide, their mouths open. At first they simply do not understand what we are talking about. What idols? They were a thousand years ago! In people's mind, idols are indeed associated with Perun or some pagan deities of the Ancient Greece. And we ask each person: show us your household gods, where do you hide them? At first, this question causes confusion.

People have never asked themselves such questions. In fact, they generally think of God in terms of 'what,' not 'who.' I think all of you are educated and understand what it means if a believer speaks of God in terms of 'what.' It turns out one does not believe in the living God, and this is serious. Though one can perfectly partake, constantly confess, tell the priest all of one's everyday cares and receive wise counsel, even tries to follow it – perhaps, superstitiously, that is, without considering. When one perceives something without considering, like in the army, as we have discussed today, this is superstition. And we priests very often encourage it because it is easier to us. We pretend it is the true obedience or humility. But it is a false humility, a false obedience, a false patience. We no longer distinguish between true and false.

It turns out that idolatry is not just a formal breaking of the commandment. It is indeed the greatest evil. In the Old Testament this is the biggest sin. There were many mortal sins for which one should be immediately stoned, but still the greatest sin is idolatry. This is what the entire Old Testament is all about. Of course, there is also hope in the Old Testament that the truth would prevail some day. And the truth has shone in Christ. But we see and perceive this truth badly.

This is, in my opinion, the key point of the paper and the issues raised by Vladimir Yakuntsev. I am very grateful to him for this presentation. To me it is very good. When this paper was delivered in its first version at the 'Christmas Readings,' the large-scale conference, it produced a very strong impression on the audience. But the listeners started opposing because most people do not want any changes. Everybody understood that, if taking seriously this text and the problem posed in it, one must change one's own life, the life of parishes and dioceses, one must teach clergy and laity differently. Generally speaking, one must do all things differently. And who will do it? Why is catechesis so important? There is no need to look whether a person is baptised or not, whether s/he partakes or not. This may be very important or may have no positive significance at all.

Of course, all these issues point out the fact that the church needs an overall revival. It is especially difficult for traditional societies in Orthodox countries where the church with its thousand-year roots has apparently prevailed, because everything seems to be fine there. Let us a little more often attend the church, let

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us read the Bible and confess more often. But that is not the issue. That would not correct anything. It is new missionary territories where Christianity is much more lively, profound and serious.

Even to me it was a huge surprise when I came across this in India, in Bangalore, at a missionary conference held by non-Orthodox. There were also Orthodox participants and members of the Ancient Eastern churches. But what struck me was that the discussion was about the mission in South-East Asia, in all those countries where, as you know, the conditions for mission are terrible. I saw that in those places where Christians constantly sacrifice themselves, putting their lives at risk for the sake of Christ, Christ teaches them to live a genuinely Christian life. They are not like our Pentecostals who, having nothing better to do, practice glossolalia. Those Christians carry out the true missionary ministry. They preach the genuine Christianity, though in forms that sometimes may seem to us dubious.

Our superstitions can be harmless, at the level of a joke, but they can also be serious when one believes in coincidences or some kind of magic things more than in God, when one replaces faith in God with a real superstition, that is, with a superficial and irresponsible faith. Of course, the fact that we have the sin of idolatry and multiple superstitions upon our souls is a very serious challenge for every Orthodox, especially for one living in a traditional environment.

D. Gasak: To our immense regret, we have to finish our discussion. Once again, we have approached a very important subject of what the Christian church is today, how it manifests itself, how the witness to Christ and to the Gospel revelation is embodied in every Christian's life. This might be a topic for our next workshop. On the other hand, the fact that we one way or another have approached this issue is a fruit of the two-day discussion.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the speakers and those who took part in this discussion. In my opinion, this conference, the first meeting and theological dialogue between our two schools, has not only taken place but also has benefited all the participants. It is always important not simply to communicate with colleagues who are in close proximity but also to listen and ponder over what partners from other countries and cultures, living under different circumstances, think and say. The main topic of our conference on contemporary problems of church life was covered, if not completely, at least in some of its key points. We started the discussion with the issue of Tradition, then we touched upon the canonical tradition of the church, the themes of law and grace, law and love. Finally, our meeting was concluded with the fruitful discussion on the paper by Vladimir Yakuntsev on superstitions in today's church life. I think all this is a very important result.

Discussion

S. Moldovan: Clearly it was inevitable that the discussion will include a horizon far greater than we could cover. That is certainly, because life is a whole and no matter from where we start we get to the whole. We can not think of anything particularly if we do not consider the whole. Therefore, the fact that we started with these topics and that they do not end here, it was something that we could expect from any topic we have chosen. I think the most important thing was the act of mutual knowledge. We can not move forward on the path of a deeper partnership, if not explore in the beginning, at this very provisionally way, how we think, what problems we have, how we feel them, how we react to the great challenges of contemporary church life. I have two specific proposals that in the published version of these presentations to be included as many observations as possible. So not only the extensive texts of the presentations. I'd be very happy that at least some of the most interesting observations made here to be reflected in the printed version. I think it would be very important. All comments have said something, but I, at least, liked some in particular. I would be sorry not to show them further than this group here. They can be enriched also. If someone wants from henceforth, even if he failed to intervene here, to leave a comment, develop it, I think it would be great. One page, two, a comment, a whole material. I think it would not be better to confine to group of those who have discussed here. The second proposal refers to what is expected to do next. I propose, as working algorithm, that the hosts to propose the topic of the meeting. So, for next year, in Sibiu, we will inform you, in due time, about the topic, which is most sensitive for us, but of course it should have correspondent in your concerns. We will make more suggestions. But the proposal will come from those who will host the meetings. Thank you on behalf of our group especially for these three very serious discussion sessions, which represent an enrichment for us of the horizon of knowledge and a more concrete understanding, of the ecclesiastical problems which you face and this helps and enriches us. Thank you to everyone who participated and we address the warm invitation to meet again Sibiu, when you can, whenever possible. We want these meetings to be annual. With God's help we will be able to specify all the details in time. Thank you from our hearts for your great hospitality!

Fr Georgy Kochetkov: In my turn, as the Rector of the Institute, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone and to say that our Institute will always be happy to continue cooperation between our schools. I hope that the plans we have just mentioned will be carried out.