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CATHOLICISM AND THE EASTERN CHURCH IN RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

The Westernization of Russia is usually associated with the secularization of Russian culture and with the emergence and development of a Westernized and laicized enlightened stratum. It is often forgotten in this connection that Westernization also covered the Russian Church. Contrary to the opinion, to the spreading of which the Russian Slavophiles have greatly contributed, the Church was not in the least an unshakable bulwark of the Old-Russian Orthodox tradition, saved by some miracle from the destructive pressure of Westernizing reforms. On the contrary, the Westernization of Orthodox spirituality began long before Peter the Great and continued until at least the early nineteenth century. Father Georges Florovsky, the best expert in Russian theology, wrote about the nearly total separation of the Orthodox secular clergy from the authentic tradition of Eastern Christianity, which was being preserved only in remote hermitages and monasteries that cultivated ascetic contemplation at the cost of completely turning away from "the matters of this world."\(^1\) That separation weighed heavily on the history of Russian religious thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is, therefore, worthwhile presenting briefly its causes and its forms.

The first contact between Orthodox Christianity and the Western denominations took place, of course, on the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian State (formed by the Union of Lublin in 1569). The Orthodox Church saw the principal enemy in Roman Catholicism, especially in its Eastern rite, established at the Union of Brest (1596), and hence the Orthodox opponents to that union did not at first hesitate to form a common front with the Protestants.\(^2\) That, however, was merely a temporary trend, because it soon appeared that the refutation of "Latinism" by Protestant polemists also undermined the dogmatic foundations of the Orthodox Church. Hence the tactical alliance with the Reformation proved

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irreconcilable in the long run with the maintaining and consolidation of the
identity of the Eastern Church. The necessity of defending that Church
against Roman Catholicism required, however, the proving of its own
cause, which tempted that Church to polemize with the Roman Catholics
by using their own weapon, that is, to resort to theological scholastic argu-
mentation. Petr Mohyla, the metropolitan bishop of Kiev, decided to fol-
low that path. The Spiritual Academy of Kiev, which he founded, became a
bastion of resistance against the union. The Orthodox Church regained its
legal status within the state, but that took place at the price of the
"Latinization" of the Orthodox Christianity. As Florovsky wrote, that
Latinization covered not only the language, theology, and manners, but
entire religious psychology as well.3

The cause of that phenomenon can be explained by one of the most
characteristic features of the Orthodox religious consciousness, namely, its
orientation, which might be termed mystical and existential and which is
diametrically opposed to the rationalistic and legal tradition which prevails
in Roman Catholicism. In the Eastern tradition there was no sharp distinc-
tion between mysticism and theology, between a personal experience of
divine mysteries and dogmatics.4 Nor did it recognize any clear demarcation
line between theology as taught by the Church and broadly interpreted reli-
gious philosophy.5 The mystical theology of the Eastern Church was exis-
tential in character, for its point was to help the believers to experience
union with God, such an experience being not intellectual but integral, em-
bracing the whole human being. That theology was programmatically anti-
rationalistic, *apophatic*, that is, one which defines God only by negation,
which contemplates Him in His unknowability and treats the mysteries of
faith as unspeakable and not accessible to human reason.6 That theology did
not accept the passage from the symbol to logical argumentation, from
synthetic perception to conceptual analysis, and thus did not produce its
own scholasticism.7 The boundaries of scholasticism were the boundaries of
the Western world. It was no wonder, therefore, that Orthodox Christianity
did not know how to defend itself in contact with Roman Catholic scholas-

3. Ibid., p. 164.
    pp. 8-9.
5. Cf. J. Klinger, *O istocie prawoslawia* (On the Essence of Orthodox Christianity)
    55, and 258-259.
7. Cf. Yves Congar, *After Nine Hundred Years. The Background of the Schism Between the