

## An Apologia for the Revival of the Russian Greco-Catholic Exarchate: Holy *Yurodstvo* in a New Time of Troubles<sup>1</sup>

Peter Galadza

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I must begin with a confession. Until very recently I would never have argued publicly for the revitalization of the Russian Greco-Catholic Exarchate. First, it seemed a rather impractical way to promote the gospel in Russia – for reasons that I will explain shortly. And second: my own operative ecclesiology gave me pause.

As regards the impracticality, it seemed to me that in an ecumenical age, when so much of what a Russian Greco-Catholic Church could achieve was achievable by the witness of a vibrant Russian Orthodox Church, investing in the efforts of a miniscule Russian Catholic community was a misplacement of scarce resources. In any case, for Russian Greco-Catholicism to revive it would have to be Russians themselves – or at least Christians within Russia – who would not only do the “heavy lifting,” but also provide the bulk of reflection on the topic.

This is not to suggest that I was ever pleased with the fact that Latin-Rite Catholicism alone was supported or at least tolerated in Russia by the Vatican and the Russian government. I had always believed in the universal mission of the Eastern Catholic Churches, as indicated by *Orientalium eccle-*

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this lecture was delivered in June, 2017 in San Felice del Benaco, Italy at the Russian Catholic Global Congress marking the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Russian Greek Catholic Exarchate.

*siarum*, par 4. However, as just noted, without sufficient interest among the citizenry of Russia itself for such a mission, it seemed that the *kenotic* and *ecumenical* accents of Eastern Catholicism would have to be allowed to reign.

As for my own ecclesiology, for decades I had been drawn to the conclusion that “the Orthodox and Catholic Churches are together the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church – though in a state of schism.”<sup>2</sup>

As I admitted when I wrote those words, this approach to the schism may hardly be acceptable to magisterial Catholic ecclesiology (not to mention almost all iterations of Orthodox ecclesiology), but the fact that a member of the Russian Orthodox Church who in conscience feels drawn to Roman communion and yet wants to retain his/her Eastern tradition, is oftentimes counseled by Catholic authorities to continue worshipping in the Orthodox Church and only once a year receive communion in a Catholic Church, certainly seemed to bolster the implications of my approach to the schism.

I must admit, however, that even as I suggested a basic parity, as it were, between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, I continued to believe that a fullness of universality thrived in the Catholic Church in a way usually absent from Orthodoxy. Was this operative ecclesiology, then, illogical? At the level of linear logic there certainly was a flaw. However, applying anti-nomic thinking, I was compelled by my consistent experience, spanning 60 years, to hold in tension the *apparent* contradiction that both the Catholic and Orthodox Church together are the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ. Obviously, if I am standing here today, arguing for the revival of a Church whose existence would seem to challenge this operative ecclesiology, something has changed. (Incidentally, I hope it is apparent that I am using an autobiographical narrative here only to develop my arguments.)

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Galadza, “How Many Ecumenical Councils?: A Test Case for Eastern Catholic Theology,” in *A Ministry of Reconciliation: Essays in Honor of Metropolitan Maximos Aghiorgoussis*, ed. Thomas Fitzgerald (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2015), 72.

### *A New Situation: Official Ecumenism, the New Russia*

So what has changed? Several things. First there is the frustration with official ecumenism. And while the ecumenism of pontifical bodies and departments of external church affairs remains vital, it cannot persist as the only form. Official ecumenism may reflect the royal dimension of Christian vocation, but all too often it sacrifices the prophetic. We live in an age when, quite understandably, most people under the age of 60 have little patience with ecclesial strategies grounded in secular models of *Realpolitik*, “expediency,” or “diplomacy.” Younger Christians are simply scandalized by such models – and rightly so. In attempting at almost all costs to maintain ecumenical “lines of communication” and “fraternal bonds,” churchmen risk losing the lines of communications and bonds with their own younger generation. That generation has seen the tragic results of an inordinate stress on institutional Christianity. Consequently, in many Western countries – as well as in Russia – these younger people simply walk away from the Church.

So why support one more division within the Russian Church? The only acceptable reason can be that the alleged unity of the Russian Church lacks some of the key qualities of a communion of the Holy Spirit – the only unity deserving of “expediency” or similar “diplomatic measures.” If, for example, official ecumenism requires Christians to remain silent for extended periods of time in the face of corruption, mendacity, and oppression, then ecumenism is not fostering Christian unity, but rather social conformism – or worse.

### *Folly for the Sake of Christ*

However one interprets the present situation in Russia, it seems quite evident that Christians there (and not only there but in Western countries like the USA as well) should be reviving the tradition of folly for the sake of Christ [*yurodstvo*]. There are few currents within Christian spirituality that are so closely identified with Russian Christianity as *yurodstvo*. Commenting on the prophetic defiance of Ivan the Terrible by