

# The Politics of Prudence vs. the Politics of Trust: *Ostpolitik and the Message of Tuy*

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My lecture today will be on the topic of Russia and the Popes, and there are two questions that I want to raise and then try to answer throughout the course of my lecture. And those two questions are these: Is the conversion of Russia to the Catholic Faith an aspect of the Fatima Message which simply does not fit into the historic life of the Catholic Church or into the relationships which have existed historically between the Holy See and the nation of Russia? Second Question: Is the request for the Consecration and conversion of Russia an arbitrary anomaly in an otherwise simple Fatima message of penance, prayer and sacrifice?

When we consider these questions in the light of documented History, I think we can say clearly that the answer to both questions is a resounding *no!* In fact, I will say more. There is a perfect accord between traditional papal policy and the promises of Our Lord and Our Lady to Sister Lucy concerning Russia. But then we ask ourselves, what happened? Why is there no conversion? Why no Consecration? In order to answer this question, I need to first show that there is this accord between the requests of Our Lady at Fatima and at Tuy, and what the popes had been seeking for decades prior to Our Lady's visit to Fatima.

First of all I will say that the conversion of Orthodox Russia – like that of Protestant England – was one of the great hopes of the Roman Catholic Church. It was blessed Pope Pius IX who first gave instruction in the nineteenth century for there to be said regular prayers for the conversion of Russia. These were all the more necessary because during the nineteenth century, there was a deterioration of the relationship between Russia and the Vatican. The reason was, in general, the solid hostility of the Orthodox Church to better relations between Rome and Russia.

We move from Pius IX to Leo XIII and I want to read a very short paragraph from an allocution by Pope Leo XIII from 1888. In this allocution, the Pope invites the nations of the East to associate themselves again with the Roman Church. He says this, “As for ourselves, to say the truth we must confess, that the very remembrance of the ancient glory and incomparable merits of which the East can boast, are to us inexpressibly sweet.” Look at the praise for the culture, the history and the treasures of the Eastern Church. This is Leo the XIII:

“It was there, in fact, that one finds the cradle of human redemption and the first fruits of Christianity. From thence, like streams of some Royal river being diffused over the West, the riches of inestimable blessings came to us from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. While we ponder on these things, venerable brethren, in our mind we desire and long for nothing so much as to effect the restoration to all the East of the virtue and the grandeur of the past. And more so because the signs which, in the development of human events, appear there from time to time, give reason to hope that the Orientals, moved by divine grace, may return to reconciliation with the Church of Rome, from whose bosom they have been for so many years separated.”

With Leo XIII there's praise for the tradition and for the glories of the Eastern Church and yet there is this paternal hope for their return to the Catholic Church. This attitude was continued by Pope St. Pius X, this appreciation and yet this paternal desire for the return of the Byzantines to Holy Mother Church. In Saint Pius X's encyclical on the reunion of the Churches, he says this when speaking about his hope for the Byzantines. He says that once they accept one embrace of faith and charity, peace – note this word – that peace so long sought for, may finally flourish in order that there may be one fold and one shepherd. In the mind of Saint Pius X, peace for the Russian nation and peace for the Eastern world were one in the same thing. The idea was connected with his understanding of what they must do – to attain this peace they must be reunited to the one fold of the Catholic Church under the one Shepherd. He says this also,

“Lastly, let all of us be sure that to work for this objective – this objective of union – between the Churches, will be in vain unless first and foremost they hold the Catholic Faith, true and entire, as it has been handed down to us and was consecrated in the Holy Scriptures, in the traditions of the Fathers of the Church, in the assent of the Church, in the General Councils and in the decrees of the Supreme Pontiff.”

And then follows this beautiful prayer of hope and faith:

“May God, the Author and lover of peace, in Whose power are the times and movements, hasten the day when the nations of the East shall return to Catholic unity and unite themselves to the Apostolic See, so that once having cast away their errors, they shall enter into the port of everlasting salvation.”

For the Popes – Pius IX, Leo XIII, Pius X – there was one hope for Russia and for the East to regain her true glory, her authentic vitality and to bring peace to these nations: *through* their conversion to the Catholic Faith and their entrance into the fold of the Catholic Church. We ask ourselves this, “So the Popes had this one hope that Russia and the East would find themselves in a true reunion with the Church. Can we find in Russia – because Russia is our topic – during this time period, a man who embodies what a Russian truly is? Who loves his nation and yet sees that the glory of that nation can only be achieved by reunion with the Universal Church?”

We find this man in Vladimir Solovyov. I will quote to you his work – *Russia and the Universal Church*. But speaking of Solovyov himself, he lived in the nineteenth century. He flourished in the 1880's. He was a friend and confidante of Dostoyevsky. Four years before his death, this man, the best of the Russian philosophers, this Great Russian theologian, after having gone from childhood, growing up in Russian Orthodoxy and moving on in his teenage years to nihilism and atheism, and returning to Orthodoxy later on in life – he sees four years before dying – that conversion to the Catholic Faith is the answer, both for himself and for Russia. Solovyov has been praised as recently as the year 2000 by the then Cardinal Ratzinger. And Cardinal Biffi in the year 2000, also praised Solovyov.

According to Solovyov it was Russia's historical destiny to provide the Universal Church with the political power that it needed for the salvation and regeneration of Europe and the World. He desired that a moral and intellectual bond be forged between those Russians who were conscientiously religious and the Universal Church. This was in 1888 when he wrote

*Russia and the Universal Church.* He says that there is a distinctly religious character which the Russian people have. It's exhibited in their philosophy, literature and arts and seems to indicate that Russia had a great religious mission. To those who said at the time that the essence of Russia was its Orthodoxy and its separation from Rome and the Universal Catholic Church, he points that the true Russian soul is not opposed to the Catholic Church, to Catholic piety, to the Catholic life. He says whatever is holy and sacred for us (meaning Russian Christians) is holy and sacred for them (meaning Catholics). He asks one thing in particular: what kind of devotion are you speaking of? As we should know, he indicates devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary as a characteristic both of the Catholic religion *and* of Russian Orthodoxy. He even speaks of the common veneration by Catholics and Orthodox of certain miraculous images.

He mentions the Holy Virgin of Czestochowa, in Jasna Góra, in Poland. He mentions their liturgy in which Our Lady is found – contrary to the Orthodox theologians, who are able to deny the Immaculate Conception – he calls to mind that in the Byzantine liturgy Our Lady is referred to as “Most Immaculate”, “All Immaculate”. To complete his discussion and to emphasize the fact that Russia will only achieve her true destiny by reunion with the Universal Church, he cites the writings the Russian theologian, Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow, whose work was published in 1873.

He refers to Philaret of Moscow as the man he calls “our *only* theologian” and writes:

“In these times, the Metropolitan of Moscow is speaking about the Primacy of Peter, which it seems, is apparently the main point of separation between the Orthodox and the Catholic Church. After recalling the fact that Peter was entrusted by Christ with the special task of confirming his brethren (that is to say the other Apostles) the famous Russian prelate continues thus ‘... in point of fact, although the Resurrection of Our Lord had been announced to the women who came bearing spices, this did not confirm the Apostles in their faith in the event. But when the risen Lord had appeared to Peter the other Apostles declared with conviction that the Lord is risen indeed and hath appeared to Simon. Finally when it is a question of filling the gap left in the apostolic band by the apostasy of Judas, it is Peter who is the first to draw attention to the fact and take the decisive step.

““When the moment arrives just after the descent of the Holy Ghost for the solemn inauguration of the preaching of the Gospel’, Philaret cites the Scriptures, ‘Peter standing up, speaks. When the foundations of the Christian Church are being laid among the Pagans, as well as among the Jews, it is Peter who gives Cornelius Baptism. And thus not only once does this fulfill the utterance of Christ: *Thou art Peter*’”.

To sum up Philaret's writings – this is the Patriarch of Moscow, the Metropolitan of Moscow speaking – Solovyov says that the true and living seed of the supreme authority is displayed in the primitive Church by practical leadership on the part of Peter in every matter which concerned the Universal Church and *this* is what we actually find in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles.

With all this in mind it gives great hope that the best of the Russian soul – the best of Russian philosophy – the best of Russian theology speak of the Primacy of Peter, of the need to be a part of the Universal Church. This is the affirmation of the Russians themselves. It's not surprising that in 1917 Pope Benedict XV saw the fall of the Russian Monarchy as bringing a glimmer of hope and light for the Church in Russia. Looking back on that situation now, we think this to have been naïve. But at the time, given the Orthodox establishment, this was how Benedict XV viewed the situation with the fall of the Monarchy in Russia.

In fact it followed from the famous words by the Western leaders when they heard about the fall of the Russian Monarchy. Lloyd George, at that time Prime Minister of Great Britain, said that, once he heard about the fall of the Monarchy, one primary war objective of the Allies had been achieved. And yet Nicholas II was his ally during the war. The US President Woodrow Wilson's famous statement when he heard about the fall of the Russian Monarchy, was when he said, "Russia has been made fit for a League of Honor". We look back at this today and we say, "how naïve!" And as we meditate on the past, we hesitate before the optimism shown by the Vatican, even when the Communists came to power in Russia in November of 1917. It was that great hope they had — and when I speak about the politics of prudence, there is no implication that there were any reprehensible motives on the part of the Vatican.

Pope Benedict XV said to himself, "This is an opening of Russia to our missionary efforts. How can we get in? How can we get priests into the Country? How can we get Bishops into the Country? How can we make Catholicism flourish in Russia?" He tried. How did he try? It was during the period from 1920 to 1922 that the valiant Poles defeated the Red Army. Famine and economic conditions were such that Lenin realized he would have to do something. He would have to reach out to those whom he had persecuted – to those whom he had declared to be his enemies and enemies of the socialist state. One of those that he reached out to, was the Vatican of Pope Benedict the XV.

And in the last months of Benedict XV's reign we see the so-called Vronski Affair – in which the Russian trade representative in Rome negotiated a deal to allow Catholic Clergy into Russian territory in order to administer famine relief and even to promote moral and religious education, but – and with the Soviets there was always a but – in return for the Vatican's *de facto* recognition of the Soviet Regime. The Pope saw this as an opening which his apostolic heart could not fail to accept and follow through with. In fact we are moved with pity to recall that the Holy Father Benedict XV, in one of his last recorded statements, said: "Tell me Russia doesn't matter for the Church." When, also in one of his last recorded statements, he asked: "Have the visas come yet from the Bolsheviks?"

Ambrogio Damiano Achille Ratti – when he was elected and took the name Pius XI – did not want, in any way, to change the policy of Benedict XV; the policy of engagement. In fact he followed the policy of his predecessor even more systematically and boldly. Immediately after being elected – *immediately after* – it was one of the first things on the mind of Pius XI. He decided to send a Pontifical mission to Red Russia to relieve the famine victims. Beyond that, in order to achieve this engagement with the Russian Soviet State for the good of the Church, he participated in 1922 in an international conference at Genoa which was called to end the diplomatic isolation of Germany and Russia after World War I. The Pope fully supported the intent of this conference. So the Pope in his support for the Genoa Conference of 1922 hoped

that with the recognition by the world of Soviet Russia, the Church would be allowed to enter into the country and initiate its missionary work. Nonetheless there were conditions.

The Vatican had their conditions and this is important and we must meditate on this. The Pope in a memorandum to the Genoa Conference in 1922 proposed to the nations the official recognition of the communist government, on the sole condition that the Soviet Government promise to grant in Russia respect for consciences, freedom of worship and safeguard the goods of the Church for all religious confessions whatever they may be. The condition was religious liberty in Russia. If that were granted, then there could be this recognition.

However, Moscow had its own conditions for allowing the Church into Russia – even for allowing the Church to minister to the victims of the Soviet induced famine! The conditions that the Russians made for entrance were the following: All manifestations of Christian Faith and all Apostolate were forbidden to the religious of the relief mission. They could celebrate Mass *only behind closed doors*. It was not even permitted that they distribute with the food, images of the Holy Virgin. Relieve our suffering, relieve our starving people but no religion is to be invoked or shown publically, not even the image of Our Lady. Because they knew what this meant to the Russian people and during this whole period of negotiation – honest negotiation – between the Vatican and Moscow, the persecutions continued unabated in the Soviet Union!

In 1922 *alone* eight hundred priests, brothers and nuns – both Orthodox and Catholics – were shot in Russia. An American Jesuit, Father Edmond Walsh, a man of great apostolic and charitable zeal, realized very quickly that this famine relief mission, though such a basic thing, was in the final analysis, in vain. And it mostly profited the Communist Government.

Did Pius XI loose heart? Did he say, “It’s finished. The government is against us. We won’t get in.” No. We are moved with pity, because his apostolic soul went to the next plan. Always that concern, that desire of his heart to attain the conversion of Russia and bring the faith to Russia. The Pope, seeing that the relief effort had collapsed, decided he would launch a two-pronged offensive: one diplomatic and the other clandestine (which ended up not being clandestine). He instructed his Nuncio, Archbishop Pacelli, the future Pius XII, to continue talks with Soviet diplomatic representatives in Berlin in the hope of some minor concessions. At the same time he conceived of a clandestine effort to secure the Church’s position in the Soviet Union. The man who would be in charge of this effort was a Jesuit, Father Michelle d’Herbigny, who later became Bishop d’Herbigny. He was to go to Russia to investigate the conditions of the Catholic Church in the Soviet State and when he went there he found the Church to be in a desperate situation. There was no way to replace lost bishops or the declining number of priests. Only bishops could deal with the situation of the Church in Russia.

So Michelle d’Herbigny was a Catholic Bishop sent to Moscow by Pope Pius XI on a mission to establish an underground church hierarchy and administration to replace the bishops and priests exiled or imprisoned by communist authorities. Was there any ill will here? Was there nothing but apostolic zeal? It was the politics of prudence which in those circumstances appeared perfectly legitimate. But then it happened that this was not clandestine. The Russians *knew* what was happening.

And thus we arrive at the terrible month – at the beginning of the year 1923. And we see the true character of the Soviet State and what they thought about the Catholic Church. In

January, 1923, the Holy See was informed about the demand that circulated in certain Communist circles that a highly placed member of the Catholic Church hierarchy be put to death. When? When is it the sacred day for the priesthood, Holy Thursday? So the Vicar General of the diocese of Mohilev, Monsignor Budkiewicz and thirteen other priests were arrested and transferred to Moscow, then in a scornful fashion, transported across the city in uncovered trucks. The Vatican was informed. The Kremlin promised the release of these priests if official diplomatic relations were established between the Vatican and the Kremlin. Since at the time – 1923 – only Germany had dared to recognize the Soviet Government officially; the Vatican could not and did not. So Moscow executed the sentence.

On Holy Thursday of 1923 Monsignor Budkiewicz was martyred. Brutally pushed across a dark corridor, he fell and broke his leg. Father Edmond Walsh who was his superior and the superior of the relief mission for the Soviet famine victims, waited, not far away, all Holy Thursday. The authorities had told him that he would be informed beforehand about the hour for torture so that he could assist his confrere in the priesthood. Monsignor Budkiewicz, stripped of his clothes and unable to walk, was dragged by his ears all the way to a detachment of guards. One of his ears was severed, and in the gaping hole he was given a revolver shot. Father Walsh who was constantly requesting on the phone if he could finally come to his friend, heard over the phone the shout ring out, among shouts of drunken singing and bursts of laughter.

So that no relics would remain, the martyr's body was burned and his ashes dispersed, and then, just as quickly, the efforts by the Vatican in their dealings with the Russian state came to an end. There were to be no more visits by Bishop Michelle d'Herbigny. Stalin indicated that no more visas would be issued for "foreign servants of religion". Newly consecrated bishops and priests were all arrested or exiled and a death blow was dealt to the Russian Church. If we look at the results, the statistics for the Catholic Church in Russia and basing those statistics and the health of the Church on the number of priests in the country, we see the following: In 1924, the year of Lenin's death, we have two hundred priests in all of Russia — in all of the Soviet Union. In 1936 we have fifty priests. In 1938 we have 2 Catholic priests in Russia. Even Bishop d'Herbigny who's life had been dedicated to establishing the Church in Russia and achieving this rapport with the Soviets, acknowledged that Benedict XV had been mistaken, that the conditions for the Catholic religion were more bleak than any imposed by the Russian Monarchy. So the failure, you see, was the failure of the politics of prudence, this honest attempt to achieve conversion and to expand the missionary effort of the Catholic Church in Russia. And it was a failure that was complete.

So what does Our Lady do? What does Our Lord do? At Tuy She tells the Pope how to bring about this conversion and we are moved. We are moved because we see these words spoken at Tuy of Our Lady to Sister Lucy in the midst of that grand vision of the Most Holy Trinity which has such significance for the Russian soul. The Most Holy Trinity ministering to mankind: The Father, Son and Holy Ghost; The Son on the Cross, with His Precious Blood running into the chalice which symbolizes the Holy Eucharist, touching physically the very being of Man; and with Our Lady at the side. There was no Mary Magdalene in this vision. There was no Saint John. There was Our Lady. And one thing about this vision is that She appears with her Heart but She does not have the sword in Her Heart. She appears with the Heart of Her Son showing this perfect unity between the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary which is the theme of

the Fatima Message. In light of this whole history of the relationship between the Popes and Russia, this is what She said:

“The moment has come in which God asks the Holy Father to make, in union with all the bishops of the world, the Consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, promising to save it by this means. Sacrifice yourself for this intention and pray.”

What strikes me in this is that Our Lord will later appear in 1931 at Rianjo to Sister Lucy and say that: “My Ministers have not heeded my request.”

God Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, Lord of Life and Death, Founder of the Church, the God who is present in all things by His Holiness, makes a request to the Holy Father. A request — how delicate, what gentle reserve, what respect for the office of His Vicar! He requests. What a gracious soul — how our God is a God of goodness! And what is that office? What is the greatness of that office and that man to whom God Himself — Our Lord Jesus Christ — makes a request? And we shake our heads a bit, because the Message of Fatima says that, ultimately, the fate of the world turns on that request, a request that can in all freedom be rejected.

We know for certain that this request was known by Pope Pius XI. It was understood. We know that by a letter he knew what Lucy had said were the words of Our Lord – because she wrote these words to Pius XI. She said: “sometime after June 13, 1929, I gave an account of it to my confessor who employed certain means to bring it to the attention of His Holiness Pius XI.” We know for certain that Pope Pius XI was informed about Heaven’s requests between July and August, 1931. What should have happened? What did happen? He knows the request. He has this apostolic soul yet the Consecration — the one thing that was asked for, was not done. Nothing was done. And we even know that what was happening in Marxist Russia was a constant sorrow for the souls of the Popes. In fact, in 1930, during this time period when Our Lord asked for the Consecration, Pius XI wrote a letter to Cardinal Pompílio, Vicar General of Rome and said this about the conditions for religion within the Soviet Union:

“We feel profound emotion at the thought of the horrible crimes and sacrileges against God and against souls which every day are repeated and aggravated among the innumerable peoples of Russia. The renewal and official publicity given to so many acts of blasphemy and impiety require a more universal and solemn reparation. It moves my heart; it moves the heart of any Christian to know that this past year, during the Holy Christmas Days not only were hundreds of Churches closed and great numbers of icons burned, and all the workers and school children compelled to work on Sunday, but they even compelled factory workers, both men and women, to sign a declaration of formal apostasy and hatred against God, or else be deprived of their bread, rationing cards, clothing and lodging, without which all the inhabitants of this poor country will be reduced to dying of hunger, misery and cold. We wish therefore to the best of our ability to make an act of reparation for all these sacrilegious acts and also to invite the faithful of the whole world to make reparation.”

And yet the Consecration of Russia, as requested by Our Lady, was not done. The final appeal by Bishop D. José da Silva to Pius XI in 1937 to Consecrate Russia was acknowledged but not acted upon. It moves us in our souls when we realize that the last encyclical of Pope Pius XI in 1937 was dedicated to the Holy Rosary. He invited the Faithful to have recourse to Our Lady's mediation through the recitation of the Rosary. He condemned the grave errors and peril of Communism, and strongly recommended to the Christian people to address urgent prayers to obtain from the powerful Mother of God the defeat of the destroyers of *Christian and human* civilization.

Dear Fathers, we live in an era that followed this refusal. But the refusal is not an absolute one. The gentle request of Our Lord Jesus Christ was addressed to *all* the successors of Pius XI. Let us hope that the politics of what would now be a *human* prudence does not override the politics of trust. The Pope need not be afraid to interfere in the life of a great nation. He need only turn to the words of Pope Leo XIII in 1899, who said this:

“Indeed the Empire of Jesus Christ does not extend to Catholic Nations alone. It does not extend only over men who have been purified in the water of Baptism and who belong by right to the Church, although erroneous opinions separate them from it and schism cuts them off from its charity. But the power of Christ extends also over all those who live outside the Christian Faith. It is an unquestionable truth that the whole human race is under the power of Jesus Christ.”

Thank You.