Art and Politics at the Vatican Congregation for the Oriental Churches, 1917-45

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Abstract
In the period 1917-45, the Roman Catholic Church vacillated in its views of Russian Orthodoxy and the Russian Revolution. Some forces in the Vatican focused on the “consecration” of Russia, connoting support for Orthodoxy. Others preferred to push for the “conversion” of Russia to Roman Catholicism. The tension between these competing views can be seen in the Vatican’s patronage of the arts. From 1925-1945, the Congregation for the Oriental Churches commissioned works by four artists—Leonid and Rimma Brailowski, Pimen Sofronov, and Jérôme Leussink. Collectively, their work illustrated the changing mixture of politics, piety, and aesthetics that characterized Rome’s view toward Russia in the first half of the twentieth century.

Keywords
Russian Orthodoxy; Congregation for the Oriental Churches; Leonid and Rimma Brailowski; Pimen Maksimovich Sofronov; Jérôme; iconography; Russian art

When you see a night illumined by an unknown light, know that this is the great sign given you by God that he is about to punish the world for its crimes, by means of war, famine, and persecutions of the Church and of the Holy Father. To prevent this, I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the Communion of reparation on the First Saturdays. If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church. 2

1) I am indebted to many people for their help on this article: Fr. Bernard O’Connor and Dr. Gianpaolo Rigotti at the Congregation for the Oriental Churches; Fr. Antoine Lambrechts, OSB, at the Benedictine Monastery of Chevetogne; and Professors Robert F. Boughner and Peter T. Hoffer at the University of the Sciences.

In July 1917, in the midst of World War I, three children in Fatima, Portugal began to see visions of the Virgin Mary. The second Fatima Prophecy, quoted above and divulged by the children, mentioned only one nation by name—Russia. Peace, said the prophecy, can come only when Russia was “consecrated” or “converted” to God. By 1917, the Roman pontiff was already on the job. On 1 May of that year, Benedict XV had formed the Congregation for the Oriental Churches to oversee activities related to Russian Christianity, including the creation of the Pontifical Oriental Institute (PIO) and the Commission for Russia. Through these organizations, the Roman Catholic Church vacillated between a focus on “consecration,” connoting the support for Christianity, and “conversion,” with its overtones of a Papal takeover of Russia after the eventual fall of the Communist government.

The tension between these competing views of Russia played out in many areas, but it was especially subtle in the Vatican’s patronage of the arts. From 1925-1945, the Congregation for the Oriental Churches commissioned works by four artists—Leonid and Rimma Brailowski, Pimen Sofronov, and Jérôme Leussink. Collectively, their work illustrated the changing mixture of politics, piety, and aesthetics that characterized Rome’s view toward Russia in the first half of the twentieth century.

Russia Will Be Converted: The Paintings of Leonid and Rimma Brailowski

Walk through the loggia of the Palazzo dei Convertendi toward the entrance to the Congregation for the Oriental Churches. Sunlight dappling the ochre walls, the scene is quintessentially Renaissance Rome. But step inside, and you will be surrounded by visions of Slavic spirituality—pictures, icons, and architecture reflecting Russian themes. Scores of large canvases line the walls of the Congregation’s home. Painted by Leonid and Rimma Brailowsky, they portray monuments of Russian church architecture. The pictures reveal a view of Russian Christianity that is both precise and illusory—one converted from its everyday troubles to a more mythic stature.

In 1924, the Brailowskys arrived in Rome, after fleeing the Soviet Union via Constantinople in 1920 and settling in Belgrade for two years. In Rome, they contacted Fr. Aleksandr Sipiagin, a Russian émigré, Jesuit, and Catholic priest. In 1925, the duo began a long-term project to memorialize churches and monasteries under siege by the communist government in Russia. The cycle of paintings linked Brailowski’s training in architecture, his work as a set designer,
and their shared passion for Russian spiritual culture. A year later, the couple told the prominent London journal *The Studio* that “Our visions of Old Russia are always founded upon our exclusive studies of old Russian architecture, decoration, ornamentation and the painting of icons. We always visualise Russia as if it were a fairy land, sumptuous and brilliant in colour, fantastic and unique in architectural form, a blending of the severity of Byzantine art with that of Tartary…. With loving hand we restore bridges which have long lain in ruins. We rebuild the stone walls of ancient cities that are no more.”

Responding to this “sumptuous and brilliant” aesthetic, an American reviewer said that Brailowsky’s work was “partly illustrative, wholly decorative,” and “loaded with color.” A curator at the Brooklyn Museum also noted that Brailowsky’s paintings seemed “to be a combination of antique manuscript illuminations, illustrations for Russian fairy tales and settings for the Russian Ballet of sainted memory.”

The couple found support from Fr. Michel-Joseph d’Herbigny, the controversial leader of the Pontifical Commission for Russia and first rector of the Pontifical Oriental Institute (PIO), who had secretly begun to consecrate priests and bishops inside of Russia with the hopes of ultimately bringing it under the Holy See. In 1932, PIO invited the Brailowskys to show their works at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, and the *L’Osservatore Romano* wrote approvingly of the show. More importantly, though, the Catholic press in other parts of Europe also covered the exhibition and noted its political importance. The Catholic Russian-language journal *K Soedineniiu* made this point

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6) PIO had itself been created in 1917 as a center for higher learning devoted to the Eastern Church. Nicknamed the “Russicum” and located near the venerable Church of Maria Maggiore, the Institute continues to act as the main conduit for dialog between the Orthodox and Catholic churches. For information on d’Herbigny and the Commission for Russia, see Edward G. Farrugia, “The Theological Profile of the Pontifical Oriental Institute,” in Edward G. Farrugia, ed., *The Pontifical Oriental Institute: the First Seventy-five Years, 1917-1992* (Rome: Edizioni “Orientalia Christiana,” 1993), 18-19. For more on the Pontifical Commission on Russia, see Gianpaolo Rigotti, “Uomini e attività della Congregazione per la Chiesa Orientale tra i Motu Proprio Dei Providentis (1917) e Sancta Dei Ecclesia (1938),” *Servizio Informazioni Chiese Orientali* LXII (2007): 227-36.

explicitly, saying that prayers in “distant Russia” had been silenced, making it all the more important for “Russian prayers to heaven” to be made loudly in Rome. The German-language version of *L’Illustrazione Vaticana* was more subtle, noting that “In this first series of paintings, the painters Brailowsky have understood, with rare mastery, how to give us a true picture of the development of old Russian art, and it is only to be desired that they—as it appears—have set themselves, from a cultural historical perspective, the uncommonly significant task of representing the entire religious art of the Russians from its beginnings to today.” The weeklong show also caught the attention of Pope Pius XI, who offered to support another 50 paintings on the same theme. It took only three years for them to finish this cycle and to plan an exhibition at the Museo Petriano (now demolished) inside the Vatican walls. It opened on 14 February 1935, with official statements by Cardinal Sincero, secretary of the Oriental Churches, and the Vatican Secretary of State Eugenio Cardinal Pacelli, who had long been Pius XI’s emissary on issues related to Russia. (Pacelli would be elected pope and take the name Pius XII on 2 March 1939.) *L’Osservatore Romano* gushed over the show, describing the importance of reproducing the “great basilicas, churches, monasteries, holy Russian icons that the storm of revolution and iconoclasm has scattered, transformed, defaced, or destroyed, and that the Holy Father wishes to preserve in symbols, and revive Russia’s true glory.” The Swiss Argus International de la Presse agreed, echoing most of *L’Osservatore Romano’s* anti-Communist rhetoric.

Though described as faithful representations of real buildings, in fact these paintings showed a darker, more dramatic tone than the earlier interior pictures shown at the Pontifical Oriental Institute. In the new works, swirling winds and clouds of green and gold, brown and black often surround the buildings. In this way, the Brailowskys combined architectural renderings of sacred places with the emotional foment of the 1920s and 1930s in communist Russia. One painting exemplifies this trend: “Monasterio Solovetzki,” number 70 (Figure 1). The great Solovetskii Kremlin looks impregnable

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10) *La Sacra Congregazione per le Chiese Orientali nel Cinquantesimo della Fondazione 1917-67* (n.p., 1969), 76.
11) Archivo Congregazione per le Chiese Orientale (hereafter, ACCO) 169/51, folios 3-4.
12) Ibid., 9.
in front of the Transfiguration Cathedral, the main church of the monastery. In the foreground of the painting, monks stand near the dock, where ships have offloaded the goods the monastery bought on the mainland. It is a typical summer Solovetskii scene, witnessed by tens of thousands of pilgrims every year.

And yet the Brailowskys took important liberties. The artists foreshortened the distance between the Cathedral of the Transfiguration and the monastery walls—a fact the Brailowsky’s would have known from hundreds of available photographs. The light source in the painting illuminated only the cathedral, not the walls. Then there was the sky—more like whipped-up waves of brown, green, and gold than any Arctic sky in summer, when ships docked at Solovetskii.

It seems that there were three different scenes playing out on the canvas: daily economic life, the shining Cathedral, and the stormy skies behind it. By highlighting the Transfiguration Cathedral, the Brailowskys called attention
to its recent past. On 25 May 1923, fire had rampaged through the locked
monastery, engulfing the Transfiguration cathedral, scarring its walls with soot
and demolishing the onion domes. Just a few weeks later, prisoners began to
arrive at Solovetskii, brought by the monastery’s own ships that had been com-
mandeered by the Soviet government. Instead of a place of pilgrimage and
prosperity, Solovetskii was made into the first camp in the Soviet Gulag, infa-
mous for its harsh weather and nearly indescribable suffering. And so, the
Brailowskys painted a scene of the monastery that revealed “the beautiful,
wonderful soul of Russia, which was disclosed to us during our pilgrimages to
her holy places.” At the same time, they also hinted at the political storms that
would wash away its reputation for sanctity and make it a place of “suffering
and death.”

On 8 March 1935, just three weeks after their show opened, the Brailowskys
wrote a long letter to Cardinal Sincero. It discussed the impressive reviews of
the exhibition, but more importantly it encapsulated the artists’ desire for the
“conversion” of Russia with their and the Pontiff’s aid:

The collection of 100 paintings and 20 prints, executed under the benevolent control of
Commissioners Nogara and Biagetti, and that His Eminence had the infinite goodness of
installing in the Museum Petriano last 14 February, is only part of our reproductions of the
monuments of religious art in Russia.

The collection is finished, and it includes a number of cities with their religious monu-
ments, splendid churches and important monasteries. We know that in May 1934, in
Moscow alone some fifteen churches were destroyed—and so we document with pictures
and paintings, restoring recent victims of Bolshevik atheism.

It is a terrible fact that the Bolsheviks recently decided to destroy the cathedral of
St. Sophia in Kiev, the oldest and most precious sanctuary, to illustrate their infernal plan
of wanting to get rid of all sanctuaries in Russia. British architects have gained the world’s
attention by saying through the press that this monument, like others, belongs to all
humanity and not the leaders of Russia. The Supreme Pontiff paved the way for them by
giving asylum to our paintings, which represent entrée to a church that has already been
destroyed or is destined to suffer a violent death.

I, being one of the last specialists in our sacred architecture, fear that after me no one
will be able to continue the work that we began in 1930 and to which I have dedicated my
whole life, including my work for the [Russian] Imperial Academy of Art. Based on the
aforementioned, I dare ask the intercession of His Eminence, entrusting to the august

13) Years later, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn would write that the Gulag had been “born and come to
maturity” at Solovetskii. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago: 1918-1956 (New York:
Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2002), 188.
14) Roy R. Robson, Solovki: The Story of Russia Told Through its Most Remarkable Islands
hands of the Supreme Pontiff our most humble supplication, so that I, with my wife, may contribute our work at this most critical moment for religion in Russia.

The success of the exhibition at the Petriano shows the great interest of the public [and calls out for support] so that the monuments do not disappear entirely under the yoke of the atheists and enemies of Sweet Christ in the land.

The time will come when the Bolsheviks will disappear and the people, freed of the nightmare, will begin looking for the chance to rebuild their shrines. And then the museum, full of accurate reproductions from ruined times, will indicate to the Russians the path to the Vatican, forcing their gratitude to the Supreme Pontiff.

The infinite goodness of Pius XI to our unhappy country, and the protection of the creation and exhibition of our pictures at the Petriano, gives us hope that we will have the opportunity to continue our work for some time, for the exaltation of Christianity, for the comfort of unhappy Russians outside the country, and for the continual increase in the bright glory of the Pontiff, father of all who are persecuted.

We kiss the edge of the Sacred Purple, humbly asking the benediction of Your Eminence.  

Given these sentiments, it must have come to no one’s surprise when both Leonid and Rimma Brailowsky began their own conversion to Roman Catholicism. With copious support from the priests and scholars who had helped them mount the shows at PIO and the Museo Petriana, the couple signed a Russian-language confession of faith on 10 June 1935, a document prepared and printed by the Pontifical Commission for Russia. Six of their supporters from the Congregation also signed the document in witness to their conversion.

Shortly after becoming Roman Catholic, the Brailowskys asked for continued moral and financial help from Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, the newly-installed secretary of the Congregation. Citing their work as a memorial to the Russian Orthodox faith but also the cost of living in Rome, the Brailowskys fretted that they might lose their atelier and have to stop painting. The Congregation granted support to the couple. When Leonid died in 1937, the cardinal even allowed Rimma to continue taking meals at PIO until her death in 1959.

An inventory of 17-19 February 1940 noted that the Congregation had a total of 104 canvases, nine reproductions of those works, and eighteen church plans. Though it is not clear when the Congregation decided to hang the

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15) ACCO 169/51, folio 6.
16) Ibid., 12.
17) Ibid., 13.
18) Ibid., 1.
Brailowskys’ work throughout the Palazzo dei Convertendi, a photograph from 1969 shows them hanging just as they do today. For the Brailowskys, like many of their compatriots at the Pontifical Oriental Institute and the Pontifical Commission on Russia, the consecration and conversion of Russia had a literal meaning—only through the leadership of the Supreme Pontiff could the land be freed of both atheism and error. The way of resurrection for Russia led directly through Rome.

The Consecration of Russian Art: Pimen Sofronov and Jérôme Leussink

In 1937, the same year that Leonid Brailowsky died, Bishop Celso Costantini suggested to Pope Pius XI that the Vatican hold an exhibition of art from the lands of the Catholic mission. The pope agreed, and the conversation turned to Orthodox iconography, which was “Naturally not to be treated as [art from] missionary lands or as exotic art to which it is suitable to make appeal through a new, native expression of Christian thought, nor much less of a childish art that is suitable to be brought to maturity for the service of worship. [Rather, iconography would be exhibited] as an ancient and venerable art, which grew along with Christianity… demonstrative of how the Church adapted itself to the particular genius of a nation or of a civilization.”

Pope Pius XI gave the job of organizing the exhibition to Alcide de Gasperi, who had recently been freed from incarceration for his anti-Mussolini opinions and was working at the Vatican Library. Two years later, de Gasperi contacted Pimen Maksimovich Sofronov, a young Russian iconographer and son of peasant Old Believers from Estonia. White Russian émigrés in Riga had discovered Sofronov in the late 1920s and began to find him students and commissions. As a result, Sofronov traveled from Riga to Paris, Prague, and Belgrade to teach and to paint. In the summer of 1939, in fact, he had just finished painting the Patriarch of Serbia’s personal chapel. Sofronov represented a highly conservative form of Orthodox icon painting, and his work in Europe had been received with a mixture of excitement and artistic disdain for its traditionalism. Searching for just such a traditionalist, though, Gasperi

19) “Vita nuova delle sacre iconi,” L’Osservatore Romano, 9 Nov 1940, 3.
invited Sofronov to Rome to paint an entire iconostasis in the Old Russian style for the exhibition. A few years later, Gasperi wrote that he found in Sofronov the following traits: “faithful to the traditional elements of his school, elements that he elaborated with passion, with perfect technique, and with a lively and always present religious sentiment.”

By happy coincidence, a Benedictine monk named Jérôme Leussink arrived in Rome nearly simultaneously as Sofronov and his wife Nadezhda. Sofronov and Leussink were of nearly identical age, and the two became fast friends. Sofronov instructed Leussink in iconography, while the Benedictine monk translated for Sofronov and helped him navigate through both Vatican bureaucracy and Italian culture. Sofronov also befriended other Russian artists in Rome, including the painters Allessio Issupoff and Gregorio Maltzeff (who had, like the Brailowkys, converted to Catholicism), and Vadim Falileev, the great Russian printmaker, and his wife. Leussink wrote that “as for Sofronov, I am very happy with what I see in him. I work at [painting icons], but I watch even more. You asked me the other day if the Vatican had now given him something quite important. There is a large iconostasis with 58 large and small icons. I also know what he gets for it…. about 30,000 lire, not quite. And Father Ammann [of PIO] said that it is very cheap because Maltzef, who works in an entirely different way, which does not require much work, has received much more for his iconostasis.”

Showing their increasing fondness for one another, Leussink wrote to the abbot about Pimen and Nadezhda Sofronov’s childlike intensity and piety. In one letter, Leussink reported that Sofronov did not begin to do the face of a saint without making the sign of the cross. Once I went with them two in the Vatican Museum to see the icons and also the Fayoum portraits from the Egyptian Museum. According Kondakov and several others, the original style of iconography can be found in these encaustic portraits. As we passed some Egyptian mummies, I must say that I looked at them just as museum pieces. But spontaneously beside me there were signs of the cross, and Ms. S. began even on her knees praying for a moment. I was really edified by it.”

The relationship deepened during 1940-41, especially as Nadezhda Sofronov became ill. Leussink wrote that “They are priestless [Old Believers], but I had noticed their very great veneration for the icons and the relics. I have a relic of

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23) Ibid., 21 January 1940.
the Holy Cross which is very dear to me.… Ah well, I gave it for awhile to Sofronov who had me take it to the sick woman’s bed. Now she is healed and it is only the relic which did it. You see then. But their attitude is very instructive. When I brought the relic, they began to make prostrations [pocolones] and signs of the cross. They had worshipped with much reverence and I noticed they burned some incense there, too." 24 Alas, the miraculous power of the relic did not completely cure Sofronova, and she died just as her husband was finishing the iconostasis.

In spite (or perhaps because of) his hardships, Sofronov’s iconostasis showed an artist at the height of his talent. Throughout the iconostasis, Sofronov employed the clarity of line, careful use of color, and softness in the faces that he had developed by connecting Russian iconographic styles with those of Serbia, where he had been painting and teaching. 25 Two icons of the Theotokos particularly illustrated how Sofronov integrated ancient techniques and styles with surprisingly modern ideas. In the large icon (Figure 2), Mary gazes outward with a look both loving and sad, clearly foreshadowing the pain her son will endure. Christ, on the other hand, was both childlike and highly involved with his mother, looking directly at her and holding her face in his hand. Sofronov framed both figures beautifully by the bright blue of Mary’s inner robe, which both reminded the viewer of Mary’s virginity and brought the eye toward the two figures. On Mary’s veil, Sofronov painted words of the Ave Maria, which at first just looks like part of the decoration on the veil. Only on closer inspection can you see the words framing the Mother of God’s face (Figure 3). Sofronov had long employed this technique, beloved by Old Believers. On this icon, however, he traded the usual inscription for a different text, undoubtedly as a nod to his Catholic patrons. 26

For the background of this icon (as others for the iconostasis), Sofronov used an innovative technique, likely influenced by Impressionist and Post-Impressionist styles. Typically, iconographers would paint a flat color or use gold leafing to surround figures. In this case, however, Sofronov used subtle

24) Ibid.
26) The usual Old Believer inscription would read “O all-hymned Mother, worthy of all praise, who brought forth the Word, the Holiest of all Saints, as you receive this our offering, rescue us all from every calamity, and deliver from future torment those who cry with one voice: Alleluia.” Sofronov used, instead, the Slavonic version of the Ave Maria, beloved by Roman Catholics: "Rejoice, O Virgin Mother of God, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb."
Figure 2
cross-hatching with visible brush marks and swirls of colors to heightened definition of the figures while maintaining the flat planes and lack of single-point perspective necessary to traditional iconography. The Presentation of Mary in the Temple (Figure 4), however, showed an even more innovative technique. The main body of the icon was traditional. Once he left the central image, however, Sofronov again experimented with new ways to apply color and texture to the raised frame. There he used circular daubing—reminiscent of van Gogh—to enhance the colors and bold lines of the main image. The result successfully linked traditional iconographic forms to techniques Sofronov was observing in the work of his friends in Rome at the time.

World War II kept the international art exhibition from being held. Instead, the Pontifical Oriental Institute mounted a personal exhibit of Sofronov’s work in June 1941, under the patronage of S. E. il Principe Francesco Chigi. Sofronov showed 83 new works in the show, an astonishing number of paintings done in less than two years. The centerpiece of the show, Sofronov’s iconostasis, hung on the gallery wall rather than standing together as an icon
When he saw it, Eugene Cardinal Tisserant immediately wrote a letter of thanks to Sofronov, which the artist lovingly kept for the rest of his life: “The admirable holy figures in your composition inspire a feeling of devotion

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27) Photograph of Sofronov and Chigi in L’Osservatore Romano, 15 June 1941, 2.
by their faultless and delicate execution, even in those who are not familiar with this particular form of art.”

Just as Sofronov was finishing the iconostasis, Leussink accepted an offer to paint the chapel at the Congregation for the Oriental Churches’ new building, the Palazzo dei Convertendi. Leussink had won the commission through his growing skill and his relationship to Sofronov. On Easter, 1940, Leussink had reported to his abbot that “I think it is not necessary to tell you how happy I am. Meanwhile I manage to get a lot better, and now Sofronov agrees that I work with him in the sense as I had once proposed, as a volunteer without pay…. Thus we are both aided [emphasis added].”

By November 1940, Leussink had begun work on the chapel and he turned to Sofronov for help. When his abbot wrote with regret that Leussink had to rely on Sofronov’s sketches rather than making his own, Leussink replied that “You say that you are sorry that I am not able to make the sketches. But it would be truly impossible to do it without [Sofronov’s sketches]. A good quantity has already been done and others are being made gradually for the work.” Leussink labored for three years on the chapel, locking himself inside even during the terrible heat of summer 1941, when he took off his cassock to work alone or in the presence only of Sofronov.

Exactly a year later after he began, Leussink had nearly finished the ceiling, nearly 33 square-meters of work, crowned by a Christ Pantocrator surrounded by a “celestial liturgy” of angels holding the communion vessels (Figure 5). Leussink praised Sofronov’s “very good advice” on the icon. In fact, it showed both Sofronov’s influence on Leussink and the latter’s personal style, as influenced by icons he had seen on Mt. Athos. The color scheme and, especially, the facial characteristics of Christ mirrored Sofronov’s style very closely. The eyes and shape of the face could have been Sofronov’s work, and indeed the sketch for the painting was probably done by him. Leussink, however, chose the design, “a ceiling bima with Christ the King and High Priest surrounded by the heavenly liturgy and the ceiling of the chapel with the Pantocrator and doors that open to the sky above him.” Leussink also used the Greek form of hand blessing (anathema to the Old Believers) and wrote the text in Greek.

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28) Letter of Eugene Cardinal Tisserant to Prof. Pimen Sovronoff [sic], 15 October 1940. Sofronov Personal Archive, Philadelphia, PA, Rome Correspondence.
30) Ibid., 4 February 1941.
31) Ibid., 1 November 1941.
32) Ibid., June or July 1941.
Likewise, Leussink strayed from Sofronov’s style by painting the angels with longer, less round faces than ones on Sofronov’s iconostasis. Finally, perhaps because he still saw himself as an apprentice iconographer, Leussink did not allow himself to stray into modernism, even though his work was a hybrid of Russian and Greek influences.

Years later, few people see either Sofronov’s iconostasis or Leussink’s chapel. The Vatican art historian Fr. Michel Berger lamented this fact in a detailed study of the works published in 2004. Only nervous priests find solace in

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Sofronov’s icons, as they wait in the antechamber to the office of their boss, the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches. Even fewer people appreciate Leussink’s chapel, as the Congregation only rarely opens it for an eastern-rite liturgy.

Sofronov (like Brailowsky) presented himself as one of the last remaining traditional Russian artists. Also like Brailowsky, Sofronov was highly influenced by his work in Rome, especially the collaboration with Leussink. (Sofronov even sketched a version of Our Lady of Fatima.) Yet the two young iconographers mapped out a different path than their elders, hoping for a “consecration” instead of a “conversion” by employing traditional techniques and styles with a careful dollop of modernist experimentation. Though we do not know Sofronov’s view on the matter, it is clear that Leussink worked “for the unity of the Churches” rather than the subjugation of Russia to Rome.\(^{34}\)

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\(^{34}\) Letter of Jérôme Leussink to Prior Théodore Belpaire, 4 February 1941. Archives Amay-Chevetogne, fonds Belpaire, Lettres de Leussink.