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Religion: Russian Orthodoxy

In Rus' the official conversion from paganism to Christianity took place in the tenth century. Paganism, thriving in the vast East European territory inhabited by different Slavic, Finno-Ugric, Lithuanian, and Turkic tribes was not an "organized" religion, which could be viewed as some kind of unified whole with common gods for all tribes or with a common level of world understanding. There were, instead, higher deities unifying the tribe or several tribes, and there were local deities, of particular settlements, and even of homes (for example, the house spirits or *domovye*).

With the adoption of Christianity in the population centers, only the higher deities, such as Perun (in Finno-Ugric Perkun, god of thunder and war), Veles (god of household animals and trade), and Daž bog (god of the harvest), were deposed. The "lesser" deities, the house gods, those imagined by the people to inhabit swamps, forests, rivers, and outbuildings, continued to be objects of worship – or, more exactly, superstition – into the twentieth century. Faith in them coexisted with belief in Christianity, just as superstitions continue to exist to the present day in different varieties of omens, fortune-telling, and so on.

Such cultural conditions among the lower classes – including the preexisting beliefs regarding the land and nature that supported the ethics of common agricultural labor – made the transition from paganism to Christianity in the official sphere fairly rapid and painless. The need for a single religion to bring together the Russian tribes was fully recognized by Vladimir at the end of the tenth century. In 980, when he, the Prince of Kiev who already had done much in the way of Russian unification, gathered and placed the idols of all the major tribal gods on the highest ground of the city no great new unity between the tribes resulted.

Paganism was unsuitable for centralization and Vladimir chose another more fortuitous path to his goal: the official recognition of a single state religion from the ones available.

Christianity was adopted from Byzantium in 988–89 to serve this function. Vladimir's task was prepared by other historical conditions: Eastern Christianity previously had spread in a spontaneous fashion along the Black Sea shore, and had taken root in the great Slavic centers of Tmutarakan (at present Taman) and Korsun (now Khersones in the Sevastopol region). Vladimir brought into widespread social and political practice many of the values of Christian culture already introduced in these areas: they included charity and education (the "study of books") both noted in the *Primary Chronicle*, democratic ideals, and the virtues of an austere way of life.

Certain differences between Eastern (Byzantine) and Western (Roman) Christianity, important for the future course of Russian history, were already determined in the tenth century. A general disposition of Byzantine religiosity that differed from Western tendencies was more significant than the commonly noted local divergences – perceptions of the Holy Spirit's origin, the ways in which the Eucharist sacrament was celebrated, or other ritual practices. In the words of the great Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev, this crucial feature of Byzantine Orthodoxy was – and continued to be into the modern era – its firm and stubborn commitment to the traditions of the past. Christianity for the Orthodox was: "something consummated and complete, God's truth of truths; it figured only as a ready-made object for mystical contemplation, pious worship, and dialectical interpretation."[1]

Soloviev, in the main, saw this religious preoccupation to be a negative phenomenon. It was, however, precisely the vigorous adherence of Eastern Christianity to church traditions that helped it to survive the Ottoman Turks' occupation of the Byzantine Empire, Bulgaria, and Serbia, and in Russia to withstand the reign of Peter I, and to live through seventy years of the Soviet government's unrelenting atheism in the twentieth century. Consciously or unconsciously the same sense of tradition led Orthodox believers to hold on to values from the past partly deemphasized by Christians of other denominations.

In any case, Prince Vladimir was very conscious and deliberate in selecting the Eastern Christian creed with its strong external and ritual practices. When Vladimir began choosing a faith in 986 he received representatives from Islam, Judaism, and Rome; he heard them out but

responded immediately to his own ambassadors, who had returned from Constantinople after attending a service in St. Sophia and who recounted their amazement at the grandeur of the church and the beauty of the service. Vladimir made his choice on the basis of their testimony, and that act shaped a cultural leitmotif – the idea that the Russian religion was determined by aesthetic qualities (of Byzantine ritual and St. Sophia itself). Beauty determined the nature of Orthodoxy in Russia.

Vladimir's decision was not his personal whim. The chronicles of the eleventh and twelfth centuries typically note the construction of new churches, and, if they are beautiful, describe their external facade along with their internal design and the splendor of the service. That is precisely why the concepts of the church as a building and the church as a congregation of believers often converge and blur in ancient Russian religious practice.2 Beauty beyond intellectual justifications allowed the content of church doctrine and its sanctity to be preserved. The often-quoted words of Fedor Dostoevsky "Beauty will save the world," are evidently to be interpreted in this light: beauty will not allow faith to collapse or disappear. As Soloviev points out: "In the East, the Church was understood and defended mainly as a sanctuary, steeped in tradition – in its immobile [static] elements. This [tendency to preserve tradition] corresponded to the general spiritual disposition of the East."3

Churches constructed in keeping with this aesthetic sense of religious tradition mark the subsequent history of Russian architecture. After the building of St. Sophia in Kiev (1037–41) and St. Sophia in Novgorod (begun 1045), with their overt references to Byzantium, a very abbreviated list of notable examples includes: the Uspensky (Assumption) Cathedral built in Vladimir (1158–60) for which Andrei Rublev and Daniel the Black painted icons in 1408, the Church of the Virgin of the Intercession on the Nerl, Bogoliubovo (1165), the Church of the Assumption on Volotovo Field near Novgorod (1370–80), the Moscow Kremlin Church of the Annunciation with an iconostasis (the partition of icons separating altar from worshipers) decorated by Theophanes the Greek and Andrei Rublev in 1405 and rebuilt by native Pskov architects in 1484–89, the Kremlin Cathedral of the Assumption informed by the Renaissance vision of Aristotle Fioravanti (1479), the Church of the Ascension in Kolomenskoe near Moscow (1532), the Cathedral of the Virgin of the Intercession (known as St. Basil's the Blessed) on Moscow's Red Square (completed 1560), the Church of the Holy Trinity in Nikitinki, Moscow (1643), the Church of Ilia the Prophet in Yaroslavl'

(1647–50), and a series of architectural projects combining Western and native Russian elements such as Domenico Trezzini's Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral (1712–33), Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli's Smolny Cathedral (1748–64), the Kazan Cathedral (1811), and St. Isaac's Cathedral (1818–58) all in St. Petersburg. One should also note the intricate wood construction of the Church of the Transfiguration of the Savior on the Island of Kizhi (1714), the imitation of Moscow's St. Basil's in Petersburg's Church of the Resurrection (built after Alexander II's death in 1882 on the place where he was assassinated and known as "Savior on the Blood"), and the monumental Cathedral of Christ the Savior opened in 1883, blown up by the Soviet government in 1930, and totally rebuilt in the 1990s.

The attention that the Russian ambassadors paid to external beauty in choosing a faith, thus, left its mark on the entire subsequent course of Russian culture. Within church history, it is most evident in the Eastern Orthodox – especially Russian Orthodox – emphasis on ceremony, church singing, and the pleasing architectural forms we have noted, and church ornament and decoration. In the society at large the religious beginnings influenced a long history of profound and tangible interactions between the search for knowledge and theology, and the artistic forms of culture. Theology in Russia expressed itself through the painting of icons, through architecture, prose, and, especially, through poetry. This essential cultural characteristic was evident both in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. For the most part, Russian theologians were – poets; poets such as Gavrila Derzhavin (particularly the ode "God"), Aleksandr Pushkin toward the later part of his life, Mikhail Lermontov, Fedor Tiutchev, and Vladimir Soloviev. A poetic sensibility inspires the religious works of the greatest Russian theologian of the twentieth century, Pavel Florensky, and it lives on in the reflections of the philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev.

In all probability this preference for beauty influenced the composition of Russian hagiography; the saints' lives do not so much communicate the facts of their existence as they use ceremonial aesthetic forms to embellish the few facts that are known. The ritual format conveying the beautiful is linked firmly with another characteristic element of the saints' lives which gives the concept of beauty ethical and social dimensions: the saints, in the main, lead lives full of labor and creation – they originate monasteries and build churches. Work, for them, often replaces physical asceticism.

Labor is one of the basic elements of saintliness in the cases of Theodosius of the Caves, ascetic leader of the Kiev Monastery of the Caves founded in the eleventh century, Sergius of Radonezh, founder of the Holy Trinity Monastery northeast of Moscow in 1337, Metropolitan Filipp, Ivan the Terrible's moral antagonist in the sixteenth century, Pafnuty Borovsky (d. 1477) descendant of Tatars and founder of the monastery which bears his name, Yulianiia Lazarevskaia, the matron-saint (d. 1604), Ksenia of Petersburg (*Ksenia Piterskaia*), the female holy fool of the eighteenth century who dressed in men's clothing and was widely respected for her untiring work, and others. And the most holy feat of labor was considered to be the copying of books. From the eleventh century on this form of promulgating literacy and church doctrine becomes a central occupation of monks and entire monasteries. Monasteries were established a certain distance away from the towns, and from the time of the Mongol-Tatar conquest monastic life "departs" to the forests and to the north. Even in the wilderness, however, the monasteries continued to maintain contacts between themselves and to exchange manuscripts for copying. It was at this time of the Tatar invasion that the church center of Russia shifted away from Kiev. In 1300, the Kiev based Metropolitan of All Russia, Maksim, moved to Vladimir, and then to Moscow, retaining the title of "Metropolitan of Kiev and Vladimir."

In the middle of the thirteenth century – during the period of their Russian conquests – the Tatars were pagan and they were extremely cruel to the local inhabitants. It is known from the chronicles that if the people of a town or village opposed them in any way, the entire population was destroyed. Nevertheless, the Tatars were tolerant to the church and even granted it certain favors. The reason for this attitude is probably that as believers in "multi-gods" the Tatars were ready to recognize even Christian saints "just in case." Their superstitions, however, were not consistent in consequences, particularly after they began to convert to Islam following the conquest of Russia.

One more historical factor complicated the external situation of the Russian church. Metropolitan Isidor, representing the Russians at the Council of Florence, accepted unification with the Catholic church and announced the decision in Moscow in 1441. The union was rejected (Isidor was imprisoned), and the Russian church was confined to its national boundaries, which, in turn, led to reinforcement of its state and political attributes: subjugation to the Moscow princes on one hand, and

submission to Tatar power on the other. Moreover, at the outset, the Tatars themselves were interested in reinforcing the influence of the Moscow princes on the church since the princes tended to be obedient executors of the Khans' will. Thus, the tradition of church obedience to the state – although violated from time to time in short bursts of protest – was established as early as the fourteenth century. And in consequence, by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the church's submission to the state was complete, which led to the creation of sharply critical attitudes toward the church and toward religion as a whole. Eventually, this negative perception of the church predominated in the intelligentsia and took an especially virulent form among the revolutionary semi-intelligentsia.

On this historical background the fourteenth century saw religious life flourish in particular forms connected with the development of hermit monasticism in the Byzantine Empire and the Balkans, with seclusion, and with the search for profound prayer. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a large number of monasteries were founded in forest tracts and on lake and sea islands (Lake Seliger, Ladoga, Siver, the White Sea). During this period importation of South Slavic and Greek manuscripts intensified. Particularly noticeable among them was ascetic literature, such as the works of Isaac the Syrian, Maksim the Confessor, Simeon the New Theologian, Vasily the Great, and Gregory Palamas.

Of the newly built monasteries, the Troitsky cloister, later named the Trinity-Sergius Monastery, founded by one of the most revered Russian saints, Sergei Radonezhsky (the name comes from the small town of Radonezh where he was born), assumed particular importance. Former monks of Trinity-Sergius created an entire network of monasteries. Among the major and most attractive of them are: the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery, the Ferapont Monastery, where the famed frescoes of Dionysius are still preserved, the Spaso-Kamennyi Monastery on Kubenskoe Lake, the Valaam Monastery on Lake Ladoga, the Solovetsky Monastery on the White Sea, and the Spaso-Prilutsky Monastery close to the Vologda region. The monasteries not only spread spiritual enlightenment, but were large agricultural and craft organizations as well.

If the culture of Western Europe predominantly was a university culture – with all the specific features of university tolerance of other cultures past and present, Russian culture, from the fourteenth century and up to the beginning of the eighteenth, was one of monastic literacy and a monastic type of economic structure.

The flourishing of monastery culture was supported not only by an abundance of holy places, but by the large number of saintly ascetics living in the monasteries. Thanks to them basic Russian ideals of moral conduct were created during this time. This ideal moral structure was most fully embodied in the *Izmaragd* which received widespread distribution. In the sixteenth century, a collection of texts dealing with practical advice on household and everyday matters and titled *Domostroi* was compiled out of excerpts from *Izmaragd*. Although *Domostroi* was not at all as influential as *Izmaragd*, thanks to a lack of discernment on the part of many in the nineteenth century, it became a source for false evidence regarding the backwardness of Russian mores. To the present day, it should be noted, *Izmaragd* has not been made available in a scholarly edition and, for all practical purposes, is unknown even among educated readers.

The non-possessors movement, led by monks who maintained that poverty in the monastery was a condition for profound spiritual life, marked Russian church history in the period toward the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries. Chief among the non-possessors was Nil Sorsky, who advocated the abolition of monastery rights to land during a church council held in 1503. In addition to Nil Sorsky, other intellectuals among the clergy such as Vassian Kosoi, Artemy Troitsky, and Maksim Grek (well known due to his past life in Italy as a supporter of Savonarola), argued that spiritual fulfillment was unattainable except in conditions of personal poverty. Nil Sorsky and the other non-possessors also supported evangelical tolerance of other points of view, and wrote on the problems of spiritual self-realization, the dependence of spiritual life upon external stimuli, and the corporeal nature of man.

The non-possessor movement of Sorsky and his followers, to a considerable extent, continued to inform the most important and morally cultivated tendencies in the further history of Russian Orthodoxy.

At the same time, one cannot overlook the culturally vital and multifarious offshoots of the official church among the Russian people.

The Old Believer movement, in particular, not only exemplified but also developed many characteristic features of Russian religiosity. The Old Believers demanded that nothing be altered in the Russian service, texts, or rituals. The Russian church had always followed this principle earlier, attempting to fix "distorted" texts and to deal with mistakes in

Russian orthography that were the result of countless copying. So, for example, the orthographic reforms undertaken by the Bulgarian patriarch Evfimy in the fourteenth century were adopted in Russia because they were considered to be an attempt to return to the past and to traditional ways. The same goal of reviving past tradition led to an invitation to the learned monk Maksim Grek (a member of Aldo Manuci's circle of Italian humanists under his secular name Mikhail Trivolis) to come from Mt. Athos to Russia at the end of the fifteenth century.

In 1550, at the Stoglav Council of leading religious figures which took place during the reign of Ivan the Terrible, attention once again concentrated on the revision of theological books (the minutes taken at this council were written in a hundred chapters and that is why their compilation and the conference itself took on the name "Stoglav" or "Hundred chapters"). In his keynote address to the council, Tsar Ivan observed: "the scribes copy books from inaccurate translations, and having copied, do not correct them." It should be noted, once again, that this tendency toward tradition in the external forms of belief was typical of Orthodoxy throughout the length of its history.

The issue of divergence among the Russian, Greek, and Ukrainian ceremonial practices and the texts of church books became especially acute after the so-called Time of Troubles – the period of anarchy and Polish invasion at the beginning of the seventeenth century. After the restoration of the Printing House (the main Moscow printing facility) which had been destroyed during the unrest, it became not only a center for printing books but also a type of learning establishment, where the editing of theological editions to be published was undertaken. This work began in 1616 and was initially considered to be a "local" task, concerning only the Russian church and predominantly carried on by Russians editing Russian texts. Subsequently, members of the Printing House began working with Greek books, since they considered the Greek texts to be older than the available Russian ones. One of the most important stages in the verification of Russian books was two trips of a Russian scholar named Arseny Sukhanov to the East, from where he brought back approximately 500 Greek manuscripts. His detailed research in the material he gathered allowed Sukhanov to compile a detailed account – named by him *Proskinitarii* – regarding the differences between Russian and Greek rituals.

The establishment of contacts with Kiev scholars complicated the task

of correcting texts and rituals, since the Ukrainian scholars' studies were, as a rule, in Latin. As a result, many of the corrections made in the texts were considered to be heretical, which included many of the differences in ritual practices existing then between Kievan and Russian services. Adherents of the old rituals held the following major points to be deviations from Orthodoxy: in the eighth part of the Creed the word "truthful" was omitted from the line "and in the Holy Spirit, God truthful and life-giving," the form of address to God in the Lord's prayer was changed, and the spelling of Jesus' name was slightly altered. In ritual changes five prosphoras (pieces of communion bread) were used instead of seven, the "hallelujah" was sung three times instead of two, and it was suggested that priests walk around the altar to face the sun's movement (instead of moving with it). The most important change for all worshipers was the manner in which fingers were to be held in crossing oneself. The established practice in Russia since days of old had been to cross oneself using two fingers, while in the East the custom (indeed of newer origin) dictated making the cross with three fingers. At present Old Believers are still identified in Russia by the act of crossing themselves with two fingers.

In the middle of the seventeenth century, Patriarch Nikon, the head of the church, began to impose these changes in a stubborn and cruel fashion, creating conditions that eventually led to the *Raskol* (Schism). The churchgoers unhappy with his reforms complained to the Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, and accused Nikon of heresy. Nevertheless, Nikon and the tsar gathered a council in 1654, that agreed on the necessity of correcting the church books. The "corrected" books began to be printed; however, more than a quarter of the population from various social groups (boyars, noblemen, merchants, craftsmen, and peasants) refused to accept these innovations.

The struggle of the Old Believers on behalf of the earlier customs and rituals gradually took an extremely violent course, especially from the time when Avvakum – "the intransigent archpriest" – became the head of their movement. Archpriest Avvakum (1620–82) stands out among the leading supporters of the Old Belief thanks to his enormous gifts as a preacher and a writer, and the unyielding defense of his convictions. His works provide exceptional examples of authorial passion, spontaneity, originality of language and thought. He defended the Old Belief, above all, as one sanctioned by tradition – as the faith of the Russian forefathers. After a series of unsuccessful attempts to subjugate him to state-approved doctrine (including monastery imprisonment and exile to Siberia)

Avvakum was defrocked and sent to Pustozersk in the Far North, where he was held for fifteen years confined to a damp hut dug into the earth. It was here that his main works were written – including interpretations of Holy Writ, epistles, and his famous autobiographical *Life*, now considered to be among the outstanding works of Russian literature of the seventeenth century. It was in Pustozersk, as well, that Avvakum was burned at the stake along with three of the supporters exiled with him.

The Old Belief spread throughout the entire North, the Urals, and to Siberia, where it is held even today. In order not to acquiesce to the church innovations after the Schism the people resorted to mass self-immolations, that often included hundreds of believers. The largest *"gar'"* (burning) took place in 1687 when around two thousand people and children voluntarily immolated themselves. An armed resistance of monks from the Solovetsky Monastery on the White Sea continued from 1667 to 1676 (the tsar's troops were able to seize the monastery only because of the treachery of one of the monks, who showed them a secret passage). Although they strongly resisted attempts to crush their movement with military force, the Old Believers never themselves attacked the authorities. Defending their convictions and the right to live according to them, they left for the North – to the shores of the White Sea, the Urals, and to Siberia.

Fairly early in its history the Old Belief branched out into various sects. After the last Old Believer bishop, Pavel Kolomensky, was burnt at the stake, there was no one left to ordain priests. It became impossible to perform a number of rituals in accordance with the church canon. As a result, there appeared a sect named *bespopovtsy* or "The Priestless," among whom many of the clerical functions were taken up by laymen – i.e. the most respected and educated members of the church community. Eventually, another branch of the Old Believers was able to have their priests ordained by the Bosnian bishop Amvrosy, who accepted their faith in 1841. In this way, the priesthood was restored to this particular group, subsequently named the *popovtsy* or "The Priestly."

The Old Believers maintained values characteristic of Orthodox monasticism such as attention to industriousness, cleanliness, precise workmanship, honesty, and a high level of general education which later helped them to assume leading roles in Russian industry. From the eighteenth century on the Old Believers were prominent in the metallurgical industry, silver and gold mining, and in commerce. They came to be known for their practical acumen, reliability, love of work, and high

ethical standards that did not permit fraud and subterfuge in commercial activities. It may very well be that all these qualities were developed in them precisely because of their adherence to the strict fulfillment of rituals, the view of all actions as a holy task or as a religious feat. As we have already noted, physical labor and the arduous work of copying manuscripts were considered to be holy acts in old Russia. In any case, due to hard work the Old Believers, together with monasteries engaged in the Russian economy, prospered.

During the eighteenth century Old Believers built their own cultural center in the wilderness of Karelia, on the banks of the stormy and deep river Vyg. This most famous of all Old Believer settlements continued to maintain the legacy of ancient Russian culture even in the epoch when Peter I attempted to break with established traditions. With all his Westernization, in fact, Peter the Great eased the persecution of the Old Believers, and did not move against the Vygovky settlement. He understood its value for the industrial and cultural development of Russia's North, a process that had in turn moderated the excesses of the Old Belief faith. In the second half of his reign, however, Peter began to deal with the Old Believers in a much harsher fashion, seeing in them a political threat to the state.

By the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century the Old Believer milieu had produced a number of enlightened patrons of the arts and charities, creators of innovative industrial technology, and collectors. Thanks to their knowledge of ancient Russian art, the most prominent of the last group were able to take a leading role in the European art world in gauging the merits of impressionist and post-impressionist works, and in putting together the outstanding collections which now grace Russian museums. They also played a considerable role in the development of the performing arts by supporting theatres and creating "private operas." And they acted as patrons of scholarly research. In these activities the contributions to world culture of people such as Pavel Tretiakov (after whom the gallery in Moscow is named), Savva Morozov (without whose patronage the Moscow Art Theatre could not have survived) and his numerous relatives, the Mamentovs, the banker and publisher of *The Golden Fleece* Nikolai Riabushinsky and his family, the six Shchukin brothers (particularly the great art collector Sergei), I. Ostroukhov, and others, were substantial by any measure.

Despite all the persecution that the Old Belief experienced at the hands of the Russian state, it managed to preserve its cultural and moral

potential into the twentieth century. The disparities between this productive cultural presence and the religious notions supported by the government are of some importance for an understanding of Russian culture. A core difference between the official church and the Old Believers was the official church's vision of itself as a universal institution – a church for all nations. The Old Believers also took every opportunity to emphasize the universality of their church but they saw it, in the first instance, as a Russian institution, and as such based in Russian customs and rituals. The Old Belief, to some extent, intensified the dominant elements of Orthodoxy, formed in the earliest period of its existence. Nevertheless, the Old Believers were not characterized by nationalism; they easily managed to coexist with all the different nationalities and races next to whom they lived in the course of saving themselves from persecution. In many ways, their religious vision expressed an underlying idea of Russian culture, that the relationship between church and state in its ideal condition should be a "symphony" – a complete, harmonious agreement. On Palm Sunday this vision was annually represented to the people in a procession through Red Square, in which the Orthodox patriarch rode on a horse led by the tsar himself, on foot.

The persistence of the Old Believer movement finally brought the state to strive toward total subjugation of all religious institutions. During Peter's reign, for more than twenty years after the death of Patriarch Adrian in 1700, no new patriarch was selected to head the reigning "Nikonian" church (that is, that part of it that followed the reforms of Patriarch Nikon). As a result, worshipers became accustomed to the absence of a patriarch and comparatively easily agreed to substitute a composite governing body – what became the Synod – for a single church leader. For Peter this was an advantageous state of affairs, since it is always more difficult to subjugate a separate person than a collective body.

It is said that during one of the Synod meetings, while discussing the necessity of electing a patriarch, Peter replied in gestures – with one hand he unsheathed his dagger and with the other he struck his chest, saying, "Here's your patriarch!" That is, Peter made it clear that he himself assumed the functions of the patriarch and that he would rule by force. It was Peter the Great who introduced absolutism to Russia; earlier autocracy was limited by councils and an assembly of boyars, the duma, which at times did not submit to the monarch. Strange as it may seem, true despotism came to Russia along with Westernization and Peter was the medium for both one and the other.

In order to help him completely subjugate the church Peter devised a clever ploy – he appointed a Ukrainian, Stephan Yavorsky, and not a Russian, to manage all its affairs. Yavorsky was a loyal and totally obedient follower of Peter's, and the tsar could rest assured that he would never side with the Old Believers. Among the other supporters of Peter's church politics, another outstanding personality was Feofan Prokopovich (also a Ukrainian), who drafted the *Spiritual Order* that provided the official rationalization for collective administration of the church. In this way, the Holy Synod was created. At its head was a government appointee who acted as a liaison with the monarch and represented him or her at meetings. Gradually, this government official assumed responsibility for all church matters and took on the role of its leader.

Let us note that the dependence of the church on the state was not a novelty for church life; in the past, the Byzantine emperor was considered to be the protector of all the Orthodox churches. After the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks, this view contributed to the gradual formation of the concept of merger between church and state – in Rome. In Russia, this concept received its own continuation in the theory of "Moscow, the Third Rome."

The widespread notion that Peter "turned" Russia onto the European path of development is very inaccurate. The European character of Russia was formed out of its conversion to Christianity (which was much more important for culture) and not out of Peter's reforms. Russia's ties with Europe were never completely severed, although they grew weak from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, when Russia was under the power of the Golden Horde. The ties were maintained through the northern ports of Novgorod and Narva (where the majority of residents were and still are Russian). In turn, large numbers of foreigners lived in Moscow, and the Germans formed an entire settlement. Peter, thus, did not establish but continued ties with Europe, which had been already strengthened by his father Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich. Peter only gave the existing cultural conjunctions an externally visible presence, by attempting to change dress codes, the design of Russian towns, and the mores of the Russian citizens.

As we have already noted, a principal difference between European and Russian culture was that European culture was based in universities while the cultural centers for Russians were monasteries. The importance of religious institutions for Russian history explains why a crucial

part of Peter's attempt to establish political absolutism included limiting monastery resources,4 abolishing the patriarchate, and generally subjugating religion to political concerns to the extent of restoring the Byzantine system of church–state relations. Peter, in fact, brought back the emperors' power into Russia, and he stopped convening the institutions of a democratic nature – assemblies (both of the church and of the citizenry in general). Having fashioned the state on Byzantine lines, Peter tried to give Russia the appearances of a European power, taking his model not from south or central Europe but from the northern Baltic region.

For Russia such an aggressive attitude toward the church and church spirituality was extremely risky in essence, since secular government and bureaucratic administration damaged central achievements of the religious tradition based on non-possessor values and the striving for pure spirituality.

As signaled by the positions of power achieved by Feofan Prokopovich and Yavorsky, the end of the seventeenth century through the entire eighteenth century saw Ukrainian prelates assume dominant roles in the Russian Orthodox hierarchy. The close attention paid to rituals and to all the external aspects of religious practice, which earlier had helped to preserve church tradition, now turned against it. The musical element of the rituals, the language and pronunciation of the services, were all strongly Ukrainianized, becoming in their turn traditional and binding. Among the positive effects, however, the strong musical talents of Ukrainian singers who were enlisted into the Imperial Chapel Choir and composers such as Dmitry Bortniansky enriched the divine service (without entirely replacing older traditions – especially in the provinces). The art of oratorical prose was also developed, and sermons composed by Dmitry Rostovsky exemplified a new type of scholarly asceticism.

The evolution of scholarship among ascetic hermits was particularly noticeable in the eighteenth century in the activities of Tikhon Zadonsky (1724–82). Tikhon studied at Latin schools both in Tver and Novgorod and he enjoyed reading Western mystics such as Johann Arndt (whose works were translated by Simeon Todorsky, the Ukrainian son of a converted Jew, and an outstanding Orthodox theologian). Tikhon named his own main work in imitation of Arndt, giving it the title of *About True Christianity*. Tikhon's language is colored by Latinisms but is smooth and

readable. The principles of Tikhon's asceticism support his high moral standing among the Russians together with his diverse examples of prayer, pastoral duty, teaching, and compassionate advice. Many of his characteristics, along with those of Father Ambrose, the elder often visited by Fedor Dostoevsky, found their way into the depiction of Father Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Another outstanding prelate was the founder of the famous Optyna Pustyn (Wilderness of Optyna) monastic community near the town of Kaluga, Paissius Velichkovsky (1722–94), the son of a Ukrainian priest and a converted Jewish woman. He studied at the Kievan Theological Academy, but left it early to travel, to visit Mt. Athos, and to live in Moldavian cloisters. His readings consisted mainly of the Church Fathers but he preferred Greek to Latin writings, following the precepts of Nil Sorsky. He actively translated Greek ascetic essays in a Moldavian monastery, organized a school of translation there, and published a collection of translated texts which is famous even today as the multi-volume *Dobrotoliubie* (Love of the Good).

The end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century was marked by a religious revival – that sometimes took secular forms such as Masonry or Alexander I's notion of a Holy Alliance – and by new Russian interactions with Catholics and Protestants. Particularly important was the influence of Joseph De Maistre and the Jesuits, who established a new branch of their order in St. Petersburg and who were allowed to open a seminary in Polotsk. Protestant Pietism and the mystical writings of Heinrich Jung-Stilling and Karl Eckartshausen provided strong competition for Catholicism. Much of the appeal of Pietism was, once again, the vision of a universal church, a new union of Christians that would transcend all religious differences and creeds.

Closer to home, and partially under the influence of Paissius Velichkovsky and Tikhon Zadonsky, intellectual asceticism was renewed in Russia in the nineteenth century. In Optyna Pustyn the work of monastery elders once again flourished in the form of the so-called "wise activity" typical of Mt. Athos. The monastery obtained a widespread resonance in Russian society thanks to the regular visits of Russian authors like Nikolai Gogol, Konstantin Leontiev, Dostoevsky, and Soloviev. In the 1840s, the Optyna elder Makary (1788–1860) and the well-known Slavophile philosopher I. V. Kireevsky began printing literature, which exerted a strong influence throughout Russian culture. In 1910, it was to

Optyna that Leo Tolstoy intended to go after leaving home before his death. Here also many Russian intellectuals found consolation in dialog with the elders during the earlier years of Soviet power, when the church was subverted by the destructive "movement for church renewal," promulgated skillfully by an atheist state. This leading role for maintaining religious life was continued by the monastery after the death of Patriarch Tikhon and up to its closure in the 1920s. In the last decades of the twentieth century the monastery once again experienced a revival of intellectual and cultural activity.

The great saint of the Russian Orthodox Church in the nineteenth century was Seraphim Sarovsky (1759–1833), whose personality and indubitable oratorical gifts influenced many men and women of the Russian intelligentsia to turn to the church. Seraphim founded his Sarovsky Monastery and a convent for women, the Diveevsky Pustyn, close to the town of Arzamas; they became favored places for pilgrimages.

The separation of the clergy into an isolated social class during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seemed to alienate it from the Russian intelligentsia. Nevertheless, the church remained an important and familiar cultural presence for poets and artists. Aleksandr Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolai Gogol, Fedor Tiutchev, Sergei Aksakov, Nikolai Leskov, Konstantin Leontiev, Vladimir Soloviev, and many writers and philosophers of the "Silver Age" of Russian culture dating from approximately 1900 to 1928, all arrived at religious issues by complex and diverse ways.

The religious engagements of the Russian intelligentsia are most typical in the life of the great Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, who later became a Russian national symbol. Despite his premature death (he only lived for thirty-seven years), Pushkin was able to pass through an entire lifetime of spiritual change. At the beginning of his creative path lay atheism, exemplified in his works by the anti-church poem "Gavriiliada." At the end of his life, in his last year, he created a poetic version of one of the favorite prayers of the Russian people – the supplication of Ephraim the Syrian – which is repeated many times throughout Lent. The text delineates the sins and virtues of man's destiny, which most fascinated Russians and especially Pushkin himself.

The prayer begins with repentance. The penitent asks to be delivered first from four minor, very ordinary sins: such as feelings of indolence (laziness), despondency, love of rule (i.e. the striving for power), and idle

talk. He then prays for four virtues: integrity (chastity), humility, patience, and love. At the end, of particular importance is a request for the ability to perceive one's own sins and to not condemn one's brother. In totality all these virtues were the characteristic features of Russian saints; they are, in fact, the moral qualities of the Optyna elders and Seraphim Sarovsky reproduced by Dostoevsky in the elder Zosima.

Pushkin's journey from non-belief to belief was repeated by most of the major Russian philosophers of the first half of the twentieth century, including Nikolai Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Semen Frank, and many others. The key figures of the spiritual renaissance, which was interlinked with the Silver Age of the first quarter of the twentieth century, were not only poets, prose writers, and philosophers but also intellectuals from the clergy itself. The clergy and the intelligentsia began a vibrant dialog in religious-philosophical meetings, the first of which was held at the end of 1901, and which were eventually banned by the head of the Holy Synod, K. Pobedonostsev, in 1903. The debates, however, continued in print in the collection *Vekhi* (Landmarks, 1909) and the journal *Novyi put'* (The New Way). One of the eminent theologians of this time was the priest Pavel Florensky (1882–1939), who, in the short life allotted to him before he was shot, managed to do outstanding work not only in philosophy and theology but in the sciences and humanities as a mathematician, philologist, technical engineer, museum scholar, and art historian.

One should also note publishing firms such as *Put'* which flourished and printed an extensive series of books under the rubrics of "Logos," "Musaget," and "Orpheus." Various gatherings of intellectuals who discussed religious topics flourished as well, including the circle organized by M. A. Novoselov (among the most democratically inclined) and that of A. Meier, which was the most free-thinking and well-attended.

Atheism continued to be typical of the revolutionary and, I would say, terrorist-inclined semi-intelligentsia. A form of radical atheism was widespread among the newly enlarged class of service workers (postal and railroad workers, accountants, technicians, petty merchants) who often had not received a higher education and, at times, not even a secondary education. The church's subservient position in the monarchial state played a significant role in generating this attitude toward religion. For growing numbers of the semi-intelligentsia the church was the personification of reactionary ideology. Typically, having inaccurately taken Rasputin to be a church dignitary, the semi-intelligentsia ascribed all his

vices to the church. Thanks to these widespread attitudes, when the Revolution succeeded in overthrowing the existing order in 1917 and the semi-intelligentsia came to power, the church, as well as the real intelligentsia, underwent a form of persecution seldom seen in the histories of either Christianity or world culture. The negative attitude of the semi-educated classes of society toward theology and higher culture was further reinforced by a general suspicion of everything which was in one way or the other incomprehensible to them, or which testified to the cultural inadequacies of the governing semi-intelligentsia.

The church attempted to respond quickly to the social upheaval, and in August 1917 convened the first church council since the times of Peter I. Finally acting independently of the state the council elected a patriarch, the former head of the Russian Orthodox Church in North America, Tikhon. The new patriarch demonstrated qualities of modesty, kindness, firmness, and broad-mindedness, typical of the best representatives of Russian religious practice: Theodosius of the Caves in the eleventh century, Metropolitan Filipp Kolychev during the reign of Ivan the Terrible in the sixteenth, and Seraphim Sarovsky in the nineteenth. As a result, Tikhon was widely respected and attempts by the political authorities to discredit him failed. Until his death in 1925 he continued an intelligent and courageous defense of the interests of the church. The "progressive" movement of the so-called Renovationists supported by government organs in opposition to Tikhon's administration ultimately faltered because the people refused to believe in their innovations and preferred traditional church practices. The true representatives of the religious element in culture, the thinking intelligentsia, were sentenced to annihilation in jails, concentration camps, and in mass executions.

It is typical of this persecution, concentrating on the intellectual opposition to Soviet ideology in the 1920s–1940s, that the church suffered the same fate as the Academy of Sciences, various universities, and eventually entire cultural movements. They were labeled as "anti-Marxist" and "anti-scientific" and were eliminated by force and terror. Such was the fate of the Indo-European theory in linguistics, of its direct opposite "Marrism," of genetics, of cybernetics, of the formalist method in literature and the humanities, and so on.

Nevertheless, the majority of the people, brought up for centuries to respect tradition, the external form of church services, and the performance of church rituals, preserved its faith in Orthodoxy. No small role in maintaining the cultural vitality of religion was played by Russian

Orthodox theologians who continued the productive conjunction of the church and the intelligentsia in emigration. The beginnings of a new renaissance of Russian Orthodoxy could be seen at work in both the broad base of worshipers and in the intellectual sphere after the 1988 celebration of the millennium since Russia accepted Christianity.

notes

Translated and adapted by Nicholas Rzhevsky with the help of Rama Sohonee.

1. Vladimir Solov'ev, "Velikii spor i khristianskaia politika," *Sobranie sochinenii,* vol. iv (St. Petersburg, 1911–14), p. 64.
2. Platon Sokolov, *Russki arkhierei iz Vizantii* (Kiev, 1913), p. 550.
3. Solov'ev, "Velikii spor i khristianskaia politika." iv, p. 55.
4. In 1701 Peter created a new monastery administration to which he turned over control of the extensive land holdings of the clergy.