Chapter 4  
A People’s Life:  
Post-Christian Existentialism in *Confession*

“Homo homini deus est” [*Human is god to human*]  
–Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (1844)[[1]](#footnote-2)

When I was very young, I forgot how to laugh in the Trophonic Cave; when I grew older, when I opened my eyes and looked at reality, I began to laugh, and have not stopped laughing since then. I saw that it was the meaning of life to earn a living, its aim to become a council of justice; that it was love's rich desire to get a wealthy girl; that it was the bliss of friendship to help each other in money embarrassments; that it was the wisdom that the majority therefore assumed; that it was excitement to give a speech; that it was courage to dare to be fined 10 silver coins; that it was cordial to say welcome after a midday meal; that it was godly to go to the altar once a year. I saw that and I laughed.  
–Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (1843)[[2]](#footnote-3)

“Without God, everything is permitted” is a thought-provoking aphorism at face value, but that phrase is not quite what many believe it to be. Often falsely attributed to Fedor Dostoevskii directly, the popularly quoted form comes from Jean-Paul Sartre’s commentary about *Brothers Karamazov* in the French philosopher’s foundational *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* [*Existentialism Is a Humanism*] (1946).[[3]](#footnote-4) His words are part interpretation and part quotation of Dostoevskii’s prose. In actuality, Sartre’s “God” is of his own making, read in Miusov’s apophatic criticism of Ivan’s atheism, which mentions no such “God,” as such: “you destroy humanity’s faith in its immortality..., then nothing will be amoral, and everything will be permitted.”[[4]](#footnote-5) Sartre, an adamant atheist like Gor’kii, constructs a “God” where there were only people’s collective beliefs. Dostoevskii’s Miusov, on the other hand, describes “God” as many things, but never utters the name “God” itself. With that, when we argue about the existence of “God” and ultimately the idea that “without God, everything is permitted,” is it Sartre’s or Dostoevskii’s “God” that is said—or unsaid—to be absent?

The following chapter argues that Gor’kii’s godbuilding phase, as exemplified in *Confession* (1908), constructs a post-Christian “God” to bridge the gap observed between religious and secular forms of existentialist thought, such as those seen in Sartre and Dostoevskii, or Feuerbach and Kierkegaard. Written in Italy at a safe distance from Lenin, the novel is Gor’kii’s most complete profession of the revolutionary faith developed in *Mother* and previous works out of Orthodox symbolism and socialist fervor. “I saw her, my mother ... and I saw her lord [*vladyku*], the all-powerful, immortal *narod*,” Matvei, *Confession*’sprotagonist exclaims in the end, putting a name at last to “God.”[[5]](#footnote-6) The *narod*, which I transcribe rather than translate, is a culturally significant Russian term that attempts to refer to the native ethnolinguistic population. By co-opting pre-Christian and Christian elements, Gor’kii’s post-Christian godbuilding is in some ways an ordinary instance in the “dual-faith” Slavic tradition, but the novel stands out in ways, as well. To be specific, *Confession* uses transpositions of Christian genres, narratives, and liturgy to make Gor’kii’s ultimate revelation to his readers: “God” and the wonders ascribed thereto were the *narod*’s—the people’s—making all along. Instead of taking away from the miraculous nature of the divine, however, Gor’kii finds in this human capacity an equal if not greater source of awe. Bringing light to humanity’s innate creative power with unlimited potential, Gor’kii hoped that he could halt the country’s moral backslide and set the Russian people on a revolutionary divine mission.

The novel is framed as the spiritual autobiography of Matvei, an aged man who narrates his evolution from Orthodox Christian to a faith he calls “godbuilding.” As an infant, he was found on the side of the road by a wealthy landowner and raised by the staff of his estate. As an adult, he marries and has a child, but his wife dies during the birth of their second child. The event unmoors him, and he embarks on a search for answers about the meaning of life and nature of God. Matvei begins his seeking with the institution of the Orthodox Church at the recommendation of a prostitute. He joins a monastery, but the abbot dismisses him shortly after for speaking out against the immoral behavior of the other monks. Still looking for answers, Matvei sets out on a pilgrimage across Russia. Along the way, he hears about the lives of numerous other people, opening his eyes to the broken and diseased state of society, including his own isolation from others. Hearing there may be answers in a factory, Matvei travels to find a different way of life. Though it looks like hell, workers labor together to build the physical and spiritual foundation on which the country will grow. The impression causes Matvei to study and preach ideas of collective labor to others, and Matvei finally finds a community to call home. After leaving the factory, he witnesses a miracle happen when a group of the *narod* cure a disabled person. This event testifies to Matvei that “godbuilding” is the Slavic peoples’ righteous future.

*Mother*’s focus on what the *narod* should do turns to the necessity and capacity to act in *Confession*. Revisiting unanswered philosophical questions from past works, here we find a treatise on justice, immortality, virtue, agency, truth—“God” by another name. *Confession* constructs the “God” missing from *Mother* with Gor’kii’s most treasured resource, the people, to rewrite cultural foundational narratives about good, evil, and reality itself. The novel’s anthropocentric conclusion attributes to the collective renewed ideals of justice, immortality, virtue, agency, or at least their highest forms—“God” by another name. For these reasons, this chapter argues for *Confession*’s consideration among other existentialist works, such as those of Dostoevskii and Sartre. Gor’kii’s godbuilding fundamentally concerns itself with the primary question of existentialism, the meaningful essence—“God”—and its development—“building”—to use Sartre’s own definition.[[6]](#footnote-7) Transposing Christian narratives onto contemporary social issues, *Confession* lays bare the role of religious thinking in a secular society (as Gor’kii sees it): holding certain ideas as inviolable Truth makes our individual and collective experiences possible, and together in faith, moving mountains is often as easy as deciding to do it.

As we have seen in previous chapters, social division had given way political turmoil as the Russian Empire approached the turn of the twentieth century. A revolution came, but instead of complete reformation of the Russian Empire’s broken but predictable political apparatus, Bloody Sunday transformed the country into a patchwork state of conservatism and liberalism, autocracy and democracy, theocracy and atheism. Gor’kii, newly settled in Italy by spring 1907, was responding to all those trends in *Confession* with a blend of religious and secular questions to discern the “True” right path for Russia—what those who raised him and thus Gor’kii called “God.” In other words, this chapter examines Gor’kii’s response to the existential crises of the period while putting him in conversation with prominent existential philosophers before and after him. I argue that *Confession* presents the psychosocial case for a collectively constructed “Truth,” which Gor’kii’s confessed spiritual socialism is meant to fulfill as an outlet for the Russian people’s presumed spiritual impulse. In its exposition, the religiously tinged secular claim to the “Truth” offers us a fascinating lesson on the subjectivity of perceived facts, such as those at the foundation of nation states past and present. Though Gor’kii’s villa is ages and oceans away, the Capri School and *Confession* can nevertheless teach us about managing dueling realities in our present time and place.

Since the novel's publication in 1907, critics have scratched their heads at Gor’kii’s religious sensibilities, and many have treated his godbuilding phase as an aberration or lark that he eventually overcame. Georgii Chulkov, a prominent figure in early-twentieth century Russian literary life, once said in response to reading *Confession,* “I am not afraid to assert paradoxically that Maksim Gor’kii is the strongest believer of modern writers. The object of his faith is another question, but the nature of his preoccupation is defined by faith.”[[7]](#footnote-8) However, as this chapter shows, *Confession* is the latest in a consistent trend of religious thinking. It is ironic that many see Christ in *Confession* when Gor’kii is not searching for but revealing God. As we shall see, the Russian *narod* makes its own saviors. In the role of a facilitator, Gor’kii is looking to produce self-realization—more specifically, *our* self-realization, in other words, realization of our self. Collective manifestation of our potential triumphs over any individual will, even that of the tsar, or so his thinking goes. My discussion also includes the essay “Destruction of the Personality,” which explains that very concept as though he never wrote *Confession* in the first place. This chapter shows how Gor’kii’s transpositions move almost entirely away from the Gospels—and thus away from the idea of a savior as a single person—to envision the Russian people as Matvei's God-the-Father. *Confession* is a post-Christian catechism for the Russian people to realize that the only “God” after Bloody Sunday can be found looking back at them in the mirror.

I suggest this idea of collective self-realization to frame the scholarly conversation about the “god” in godbuilding, for which scholars have yet to give a definition. Lidiia Spiridonova claims that these ideas are not truly religious, but simply what Gor’kii conflates with religion, though she is alone in that opinion.[[8]](#footnote-9) Most others, such as Rowley, call it “religion.” The majority conclude Gor’kii’s is a “new Christ-based religion,” putting it in the “godseeking” category, in Scherr’s terms.[[9]](#footnote-10) In a certain sense, Scherr is correct, for any post-Christian faith is per se based on Christ. In a truer sense, critics miss Gor’kii’s intention to say that “God” was a human all along, begotten by Russians’ collective belief in the idea of Christ: “Was it from the heavens that God came down to Earth or from Earth did the people’s force ascend into the heavens?” Matvei reflects in a Feuerbachian manner during his conversion to godbuilding in *Confession*.[[10]](#footnote-11) At this point, labels like “religion” become less meaningful, but I find precedent for Gor’kii’s worldview elsewhere in religious philosophy. This chapter argues that *Confession* succeeds the Slavophiles’ “ecumenicity” [*sobornost’*] and Vladimir Solov’ev’s concept of “syzygy” [*sizigiia*] as models of faith-based nation-building. The plain prose of “Destruction of the Personality” provides clarifying context to Matvei’s transformation into a social thinker and believer, which was Gor’kii’s solution like the Slavophiles and Solov’ev to divinely inspired governance. Instead of an amorphous “God” like others of the past, Gor’kii’s “God” was the shape of the community he was building.

The idea of a deity dwelling within the masses can be found in Orthodox thinking throughout history, most acutely in the concept of the Russian “godbearing *narod*” [*narod-bogonosets*]. In early Christianity, the “godbearers” (from AG Θεοφόρος [*theoforos*]) led holy processions carrying an icon of Jesus, and the term came to represent any individual metaphorically carrying God with them.[[11]](#footnote-12) In the nineteenth century, conservative movements branded the Russian people with this epithet for an array of sociopolitical agendas. Slavophile-Westernizer debates brought to the forefront questions of national identity, which Orthodox nationalists like Khomiakov answered the godbearing folk destined to do God’s work on Earth. Successors to the Slavophiles on the right repeated this idea, including Uvarov’s Official Nationality (“Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality”) and Nicholas II himself. That lineage also includes the so-called *pochvenniki* (a populist movement, from the Russian *pochva*, “soil”) and, most prominently, Fedor Dostoevskii. The godbearing trope can be found in varying intensities in a majority of his most significant novels, particularly *Brothers Karamazov*. This divine duty of the Russian people, which features in studies such as Peter Duncan’s *Russian Messianism*, is a view common among traditionalists, but Gor’kii is perhaps the first revolutionary thinker to champion the view. Other socialist writers, like Alexander Herzen and Nikolai Chernyshevskii, found their solutions in collectivism while leaving God out of it. Thus *Confession*, despite its message of starting anew, finds itself in conversation with radical Russian conservatism in its pivotal moments.

Perhaps the most surprising conservative connection found in *Confession* is its praise of Old Believers and their figurehead, Archpriest Avvakum. The novel’s original title was *A Saint’s Life* [*Zhitie*] because, as the author himself remarked, the work aims to model the spiritual transformation of an individual.[[12]](#footnote-13) The hagiographic genre often depicts the miraculous and selfless deeds done by those whom the Church has made saints. Each story, generally written by officials gathering evidence about a person’s life after their death, serves as justification of a saint’s eligibility for beatification and as a lesson to readers in Church-sanctioned lifestyles. Though he changed the name, the original choice of *A Saint’s Life* provides valuable information about Gor’kii’s thinking about his own story. In addition to reading *Confession* as a hagiographic work, the title makes connections with an unexpected religious influence. While there are many saints’ lives in the Orthodox tradition, the *Life of Archpriest Avvakum, Written by Himself* [*Zhitie protopopa Avvakuma, im samim napisannoe*] is known in particular for its first-person perspective, such as that in *Confession* when it was called *A Saint’s Life*. The text, written in 1672–1673, recounts the Avvakum Petrov (1620–1682) with a particular focus on the persecution he and others endured at the hands of the Tsar and the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Though the Church censored any official publication through the end of the nineteenth century, the text was still clandestinely circulated among Old Believers—some of the earliest surviving independent publication [*samizdat*] in Russian*.*[[13]](#footnote-14)

More than a title, Gor’kii has a documented history of celebrating Avvakum. Barry Scherr makes note of a couple “coincidental” commonalities between *Confession* and *Life of Archpriest Avvakum*, but I see sufficient evidence to argue that Gor’kii openly admired Avvakum’s life, his practices, and the Old Believers’ steadfast faith.[[14]](#footnote-15) In addition to structural allusions in Confession, we see Gor’kii directly quote Avvakum’s autobiographical hagiography in “Destruction of the Personality.”[[15]](#footnote-16) His *Life* would have been available to Gor’kii by 1882, when he began working as an assistant in an Old Believer family's icon shop, if not already present in his childhood.[[16]](#footnote-17) Later in life, he praised the priest, calling Avvakum's fiery oratory the sole exception to the trend of cold-hearted Russian preachers. Like Avvakum, Matvei in *Confession* places great importance on speaking to the public with passion. In an memorial letter, Gor’kii even compared Lenin to Avvakum, saying that his dear friend and the founder of the Soviet state “was a Russian person through and through … with the iron will of Archpriest Avvakum.” Those words did not survive Soviet editors before being published widely.[[17]](#footnote-18) What could possibly cause Gor’kii to look up to a seventeenth-century religious leader considered radically conservative even by his own contemporary—i.e., seventeenth-century—standards? Avvakum Petrov was burned at the stake in 1682 by Tsar Feodor Alekseevich for preaching his against the Orthodox Church’s reforms in defense of the “Truth” as he saw it. In response, the Old Believers became a persistent thorn in the side of the Romanovs’ caesaropapism despite the monarchy’s equally unrelenting persecution. The Archpriest represented a David against the Goliath Orthodox establishment, which Bloody Sunday had brought to its knees before Gor’kii’s eyes. In fact, the Old Believers were finally granted leniency as a part of religious tolerance reforms in April 1905 immediately following the conflict.[[18]](#footnote-19) At the time of *Confession*’s writing, there was perhaps no more potent symbol of prevailing anti-mainstream convictions than the Old Believers and Archpriest Avvakum.

Before Gor’kii finished the novel, however, he changed its name from *A Saint’s Life* to another religious genre, the confession. The surviving title borrows from the Christian sacrament and signals certain authorial intentions, much like *Mother* sought to do with the gospel genre. The written declaration of belief began with Augustine’s *Confessions* (completed 400 CE). Its description of an internal journey first away from and subsequently back to faith became an archetype for later iterations of the genre. The organization leaves readers with an instructive example to replicate the process themselves as needed. Augustine has profoundly impacted Western philosophy and religion, including religious existentialists like Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard. Alongside him is Lev Tolstoi, whose spiritual rebirth in the late-1870s precipitated his *Confession* (1880) in the Augustinian tradition.[[19]](#footnote-20) Tolstoi’s version was quite different, however. As William James explains in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1917), whereas Augustine writes openly and triumphantly, Tolstoi recounts his return to faith with resentment.[[20]](#footnote-21) This sharp contrast in tone is primarily due to Augustine’s submission to the Christian ideal and Tolstoi’s overflowing skepticism of the human institutions around religion. The present chapter examines how Gor’kii’s *Confession* is more than an angry response to Tolstoi, as others have said.[[21]](#footnote-22) In fact, as I argue, it would be more accurate to see *Confession* as lesson to Tolstoi to embrace Augustine’s focus on the present. Gor’kii’s espouses Augustine’s joyful redemption to tell thinkers like Tolstoi, and perhaps Tolstoi himself, to see God in the miraculous power of the people.

Finally, I look at *Confession*’s contributions to the “vagabond” tradition [*bosiachestvo*, from *bosiak*, “barefooted”], for which Gor’kii is distinctly known.[[22]](#footnote-23) *Confession* is rarely mentioned as an example of his works featuring his trademark itinerant figures like Matvei, but the character fits the bill perfectly. Barry Scherr mentioned this connection in passing; his explanation, ascribing influence in the creation of Matvei to Nikolai Leskov’s religious motifs, is a guess, albeit a good one.[[23]](#footnote-24) At first glance, the shoeless vagabonds seen in Leskov’s, Gor’kii’s, and others’ works resemble Christian pilgrims, accounts of saints’ lives, and rituals. Gor’kii himself indicates his intentions in a letter to Konstantin Piatnitskii in February 1908, saying that he is “finishing a story about the pilgrimage of a certain person to holy sites [*khozhdeniia nekogo cheloveka po sviatym mestam*], about his existence in a monastery, and about his search everywhere for Lord God, whom he fortuitously finds.”[[24]](#footnote-25) He repeats nearly the same phrase in another letter to his publisher Ivan Ladyzhnikov when he calls Matvei “a wanderer to holy sites” [*strannik po sviatym mestam*] in his new story *A Saint’s Life*. Interestingly, those descriptions bear a resemblance to the 1832 spiritual sketch “Travels to Holy Sites of Russia” [*Puteshestviia po svatym mestam russkim*] by Andrei Murav’ёv (1806-1874), an Orthodox historian, author, translator, and friend of Slavophile Aleksei Khomiakov. Like Murav’ёv, Gor’kii reached to Christian literature to instill a higher purpose in the Russian people.[[25]](#footnote-26) Thus, I look at *Confession*’s role in Gor’kii’s *bosiak* trend and potential religious influences in the development of the wanderer type.

Pilgrimages are sacred less because of the walking one must do and more because of the thinking one is left to do while walking long distances. We see this practice throughout world religions, and Christ’s walks through the desert continue to inspire literary and physical transpositions through the present day. Written accounts of pilgrimages [as a genre, *khozh*(*d*)*eniia*, from *khozhd*, “walk”] played prominently in pre-modern Slavic literature and peaked in popularity by the late fifteenth century with the publication of *A Journey Beyond the Three Seas* [*Khozhdenie za tri moria*]. The business trip journal log, written by a merchant named Afanasii Nikitin documenting his commercial ventures to the Indian subcontinent and back, is also famous for being the first secular work of Russian literature.[[26]](#footnote-27) According to I.V. Mokletseva, in *“Khozhdeniia”* in *R**ussian Culture and Literature in the Tenth-Twentieth Centuries*, such stories customarily carry both religious and intercultural significance for authors and audience alike: coming know to know oneself as well as the other are equal parts of the path to God. For the Russian people, she continues, this type of narrative has come to define ethnic and ideological boundaries between *us* and *them*.[[27]](#footnote-28) Below I argue that Gor’kii draws on this religious storytelling tradition and a specific narrative, Mary’s “Pilgrimage of the God-bearer among the Torments” [*Khozhdenie Bogoroditsy po mukam*], to gradually reveal the source of Russians’ miserly state and construct an ideological pathway toward spiritual sovereignty. It is a snapshot of an entire worldview, as Mokletseva describes, which, in the case of *Confession*, always returns to seeing oneself in the other.

Gor’kii writes a pilgrimage narrative in contemporary Russia leading to Matvei’s own descent into the hell of the factory. In what follows, I argue that Matvei’s travels across Russian lands are in fact pilgrimages to the Russian *narod*. In this way, Gor'kii also depicts an alternative vision for the “Going to the *Narod*” [*Khozhdenie v narod*] populist movement of the 1860s and 1870s to propagandize rationalism and agitate among the newly freed serfs and others.[[28]](#footnote-29) What Gor’kii calls “the holy sites of Russia” are not geographic locations but the holy people of Russia, each of which offers wisdom. Conversations with individuals, when assembled in a single narrative, argue for the sanctification of the *narod* to proceed the ultimate hagiographic proof, which is to say, the collective miracle. Conventional saints’ lives present the case for beatification in much the same way, with an important exception: the same person, the saint, does everything. The first two-thirds of the journey unfold with Matvei’s doubt and questioning of the Christian tradition. The month of May marks the middle of his spiritual metamorphosis as he moves back out into the lay world and among the *narod*. In this time, Matvei strikes up conversations with clergy, a prostitute, monks, and laity so that Gor’kii can first humanize Christianity and second deify the common Russian people. The visits convince Matvei, becoming a foundation for his new faith, and only once Matvei believes does he witness the *narod* perform a miracle to affirm its divinity. A montage of faces that we meet in these conversations is summarized in the *narod*’s icon-like collective visage that appears to Matvei after the crowd heals the crippled girl. Until then, snapshots of the Russian people embolden him to face the fire and brimstone to be found at the factory.

The meetings launch a spiritual journey that follows a period of sorrow in Matvei’s life. After his wife dies in childbirth, he intends to commit suicide until a glance at his reflection frightens him into rethinking the choice. As Franco-Algerian existentialist Albert Camus said, “There is only one really serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide.”[[29]](#footnote-30) Gor’kii himself attempted suicide in 1887, surviving a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the chest.[[30]](#footnote-31) The fictional account is closer to the temptations described in Tolstoi’s own *Confession* than to Gor’kii’s past, however. Like Tolstoi, Matvei’s loneliness leads to thoughts of ending his own life but in the end begets the text’s driving spiritual crisis-turned-transformation. His pilgrimage begins with two pairs of encounters. In each, a planned visit to an institution of the Orthodox Church ends in disappointment and leads Matvei to an outcast of Christianity who imparts wisdom about God to him: first, a visit with local clerical leadership leads to a lesson from a prostitute, and a trip to a monastery becomes meaningful only upon speaking with the abbot’s opposition. These meetings are meant to cleave faith from the Church much like Pelageia Nilovna’s exclamation to Pavel, “You revere Christ, but you avoid church!” in *Mother*.[[31]](#footnote-32) From the beginning, Gor’kii argues for the separation of religion and the institution of the Orthodox Church.

Guilt was a very familiar feeling to Gor’kii from childhood. A three-year-old Aleksei passed along a cholera infection to his father; the boy recovered, but his father died as a result.[[32]](#footnote-33) Recurring illnesses followed him for the rest of his life as a nagging reminder of his father’s untimely and unfortunate death. His mother would also die of illness not long after Aleksei had turned eleven. The presence of guilt looms large in Gor’kii’s early works, particularly the question of who, if not God, is to blame for the many tragedies that have befallen the world and young Gor’kii. Perhaps for that reason, his philosophical opus *Confession* attempts to provide an answer to that question. Matvei, too, carries with him the guilt he held as a child about his parents: “Why, Lord? Am I guilty for how my parents disowned me and, like a kitten, threw a baby into the bushes?”[[33]](#footnote-34) When an older Matvei the Church demands admission of personal guilt from him even when conversation with a priest ends in mockery. Matvei responds, trying to rationalize what he is hearing, “Why on my knees? If I am guilty, then not before you but before God!”[[34]](#footnote-35) His refusal to comply angers the priest, who threatens to call the police to enforce compliance, including exile to Siberia if necessary. Gor’kii seems to recount his memories of Bloody Sunday when Matvei recalls, “Then I came to my senses. It is clear that, if a person calls the police to support their god, it means that neither he nor his god has any kind of power, much less beauty.”[[35]](#footnote-36) The sentiment is found in Gor’kii’s previous works, though in more emotional terms. A Feuerbachian tone pervades throughout the work which distinguishes it from others that comes to the forefront here in the phrase “his god.” In doing so, he distinguishes the “god” of godbuilding as another, to-be-defined deity. Feeling the burden of guilt nevertheless, Matvei flees the church grounds and sets out for a walk to find absolution elsewhere.

Sex workers occupy a peculiarly important place in the Russian Orthodox cultural sphere. Prostitution’s historical significance to Christianity and Russia, which are explored in a number of other scholarly investigations, converge in Matvei’s first acquaintance after the church.[[36]](#footnote-37) Down the road, the innkeeper and prostitute Tat’iana gives the beleaguered traveler a room for the night. She gains Matvei’s admiration first through kindness and later through a shameless recognition of the facts: “‛Now,’ she says, ‛sometimes I have to take in a man for some bread.’”[[37]](#footnote-38) When Christian moral standards enter the conversation, she rejects his transposition of Mary Magdalene, the sex worker among Jesus’s followers, onto her, asking, “What does God have to do with it? ... If I’m not doing any harm to people, what exactly am I guilty of? [If it is] because I’m unclean, who’s sorrow is that? Only mine!”[[38]](#footnote-39) Here Gor’kii wants to redefine religious guilt toward “God,” which was Matvei’s original Christian outlook, as guilt toward the *narod*’s wellbeing. Material needs take precedence over beliefs, but Gor’kii does not forsake the spiritual entirely. Matvei cannot fully comprehend what Tat’iana is trying to tell him, so she sends him to a monastery to further discover the truth about God. Tat’iana is Gor’kii’s answer to the famous prostitutes who advised heroes of Russian literature of the past. A post-Christian sex worker who admits guilt exclusively to the people before her bucks the trend of penitent prostitutes—referred to in the Russian Bible as *bludnitsa*, from *blu(zh)d*, to wander (from a path)—before her. Those, such as Sonia Marmeladova in Dostoevskii’s *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and Katiusha Maslova in Tolstoi’s *Resurrection* (1899), were punished, found the Christian Way, and only then gained spiritual understanding. Tat’iana retains her connection with God not despite the sex but because of the work, which should never be a cause for guilt as long as it causes no one harm.

Joining the monastery is one step forward and two steps back for Matvei until he meets his next unlikely teachers. Hoping that isolation leads to spiritual fortification, which is the Orthodox monastic standard, Matvei instead finds out that his monasterial brothers are far worse off for their social estrangement. The monks around him, especially the leadership, use their privacy to conceal indulgence, abuse, and fraud among the ranks.[[39]](#footnote-40) He is particularly disturbed by his mentor’s rampant sexism, which directly contradicts the virtues he had just witnessed in Tat’iana. The elder monk, Mikhail or “Mikha” as Matvei calls him, agitated as a baseline, suggests the world would be better off with half of humanity: “If [Christ] had thrown the Samaritan woman into the well instead of talking with her, had this libertine gotten a stone to the forehead...—well, look, the world is saved!”[[40]](#footnote-41) Mikhail refers here to the story of the Samaritan woman sitting at the well in John 4:4-42, who represents a beacon of truth in Christ’s early ministry. Photine (from the Greek *Φωτεινή*, the "luminous [one]") is particularly revered in the Orthodox tradition, and the suggestion that Christ kill her is tantamount to Judas’s betrayal. Matvei invokes Genesis 1:28, “Go forth and multiply,” to counter that Mikha’s opinion, which is to say the Church’s opinion, ignores fundamental facts of God-given human sexuality. Mikha’s subsequent outburst that God “turned [humanity] over to the power of the devil” sets up a problem for which Matvei must find a solution.[[41]](#footnote-42) When Matvei turns to the monastery’s abbot about ongoing doubts, his surprise at the inquiry signals that spiritual edification is to be found elsewhere.

Before he has a chance to leave, more teachers in the unexpected forms of a would-be novitiate and a vagabond stop by the monastery. Grisha is a meek and conservative monk from the grounds who is dismissed by the abbot’s as personal retaliation against his father, another monastery official. Despondent at his expulsion, the passive Grisha nevertheless comforts himself with the Old Testament story of Job. This voice echoes that of Gor’kii’s past characters as they reassure on their searches, such as Maiakin speaking to Foma in *Foma Gordeev* as well as Iakov counseling Il’ia in *The Three*. What comes next, on the contrary, is new. Matvei responds with a transposition that defiantly rewrites Job: “I would have said to God in his place, ‘Do not scare but explain clearly: where is the path to you? For I am the son of your power and created in your likeness; do not denigrate yourself by pushing away your child!’”[[42]](#footnote-43) Matvei’s rejection of the Biblical justification of God’s righteousness demonstrates evolution in Gor’kii’s relationship with Job. Decades before *Confession*, the story of Job was sufficient reassurance for Foma and Gor’kii such as it is for Grisha. As Matvei approaches the truth, the Christian theodicean argument, which is metonymically expressed in Grisha’s invocation of Job, falls short. However, at this point, Gor’kii’s discussion of the problem of evil that had so captivated him until now itself seems to grow cold. Going forward, another term, “lonely” [*odinok*], takes the place of “evil” in Gor’kii’s religious sensibilities—it would follow, therefore, that “transcendence” or “connection” would take the place of “good.” We see isolation in *Confession*’s conclusion as well as the essay “Destruction of the Personality” depicted as the primary enemy to humanity’s prosperity. Like the Christian tradition, Gor’kii sees that which is separated from “God” as that which is against “God.” Understanding that, Matvei is about to discover for the first time where that God resides.

Opposite Grisha is Serafim, a vagabond from the Caucasus region who speaks in riddles. In standard Gor’kii contrarian fashion, Serafim, whose name comes from the holiest order of angels in Christianity, is agnostic about the matter of God. He is the complement to Grisha’s traditional dogma, worshipping the natural wonders of the present regional environs instead of an anthropomorphic deity. Serafim’s paradoxical comments, such as “He who eats his bread is hungry,” and eccentric character paint him as an offshoot of the Russian tradition of the holy fool for Christ [*iurodivyi Christa radi*]. This religious tradition describes individuals who broke social conventions to spread the central tenets of Christianity, intentionally or not using their so-called foolishness as a heuristic.[[43]](#footnote-44) Most likely, it was the holy fools in Russian literary history Gor’kii’s mind when writing *Confession*, namely Tolstoi’s Grisha, the local fool in his 1852 semi-autobiographical novel *Childhood*. Scholarship like *Holy Foolishness in Russia* by Priscilla Hunt and Svitlana Kobets has shown how the phenomenon came to national literature to voice traditional spiritual values in opposition to contemporary deviance from a holy path.[[44]](#footnote-45) Gor’kii transposes the tradition in his secularized world as a reminder to focus on humanity’s most basic needs: food, rest, and ultimately community. *Confession*’s Serafim is a post-Christian fool for the *narod* who reveals to Matvei the solution to his existential woes.

Finally, Serafim and Grisha teach Matvei that there exists something worth searching for beyond what he already knows. Matvei makes note of Serafim and Grisha’s spiritual connection with each other despite differing beliefs, though he cannot explain it: “Serafim against Grisha is like a clear spring day against an autumn evening, but they became closer with each other than with me.”[[45]](#footnote-46) Gor’kii wishes to suggest that a broader force was uniting the two very different people who had just met, a hidden connection that his protagonist was only just glimpsing. When they depart, Matvei is left to investigate further the missing piece in his spiritual journey thus far, a community that he will call “God.” Gor’kii is imagining a broad spiritual community that includes everyone from the Grishas to the Serafims across Russia, which is to say the Orthodox and the agnostic populations of the country. Seeing the fraternity between the two extremes of Russian spirituality helped Matvei recognize that he is not party to the connection between that still unites them. When the pair disappear, Matvei is left with a goal: find “God” by finding community.

Matvei discovers his connection with other people by leaving the grounds of the monastery on a pilgrimage across Russia. Gor’kii launches his narrator directly in the middle of the flow among the *narod* and throws the death-like stillness of the monastery grounds into stark contrast with the rest of life’s vitality. “They go—old and young, women and children, as though all called by one voice, and I feel in this transit of the earth down all its paths a certain force; it seizes me, alarms me, as though it promises to reveal something to my soul.”[[46]](#footnote-47) It is at this point that the pace of new characters starts to reach its peak. Each fellow pilgrim Matvei meets while traveling to and from Christian holy sites, which are never mentioned themselves, offers their own pieces of wisdom about God, faith, and humanity, which brings Matvei closer to the faceless crowds of the poor, beleaguered masses around him. One question in particular interests Matvei. As a crowd gathers around to listen to him, readers see a preview of what is to come. Matvei recounts, “And then, I remember, all of the faces merged into one sad face; it seemed pensive and stubborn to me, poor in words but bold in hidden thoughts, and I saw an unextinguishable flame familiar to me burn in its hundred eyes.”[[47]](#footnote-48) The scene reminds us of Pelageia Nilovna’s demise at the end of *Mother*, whose death lights the fire of revolution in witnesses. Moreover, it foreshadows the post-Christian icons later in the novel. In contrast, Matvei’s story continues and finishes the work Pelageia started.

The vision of a collective human face that appears to Matvei moves him to inquire about people’s lives and torments, which sets our narrator on the way to a godbuilding transposition. Matvei considers the sorry state of the world’s affairs he has seen since his wife died, the cause of which he pins on atomization in society: “People have no god while they live absent-mindedly and in enmity. And why does a well-fed person need God? The well-fed one seeks only justification for the fullness of his stomach in the people’s general hunger. His life is ridiculous and pitiful, lonely and surrounded everywhere by the air of horrors.”[[48]](#footnote-49) is confirmed by the first person he stops to talk. A woman, “silent, teeth clenched, with an angry face darkly tanned and sharp anger in her eyes,” gives Matvei what he wants. ‬“I need your sorrow, I want to know everything that torments people,” he asks her. With the invocation of a word, Gor’kii calls to the foreground a story from Orthodox history to frame the mission he gives Matvei, find community and find “God.”

The story of the “Pilgrimage of the God-bearer among the Torments” [*Khozhdenie Bogoroditsy po mukam*] is an apocryphal religious text from the twelfth or thirteenth century describing Mary, the mother of Jesus, visiting hell as prepares to go to heaven. Accompanied by archangel Michael, Mary seeks firsthand knowledge of that which causes people to suffer, and she finds in hell an array of sinners’ punishments, described in vivid detail for readers. Having witnessed people hung upside-down by their toenails, drowning in a river of fire, and other such torments, Mary begs her son for mercy on Christians. The story ends with Christ granting a temporary reprieve, but only after Mary enlists every servant in heaven’s ranks to help convince him; any greater mercy would require a second coming.[[49]](#footnote-50) Little is known about the story’s Greek origins or how and when it arrived in the Russian cultural sphere. For centuries following the schism of 1666, the narrative was closely associated with the Old Believers, who valued the presentation of traditional Christianity in the story and thus regularly included it in collected volumes passed through the generations.[[50]](#footnote-51) In the second half of the nineteenth century, “Pilgrimage of the God-bearer” gained popularity among broader audiences due to Dostoevskii’s *Brothers Karamazov*, when Ivan compares his play *The Grand Inquisitor* to it in spirit.[[51]](#footnote-52) We can assume that Dostoevskii included that unnecessary detail to draw parallels of heretical thought. For Gor’kii, the story was an example of taking matters into one’s own hands to get a desired result from an obstinate God. He recreates the “Pilgrimage” with a twist in search of God’s honest truth and mercy for all.

Gor’kii conceived of hell as a spiritual disease that erodes at a population from the inside out. While the effects on an individual are grim, society faces the more gruesome symptoms. In order to transpose the “Pilgrimage of the God-bearer,” Gor’kii concocts a hell for his pilgrim to visit. References to “hell” [*ad*] begin to appear as soon as Matvei sets out to survey the woes of those walking alongside him, and they do not cease until he learns godbuilding from Mikhail, his post-Christian guide. The first response sets the tone, conveying to Matvei that the worst of times have already arrived. The woman, a single mother of two, is tortured by the cries of her hungry children, whom she beats to silence her own guilt for not being able to feed them. “In hell it is no worse! There my kids won’t be with me!” she exclaims.[[52]](#footnote-53) As he continues, Matvei increasingly hears and describes his surroundings as resembling hell. This is truer than anywhere else at the factory, which is repeatedly called a “dirty hell,” “hellish place” where workers “do their business confidently like demons in hell” full of “hellish noise and romp.” Put plainly, the factory is “hell on earth.”[[53]](#footnote-54) This imagery may be familiar to readers. Contemporary Russia and the modern factory in particular have staged Gor’kii’s pandemonium before, such as *The Lower Depths* and more recently in *Mother*. The people’s suffering, as one would expect in hell, confirms that Matvei is heading in the right direction. Like Mary, Matvei will need some help navigating the descent into the fiery realm.

Before Gor’kii resumes the “Pilgrimage” transposition, he interrupts his narrative with an episode between Matvei and another pilgrim. Iegudiil is a physically feeble but spiritually vivacious man who catches up to Matvei on the walk from Perm to Verkhotur’e. His name was chosen with care. In Orthodox mythology, Iegudiil (also Jegudiel/Jehudiel, from Hebrew יַחְדִּיאֵל Yaḥdīʾēl, "praise to God") is one of the eight archangels, the rank atop the established angelic hierarchy. Archangels came to Christianity from the apocryphal Book of Enoch used by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; nonetheless, Iegudiil is celebrated on November 21 in the canonical Russian Orthodox liturgical calendar. These traditions venerate Iegudiil as the patron saint of monastics, ascetics, and all who practice earnest labor, thereby praising God.[[54]](#footnote-55) We can assume this association was Gor’kii’s reasoning for choosing the name for the figure who Matvei describes as the “person [who] showed me the true path to God,” by introducing the religion of the *narod.*[[55]](#footnote-56) In Iegudiil’s words we hear echoes of the spiritual voices that spoke loudest to Gor’kii’s sensibilities as well as the first mention of Gor’kii’s own contribution to the conversation, “godbuilding,” as he calls it. That Iegudiil sends the narrator to the factory, where people break their backs to produce the materials to build the country’s future, tells readers exactly where they should seek counsel.

If *Confession* and Gor’kii’s spirituality could be boiled down to a single line, it is Iegudiil’s timeless wisdom disguised as contradictory ramblings. Eccentric, parabolic speech is a distinguishing characteristic of the Orthodox holy fool [*iurodivyi*], a favorite trope among religious didacts. As Matvei recalls how he began posing questions to Iegudiil, we can imagine younger versions of Gor’kii asking many of the same quandaries to the Gor’kii writing in 1907, finally confident in what he knows and believes. After several questions with unsatisfactory results, Matvei breaks down in frustration and, finally states his question with the utmost simplicity: “Why do you avoid [discussing] God?” which is to say, “What is God?”[[56]](#footnote-57) Iegudiil’s answer comes in the powerful pairing of two rhetorical questions that get at the heart of Gor’kii’s entire worldview. The first, “Whoever is God, work wonders?” [*Kto est’ bog, tvoriai chudesa?*] plays on the text of Psalm 76:15, which is also known as the “Great Prokeimenon” for liturgical purposes. On the evenings of Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas the Orthodox Church service reads aloud ‬“Who is as great as our God? You are God, work wonders” [*Kto Bog velii, iako Bog nash; Ty esi Bog, tvoriai chudesa*] before the daily Gospel reading. A prokeimenon (from Greek *προκείμενον*, “that which proceeds”) is a psalm or canticle sung to foreshadow the primary message in the text to be read in the day’s liturgy. As the original Psalm text suggests, the Gospel readings for the days that Ps. 76:15 is also read testify to the Christian God’s omnipotence to create and destroy the world at will. Gor’kii cleverly turns the prokeimenon, a famous affirmation of God’s greatest miracles, into an invitation for a deity to demonstrate any miraculous powers in order to prove claims to divinity. What he says next is meant to testify to the even greater power we as humans possess to do God’s job and more.

The second half of Iegudiil’s answer exemplifies godbuilding thinking and strongly links the philosophy with the originator of post-Christian thinking, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). The Young Hegelian from Bavaria, who originally studied to become a Lutheran clergyman before changing to natural sciences, published multiple critical analyses of religion, including most famously *Das Wesen der Christentums* [*The Essence of Christianity*] (1841, originally published in Russian in 1861 and again in 1906).[[57]](#footnote-58) Among many other impactful thinkers, Feuerbach’s writings influenced the thinking of Mark, Engels, Chernyshevskii, Plekhanov, Avenarius, and others in Gor’kii’s intellectual ecosystem.[[58]](#footnote-59) A definitive link directly between Feuerbach and Gor’kii has yet to be found. However, there is no greater evidence of Feuerbach’s influence on Gor’kii himself than the thinking we see in Iegudiil’s second question, “[Is God] our father or the son of our spirit?” [*Otets li nash ili zhe — syn dukha nashego?*], which restates the thesis of *The Essence of Christianity*.[[59]](#footnote-60) *Confession* takes Feuerbach’s argument, that it was in fact humans who created God in our image, rather than the customary Abrahamic idea that God created humans in his image, as a starting point for nation-building purposes. This nation, ideally in Gor’kii’s view, would be around the identity of “godbuilders,” who take their collective fate into their own hands. In the essay “Destruction of the Personality,” which was published in 1909, a year after the novel, Gor’kii further argues Feuerbach and Iegudiil’s point, saying that, “Having created a hero, admiring his power and beauty, the people had to bring him into the arena of the gods, to contrast their organized energy with the numerous forces of nature, mutually hostile to themselves and humanity.”[[60]](#footnote-61) In other words, as he says through Iegudiil, further explaining his thought, “God was not created by people’s powerlessness, no, but it was from an excess of strength.”[[61]](#footnote-62) That strength, as we know, lies in the imagination. Gor’kii therefore faces a challenge in *Confession*, how can God inspire faith and help people if God is in all of us?

At long last, Matvei, who is plagued by loneliness throughout the novel, finds a new faith in the factory, where Iegudiil sends him:“‘You,’ [Iegudiil] yells, ‘open your eyes! Look with your heart, look with your soul! Am I telling you to believe? I am saying find out!’” Gor’kii stresses to his hero. Belief must be backed by evidence, and it is no surprise that Gor’kii so often chose factories as a place to work miracles in literature. He saw these places, where collective human capital comes together to create products in a way impossible for any single person, as cradles of humanity’s material and spiritual future. In a 1931 article entitled “The History of Factories and Plants” [“*Istoriia fabrik i zavodov*”], Gor’kii appeals to the general membership of the working class to educate themselves on the importance of industrial workplaces in the “successes of socialist construction” of society. In enumerating the important roles of the factory for modern society, he starts with the production of physical goods, but the remainder of the list concerns people’s inner wellbeing, calling factories “schools of revolutionaries” and “educators of consciousness.”[[62]](#footnote-63) Out in the countryside, Matvei finds that strangers can read his thoughts when they answer the question he only thinks, “Where does this road go?” “To the Isetsk factory,” everyone responds to his thought. Matvei jokes, “Do all roads lead to this factory?” Gor’kii’s play with the common Italian proverb “*Tutte le strade portano a Roma*” [“all roads lead to Rome”]—which he likely heard more often than ever after moving to his Capri villa—hints at a giddiness in Gor’kii at just the idea of what the factory will bring. As I showed in the previous chapter, the factory started as a workplace and became a church of socialism by the end of *Mother*; now in *Confession*, the factory will take its place as the seat of a new holy empire.

The pilgrim on his way to a socialist mecca is also the pilgrim on the descent into hell, as described in the apocryphal story about Mary and her guardian, the Archangel Michael. Naturally, not all is as it initially seems. Had Gor’kii included any fewer coincidences between his story and “Pilgrimage of the God-bearer,” any argument that the overlap was, in fact, pure coincidence would have credence. The reality is that Gor’kii included just enough references to say the opposite. Matvei announces that he “arrived in some grimy hell” and he is immediately introduced to the worker who will show him the ropes, Michael. Our narrator remarks that “he speaks like a soldier playing a message on a horn.”[[63]](#footnote-64) This, in turn, signals him as the successor to the archangel, who is venerated as the “commander of heaven’s army in his struggle against the dark forces of hell” and depicted in Revelations chapter 12 and various iconography blowing a trumpet in victory over evil.[[64]](#footnote-65) This Michael is a leader in Gor’kii’s “hell,” however, yet he guides Matvei much like the angel Michael guides Mary. In fact, the worker Michael is the third person with that name in the novel. The first two mentored Matvei from a monastery, a place of isolation, which left Matvei’s soul tormented. The third Michael offers Matvei the answers he has been seeking.

Like Pelegeia Nilovna in *Mother*, Matvei undergoes the transition from Christian believer to post-Christian actor that Gor’kii wanted to complete in *Confession*. When Matvei decides to leave the monastery after meeting Grisha and Serafim, he cannot depart with them to the Caucasus because he has some final meetings to attend, including a series of visits with an aged monk named Mardarii and once again with Mikha. When Matvei met Mardarii, a senior monk in the cloister, he had been living motionless for four years in a tiny, dark underground cellar while dependent upon others for basic sustenance. When the monk dies after the fifth visit, Matvei feels that change is afoot.39 This time, however, the transformation is to be radical. The final scene between Matvei and Mikha foreshadows Gor’kii’s message that morality is possible without God. In their conversation, Mikha admits that he never believed in God all this time, which makes it all the worse. His affinities for wine, velvet beddings, and the many other luxuries available to him sketch a particularly evil caricature of the clergy in Gor’kii’s view: clergy not only know that the God taught in churches is a lie, they use that lie to their personal benefit. Gor’kii describes this another way in the essay “Destruction of the Personality,” saying, “In its grasps at power, individualism was compelled to kill the immortal god, its support and justification for existence; from this moment begins the quick destruction of the godlike, lonely ‘I,’ which, without support from a force outside itself, is incapable of creativity, which is to say, of being, for being and creativity are one in essence.”[[65]](#footnote-66) Mikha’s denial of God is not a denial of theism, but a confirmation of the godlessness by which some believers live.

Matvei’s guardian angel Mikhail is an improved version of past figures and Gor’kii’s psychosocial model for the factory workers of the world. The elder monks at the monastery named Michael who served as spiritual advisors to Matvei before represent past, completely undeveloped or partially underdeveloped levels of consciousness. Mardarii, the eldest and most institutionally ingrained (schemamonk), who was once named Mikhail, lives motionless underground, as though he is already dead, and preaches only complete submission to the Christian God. The younger Mikhail was better in that he conducted his life among the living, but he was fundamentally afflicted by the greed that comes from isolation. His shortcoming was not denial of one “God” or another but rather the elevation of himself above all else. “Mikha,” as his nickname suggests, had an incomplete view of the world.[[66]](#footnote-67) Not despite but because of his youth, which Matvei mentions on multiple occasions, the third and youngest Mikhail has what Matvei needs, making him a proper successor to the archangel. In Gor’kii’s rewriting of the pilgrimage to hell, the worker Mikhail guides Matvei through his own personal torments that have, as an example for readers, caused many of life’s problems on account of an improper worldview. Young Mikhail’s speech serves as a preview of the yet-to-be-published essay “Destruction of Personality,” to the point that he recycles multiple phrases from *Confession* in the essay under his own name; out of the mouths of babes!

Gor’kii’s fiction and journalism describes a new fall of humankind and the consequential collective hell each person experiences in their own way. Both *Confession* and “Destruction of the Personality” emerge thematically from a dialectic between the collective and the individual, through which Gor’kii considers creative power as a treatment for social maladies. The difference between *Confession* and “Destruction of Personality” can be seen in the side from which Gor’kii approaches and diagnoses the problem of social atomization. As we have seen, the novel seeks to understand and solve the problem through the lens of the individual, using Matvei as a stand-in for readers who see a similar path unfolding before the narrator. Thus, when Matvei seeks wisdom from the spry factory worker Mikhail, there is no hesitation in his answer:

I am tired and ask fervently: ‘With what and how do you treat a sick soul?’ Mikhail, quietly and without looking at me, says: ‘I do not consider you sick.’ His uncle chuckles, making a noise like the devil falling out of bed. ‘Sickness,’ Mikhail continues, ‘is when a person does feel themself, but knows only their pain and lives by it. But you, as it seems, did not lose yourself.’ There you search for the joys of life, this is only available to the healthy.[[67]](#footnote-68)

In this and Mikhail’s later explanations, Gor’kii pathologizes the “I” or “the ego” as the root cause of modern woes, a consequence of the harmful misapprehension that “[your pain] puts you above people; you even guard it like something that makes you special, no?” Like the Christian idea that distance from God is ungodly, Gor’kii sees the desire to distinguish oneself from the *narod* as inherently morally degrading. In *Confession*, thus, he paints the *narod* as foundation of morality:

This wretched life, unworthy of human reason, began, he says, from the day when the first human personality broke away from the miraculous power of the *narod*, from the mass, its mother, and shrank out of fear of loneliness and powerlessness into an insignificant and evil lump of petty desires, a lump named “I.” This very “I” is a person's worst enemy![[68]](#footnote-69)

Naturally, this view shades his feelings about capitalism, but before that he wrote about the spiritual concerns of any one person’s power over another.

The essay, “The Destruction of Personality,” approaches the problem of isolation through the lens of the collective, speaking of the whole *narod* with its own personhood. Gor’kii discusses the roles of relevant phenomena operating on a cultural level, namely our shared memory, imagination, and values. He begins by saying, “The *narod* is not only a force creating everything of material value, it is the sole, inexhaustible source of spiritual values, the philosopher first in time, beauty, and creative genius and a poet, having created all great poems, all of Earth’s tragedies, and the greatest of them is the history of world culture.”[[69]](#footnote-70) The collective, he explains, formed the individual in fiction as an instrument to carry out its will, giving “such broad generalizations and brilliant symbols, such as Prometheus, Satan, Hercules, Sviatogor, Il’ia [Muromets], Mikula [Selianinovich], and hundreds of other gigantic generalizations of the *narod*’s life experience” as examples.[[70]](#footnote-71) Gor’kii repeats his assertion from *Confession* that the individual, endowed with the collective’s characteristics, began to mistake itself, a part, for the whole. In this essay, however, he paints the whole picture. Gor’kii draws a (noncausal) timeline between literature’s accidental creation of the ego through the spread of private property and competition, or “the drama of individualism,” as he calls it, to the present day. Somewhere along the way, the population had been divided and conquered by the insidious “I” of its own making. As a logical consequence in Gor’kii’s worldview, everyone suffered: “Russian individualism while developing takes on a sickly character and attracts a sharp decline in social-ethical inquiries by the individual and is accompanied by a general fall in the armed forces of intellect.”[[71]](#footnote-72) Gor’kii’s new “fall,” seen throughout earlier works such as “On the Rafts” and *The Lower Depths* and now his central fixation following Bloody Sunday, is our internal disunity—rather than humanity’s separation from an external God. Reminders in *Confession* to know thyself are meant for us as a species as much as us as individuals.

Mikhail’s guidance through capitalism’s hellish landscape shows Matvei the truth of human suffering and how to rebuild grace through socialism. The wholeness of grace achieved through communion with the Christian God is instead found in solidarity with the unexceptional masses across world history. Staring up at the night sky, Matvei glimpses a contrast between a pre-existing natural heaven and the chaos introduced by human greed:

“Two big stars patrol the heavens. Above the mountain in the blue sky, you can clearly see the jagged wall of the forest, and on the mountain the entire forest is chopped up, cut up, the ground is scarred with black holes. Below, the plant greedily bared its red teeth: it hums, smokes, fire rushes over its roofs, rushes upward, cannot break away, spreads out in smoke. It smells like burning, it’s stuffy for me.”[[72]](#footnote-73)

The natural world—the tragically fated “commons”—Gor’kii depicts is being eaten away by the factory’s consumptive desire, much like the human soul is degraded by the individual’s attempts to accumulate resources. Capitalism in this way disintegrates what was once whole, whether it be the Earth or the Russian people, in Gor’kii’s worldview, emphasizing equality as a precondition of community. Only once Matvei understands this message does he find what he is looking for: “My soul is not connecting with [Mikhail’s] soul, it stands alone, like in the middle of a desert... And suddenly I see that I am thinking in Jonah and Mikhail’s words and that their thoughts already live powerfully in me.”[[73]](#footnote-74) Matvei’s failed connection with Mikhail exposes the holes in his communal life, eaten away by the egoism of his past life. The personal isolation is representative of the Russian, formerly Orthodox, people’s disjunction as a unitary nation, to which Gor’kii attributed the country’s many problems.

Newly cognizant of his social isolation, Matvei is ready to learn the “Truth” of the human condition. Nothing on the outside is different, but there is change underway on the inside. The next morning, he is greeted by Mikhail, draped in a white shirt like an angel, surrounded by smiling children and “noise, whistling, and racket like at a council of all devils.”[[74]](#footnote-75) The scene reminds readers of how Archangel Mikhail gathered the minor angels to assist Mary in petitioning God for mercy in “Pilgrimage of the God-bearer among the Torments.” When Matvei joins them in the forest just outside the factory yard, he is pleasantly surprised by the children’s playful creativity, but even more shocking is the worker Mikhail’s child-like character. Children run around him in circles screaming and laughing, and then quickly disperse. Mikhail shares his “Truth”:

Were they really created just for labor and drunkenness? Each of them is a receptacle for the living spirit, and they could quicken the growth of their reasoning, freeing us from the bondage of our ignorance. But they will enter the same dark and dark trench, in which the days of their fathers’ lives flow turbidly. They will be ordered to work and forbidden to think. Many of them—maybe all—will submit to a dead power and serve it. There is the source of the Earth’s sorrow: the human spirit has no freedom to grow![[75]](#footnote-76)

It is noteworthy that Mikhail does not name any individuals in this or later speeches. The problem is collective, as is the solution. Whereas Mary and Mikhail in “Pilgrimage” describe sin and salvation as acts of the individual, Matvei and Mikhail in *Confession* see only what the collective can—and must—do.

The treatment for the described ruinous social isolation is a new religion that worships a “God” of persons equal amongst one other but subservient to the collective well-being. In theory at least, this could be mapped onto a social-democratic system, but Gor’kii’s intentions are more religious at this point, as we see in the vocabulary. Mikhail’s uncle, who is approximately Matvei’s age, interrupts godbuilding discussions in an attempt to shut down what he sees as “a dark forest: religion, the church, and everything alike; it’s a dark forest, and in it are our outlaws! [It is] a lie!”[[76]](#footnote-77) A socialist, the uncle is depicted in a way similar to priests and monarchists: unwilling to accept plurality of thought, which is incompatible with Gor’kii’s concept of shared governance. Mikhail, the young worker comes to the defense of Matvei and his God:

“Wait, uncle! God is a fundamental issue for Matvei! ... The God, about which I speak, existed when people created him out of the objects of their mind as one spirit, as if illuminating the darkness of existence; but when the *narod* was broken apart into slaves and masters, into pieces and chunks, when it tore apart its thought and will, that is when God died, God was destroyed! ... The primary crime of life’s masters is that they destroyed the creative force of the *narod*. There will be a time when the entire *narod*’s will once again will converge into one point, when there should arise an invincible and miraculous force, and God will be resurrected! That is the God whom you seek, Matvei!”[[77]](#footnote-78)

Mikhail’s reinforcement of a “God” goes beyond a token for the religiously minded and insists that there was and will again be a “God” in the world. Gor’kii is championing the agnostic argument here, as a part of his own godbuilding thesis, but his point is something else. Despite disagreeing on something as fundamental as God’s existence, "they argue heatedly, but do not offend each other with anger or abuse.” Their mutual respect allows them to contend on the battlefield of rhetoric rather than physical or verbal violence. To Matvei they are “two people squaring off before me, and they both, denying the other’s god, are full of sincere faith.”[[78]](#footnote-79) Gor’kii here illustrates the antithesis to the individual who uses her personal pain to elevate themselves above others. Reflecting that everyone is going through their own struggles, these tortured souls cast no stones because they are without sin in the creation of their hell.

Seeing the believer and nihilist respectfully disagree about “God” sends Matvei on a crash course to join the godbuilding movement. Doing so changes the perspective of hell, such as it is depicted in the Marian pilgrimage narrative, into a post-Christian workshop for the human soul. He preaches for the first time in fewer than ten pages. Transformations are first expressed in the self-questioning that takes on a growing role in the novel’s narrative. He reflects immediately after seeing Mikhaila and his uncle argue, saying, “And in place of the question “Where is God?” arose another, “Who am I and what am I here for? In order to search for God?” He quickly catches himself, however, calling it “nonsense.”[[79]](#footnote-80) Yet, reading, conversations with Mikhail and young community members, and ultimately observing their work in action reinvigorates Matvei’s capacity to hope for the future. As he begins to work alongside them, the hellish landscape, brutal though it may be, takes on a new shade:

In fire and thunder, in a rain of fiery sparks, blackened people work; it seems that there is no place for them here, for everything around them threatens to incinerate with fiery death, to crush with heavy iron; everything is deafening and blinding, the unbearable heat dries up the blood, but they calmly do their job, fuss about with masterful confidence, like devils in hell, fearing nothing, knowing everything.[[80]](#footnote-81)

Instead of a hell that engulfs and tortures, the workers skillfully navigate the dangers using their knowledge to overcome irrational fears. The dedication to something beyond themselves allows them to put aside personal concerns in search of a greater goal. Moreover, among the chaos, “it is difficult to understand whose mind, whose will reigns,” yet the work gets done.[[81]](#footnote-82) In this way, shared labor ritualistically offers scattered souls to transcend themselves through unspoken yet coordinated production of both physical goods and community ties, much in the way Holy Communion is meant to provide daily and heavenly bread.

Shortly after this realization, Matvei perceives the first hints of godbuilding within himself as a connection to the Russian identity outside of Christianity. The factory’s hellish industrial cacophony is overcome at times by the triumphant voices of workers singing cheerful songs while they toil. Matvei notes the chorus makes him smile as he remembers “Ivan the Fool on a whale en route to the heavens after the wonderful firebird.”[[82]](#footnote-83) The reference, highly uncharacteristic for the rest of the work, does double duty for Gor’kii. The narrator here refers to the Slavic folk hero Ivan the Fool [*Ivan-durak*, dim. *Ivanushka-durachok*] and the Firebird [*zhar-ptitsa*], two members of the pantheon of pagan characters in Eastern Slavic folklore. First, inclusion of these characters harkens back to the Russian identity as it existed before the Christianization of Rus’ and celebrates the lasting parts of pagan Slavic culture that survived through the present day. The concept of “dual-faith” [*dvoeverie*], a blend of pagan and Christian traditions, has historically defined the lived reality of Russian religious practice, particularly among the laboring peasant classes, which is to say, most Russians. Art derived from Russian pagan traditions began to reemerge in popular culture in the nineteenth century, due in large part to the poems of Aleksandr Pushkin and the folklore studies by Aleksandr Afanas’ev.[[83]](#footnote-84) However, Gor’kii is not referencing any version of Ivan the Fool, but rather a particular adaptation by Petr Ershov, *The Little Humpback Horse* [*Konek-Gorbunok*] (1834). This reference’s second function relies on Ershov’s tale, which infamously used Ivan the Fool and other folk heroes to deride the Church and tsar by name, to highlight the paradoxically progressive nature of returning to the world of a thousand years ago.[[84]](#footnote-85) Going back to a world—and worldview—without Christianity is no longer possible for Gor’kii; fortunately, there is a revolutionary solution.

Matvei is finally able to enter the community of godbuilding believers by publicly questioning Russian institutions of authority while reenforcing values associated with Orthodoxy. With some factory experience under his belt, Matvei contemplates the *narod* that has surrounded and supported him. The closer he becomes to the workers, the more he begins to understand their essence:

In the past I when did not think about the *narod*, I didn’t even notice them, but now I look at them and still want to discover their diversity, so that they each stood before me separately. And I achieve this but also not: their speeches are different, and each has their own face, but everyone has the same faith and the same intention: slowly but diligently build something together.[[85]](#footnote-86)

Curiosity and time give Matvei greater understanding of those around him, which in turn endows everyone with a greater sense of dignity. The unanimity of their devotion to work removes boundaries that would otherwise cause concern for the self to interfere with the progress of society. When not working, however, people return to their animalistic nature. One day, the other workers tease Matvei for being a monk, which changes him forever. Kostin, another worker, comes to his defense in the name of Mikhail’s values, as any disciple of Mikhail would and should do, Matvei notes. He suddenly finds himself speaking to the community in defense of himself and, ultimately, the godbuilding dogma:

“I didn’t become a monk because I wanted to eat well, but because my soul was hungry! I lived and I saw: everywhere there was eternal work and daily hunger, fraud and robbery, grief and tears, bestiality and all darkness of the soul. Who established all this, where is our just and wise God, does he see his people’s primordial, endless torment?”[[86]](#footnote-87)

As Matvei finishes his speech, he notices a crowd has gathered around him. He spoke on behalf of Mikhail’s teachings and touched others’ hearts as his own had been touched by his defender, and his place in the community is settled.

Matvei’s launch into action appears much like Pelageia Nilovna’s martyrdom at first, but Gor’kii interrupted Matvei’s trajectory with the help of an archangel. Other workers warn Matvei after his speech that the state punished such performances with prison sentences, forced labor, or worse, and send him to Mikhail for guidance. The young worker uses police violence against socialist protesters as a lesson to Matvei in the stakes of their work, which only strengthens Matvei’s convictions, as similar news did to Pelageia. Here Matvei compares the revolutionaries’ political persecution with the New Testament story of Herod’s Massacre of the Innocents [*Izbienie mladentsev*], wherein Judean King Herod, upon hearing of the birth of a Abrahamic savior in Bethlehem, murders all Jewish infant boys in the town to retain power.[[87]](#footnote-88) Matvei also asserts that martyrdom is the sign of a just cause when making the connection: “Then in my soul everything was elevated and illuminated differently; all of Mikhail and his comrades’ speeches took on another meaning. First of all, if a person is ready to lose his freedom and life for his faith, that means he is a true believer and resembles the protomartyrs of Christ’s law.”[[88]](#footnote-89) Pelageia had also said this, comparing her son, Pavel, with Jesus, in revolutionary Russia, just before she took up her mission to spread socialism at any personal cost. Her death is surely a moving, likely a convincing, but hardly a sustainable model for Gor’kii’s readers to emulate. Instead, now that Confession has started down the path of the martyr, Gor’kii must use Mikhail to temper the flames.

The short few moments during which Mikhail prepares Matvei for the post-Christian world marks a similar milestone in Gor’kii’s creative journey. From the “Massacre of the Innocents” Gor’kii segues to his main point, laying bare the nature of the transpositional apparatus as he prepares to leave it behind.

“The whole world then appeared to me as Bethlehem, soaked in the blood of children. It became clear why the Godbearer, upon seeing hell, asked Archangel Michael [to help her bring mercy to the sinners]. Only here it wasn’t sinners but the righteous ones [*pravednikov*] that I saw: they want to destroy hell on her, for which they are ready to take on all torments [*muki*].”[[89]](#footnote-90)

Gor’kii here connects one of his earliest, isolated transpositions with his latest, novel-length use of the story of the “Godbearer Among Torments” so as to draw a complete circle around his message that good and evil had been transposed by Church and state. What was right and “capital-T True” according to everything Gor’kii believed—which is to say, according to Christ and Marx—is now wrong, and what was wrong is now right. More importantly, the people must speak up and act out to effect change as Mary does. Mikhail’s words are thus startling when he tells Matvei, raring to go on his own passion-driven mission like Pelageia to pause: “No, wait and think, it’s still early for you! ... You have much undecided, and for our work, you aren’t free!”[[90]](#footnote-91) In the apocryphal story, it is important to note, Mary presents a logical argument of compassion to persuade Jesus to relieve the suffering of those in hell. Gor’kii wishes to emphasize exactly that meek righteousness arising from a collective mindset, such as what the workers and Mary possess, which Matvei seeks in his pilgrimage, and which can be applied logically as in the literature. “Maybe, [says Matvei] to Mikhail, ‘there are no saintly hermits in the world because they haven’t left the world but joined it?’”[[91]](#footnote-92) Sacrificing yourself for the solution by removing yourself from the problem, via martyrdom or isolation, is an irrational artifact of the past. Instead, socialism’s insistence on public sharing of private burdens is the logical path to compassion, and worthy of worship. Gor’kii’s hellish factory, in other words, is brimming with Maries, and Matvei is the sinner come to find grace.

Mikhail’s final guidance places Matvei on a path to godbuilding by resolving his lifelong theodicean arguments with Feuerbachian thinking. The question of theodicy—of the justifiability of belief in God—arose from a presumed incommensurability of the existence of an all-benevolent God and the existence of evil among his creations. Gor’kii and Matvei pondered this question after tragedy struck, yet in *Confession*, neither surrenders the possibility that both can co-exist. Matvei’s passion without firsthand experience, which may have delivered him to the same fate as Pelageia Nilovna, is extinguished until “the awareness in [his] soul of its connection with the spirit of the working *narod* arises” and he can “get back on the road and see the life of the *narod* with new eyes.” These are conspicuous transpositions of religious phrases, “to see God with new eyes” and “union with the Holy Spirit,” substituting God-the-Father with *narod*. They underline a dual system of empirical thinking and spiritual feeling that summarizes Gor’kii’s socialist philosophy, to which Mikhail has been leading Matvei. Ultimately, however, one must witness for oneself the “Truth,” such as that found in the “life of the *narod*,” to understand and therefore build on it. This final of Mikhail’s axioms washes over the apprentice, and Matvei at last has his first own original godbuilding thought: “Was it from the heavens that God came down to Earth or from Earth did the people’s force ascend into the heavens?”[[92]](#footnote-93) Here Gor’kii channels German religious anthropologist Ludwig Feuerbach, who first argued in his work *Das Wesen des Christentums* (*The Essence of Christianity*, 1841) that collective spiritual impulses created deities, a universal human practice perfected by Christianity, the religion that turned humanity itself into something divine through the figure of Jesus.[[93]](#footnote-94) Like Matvei in his diegetic moment, Gor’kii in this exegetic moment moves beyond imitation to a new manner of thinking and expression. He brings Western philosophy into communion with Orthodox culture in his particular brand of godbuilding, which summarizes Gor’kii’s worldview well. Guardian angel Mikhail fulfills his duty, giving Matvei the godbuilding ideology he can use to go out “into the people” to not only witness but participate in the divinity of humanity.

Confession concludes establishing the godbuilding community of believers by demonstrating the miracles that mere mortal humans can achieve. Matvei tries to leave the factory, but he fears the police are looking for him. Mikhail’s even younger apprentice, Kostia, arrives to offer Matvei safe passage through the forest to another monastery. Kostia, only “fifteen years old, blue-eyed and blond” represents the future of Russia. Gor’kii gave him the dimunitive of the Russian name Konstantin, referring to Constatine the Great (272 – 337), the Roman emperor who converted to Christianity and transformed the Empire into an earthly homeland for Christendom. Matvei observes Kostia, saying, “The boy is not afraid to speak the truth. No one from this lineage, beginning with Jonah, carries any fear in themselves.”[[94]](#footnote-95) In this period of great transition for Matvei, Russia, and Gor’kii, Kostia is the kind of future leader that will find a home for godbuilding. Matvei realizes this miraculous promise in the adolescent’s responses to questions about saints’ lives, Gor’kii’s primary didactic tool in *Confession*.

Readers receive a preview of godbuilding-dom when, upon Matvei’s prodding, Kostia lists the hagiographies that had interested him: Saints Pantaleon [*Velikomuchenik Panteleimon*] (c. 275 – 305) and George [*Georgii Pobedonosets*] (c. 275 – c. 303). Both were martyrs for early Christianity who died immediately before Constantine’s reign, which began in 306 and lasted until his death. In the pair we find a balance of Christian mercy and righteousness. Pantaleon (from Greek *παντελεήμων*, all-compassionate) was a pagan doctor, who, according to traditional narratives, came to believe in Christ when he invoked Jesus’s name in a frantic attempt to save an infant from a fatal snake bite. For the rest of his life, Pantaleon traveled and healed people while refusing compensation. He voluntarily accepted his execution by decapitation for depriving other doctors of income, but his corpse never burned on the pyre, for which he was later beatified. Gor’kii shows us this part of godbuilding-dom at the novel’s conclusion. Similarly, Saint George, called “George the Victory Bearer” [“*Georgii pobedonosets*”] in Russian, is said to have harnessed his Christian faith to return from death on a heroic mission. In his hagiographic account, Georgii decapitates a giant snake (sometimes “dragon” in English, but “*velikaia zmeia*” in Russian texts), a Biblical symbol of paganism, thereby saving a princess at the behest of the king. Witnesses take the monster to the countryside and burn its corpse—successfully, of course. Gor’kii never explains the beautiful symmetry found in Kostia’s favorite saints’ lives, likely due in large part because readers were well-equipped to make the connections between the same stories heard since childhood. Kostia finally adds rhetorically, “What joy would people have if ten of them became saints?” The question reminds readers that they, too, can be Pantaleon or George today for a better Russia tomorrow. In godbuilding, first comes mercy then justice.

Readers may wonder whom or which ideology the snake represents in Kostia’s godbuilding interpretation of the saints’ lives, but they need not ponder the question long. While Matvei is admiring his young comrade’s thinking, Kostia erupts into a post-Christian critique of the stories just mentioned:

“If,” he says, “a king’s or a rich man’s daughter believes in Christ, they will torture her—after all, neither the king nor the rich man were kinder to people because of this. It is not said in the Lives that the kings, the tormentors, were corrected!” Then, having paused a moment, he says, “I also don’t know what all of Christ’s suffering was for. He came to defeat misery, but it left [without Christ]...”[[95]](#footnote-96)

The Marxist deconstruction of the ancient Christian legend dictates that the powerful were obviously victims because of their power over others, and thus, relinquishing that unkind superiority for, it follows, a kind equality, would prevent future violence. Circuitous logic aside, we can easily decipher that Gor’kii here is thinking of the violence on Bloody Sunday of 1905 and the ensuing years, while also unconsciously foretelling the waves of violence just beyond the revolutionary horizon. Individuals who selfishly wield power over the masses are personae non grata in godbuilding, and if they do not yield to mercy, they will yield to justice.

*Confession* ends on a definitively hopeful *Mother*. Matvei leaves the factory with high hopes in the Kostia and other young people to remake the future, and the remainder of the novel is a series of confirmations of what Matvei has learned from his various mentors. In his travels, he encounters another young comrade worried about the Russian people’s fate, further distressed by the lack of signs of a change. Matvei proclaims that “This boy looking for signs—he’s the miracle if he can preserve love for the human amidst life’s terrors!”[[96]](#footnote-97) The experience launches Matvei into his first mission to preach to the *narod*, filled with the same fire that Gor’kii depicted burning in the hearts of Pavel and Pelageia Nilovna: “Earlier, words of sorrow and grief laid like ashes on my heart, but now, like a pointed spark, they ignite [my heart], for all current sorrow is my sorrow and the narod’s lack of freedom brings me closer,” Matvei proclaims as he prepares to address a crowd gathered around him. As he speaks about the injustices against the “the *narod*, the tsar of the Earth,” his fiery godbuilding aura spreads to the crowd: “People’s eyes blaze, from which an awakened human soul shines.”[[97]](#footnote-98) Gor’kii portrays the masses as a collective icon enveloped in light, as he also does in Mother, but now he will create something with the religious image. Still, Matvei preaches “calling people to a new service, in the name of a new life, but still not knowing [his] new God,” So Gor’kii must show him. The novel’s final scene combines a traditional Orthodox icon with the icon of the *narod* to perform a miraculous healing, demonstrating to Matvei that the people have been God all along.

Confession concludes in a historically accurate location, which creates for readers a tangible sense of godbuilding’s potential to evolve from Russian Orthodoxy. Matvei arrives at the Sedmiozernaia Godbearer Hermitage [*Sedmiozernaia Bogoroditskaia pustin’*] just north of Kazan. The monastery is famous for the “miracle-making icon” [*chudotvornaia ikona*] around which it was founded. Depicting Mary and the Child Jesus in the common Hodegetric pose, the Sedmiozernaia (Old Russian: ‘sedmiezernaia’) icon is said to healed people for centuries. After the icon reportedly saved the local population from the plague in the seventeenth century, the hermitage was built around it, and people came from all around to be healed of their illnesses through Gor’kii’s time.[[98]](#footnote-99) It is therefore no coincidence that he chose the return of this particular icon back to the monastery following a round of miracle making as the setting for Matvei’s “final strike to the heart, the kind of strike that completes the construction of a cathedral.”[[99]](#footnote-100) That moment of creation of the Godbuilding Church in Matvei’s heart—the pivotal moment Pavel is never able to reach—is when the narod rises as a unit alongside the icon to cure a lame girl at the monastery’s gates:

In the whole cloud of dust there are hundreds of black faces, thousands of eyes, just like the stars of the Milky Way. I see: all these eyes are like fiery sparks of one soul, greedily awaiting unknown joy. People are walking, like one body, pressed tightly against each other, holding hands and walking so quickly, as if their path is terribly far, but they are ready now to tirelessly walk to the end of it.[[100]](#footnote-101)

Here Gor’kii pulls the wool from readers’ eyes to reveal the truth of miracles: the people behind the icon are the miracle makers, not the icon. The syzygy of the *narod* acting as one and the “faith in its own power creates miracles.”[[101]](#footnote-102) All that to say, the *narod* is “God” and vice-versa; after all, its children are the prophets, and its spirit moves through those like Matvei and Pelageia to reveal the truth... “You are the one God, work miracles!”[[102]](#footnote-103)

In *Confession*, Gor’kii sketches a pathway to unification of his two contradictory selves, an Orthodox Russian and a godless socialist, with the “godbuilding” philosophy. Through a series of meetings that gradually reveal the godbuilding worldview, that the Russian *narod* (people) is the source of everything good and holy. Godbuilding thus redefines the Christian “God” not just as an alternative “God” but as a new genre of spiritual knowledge. As I have shown, godbuilding applies anthropologist Ludwig Feuerbach’s analysis of Christianity as the ultimate anthropocentric religion to an Orthodox believer, the narrator Matvei. Gor’kii strives in the novel to show how a Russian earnestly coming to understand Feuerbach’s concept of “God” can naturally transfer knowledge of the past and hopes for the future to the Russian narod. In this way, *Confession* is the *Essence of Russian Orthodoxy*, according to amateur anthropologist Maksim Gor’kii. It is little surprise that such existential questions bothered Gor’kii enough to compel novel-length philosophical treatise, as the Russian Empire was facing existential problems at the time. Growing contingents within the country had diverging sets of facts that constituted radically opposed “Truths.” To one faction, the country’s leader was more akin to Archangel Michael, and to the other, he was closer to the devil incarnate; nevertheless, the vast majority of people, belonging to neither faction, simply worried about getting by, regardless of who was in charge. *Confession* is evidence that Gor’kii saw this divide in the country and wanted to suture the wound left by Bloody Sunday on the Russian people.

Despite the fact that he could not have known, Gor’kii knew that the societal rift needed mending—or else. Godbuilding was his way to invite the vastly different sides of the conversation to the table and find common ground. We see that in the extensive outreach to conservative ideologies from Avvakum, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, Solov’ev, and the religious content within an otherwise unashamedly anti-theistic socialist context. Gor’kii’s solution is thus a reconciliation of various accounts of “Truth” from each side, with hopes that it will lead to a brighter future. The model of melding two opposing ideologies is admirable because it attempts to find a common tongue between differing populations. If your nation or community finds itself at odds between diametrically opposed choices, ask what commonalities can drive conversation forward. “True faith is always a source of action,” as Mikhail says. If we do not hold common "truths,” we cannot act together. If we cannot act together, we cannot survive. Though hard times make it seem impossible, there is always a road to reconciliation. You are the one God, work miracles!

1. He writes this a couple times: “Der andere is per se der Mittler zwischen mir and der heiligen Idee der Gattung. Homo homini Deus est.” (p. 278); “Is das Wesen des Menschen das hochste Wesen des Menchen, so muss auch praktisch das hochste und erste Gesetz die Liebe des Menschen zum Menschen sein. Homo homini deus est – dies ist der oberste praktische Grundsatz, dies der Wendepunkt der Weltgeschichte.” (444) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Kierkegaard 1920, p. 21: “Da jeg var meget ung, da glemte jeg i den trophoniske Hule at lee; da jeg blev ældre, da jeg slog Øiet op og betragtede Virkeligheden, da kom jeg til at lee, og har siden den Tid ikke ophørt dermed. Jeg saae, at det var Livets Betydning at faae et Levebrød, dets Maal at blive Justitsraad; at det var Elskovens rige Lyst at faae en velhavende Pige; at det var Venskabets Salighed at hjælpe hinanden i Pengeforlegenheder; at det var Viisdommen, hvad de Fleste antoge derfor; at det var Begeistring at holde en Tale; at det var Mod at vove at blive mulkteret paa 10 Rbd.; at det var Hjertelighed at sige Velbekomme efter et Middagsmaaltid; at det var Gudsfrygt eengang om Aaret at gaae til Alters. Det saae jeg, og jeg loe.” “To descend into the cave of Trophonios" became a way of saying "to suffer a great fright" or to lose one’s innocence. This saying is alluded to in Aristophanes' Clouds. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. This error shows up in even refereed literature, e.g. Kibalnik, Sergei A. “‘If There Is a God, Then Anything Is Permitted’ (Dostoevsky’s Meta-Theme in Jacques Lacan’s Psychoanalytic Interpretation).” *Studies in East European Thought* 72, no. 3 (December 1, 2020), 227–8. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-020-09388-w>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Fedor M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenie v tridtsati tomakh*, vol. 14, 30 vols. (Nauka, 1976). “Иван Федорович прибавил при этом в скобках, что в этом-то и состоит весь закон естественный, так что уничтожьте в человечестве веру в свое бессмертие, в нем тотчас же иссякнет не только любовь, но и всякая живая сила, чтобы продолжать мировую жизнь. Мало того: тогда ничего уже не будет безнравственного, все будет позволено, даже антропофагия.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 390. “Видел я ее, мать мою, в пространстве между звезд, и как гордо смотрит она очами океанов своих в дали и глубины; видел ее, как полную чашу ярко-красной, неустанно кипящей, живой крови человеческой, и видел владыку ее — всесильный, бессмертный народ.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Sartre, Jean-Paul. *L’existentialisme Est Un Humanisme*. Collection Pensées. Nagel, 1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Agursky, “Velikii eretik,” 80. “Один из основателей так называемого мистического анархизма Чулков писал об Исповеди: Я не боюсь сказать парадокса, утверждая, что Максим Горький самый верующий из современных писателей. Каков объект его веры это иной вопрос, но природа его переживания опеределяется именно верой.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Spiridonova, *Nastoiashchii Gor’kii*, 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Scherr, “Godbuilding Redux,” 455-462. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Pavel Petrovich Vasil’ev, “Bogonosets,” in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ Brokgauza i Efrona* (1891). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 535. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Avvakum Petrov, *Zhitie Protopopa Avvakuma Im Samim Napisannoe* (Werden-Verlag, 2003), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Scherr, “God-building or God-Seeking?,” 456. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Maksim Gor’kii, *M. Gor’kii o literature*, ed. I. Mikhailova (Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo Khudozhestvennoi Literatury, 1961), 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Nikitin, “Sem’ zhinei Maksim Gor’kogo,” 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. V. I. Lenin and M. Gor’kii, *V. I. Lenin i A. M. Gor’kii*, ed. B. A. Bialik et al., 3rd ed. (Nauka, 1969), 595-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Iu. V. Maslova, “Nachetchiki staroi very: istoriko-kultur’nyi aspekt,” *Kulturnoe nasledia Rossii* 3–4 (2013), 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. G. M. Hamburg, “Tolstoy’s Spirituality,” in *Anniversary Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Donna Tussing Orwin (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. This is a synthesis of the text, especially the end, and James’s discussion of LNT’s Confession, e.g. pp. 149, 187, 220 (“We must class him, like Bunyan and Tolstoy, amongst those upon whose soul the iron of melancholy left a permanent imprint.”). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Sesterhenn, *Das Bogostroitel’stvo*, 266. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. See, for example, the chapter “Gor’kii i bosiaki” in Pavel Basinskii, *Gorʹkii*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Scherr, “God-building or God-Seeking?,” 457. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Gor’kii, *PSP*, vol. 6, 176. “Заканчиваю повесть о хождении некоего человека по святым мес­ там, о бытии его во обителех и о искании всюду Господа Бога, коего он благополучно и находит.” [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. A subject of Leskov’s *Trifles of a Bishop’s Life* [*Melochi arkhiereiskoi zhizni*] (1878), to Scherr’s credit. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Serge A. Zenkovsky, ed., *Medieval Russia’s Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, trans. Serge A. Zenkovsky, 2nd ed. (Meridian, 1974), 333-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. I. V. Mokletsova, “*Khozhdeniia” v russkoi kulʹture i literature X-XX vekov* (MGU im. A.V. Lomonosova, 2003), 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Here I am referring to the populist movement that also used the same term, khozhdenie. The Khozhdenie v narod organized by Herzen, Bakunin, and Kropotkin, among others, is not called a “pilgrimage,” however, likely due to its supporters. Those who went out “to the people” as Herzen ordered almost exclusively preached a worldview that was atheist, which was a factor in their failure to reach the “people,” whom they did not understand. Interestingly, there was a small group noted for attempting to use the Gospels to get their message across. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe: Essai Sur l’absudre*, Les Essais (Paris: Gallimard, 2012). “*Il n'y a qu'un problème philosophique vraiment sérieux : c'est le suicide*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Nikitin, *Sem’ zhiznei Maksima Gor’kogo*,71-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 8, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Dmitrii Bykov, *Byl li Gorʹkii?* (Astrelʹ, 2008), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 239. “За что, господи? Виноват ли я, что отец-мать мои отреклись от меня и, подобно котенку, в кусты бросили младенца?” [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Ibid., 262. “Зачем же,— говорю,— на колени-то? Ежели я виноват, то не перед вами, а перед богом!” [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Ibid., 263 “Тогда я опомнился. Ясно, что, коли человек поли­ цию зовет бога своего поддержать, стало быть, ни сам он, ни бог его никакой силы не имеют, а тем паче красоты.” [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. About sex work in Russian Christianity, see Colleen Lucey, *Love for Sale: Representing Prostitution in Imperial Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 267-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Ibid., 272-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 275. “Молчи! Слушай опытного внимательно, старшего тебя с уважением! Знаю я — ты всё о богородице бор­ мочешь! Но потому и принял Христос крестную смерть, что женщиной был рожден, а не свято и чисто с небес сошел, да и во дни жизни своей мирволил им, паскудам этим, бабенкам. Ему бы самарянку-то в колодезь ки­ нуть, а не разговаривать с ней, а распутницу эту камнем в лоб,— вот, глядишь, и спасен мир!” [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Ibid., 276. “Как же,— мол,— господь сказал: плодитесь, множьтесь? Даже посинел мой наставник, ногами топает, ревет: — Сказал, сказал!.. А ты знаешь, как он сказал, ты, дурак? Сказал он: плодитесь, множьтесь и населяйте землю, предаю вас во власть дьявола, и будь вы про­ кляты ныне и присно и во веки веков,— вот что он ска­ зал! А блудники проклятие божие обратили в закон его! Понял, мерзость и ложь?” [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. PSS v. 9, 282-3. “Иов,— говорю,— меня не касается! Я на его месте сказал бы господу: не пугай, но ответь ясно — где пути к тебе? Ибо аз есмь сын силы твоея и создан тобою по подобию твоему,— не унижай себя, оттал­кивая дитя твое!” [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. Ewa Majewska Thompson, *Understanding Russia: The Holy Fool in Russian Culture* (University Press of America, 1987), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Priscilla Hart Hunt, Svitlana Kobets, and A. M. Panchenko, eds., *Holy Foolishness in Russia: New Perspectives* (Slavica Publishers, 2011), 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 286. “Серафим против Гриши — как ясный день весны против вечера осени, а сошлись они друг с другом бли­же, чем со мной.” [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 309. “Идут — идут старые и молодые, женщины и дети, словно всех один голос позвал, и чувствую я в этом прохождении земли насквозь по всем ее путям некую силу,— захватывает она меня, тревожит, словно обе­ щает что-то открыть душе. Странно мне это беспокойное и покорное хождение после неподвижной жизни моей.” [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Ibid., 314. “И тогда, помню, слились для меня все лица в одно большое грустное лицо; задумчиво оно и упрямо пока­ залось мне, на словах — немотно, но в тайных мы­ слях — дерзко, и в сотне глаз его — видел я — неуга­ симо горит огонь, как бы родной душе моей.” [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 315. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. L.V. Sokolova, “Khozhdenie Bogoroditsy po mukam,” in *Literatura Drevnei Rusi*, ed. O.V. Tvorogov (Prosveshchenie: Uchebnaia literatura, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. M. V. Rozhdestvenskaia, “Khozhdenie Bogoroditsy Po Mukam,” in *Slovar’ Knizhnikov i Knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi*, ed. D. S. Likhachev (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. Sokolova, “Khozhdenie Bogoroditsy po mukam.” [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 319. “А что мне в том? Не виновата я богу! Не про­ стит — не надо; простит — сама не забуду, да! В аду не хуже! Там детей не будет со мной!” [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 349, 366-367, 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. L. V. Litvinova, “IEGUDIIL,” in *Pravoslavnaia Entsiklopediia* (Tserkovno-nauchnyi tsentr “Pravoslavnaia Entsiklopedia,” 2010), <https://www.pravenc.ru/text/293567.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 334. “Как только заглянула в город весна, ушел я, решив сходить в Сибирь — хвалили мне этот край,— а по дороге туда остановил меня человек, на всю жизнь окрыливший душу мою, указав мне верный к богу путь.” [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. Todd Gooch, Edward N. Zalta, and Uri Nodelman, “Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. MG talks about reading M&E’s work on Feuerbach in an article “Zasukha budet unichtozhena” (1831). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 341. “Кто есть бог, творяй чудеса? Отец ли наш или же — сын духа нашего?” [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. Maksim Gor’kii, “Razrushenie Lichnosti,” in *Maksim Gor’kii: Pro et contra* (Saint Petersburg: Russkii khristianskii gumanitarnyi institut, 1998), 47. “Создав героя, любуясь его мощью и красотой, народ необходимо должен был внести его в среду богов -- противопоставить свою организованную энергию многочисленности сил природы, взаимно враждебных самим себе и человечеству.” [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. Maksim Gor’kii, “Istoriia fabrik i zavodov,” in *Publitsisticheskie stat’i*, ed. I. A. Gruzdev, 2nd ed. (Lengikhl, 1933), 415. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 350. “Говорит, как солдат на трубе сигнал играет, сказал, махнул рукой и пошел прочь.” [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
64. “Mikhail Arkhangel,” in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ Brokgauza i Efrona* (Saint Petersburg), accessed February 23, 2025. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
65. Gor’kii, “Razrushenie lichnosti,” 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
66. The nickname “Mikha” is clever world play. The name comes from Michael, which is Hebrew, meaning ”no/one like God.” The nickname drops the “El” (”God”), which alternatively means “no one.” [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
67. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 353-354. “— Болезнь,— продолжает Михайла,— это когда че­ ловек не чувствует себя, а знает только свою боль да его и живет! Но вы, как видно, себя не потеряли: вот вы ищете радостей жизни,— это доступно только здоро­вому.” [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
68. Ibid., 354-355. “— Началась,— говорит,— эта дрянная и недостой­ная разума человеческого жизнь с того дня, как первая человеческая личность оторвалась от чудотворной силы народа, от массы, матери своей, и сжалась со страха перед одиночеством и бессилием своим в ничтожный и злой комок мелких желаний, комок, который наречен был — «я». Вот это самое «я» и есть злейший враг человека!” [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
69. Gor’kii, “Razrushenie lichnosti,” 44. “Народ не только сила, создающая все материальные ценности, он — единственный и неиссякаемый источник ценностей духовных, первый по времени, красоте и гениальности творчества философ и поэт, создавший все великие поэмы, все трагедии земли и величайшую из них — историю всемирной культуры.” [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
70. Ibid., 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
71. Ibid., 75. “Это одна из иллюстраций положения, которое я формулирую так: русский индивидуализм, развиваясь, принимает болезненный характер, влечет за собою резкое понижение социально-этических запросов лично сти и сопровождается общим упадком боевых сил интеллекта.” [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
72. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 355. “Две звезды большие сторожами в небесах идут. Над горой в синем небе четко видно зубчатую стену леса, а на горе весь лес изрублен, изрезан, земля изранена черными ямами. Внизу — завод жадно оскалил крас­ные зубы: гудит, дымит, по-над крышами его мечется огонь, рвется кверху, не может оторваться, растекается дымом. Пахнет гарью, душно мне.” [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
73. Ibid., 355-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
74. Gor’kii, PSS v. 9, 357-8. “А проснулся — шум, свист, гам, как на соборе всех чертей. Смотрю в дверь — полон двор мальчишек, а Михайла в белой рубахе среди них, как парусная лодка между малых челноков.” [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
75. Ibid., 359. “Разве они созданы только для работы и пьянства? Каждый из них — вместилище духа живого, и могли бы они ускорить рост мысли, освобождающей нас из плена недоумений наших. А войдут они в то же темное к теспое русло, в котором мутно протекают дни жизни их отцов. Прикажут им работать и запретят думать. Многие из них — а может быть, и все — подчинятся мертвой силе и послужат ей. Вот источник горя земли: нет свободы росту духа человеческого!” [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
76. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 361. “Не ври, Мишка! Ты пошли его к чёрту, Матвей! Никаких богов! Это — темный лес: религия, церковь и всё подобное; темный лес, и в нем — разбойники наши! Обман!” [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
77. Ibid., 361-2. “Михайла упорно твердит: — Бог, о котором я говорю, был, когда люди едино­ душно творили его из вещества своей мысли, дабы осветить тьму бытия; но когда народ разбился на рабов и владык, на части и куски, когда он разорвал свою мысль и волю,— бог погиб, бог — разрушился! — Слышишь, Матвей?— кричит дядя Петр радоство .— Вечная память! А племянник смотрит прямо в лицо ему и, понижая голос, продолжает: — Главное преступление владык жизни в том, что они разрушили творческую силу народа. Будет время вся воля народа вновь сольется в одной точке; тогда в ней должна возникнуть необоримая и чудесная сила, и — воскреснет бог! Он-то и есть тот, которого вы, Матвей, ищете!” [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
78. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 362. “Интересно мне слушать этих людей, и удивляют они меня равенством уважения своего друг ко другу; спо­ рят горячо, но не обижают себя ни злобой, ни руганью. Дядя Петр, бывало, кровью весь нальется и дрожит, а Михайла понижает голос свой и точно к земле гнет боль­ шого мужика. Состязаются предо мной два человека, н оба они, отрицая бога, полны искренней веры.” [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
79. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
80. Gor’kii, PSS, vol. 9, p. 367. “В огне и громе, в дожде огненных искр работают по­черневшие люди,— кажется, что нет им места здесь, ибо всё вокруг грозит испепелить пламенной смертью, задавить тяжким железом; всё оглушает и слепит, сушит кровь нестерпимая жара, а они спокойно делают свое дело, возятся хозяйски уверенно, как черти в аду, ничего не боясь, всё зная.” [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
81. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
82. PSS, vol. 9, 368. “Порою в этом адском шуме и возне машин вдруг победительно и беззаботно вспыхнет веселая песня,улыбаюсь я в душе, вспоминая Иванушку-дурачка на ките по дороге в небеса за чудесной жар-птицей.” [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
83. Jack V. Haney, *The Complete Folktales of A. N. Afanas’ev: Volume I* (University Press of Mississippi, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
84. A. P. Tolstiakov, “Pushkin i ‘Konek-Gorbunok’ Ershova,” in *Fundamental’naia elektronnaia biblioteka: russkaia literatura i fol’klor*, accessed February 23, 2025, <https://feb-web.ru/feb/pushkin/serial/v82/v82-028-.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
85. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 368. “Раньше, когда я о народе не думал, то и людей не замечал, а теперь смотрю на них и всё хочу разнооб­ разие открыть, чтобы каждый предо мной отдельно стоял. И добиваюсь этого и — нет: речи разные, и у каждого свое лицо, но вера у всех одна и намерение едино,— не торопясь, но дружно и усердно строят они нечто.” [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
86. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 368. “Раньше, когда я о народе не думал, то и людей не замечал, а теперь смотрю на них и всё хочу разнооб­ разие открыть, чтобы каждый предо мной отдельно стоял. И добиваюсь этого и — нет: речи разные, и у каждого свое лицо, но вера у всех одна и намерение едино,— не торопясь, но дружно и усердно строят они нечто.” [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
87. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 369-70. “Ушел. Остался я очень удивлен его словами, не ве­ рится мне, но вечером Михайла всё подтвердил. Целый вечер рассказывал он мне о жестоких гонениях людей; оказалось, что за такие речи, как я говорил, и смертью казнили, и тысячи народа костьми легли в Сибири, в каторге, но Иродово избиение не прекращается, и ве­ рующие тайно растут.” [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
88. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 370. “Тогда в душе моей всё возвысилось и осветилось иначе, все речи Михайловы и товарищей его приняли иной смысл. Прежде всего — если человек за веру свою готов потерять свободу и жизнь, значит — он верует искренно и подобен первомученикам за Христов закон.” [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
89. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 370. “Не хочу сказать, что сразу принял я их и тогда же понял до глубины, но впервые тем вечером почувство­ вал я их родственную близость моей душе, и показалась мне тогда вся земля Вифлеемом, детской кровью насы­ щенной. Понятно стало горячее желание богородицы, коя, видя ад, просила Михаила архангела: Архангеле! Допусти меня помучиться в огне! Пусть и я разделю великие муки эти! Только здесь не грешных, а праведников видел я: желают они разрушить ад на земле, чего ради и готовы спокойно принять все муки.” [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
90. PSS v. 9, p. 370. “Нет, отвечает. Подождите и подумайте, рано вам! Если вы, с вашим характером, попадете теперь же в петлю врага, то надолго и бесполезно затянете ее. На­ против — после этой вашей речи надо вам уйти отсюда. Есть у вас много нерешенного, и для нашей работы не свободны вы!” [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
91. Ibid. “— Может быть,— говорю я Михайле,— потому и нет теперь святых отшельников, что не от мира, а в мир пошел человек?” [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
92. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 371. “И рядом с этим — не борясь — другой вопрос жи­ вет: с неба ли на землю нисшел господь или с земли на небеса вознесен силою людей? И тут же горит мысль о богостроительстве, как вечном деле всего народа.” [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
93. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, His Gesammelte Werke, 5 (Akademie-Verlag, 1973), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
94. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 375. “Не боится мальчик правду сказать. Все люди этой линии, начиная с Ионы, не носят страха в себе.” [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
95. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 375. “Ежели,— говорит,— царская или богатого дочь во Христа поверит да замучают ее — ведь ни царь, ни богач добрее к людям от этого не бывали. В житиях не сказано, что исправлялись цари-то, мучители!” [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
96. Ibid., 382. “«Парень этот ищет знамений,— он сам чудо, коли мог сохранить, в ужасах жизни, любовь к человеку!” [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
97. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 384. “Говорю я хохлам, зная их ласковый язык: Века ходит народ по земле туда и сюда, ищет места, где бы мог свободно приложить силу свою для строения справедливой жизни; века ходите по земле вы, законные хозяева ее,— отчего? Кто не дает места на­роду, царю земли, на троне его, кто развенчал народ, согнал его с престола и гонит из края в край, творца всех трудов, прекрасного садовника, возрастившего все красоты земли? Разгораются очи людей, светит из них пробудив­ шаяся человеческая душа, и мое зрение тоже становится широко и чутко: видишь на лице человека вопрос и тот­ час отвечаешь на него; видишь недоверие — борешься с ним.” [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
98. “Bogoroditskaia-Sedmiozerskaia muzhskaia pustyn’,” in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ Brokgauza i Efrona* (Saint Petersburg, 1891). [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
99. Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 385. “В Казанской губернии пережил я последний удар в сердце, тот удар, который завершает строение храма. Было это в Седьмиозерной пустыни, за крестным ходом с чудотворной иконой божией матери: в тот день ждали возвращения иконы в обитель из города,— день торжественный.” [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
100. Ibid., 387. “В целом облаке пыли сотни черных лиц, тысячи глаз, точпо звезды Млечного пути. Вижу я: все эти очи как огпенные искры одной души, жадно ожидающей неведомой радости. Идут люди, как одно тело, плотно прижались друг к другу, взялись за руки и идут так быстро, как будто страшно далек их путь, но готовы они сейчас же неус­ танно идти до конца его.” [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
101. Ibid., 388. “Помню пыльное лицо в поту и слезах, а сквозь вла­ гу слез повелительно сверкает чудотворная сила — вера во власть свою творить чудеса.” [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
102. Ibid., 389. “Да не будут миру бози инии разве тебе, ибо ты един бог, творяй чудеса!” [↑](#footnote-ref-103)