Introduction:   
The Beginning at the End of the (Old) World

“In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshiping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of God or spiritual-type thing to worship—be it J.C. or Allah, be it Yahweh or the Wiccan Mother-Goddess or the Four Noble Truths or some infrangible set of ethical principles—is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive.”

―David Foster Wallace  
“This is Water” commencement speech  
Kenyon College, May 21, 2005[[1]](#footnote-2)

“This 'orthodox' Marxism, which in actuality was Russified Marxism, adopted first and foremost not the deterministic, evolutionary-scientific side of Marxism, but its messianic, mythopoetic-religious side, enabling the exultation of revolutionary will, foregrounding the proletariat’s revolutionary struggle, and commanded by an organized minority inspired by the conscious-proletariat idea. This orthodox, totalitarian Marxism always demanded confession of a materialistic faith, but it contained strong, idealistic elements. It showed how great the power of an idea is over human life if [that idea] is complete and matches the instincts of the masses.”

―Nikolai Berdiaev  
*The Roots and Meaning of Russian Communism* (1937)[[2]](#footnote-3)

Every paragraph of this dissertation works toward clarifying what “Gospel” means in its title, *A Revolutionary Gospel*—actually, every paragraph except this first one. Before jumping in, I want to mention some of the meanings underlying the other half of the title. The word “revolution” often conjures valiant scenes of radicals storming and flags rising over barricades, but the reality is that the bulk of revolutionary change unfolds unceremoniously in everyday citizens far from the front lines, at times well before or after a new national anthem is adopted. In the case of the Russian Empire, although 1917-1918 were the pivotal years when power noticeably changed hands, the identity crisis that spurred the country’s reorientation began long before. The so-called “dress rehearsal” revolution of 1905 is the next major event to come to mind.[[3]](#footnote-4) It undoubtedly plays a central role in the historical trajectory and consequently in this study. Ultimately, however, this dissertation focuses its attention to the less-commonly considered revolutions in thought that anticipated the political transformation. Above all, I am interested by the drawn out and intangible transformations that must take place within enough hearts and minds to enable a successful political revolution. Not all supporters begin as such, and someone or something must ferry them over the line. *A Revolutionary Gospel* recounts one attempt at psychological, social, and moral revolution that armed itself with literature and the promise of transcendence, despite protest of top Bolsheviks, to move the masses toward a new way of seeing themselves, their compatriots, their labor, and a brighter future to come.

While this research embraces the breadth of these sociopolitical, cultural, and philosophical revolutions, I focus most closely on the writings of Maksim Gor’kii (1868–1936), an author who became a central cultural figurehead and spokesperson of the revolutionary movement and later Bolshevik Party. Both pragmatic and intellectual reasons motivate this choice. Gor’kii’s close relationships with Lenin and other major figures, his authorial success in both sales and influence, and his radical socialist-Marxist political affiliations around the turn of the twentieth century elevated him to nearly unparalleled iconic status in the Soviet Union before World War II. Gor’kii’s titanic stature in twentieth-century Russian literature guarantees that those reading this introduction have access to many featured works as well as some knowledge of Gor’kii’s life and work. The other reason for choosing Gor’kii also comes from his prominence and the corollary that his curated status means that nearly all knowledge about him should be approached skeptically at best. The writer’s decades-long association with Bolshevik leaders instigated the state’s tight control over Gor’kii’s writerly reputation, as it reflected the image Soviet Union’s highest political echelon. It is namely those assumptions about his atheist alignment with the Bolsheviks that I hope to engage and prove mistaken. The present investigation aims to shine a spotlight on Gor’kii’s revolutionary work in the Russian cultural sphere and, in doing so, exemplify how he offered his millions of readers the blueprints for a spiritual, yet secular socialist future society. The tantalizing irony of this research question arises from a provocative fact: what the socialists, communists, Marxists, Leninists, Stalinists so often and ardently decried—what we call “religion”—was precisely the medicine they needed to make the rest of their revolutionary ideas go down smoothly.

*Goals of Research*

This dissertation approaches its subject from a multidisciplinary perspective to learn more about both a particular facet of Russian cultural studies and broader humanistic trends of the past. The ensuing discussion focuses primarily on Gor’kii’s development and usage of a literary method, wherein he integrates aspects of well-known Judaeo-Christian literature ultimately in order to project a revolutionized Russian consciousness. While examining his artistic interactions with religion, I consider how observations may help us better answer a number of questions from literary studies, intellectual history, and religious studies. These lines of investigation, while going in their own directions, converge at a reverence for social efficacy of the word. As Jacques Derrida wrote, “I only have one language, and yet it is not mine.”[[4]](#footnote-5) Well-crafted communication can change individuals the world over more fundamentally and permanently than any law, weapon, or incentive.

The various disciplines are labels for the types of questions this study asks of its subject. Considering Gor’kii and his work through literary studies, I find and contextualize stories’ engagement in wordplay and irony to convey a provocative message to readers. Straddling literature and intellectual history, my observations often lead to questions about how our conceptions of Gor’kii, both as historical man and propagandized myth, should change in light of my findings. For example, should he be considered among great Russian religious thinkers?[[5]](#footnote-6) I question how a work imagines a successful revolution, historical or imagined, in dialogue and imagery, in its minutiae. Regarding the history of Russian thought, my discussion regularly revisits the idea of how each work individually and all works collectively contribute to the rich religious discourse among intellectuals at the turn of the century. Gor’kii’s surprising ideological sources and intriguing influences arises as a notable and intriguing trend while tracking his spiritual evolution. Questions about religion, beginning from its definition, shape a majority of the discussion. Bridging intellectual history and religion, I devote a significant amount of time to decoding Gor’kii’s religious views and polemical opponents. Finally, significant space is made to consider Gor’kii’s religious impulse and its capacity to enhance our understanding of both Russian Orthodoxy and spiritual secularism. These questions resonate throughout the dissertation, asking for further explanation, creating a need for conceptual tools, and framing the dissertation’s structure.

*Concepts and Terms*

*A Revolutionary Gospel* builds on three central concepts: the anthropological “religious impulse,” the sociological secularization of “post-Christianity,” and the literary “transposition.” In practical terms, these tools help explain the medium (religious impulse), motivation (sociological secularization), and method (literary transposition) of Gor’kii’s contributions to the revolutionary cause. Each concept has its own scholarly baggage, which is necessary to review before applying any of them. This past use informs my applications of these methods to uncover meaning, but the following discussion is ultimately mine alone and claims no authority over framing transpositions, secularization, or religion in other circumstances. Insofar as they can help us better grasp human universals, however, I use them to speak about truths beyond the idiosyncrasies of pre-revolutionary Russia. In fact, the frameworks were chosen for their ability to help me best identify the many colorful through-lines in Gor’kii and others’ spatiotemporal and sociopolitical contexts. Nonetheless, in analyzing the details, my purpose is to increase their saturation and sharpness while still viewing them in their enticingly messy historical entanglement.

First things being first, the most burdensome baggage of all, is “religion.” These instincts are so fundamental and prevalent in human cultures across time and place that they resist confinement within a finite example or definition. Scholars of religion frequently bypass defining it altogether, while many others settle for broad categories of things, actions, or feelings.[[6]](#footnote-7) For these purposes, I must at least attempt at a definition of religion. What I most commonly refer to as “religion” and humanity’s “religious impulse” is meant to connote one or more commonly co-occurring practices and beliefs inherent in human culture that shape the experience of transcendence, the connection with the “other,” divine, mortal, or otherwise. This innate desire is a phenomenon among modern humans regardless of time, place, and origin. These intimate experiences with agency beyond our own may include but are far from limited to, for example, centuries of traditional ritual and knowledge in any form, faith in the power of forgiveness, or the feeling of being called for a higher purpose. In other words, I speak of “religion” as that which we think, say, and do to understand and experience transcendence, which puts the self into communication with the other. One may also say that “religion” is material things and divinities, but this is only true insofar as they facilitate connection. The impulse and its manifestations are the psychological and material cultural artifacts that provide meaning to interactions with the other. Theism, ethics, eschatology, and other constituent parts of this religious knowledge each help us further navigate other agents in the cultural world. “Religion,” like “science” and “emotion,” is a container of knowledge categories, one that specializes in knowing the other present in our cultural life.

My model of religious phenomena operates on the assumption that broadly what we call “culture” is a network of semantic confluences that cultivate meaning in relation to objects. Each intersection performs a give and take with connected concepts, which are put into relation with one another through human action, especially language. Shapes like crosses and sensations like the color red have multiple connections, i.e., potential meanings, but our understanding of these semantic phenomena relies upon situational context. This is to say that an object’s significance arises from relationships between two or more nodes. For instance, a cross is realized only in light of its surroundings, such as at the end of a letter or as a part of a church’s architecture. This view is informed by the work of Clifford Geertz and symbolic anthropology, which labels these semantic intersections as “symbols” and understands their meaning through their interrelations with semantically related symbols. This “semiotic web” in which humanity has trapped itself blankets our interpretations of the world, both interior and exterior.[[7]](#footnote-8) Thus, in order to isolate and understand a single symbol’s significance, its network of associations must be explored and analyzed. Geertz calls this method a “thick description” of culture, which becomes particularly useful for understanding the intersection of meanings expressed in “religion” and literature. Both are characterized strongly by their staunch resistance to summation, which by definition provides a thinner description with fewer semantic relationships to consider. “Religion” of all sorts, while not solely verbal, has a strong literary component that does much of the meaning negotiation over time.

Gor’kii’s wide array of transpositions makes from one religious narrative or character yet another story or figure that is neither entirely the same nor entirely different, which is the only generalization one can make of his method with any confidence. In the context of semantic networks, transpositions strategically preserve certain connections while substituting other relationships around an agent, such as a character’s name or the entirety of a parable plot. In analyzing Russian narratives, Caryl Emerson deployed the framework in her study *Boris Godunov: Transpositions of a Russian Theme*.[[8]](#footnote-9) Emerson’s work focuses on the transposition in genre studies. I would like to note that transpositions are instances of larger sociolinguistic phenomena underlying verbal and written communication: so-called inside jokes, the effect of nostalgia, the entirety of internet culture, and countless other examples of daily life testify to the role played by the relationship between the content and context of language use. Writers—and anyone who uses language, for that matter—constantly refer to precedents while choosing how to describe their present reality. Prior usage is how we know when an inside joke is funniest and objects of nostalgia the most poignant. In Gor’kii’s case, the significance of when and how the Bible was employed in his life ultimately shapes how and when he transposed its contents to describe contemporary events. The premise of this research is that while the Bible is indeed one source of many past voices Gor’kii brought to his literary career, it is the dominant content *and* context to which Gor’kii responds to current events. At least at the beginning of his career, the Bible offers the language with which he speaks about what matters to him most: personal purpose and actualization, collective ethics and fate. There is no understanding Gor’kii without understanding his relationship with the Bible and Orthodoxy writ large.

While Gor’kii’s usage of the Bible is an example of a common sociolinguistic practice, it is unique for its claims to authority and integration of contemporary social issues. Understanding Gor’kii's transpositions will largely reflect how Emerson understands Boris Godunov’s various transpositions but with strong distinctions between the two applications. Emerson’s transposition framework seeks to identify what sort of broader understanding we can gain from inspecting how related narratives around historical events and people, for example, take form in varying contexts. She begins by establishing an authoritative, though unpresuming, base narrative before presenting generic translations in historical, poetic, and operatic forms. Each of these manifestations takes from the common knowledge pool about the tsar and spins off a unique representation of the story. It is difficult to disagree with her assertion that these transpositions are some of “the most vigorous commentary possible on another’s work of art,” as they directly speak to the veracity of others’ interpretations, even point by point at times.[[9]](#footnote-10) In a similar way, Gor’kii also transposes narratives to confront previous accounts’ claim to authority, historical or present. Although Emerson brings into focus the transpositional methodology as a path toward evaluation and creative expression, but the similarities with Gor’kii largely stop there.

Gor’kii’s transposition of Orthodox Christian written culture (Bible stories, saints’ lives) differs in two significant ways from Emerson’s observations about the Boris Godunov history. Whereas within the context of Tsar Boris Godunov’s life and reign there is tangible, traceable historicity, whether antique realia or written artifacts of his earthly presence, Gor’kii is speaking to a literary tradition that is transhistorical, which is to say that it belongs to no single historical actuality. Instead, it lays claim to all histories. In other words, the history told by the Christian Bible is not defined by its chronotope, Bakhtin’s spacetime concept central to Emerson’s understanding of the variations on her subject. One may even say scriptural texts, like the Christian Bible, are distinguished by their own unique, ahistorical, and omnipresent chronotope speaking outside of a particular time or place, which further thickens the layered descriptions one can make of the contained texts. To quote the Bible is to claim authority over all times and places within and without the human realm. The claim to historical accuracy negotiated by Emerson’s subjects lays claim in Gor’kii’s transpositions instead to the authority of universal, capital-T Truth. His adaptations of narratives, characters, or motifs, for example, aim to not only speak to the borrowed contexts but also with the same biblical authority about human nature, good and evil, and other fundamental concepts in lifer. The history of Boris Godunov undoubtedly resounds throughout Russian history, but my analysis must take into consideration how Gor’kii spoke intending to co-opt Biblical righteousness. This maximalism has another consequence of its grand claims to Truth.

Emerson considers the subjects of her analysis as “co-authors,” who built upon each other’s work. That is not the case with Gor’kii, who once wrote “I came to this world to disagree.”[[10]](#footnote-11) A significant and unique condition of Gor’kii’s claims to authority is that he seeks to destroy and rebuild precedents rather than the “yes-and” nature of Emerson’s subjects. While Karamzin, Pushkin, and Mussorgskii contribute unique perspectives on the Godunov narrative, there is no expectation of rewriting history. The contrary is true for the twentieth-century revolutionaries, of whom Gor’kii is representative. The Russian Empire’s radical activists sought to replace rather than reform their government, which has implications for their narratives. Transposing Biblical stories and saints’ lives is more than an alternative view of some event; rewriting the sources of societal values is an aggressive, existential offense against the status quo’s most powerful cultural semantic agents. Writers’ antagonism toward contemporary institutions takes form in substituent moral lessons that overwrite source texts. For example, virtue still exists as a positive character qualification, but it is demonstrated with different terms, or saints persist in the common mythology, but they are beatified on different accounts. Semantic networks of the past are dismantled and rebuilt with inconsistent or incompatible new relationships. Atheist Marxists and Leninists rebuilt the semantic power of a deity while replacing a small number of details, providing recognizable continuity but just enough difference for the change to be noticeable. Gor’kii’s contribution to this effort is a martial art that weaponizes the transposed narrative or character against its source, the cast seeking revenge against its die.

That leads me into my third major concept, secularization, which I discuss in terms of “post-Christian” and “post-Christianity.”[[11]](#footnote-12) The name is somewhat misleading in that it implies the end of Christianity. In fact, as sociologist Charles Taylor defines the term, it is the change “which takes us from a society in which it was virtually *impossible not to believe* in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is *one human possibility* among others.”[[12]](#footnote-13) Christianity is not wholly absent or impotent but instead subject to the same semantic network negotiations as other worldviews. The transition from a Christian and post-Christian world, though it may seem nominal, cannot be understated. Post-Christianity describes a society which no longer relies cardinally on the theologically derived definitions of its fundamental values and principles. As Taylor puts it, “Belief in God is no longer axiomatic” in the understanding and valuation of the world in and around us.[[13]](#footnote-14) This distinction is important. Secularization, at least for the current purposes, is not necessarily the decline in faith in God or even a decrease of adherents to a particular religion, though a contraction of religiosity in the population and individuals often follows; instead, it is when a set of beliefs is once again—because nothing begins free from skepticism—subject to questioning and therefore influence. From another perspective, the only Christians in a post-Christian world are those who actively wish to be Christian, rather than by circumstance or convenience. Indeed, in some instances, it is at the threat of injury. In these societies, faith builds on experience rather than belief, and, perhaps paradoxically, the lives of believers and unbelievers largely converge.

The Russian Empire was neither the first nor the last country to undergo secularization with a post-Christian transition, and each example of the phenomenon is unique in some way. The Warsaw Confederation of 1573 established rights for religious minorities and put checks on the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth’s Catholic influence in daily life.[[14]](#footnote-15) The concept of *laïcité* (from the Greek λᾱϊκός [*laikos*], 'of the people', i.e. the laity), dating to the late-nineteenth century or before, has separated French governmental and private affairs, especially religion, across its republics and constitutions since then.[[15]](#footnote-16) Niceto Alcalá-Zamora and the Second Spanish Republic instituted a secular government for the first time in Spain with the Constitution of 1931, which survived until 1939 and Francisco Franco’s implementation of National Catholicism in the country.[[16]](#footnote-17) Sweden legalized conversion to a non-Christian religious denomination (including leaving Christianity for no religion) only in 1951 and cleaved from the Church of Sweden after the turn of the millennium in 2001.[[17]](#footnote-18) A similar list could be made for Islam, Buddhism, and folk religions over the past few hundred years. The Russo-Soviet post-Christian secularization is nonetheless notable for numerous reasons, which will appear throughout my investigation. In general, the sociological interest arises from just a couple facts: nowhere else did state-approved atheism arrive with such a violent and abrupt crusade against the status quo, and only in the Bolsheviks’ Soviet Union was Christianity purposefully replaced with a novel belief system under the banner of atheism. As a result, the revolutions and the Russian Civil War become a *bellum sacrum* that led to a new era for human history.

*Background*

The authors and thinkers featured in this study were responding to frustrations with the economic, political, and cultural order of their day, but one may question if Orthodoxy was truly a primary target of their ire. Naturally, the answer is more complicated than a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ for a few reasons. On the one hand, far from everyone in the Russian Empire was a pious Christian or even very familiar with the mainstream Orthodox culture primarily promulgated out of Saint Petersburg, Moscow, and other major cities. Gor’kii himself was anything but a practicing Christian. Those in socialist-leaning political circles especially denounced theology and religion, namely Christianity, as nonsense or, particularly in Marxist groups, as an anachronistic and deleterious vestige of the old way of life. I will argue that his opinions about the existence of a deity are also less binary than he and others would have us believe, but he was unquestionably an atheist by Orthodox standards. From what we can tell from records of his and others’ thinking at the time, few, if any, of my research subjects were Christians by any traditional measure.

On the other hand, the context of these writers’ lives made it impossible for even atheists not to be Orthodox Christians in many ways. There is sufficient basis for nevertheless isolating religion, and specifically Russian Orthodoxy, as the ostensibly primary institution against which they were rebelling. As educated littérateurs, Gor’kii’s and those around him were intensely aware of the influence of Church power and influence in Russian life. More than just writers, anyone involved in production of meaning through acts of government, culture, and commerce had been educated in a system run by the Church. In their upbringing, they studied the divine law [*Bozhii zakon*] that legitimized the Church’s power and funneled it through the tsar. The Church’s strong hold on the education system meant that anyone with a formal education was a member of the Church, even if only during the mandatory theology lessons. Religion’s universal presence also begins to explain why the Soviets were obsessed with education and literacy: there is power and influence in telling stories—especially to children. However, it was this very dogma of mandatory liturgical attendance and Bible memorization that gave him his weapon, an intimate knowledge of the Russian Christian tradition, with which he would attempt to dismantle the system in which he was raised.

Not all scholars agree that there was a formidable Christian tradition against which nineteenth century Russians could rebel. John Givens, for example, argues in *The Image of Christ in Russian Literature: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Bulgakov, Pasternak* (2018), that the “century of unbelief” that unfolded in the 1800s had done much to diminish the Church’s influence and Russians’ religiosity well before Bloody Sunday and the 1905 revolution.[[18]](#footnote-19) It was not the first or necessarily most significant period of decline for the Orthodox Church, either. Indeed, the literary tradition and broader culture had come a long way from their earliest roots in religion, and it had already been for many intents and purposes secular since eighteenth-century authors like Radishchev and Karamzin published. Givens’ assertion that Russian culture and literature was no more religious than any other country is difficult to understand, however.[[19]](#footnote-20) Like many past investigations, such conclusions only make sense when taking as narrow of a definition of "religious” or "Orthodox” as possible, or in other words applying the rules of Christian dogma to concepts beyond just Christianity. As I will argue, religion was still unmistakably present in material culture, literature, politics, and the Russian identity despite the decline of its relevance and legitimacy. Orthodoxy’s cultural hegemony is the target of Gor’kii and others’ post-Christian rhetoric.

Nicholas II’s legitimization of his reign via the name and institution of Orthodoxy is precisely what made religion a primary focus of the revolutionary movements. Though the Church itself played a smaller and smaller role with time, the tsar co-opted its role as spiritual leader and divine middleman. The façade of authority remained while power changed hands in the background. Marxism, the dominant form of socialist thought in the late Russian Empire, was dogmatically anti-religious; Sovietization of the philosophy produced political actors and movements just as, if not to an even greater extent, focused on Christianity (and its eradication from public life). Even the 1905 revolts demanded reform of state religion, finally wrestling from the tsar the freedom of to choose one’s faith, which perhaps had been the Church’s final firm grasp on authority other than the tsar himself. The following section examines Orthodoxy’s precarious position in society as an imposed cultural institution with declining legitimacy in the eyes of the people from the eighteenth through the turn of the twentieth century. As I will attempt to show, during this period the Church’s influence faced increasing competition from rising social and cultural movements as it attempted to hold on to its position as incumbent and the power to define the official state ideology and censorial propriety, among other privileges. Either Orthodoxy would remain the Russian Empire’s water, so to speak, or there would be a sea change on the horizon.

The struggle for dominance between church and state began nearly two centuries before any revolution. For clarity, I have divided the relevant history into three timelines to highlight the impactful forces and events that gradually chipped away at the Russian Orthodox Church’s influence during this period: restrictions of the Church’s scope of political power in favor of the tsar, cultural and identity tumult among Russians, and the tsar’s delegitimization as a political and spiritual leader. These are concurrent timelines, not successive, and thus their effects are additive and interactive. It is far from an exhaustive list, but these narratives collectively represent the most important transformations in the Russian Empire that contributed to its post-Christian secular turn following the turn of the twentieth century. Considering the stark difference in the position of the Church between 1700 and 1905, a more comprehensive list could be several volumes of history. The institution of Orthodoxy of Peter’s time would never be able to recognize the pitiful puppet that was the Church at the end of the Empire, relegated to a useful façade under Nicholas.[[20]](#footnote-21) The head of the Orthodox Church once had more power than the tsar, which is likely why some of the earliest reforms of church oversight happened after the 1701 death of Patriarch Adrian. Peter the Great, preparing for a war to capture the territory of his future St. Petersburg, had his eye on absolute power, and that meant taking on the Church. As Peter turned his battle campaign against Finland, he started the centuries-long campaign against religion for the power to rule the nation.

Political restriction of the Church’s power is bookended by Peter’s reforms (1710s) and Nicholas’s signing of the freedom of religion after Bloody Sunday (1905). The first quarter of the eighteenth century was marked by sweeping changes to the structure of the Russian government. One of the most fundamental changes occurred in the lead up to the victory over the Finns. The creation of the Holy Synod in 1721 alongside the Senate codified and regulated the dual governments that had existed before and placed them both under his control. In the immediate term, Peter’s position above the law and Lord elevated the tsar to unprecedented levels of power. He was able to change cultural norms like the beard tax and military regulations like clerical exceptions at the snap of a finger without a patriarch or even God who could say otherwise. His successors used this reconfiguration of power repeatedly to degrade the official capacities of Church authorities. In 1764, Catherine II used this power to redistribute monasteries’ material possessions and shut some down entirely. In the reign of her son, Pavel I (1796-1801) reallocated censorial powers from the Church to the state and began permitting Old Believers, a competitor to the official Church, to build their own houses of worship. Alexander I, Pavel’s son, in 1816 transferred jurisdiction of social and behavioral regulation from the Church’s judgment to the civil courts. Along with many other parts of society, Alexander II in his time on the throne (1855-1881) instituted myriad reforms restricting the Church’s power, including matters related to education at local schools, further tolerance for Old Believers, property inheritance, and regulation of affairs at all organizational levels. Orthodoxy, as an institution, increasingly became relegated to official authority in a small, rigidly defined set of circumstances. The decisions of the Church mattered less and less to the public life of the Empire with each passing year.

Yet, religious identity was the topic in much of public life throughout the nineteenth century. In the wake of the previous century’s western influences, time spent in the Patriotic War of 1812 against Napoleon, and an attempted revolution on the day of his coronation, a new era of Russian religious nationalism rose to its apogee under Nicholas I (1825-1855). His Ministry of National Education [*Ministerstvo narodnogo prosveshcheniia*], led by Count Sergei Uvarov, proposed a philosophy to reaffirm the hierarchy driving the Russian Empire, one which would ultimately drive it into the ground: “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality” [“*Pravoslavie, Samoderzhavie, Narodnost’*”].[[21]](#footnote-22) (The first Soviet successor to Uvarov as Minister of National Education would be Anatolii Lunacharskii, longtime friend of Gor’kii.) This slogan became known some decades later as Uvarov’s “Theory of Official Nationality” [*Teoriia ofitsial’noi narodnosti*], a term coined in 1873 by literary historian Alexander Pypin.[[22]](#footnote-23) The formulation posited a perplexing order of priorities: though it was first, Orthodoxy was increasingly subservient to the second, the tsar’s absolute authority, including over the operations of the Church. The remaining piece, nationality, which may also be translated as ethnicity or national character, beckons to something, though it is vague enough to apply to anything conceivably Russian. The result is blurred lines across several intersecting axes. In theory, the Orthodox religion was leading Uvarov’s triumvirate, but both it and the secular mandate belonged to the tsar. Put slightly differently, no one came to God except through the Romanovs. All of their subjects, those making up the *narod*, would have to find themselves among the faithful hoping for salvation from their earthly existence.

Shortly following Uvarov’s 1833 theory of national identity set in motion the greatly influential polemic with the Westernizers. The discourse, which unfolded between 1836 and the end of the 1860s, resulted in another schism in religious life and Russian identity. The collective title “Slavophiles” refers to a semi-organized group of thinkers and writers based in Moscow who emphasized conservatism and based Russianness primarily on the contents of Uvarov’s Official Nationality, though that did not always confer agreement with Nicholas’s actual policies. In their ranks were predominantly religious writers, historians, philosophers, and clergymen, but a few big names such as Dostoevskii, Gogol’, and Tiutchev may be included in a list of their adherents. Opposite them were the Westernizers, a group of intellectuals who saw Russia’s future largely in the civilizations of northwestern Europe. Much of their influence came from French and German Enlightenment thinkers, in particular. The Westernizers included many authors, publishers, philosophers, professors, and publicists of significant stature and clout in Russia at the time, including Vissarion Belinskii, Ivan Turgenev, Alexander Herzen, and others. As historian Peter Duncan details in his *Russian Messianism* (2000), the Slavophiles were deeply interested in defining the *narod*.[[23]](#footnote-24) Despite all that divides the Slavophiles and Westernizers, however, I assert that they share also their attention on the *narod* as a path forward.

The debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers did not invent the Russian identity crisis, but rather gave the population a clear decision to make. Duncan and others almost exclusively focus on the opinions dividing the two factions, and perhaps rightfully so, but in between analyses of opposing viewpoints and their minutiae, the topic of debate becomes vague. Each was a group of idealists that debated the nature of a better utopia for their country, and at the center of both desires was a collective laboring toward one ideal or another. Slavophiles upheld a fictionalized Orthodox community [*obshchina*] or pan-Slavic unity of the common folk with an optional tsar, while Westernizers championed romanticized socialist communes.[[24]](#footnote-25) Regardless of individual political bent, nearly everyone saw the urgency in defining the Russian identity, and the primary task therein was organizing the *narod*. One of the few details they agreed on was the end of serfdom, allowing greater utilization of general labor.[[25]](#footnote-26) Discourse spread through *The Muscovite [Moskvitianin]*, *The Contemporary* *[Sovremennik],* and other political journals of the day expresses a growing concern about the fundamental social issues of Russia’s body politic: “where are you heading, Russia?” to paraphrase the end of Gogol’s *Dead Souls* (1844). As Isaiah Berlin describes, addressing this issue would become the primary function of the nascent intelligentsia, to whom he also attributes the 1917 revolution, emerging alongside the Slavophile-Westernizer debate.[[26]](#footnote-27) This question of the *narod* asked the public to pick a future national configuration based on Russia’s population, not its leader, as the public tried to understand who it was.

The political upheaval beginning in the 1860s gave these questions about identity a renewed tangibility while raising the stakes of political action. This additional pressure leads to the third timeline, the decline of the Russian throne’s legitimacy and ability to exercise its power. As the Church becomes an organ of the government and the people engage in debates about Russia’s future, eyes turn toward the tsar for answers. Alexander II took the throne in 1855 soon before Russia’s definitive defeat in the Crimean War was formalized. The embarrassing loss, in addition to the resulting economic struggles, signaled just some of the many struggles he would face during his reign. The “Great Reformer,” as Alexander became known, was also met repeatedly with great external and internal resistance despite his attempts at liberalizing the state. This trend would remain true through the end of the Russian Empire’s existence. Around Alexander’s ascension to the throne, the revolutionary movement began to take form, and members of the intelligentsia that evolved out of the Slavophile-Westernizer polemic filled its ranks. Anti-governmental sentiment had long been in the Russian air, most acutely in the capital St. Petersburg since the 1825 Decembrist Revolt, though never before as organized and articulate as in emerging populist groups [*narodnichestvo*] of the 1860s. In *Russian Populism: A History* (2022), historian Christopher Ely summarizes the movement as “the intelligentsia’s attempt to envision a Russia that could transcend the divisions that defined it.”[[27]](#footnote-28) Ely’s broad definition explicitly emphasizes the progressive intelligentsia’s preoccupation with Russia’s identity crisis as the catalyst for the populist and, by extension, later revolutionary movements. The divisions he speaks of are multitude: Slavophile-Westernizer, urban-rural, gentry-peasant, monarchist-collectivist, and even intelligentsia-*narod* itself. Interestingly, it implicitly reasserts transcendence, i.e. religion for my purposes, as the key to this crisis of self-understanding. Though uprisings of the second half of the nineteenth century were not religious, it was nonetheless consistently in the background.

Though the populists started the season of tumult, they were not alone. In true Hegelian fashion, discontent and protest swung back and forth between anti-monarchist, the populists and socialists, and pro-monarchist, the religious nationalists and counter-reformists, factions. Divisions around the tsar’s legitimacy, such as those along cultural and socioeconomic lines, play an increasingly visible and violent role in public life beginning with the seven assassination attempts, the final of which was successfully carried out in 1881 by the populist terror group The People’s Will [*Narodnaia volia*]. The ascension of Alexander II’s son, Alexander III, brought with it a renewed conservatism targeted at the perceived nihilism that killed the previous tsar. This period of counter-reforms reevaluated and pushed back against the Great Reformer’s liberalizations throughout the country, but it was met with a more militant revolutionary wave, Marxism.[[28]](#footnote-29) This policy change is summarized in Alexander III’s proclamation “Manifesto on Unshakable Autocracy” [*Manifest nezyblemosti samoderzhaviia*] written shortly after the assassination by Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the Over-Procurator of the Holy Synod. It outlines, in summary, a plan to fortify their power through the promotion of Russian traditional supremacism, i.e. Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and a feeble but surviving *narod*.[[29]](#footnote-30) Like Uvarov’s tripartite Official Nationalism, Pobedonostsev hoped to retain as much power in the Church through the tsar, and, similar to the original, he would only be successful temporarily. Eventually, he will become the canary in the coal mine for Nicholas II. Before then, however, Alexander’s tightening grip on power would continue to stoke the flames of division throughout the country.

Public discontent in the following decades drew from a multitude of social, economic, and political grievances held by the population under the Empire’s final three tsars. The 1880s saw a resurgence of Russian religious nationalism as Alexander III expanded government power against minority ethnicities and religions, and in doing so was successful in quelling most protest throughout his reign. There was a single assassination attempt in 1888, which did not immediately kill the tsar, but it marked the decline in Alexander’s health that would ultimately lead to his death six years later. In that time, the tsar oversaw the disastrous 1891-1892 famine which caused the deaths of 400,000-650,000 people in the Volga region.[[30]](#footnote-31) Though the tragedy was caused by natural phenomena more so than governmental incompetence, the death of over four percent of European Russia—a figure which does not include the additional deaths by illness—never left the minds of Russians.[[31]](#footnote-32) The government’s failed response has been described as the spark that reignited the revolutionary fervor that eventually led to Nicholas II’s abdication of the throne.[[32]](#footnote-33) The period of instability of Alexander’s final years weakened the tsar’s position in governance of the Empire, and Nicholas’s continuous blunders did little to reverse that trend. Yet another instance of tsarist negligence with fatal consequences for the commoner happened on the day of his coronation in May 1896. The royal court set up a public reception in Khodynka Field outside of Moscow, to which hundreds of thousands of Russians flocked with the promise of gifts and food. When poor organization and insufficiently stocked buffets met the needy *narod*, a stampede killed anywhere from 1300 to 5000+ people according to various estimates.[[33]](#footnote-34) While this bloodbath would have been enough of a stain on the coronation proceedings, Nicholas’s response, which was to carry on as normal to his reception ball with foreign diplomats, sent victims and onlookers alike into an uproar. Like the famine, we can see the stampede at Khodynka echo throughout literature of the time, including Konstantin Bal’mont’s “Our Tsar” (1906), Fёdor Sologub’s “In the Crowd” (1907), Lev Tolstoi’s “Khodynka” (1920), and Gor’kii’s *The Life of Klim Samgin* (1936). The tragedy continues to make an appearance in various artistic works of the twenty-first century as a great tragedy of the Russian people under the foot of Tsar Nicholas.

The turn of the twentieth century also saw further internal strife and the destabilization of an increasing number of governmental and societal structures before violence engulfed urban Russia. Nicholas successfully broke up the major pro-revolution populist terror groups, but this lull in activity was only temporary as frustrations came to a head. The next major domestic disruption came as the first major pro-nationalist protests. in response to past anti-governmental political action and the tsar’s failure to maintain his, and thus Orthodoxy’s authority. Recent research in extreme nationalism like Stepanov (2020) and others has shown that radical monarchist groups, the most prominent of which were the so-called “Black Hundreds” [*chernosotentsy*] and “Union of Russian People” [*Soiuz russkogo naroda*], carried out vigilante justice for the traditional Russian way of life first in support of the Nicholas and, when even the tsar failed to sufficiently uphold the monarchist ideal, at all costs in support of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality.[[34]](#footnote-35) To these ends, conservatives and traditionalists spread their own terror in the streets of a divided Russia much like the populists of the 1860s-1880s did. The most notable manifestation of this expression of nationalism was the antisemitic pogroms that happened in a number of major cities. In the name of Orthodoxy, marauding groups stormed Jewish urban quarters and killed or destroyed whatever was in their path. The most notorious pogrom of the period is the 1903 multi-day terror brought to Kishinev in modern-day Moldova. Dozens of Jews were killed, hundreds were injured, and blocks of the city were razed by arson.[[35]](#footnote-36) Once again, however, reactions to these horrors were preserved in the literature of the day, including one by Gor’kii himself. Now the tsar, his detractors, his supporters, and the groups in between have taken up arms for the right to dictate the Russian Empire’s narrative of self.

In the two centuries between the 1703 founding of Saint Petersburg, the beginning of modern Russia, and the 1903 Kishinev pogrom, the religious institutions of Russia suffered a great blow to their direct influence, but something undoubtedly remained in the people. However, historian Gregory Freeze notes that little changed in the public face of religion—that is, until Bloody Sunday in 1905, at least.[[36]](#footnote-37) Perhaps more than ever, Russians needed an outlet for their religious impulses. As Laurie Manchester explains throughout her study on secular intelligentsia from clerical families, growing secularization of public life can heighten the importance of religious feeling for individuals, wherein it is “generalized or reoriented” and reincorporated into their lives.[[37]](#footnote-38) I extend Manchester’s argument to writers who preceded Gor’kii’s own recasting of Christian narrative dogma. This final section offers a sample of the works that similarly took aspects of the Christian paradigm and secularized them for humor, social commentary, and personal expression. Briefly, I will outline the secular-yet-religious motivations/impulses of Russian Marxism, early revolutionary literature, the visual arts, and Orthodox scripture of the late-nineteenth century as a short history of the secularizing genre. Each of these predecessors echoes in the discussions of the other chapters of this dissertation. While each of these philosophical, anthropological, and artistic critiques may not have directly influenced the Gor’kii and the Capri circle, the proto-transpositions demonstrate that the Church’s authority was fading while people looked elsewhere for their spiritual mana.

Scholars, philosophers, theologians, and others have long puzzled over the relationship between religion, especially Christianity, and Marxism. In theory, the two belong in separate realms of thought and therefore do not need to have any interaction. Simply put, Marxism is a system of understanding economic problems, while Christianity is a system of understanding theological problems. Moreover, the mutual antagonism among the two philosophies’ proponents problematizes any attempts to bring Christianity and Marxism closer together. Nonetheless many have set out to bring the ends of this political horseshoe into contact with each other. Much of this effort ultimately leads to the German anthropologist and philosopher of religion Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) and his work *Das Wesen des Christentums* (*The Essence of Christianity*, 1841). Having prepared for the priesthood before studying under Hegel at the University of Berlin and renouncing Christianity for materialism, Feuerbach offers in his treatise an anthropocentric reformulation of God and religion:

By his God thou knowest the man, and by the man his God; the two are identical. Whatever is God to a man, that is his heart and soul; and conversely, God is the manifested inward nature, the expressed self of a man—religion, the solemn unveiling of a man’s hidden treasures, the revelation of his intimate thoughts, the open confession of his love secrets.[[38]](#footnote-39)

Feuerbach’s measured analysis of religion opens doors to further investigation because he finds value in the “self-consciousness of man” that religion fosters in adherents, which separates them from the brutes of nature.[[39]](#footnote-40) The self-awareness of political philosophy (materialism) instead stands in for the supernatural power of prayer and other faith-based religious traditions, which do not interest Feuerbach in the slightest. This anthropological religion reached Gor’kii and his contemporaries through Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels themselves, who deeply engaged with Feuerbach while preparing their own writings.[[40]](#footnote-41) Marxism from its origins was already concerned with “religion” and how it affected our conceptions of ourselves.

By that time, the exultation of humankind had been significantly Russified along with the rest of Marx’s theories, as émigré religious and political philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev (1874–1948) attests in the epigraph above. In his essay collection *The Origins and Meaning of Russian Communism* (1937), he goes as far as to argue that “Marxism is not just science and politics, but is also a faith, a religion. And on this basis its power is founded.”[[41]](#footnote-42) Belief in redemption of the proletariat forsaken by the state and society gradually took the place of a Christian religion, the leader of both found in the tsar. This was possible because Christianity and Marxism were not purely theological and economic theories. Marxism and Leninism, as it came to be, were accompanied by a moral system for self-other relationships, an absolute authority, a praiseworthy idol, an eschatology, foundational texts, and an array of other qualities that would compete with Christian beliefs and practices in the minds of the public. Numerous studies have discussed in detail the comparisons between Christianity and Marxism or Leninism, many of which are cited throughout this chapter. This is true in the most general sense, such as Andrew Collier’s philosophical examination *Christianity and Marxism* (2001), as well in the most specific sense, such as *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (1983) by Nina Tumarkin. State-sponsored religion had stopped fulfilling the spiritual needs of the Russian Empire, and we can see Leninism (as well as the later Stalin cult of personality and present-day Russian Federation’s restoration of relations with the Orthodox Church) as its successor in many facets of life.

Russian artists, especially writers, have used the Church and the Bible as objects of mockery and ridicule. A classic example is Alexander Pushkin’s *The Gabrilead* [*Gavriiliada*], written in 1821 but unpublished in its entirety until 1917, a long poem that at once denigrates the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Lk. 1:26-38) and the tsar of the time, Alexander I. Pushkin’s coded critique of the imperial leader further demonstrates that state and religion had been subsumed by the tsar himself. One major milestone in the development of the genre of Biblical transposition is Nikolai Chernyshevskii’s utopian *What is to be Done? From Stories about New People* (1863), written while the author was in prison for agitating against the government. Chernyshevskii, as with many in this trend, came from a clerical family, but Feuerbach was an equally strong influence.[[42]](#footnote-43) A favorite of Lenin, other revolutionaries, and anyone who wanted to fit the New Soviet Person mold, the hastily written novel envisions a social revolution with modern young socialists in place of Christ, Mary, and the disciples. Christian typologies and symbols remain, however, both implicitly and explicitly. The heroine Vera Pavlova, whose name recalls faith [*vera*] and Saint Paul, takes on the role of Virgin Mary, who is called Chastity in the book. In the famous fourth dream, Vera is transfigured into a goddess while Chastity is anthropologized.[[43]](#footnote-44) Even some Russian editions of the book have noted in the margins that the mysterious figure of Rakhmetov, while based on a real person, is shrouded in prophecy and linked to Judgment Day-like revolution.[[44]](#footnote-45) The novel also features phrases borrowed directly from the Bible, such as “salt of the earth” (Mt. 5:13), if none of the other examples were plain enough. Once called more important than Marx’s *Capital* in inspiring the Bolshevik revolution, Chernyshevskii’s *What is to Done?* was one of the first and strongest examples of how Christianity and socialist revolution came together in the arts.[[45]](#footnote-46) In addition, there were also examples that spoke out against the Russian Orthodox Church directly.

In the visual arts, members of the troupe of “Itinerants” [*Peredvizhniki*], such as Il’ia Repin, Vasilii Perov, and Ivan Kramskoi, highlighted ordinary people’s religious fervor and religious institutions’ broken promises. Perov’s *A Village’s Easter Procession* (1861) shows the faithful *narod* leading Eastern celebrations outside a church while the priests fall over themselves drunk. Both Perov’s *Tea Party in Mytishchi* [*Chaepitie v Mytishchakh*] (1862) and Repin’s *Protodeacon* [*Protod’iakon*] (1877) feature obese, rosy-cheeked clerics who have clearly eaten more than their fair share of food and drink. To drive home the point, Perov contrasts the plump priest with an emaciated amputee holding out his hand for crumbs. Repin’s monumental *Procession in the Kursk Gubernate* (1883) shows officials towering over and beating a throng of pious commoners, lead by a pertinacious disabled boy. *Christ in the Desert* by Ivan Kramskoi depicts the Biblical Jesus in his forty days of wandering, but it is does not look like a Christ who can resist temptation: dejected eyes stare blankly downward, but they stay visible to show the sunken sockets that hold them; a face beaten by the elements expresses hopelessness and dejection; and tightly grasped hands point not to God but to the hard, gray rocks that surround. Kramskoi focuses on the humanity of the Son of God with no divinity to be found, much as Chernyshevskii anthropomorphized Chastity. A final example is Repin’s *Before Confession* (1885), which was known as *Refusing Confession* during the Soviet years. It shows a populist revolutionary on the eve of execution, like many real people of Repin’s day, who sits with his hands in his jacket while looking suspiciously at the priest offering the sacrament. Repin contrasts their systems of belief and elevates the revolutionary cause beyond the mortal concerns of the priest. The church is increasingly competing with belief systems for dominance over the soul of the nation and *narod*.

Upon realizing the importance of literature to Christianity, some authors decided to write their own. An underappreciated example of this literary reformulation is Vladimir Korolenko’s “Makar’s Dream (A Christmas Story)” [*Sviatochnyi rasskaz*] (1883), which predates Gor’kii’s subtitled Christmas tale by over a decade. Korolenko was a publicist and writer who supported the revolutionary movement, serving several exiled sentences for his part, and considered Gor’kii a friend.[[46]](#footnote-47) In the story, a young man dies and is undeservedly sent to hell because of a capricious, drunk priest who holds the keys to heaven. More than just a sharp rebuke of clerics’ gluttony, we see elements of the secularizing doubt in God brought about by the question of evil, which Gor’kii discusses in length throughout his earlier works. The strongest example of rewriting the Christian tradition is undoubtedly Lev Tolstoi’s actual redrafting of the Bible to include only the New Testament Gospels with his own annotations. *The Unification and Translation of the Four Gospels* [*Soedinenie i perevod chetyrёkh Evangelii*], published first abroad 1891-1894 and finally in Russia for the first time in 1906, offers a meticulously annotated and reorganized version of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In the introduction, Tolstoi accuses the Church of dividing humanity along arbitrary dogmatic lines and propagating a “faith that is … not only just a lie, but an immoral deception” using Christ’s teachings.[[47]](#footnote-48) The most significant point Tolstoi makes in his reformulation is to deny Christ’s resurrection. His motivation, that it muddles the Truth and may serve as a reason for disbelief in new followers, is an interesting theological position, but to focus on that would be to bury the lede. The most intriguing aspect of Tolstoi’s conclusion is that God is only useful insofar as we can see ourselves in God as a human, that omnipotence and other supernatural qualities of the divine are of little worth to the average person. This radical disagreement over God’s humanity and humanity’s divinity put Tolstoi on trial excommunication from the Church in 1901. Despite public outcry, Tolstoi and his supporters lost the case, but, in all likelihood, the Church lost much more in the long term.

*Chapter Preview*

Chapter 1, “The Beginning at the End,” introduces the concept of change central to the study, post-Christianity, and its historical precedents reaching back to the creation of the Holy Governing Synod by Peter I with a focus on the second half of the nineteenth century. The chapter argues that the Romanov dynasty, long before Gor’kii began writing, had created a secular religion around the tsar and by Nicholas II’s ascension, the people had widely lost faith in the institution, but not their faith entirely. From there, Chapter 2, “Confronting Evil,” narrows the focus on the upbringing and early career of Maxim Gor’kii (né Aleksei Peshkov), who, I argue, understood the nature of change as stated above and capitalized on his upbringing and talents to proactively create a bridge for the Russian people to traverse the treacherous future before them. The chapter examines how his childhood and adolescent exposure to an unorthodox concept of the Christian God manifest as Gor’kii’s earliest post-Christian transpositions in an array of his prose and plays prior to the events of 1905 in Russia. These first two chapters demonstrate how national and personal history had laid the groundwork for the multifaceted revolutionary change that Gor’kii, as writer and politician, would set in motion.

The next two chapters seek to show how Gor'kii addressed the spiritual character of the Russian people in defense of what he saw as necessary, even inevitable reforms on Russia's horizon. Chapter 3, “Factories of Worship,” delves into his actionable suggestions for Russian believers based on the experiences he shared with labor and religious leaders during the events of “Bloody Sunday” in January 1905, which gave shape to his essay “9 January” and novel *Mother*. I argue that the two works collectively depose all three members of the Christian Trinity and replace the Son and the Spirit with socialist successors in Pavel and Pelageia, respectively. The pair, fulfill a new righteous, just truth that will mark a novel paradigm in Russia, albeit poorly defined. Chapter 4, “A People’s Hagiography,” shows how Gor’kii outlined that new absolute truth and thus replace the final member of the Trinity, God-the-Father, in his novel *Confession*. A long and winding narrative filled with dozens of characters to summarily represent the Russian people, the story declares the supremacy of the narod as the one, true God who will rescue the country from the bedlam of the past and present. Gor’kii thus completes his post-Christian Trinity while simultaneously upending the monarchy’s philosophy of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality.” Therefore, we see how *Mother* and *Confession* form the core of Gor’kii’s revolutionary gospel, a declaration of the next epoch in human history for the people and by the people. It would, however, not be that easy to change the world.

The final two chapters take the topic beyond Gor’kii and close reading. Chapter 5, “The Devil’s in the Details,” explores the added benefit of introducing computational methods to the investigation, which will have up to this point relied on traditional approaches exclusively. There I describe the creation and preliminary results of “Augmented Textuality,” (AT) an original software package that functions as a pipeline from an input of multiple texts to a visual content comparison.[[48]](#footnote-49) The algorithm behind AT uses modified versions of some of the latest Natural Language Processing technologies for Russian to transform plain text to machine-readable text in order to learn the linguistic features of the provided corpus. In addition to creating a searchable database for further exploration, the algorithm then finds and evaluates potentially overlapping pieces between individual texts. For *A Revolutionary Gospel*, I compared some of Gor’kii’s works, including *Mother* and *Confession*, to the 1865 Synodal Translation [*Sinodal’nyi perevod*] of the Bible, the version Gor’kii would have read as a child. These data are presented in visualizations from a web interface for AT. Chapter 6, the coda but nevertheless named “An Intermezzo on Capri,” as I zoom out from Gor’kii’s literary labor to consider the legacy of his ideological influence in the Party and Soviet Union. This conclusion, with more questions than answers, points toward a future path of inquiry along later writers and cultural movements. I highlight three other socialist-leaning authors’ works, which were written under Gor’kii’s guidance on the Italian island of Capri and show evidence of transposed Orthodox elements. The indication a mentorship betweeen Gor’kii and younger writers represents a promising path for future research and additional chapters in the project. I conclude by considering the present-day use of religion in Russian politics and what is to be done to understand whither the trend has gone.

1. David Foster Wallace, *This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion about Living a Compassionate Life*, 1st ed (Little, Brown, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Nikolai Berdiaev, *Istoki i smysl russkogo kommunizma* (Azbuka, 2018), 123-124. “Этoт «оpтoдoкcaльный» мapкcизм, кoтopый в дeйcтвитeльнocти был пo-pyсcки тpaнcфopмиpoвaнным мapкcизмoм, вocпpинял пpeждe вceгo нe дeтepминиcтичecкyю, эвoлюциoннyю, нayчнyю cтopoнy мapкcизмa, a eгo мeccиaнcкyю, мифoтвopчecкyю peлигиoзнyю cтopoнy, дoпycкaющyю экзaльтaцию peвoлюциoннoй вoли, выдвигaющyю нa пepвый плaн peвoлюциoннyю бopьбy пpoлeтapиaтa, pyкoвoдимyю opгaнизoвaнным мeньшинcтвoм, вдoxнoвлeнным coзнaтeльнoй пpoлeтapcкoй идeeй. Этoт opтoдoкcaльный, тотaлитapный мapкcизм вceгдa тpeбoвaл иcпoвeдaния мaтepиaлиcтичecкoй вepы, нo в нeм были и cильныe идeaлиcтичecкиe элементы. Oн пoкaзaл, кaк вeликa влacть идeи нaд чeлoвeчecкoй жизнью, ecли oнa тoтaльнa и cooтвeтcтвyeт инcтинктaм масс.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. V. I. Lenin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 5th ed. (PSS), vol. 41, 55 vols. (Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1981), 9. “Без «генеральной репетиции» 1905 года победа Октябрьской революции 1917 года была бы невозможна.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l’autre, Ou, La Prothèse d’origine*, Incises (Galilée, 1996), 15. “«Oui, je n'ai qu 'une langue, or ce n 'est pas la mienne.»” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Gor’kii is surrounded in “myths,” and I am far from the first to suggest that. Academic and popular presses alike speak of his dual reality. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Cf., for example, a classic article, Melford E. Spiro, “Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation,” in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004). It continues to evoke responses into this century, e.g., Kevin Schilbrack, “What Isn’t Religion?,” *The Journal of Religion* 39, no. 9 (July 2013): 291–318. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (Basic Books, 1973), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Caryl Emerson, *Boris Godunov: Transpositions of a Russian Theme*, Indiana-Michigan Series in Russian and East European Studies (Indiana University Press, 1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Emerson, *Boris Godunov*, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Pavel Basinskii, *Gorʹkii*, 2nd ed. (Molodaia gvardiia, 2006), 369. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Secularization and post-Christian(ity) are related but far from interchangeable. The latter is an evolutionary strand of the former relevant to some but not all cultures with Christianity as its primary faith system. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Gifford Lectures (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3. Emphasis mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Compact of Warsaw." Encyclopedia Britannica, January 21, 2025. https://www.britannica.com/event/Compact-of-Warsaw. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Maurice Barbier, *La laïcité* (European Schoolbooks Limited, 1995), https://www-harmatheque-com.proxy1.library.virginia.edu/ebook/2738430635. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Cf. “Artículo 3” and “Artículo 26.” Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, “Constitución de la República española de 9 de diciembre 1931,” Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, accessed January 25, 2025, https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/constitucion-de-la-republica-espanola-de-9-de-diciembre-1931/html/eb011790-baf1-4bac-b9bd-b50f042667ad\_2.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Maarit Jänterä-Jareborg, “Religion and the Secular State in Sweden,” in Religion and the Secular State: Interim National Reports Issued for the Occasion of the XVIIIth International Congress of Comparative Law (Provo, Utah: The International center for Law and Religion Studies, Brigham Young University, 2010), 671. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. John Givens, *The Image of Christ in Russian Literature: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Bulgakov, Pasternak* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2018), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Vladimir Aleksandrovich Fedorov, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov’ i gosudarstvo: Sinodal’nyi period 1700-1917*, Stranitsy rossiiskoi historii (Russkaia panorama, 2003), 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Lesley Chamberlain, *Ministry of Darkness: How Sergei Uvarov Created Conservative Modern Russia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Pypin, 1873, *Kharakteristiki literaturnykh mnenii ot dvatadtsatykh do piatidesiatykh godov*, appears in the chapter title “Glava II. Narodnost’ ofitsial’naia.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Peter J. S. Duncan, *Russian Messianism: Third Rome, Revolution, Communism and After* (Routledge, 2002), 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. This is a gross oversimplification, but it hopefully shows the commonalities between the two opponents. Herzen is a notable exception. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. William Wagner in Nikolay Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*, trans. Michael R. Katz (Cornell University Press, 1989), 367, note 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Isaiah Berlin, “A Remarkable Decade,” in *Russian Thinkers*, Second (Penguin Books, 2008), 131-132. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Christopher Ely, *Russian Populism: A History* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Charles E. Timberlake and Donald W. Treadgold, *Religious and Secular Forces in Late Tsarist Russia: Essays in Honor of Donald W. Treadgold* (University of Washington Press, 1992), 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Duncan, *Russian Messianism*, 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Luke Kelly, “British Humanitarianism and the Russian Famine, 1891–2,” *Historical Research* 89, no. 246 (2016): 824–45. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. The famine struck a chord with those in the Russian intelligentsia. Vladimir Korolenko’s essay cycle “In the Hungry Year” [V golodnyi god] (1893), Ivan Bunin’s stories “On Another’s Side” [Na chuzhoi storone] (1893) and “To the Edge of the World” [Na krai mira] (1894), and Nikolai Teleshov’s “Bread and Salt” [Kleb-sol’] (1893) and “Moving On” [Samokhody] (1894) are a sample of literature that imprinted the tragedy of the famine onto Russian social consciousness. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: The History of the Russian Revolution* (Viking, 1996), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. A.I. Utkin, “K voprosu o prichinakh padeniia samoderzhaviia” (Aktual’nye problemy istorii, Orekhovo-Zuevo: Gosudarstvennyi gumanitarno-tekhnologicheskii universitet, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. S. A. Stepanov, “The Black Hundreds and the Russian Orthodox Clergy,” *Russian Studies in History* 59, no. 1–2 (April 2, 2020): 124–36. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. “Kishinev,” in *Electronic Jewish Encyclopaedia*, 1988, <https://eleven.co.il/diaspora/communities/12107/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Gregory Freeze, “Dechristianization of Holy Rus? Religious Observance in Vladimir Dioceses, 1900-1913,” in *Orthodox Christianity in Imperial Russia: A Source Book on Lived Religion* (Indiana University Press, 2014), 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Laurie Manchester, *Holy Fathers, Secular Sons: Clergy, Intelligentsia, and the Modern Self in Revolutionary Russia* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, His Gesammelte Werke, 5 (Akademie-Verlag, 1973), 12-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Ibid., 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. Both philosophers have at least one work dedicated to Feuerbach: Marx’s “Thesen über Feuerbach” (1845) and Engels’ *Leudwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie* (1886). They co-wrote *Die deutsche Ideologie* (1846), a historical-materialist criticism of Feuerbach and other German “idealist” philosophy. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Nikolai Berdiaev, *Istoki i smysl russkogo kommunizma* (Azbuka, 2018), 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. Chernyshevskii quotes Feuerbach multiple times in his novel. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. William G. Wagner in Nikolay Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*, trans. Michael R. Katz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 367, n. 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Soloman Reiser in Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevskii, *Chto Delatʹ?*, ed. Soloman Abramovich Reiser (Nauka, 1975), 860, n. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. J. Frank, “N. G. Chernyshevsky: A Russian Utopia,” *Southern Review* 3 (1967), 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. Anatolii Vasil’evich Lunacharskii, *Sobranie sochinenii. V 8-mi t. Literaturovedenie. Kritika. Estetika.*, vol. 2, 8 vols. (Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964), 20-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenie. Proizvedeniia 1880-1884*, vol. 24, 90 vols. (Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1957), 10. “И вот изучение это привело меня к убеждению, что та вера, которую исповедует наша иерархия и которой она учит народ, есть не только ложь, но и безнравственный обман.” [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. The author maintains that the coincidence of the acronym/initials are simply that, a coincidence. “Augmented Textuality” is an admittedly unimpressive pun on “augmented reality,” the technology that overlays data on everyday life objects, spaces, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)