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Religious Culture: Faith in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia

Jerry Pankhurst

The former Soviet Union is undergoing a religious revival. People inside and outside the Russian Orthodox church are reexamining its ancient ways, rediscovering its long-forgotten saints, searching its institutional memory for answers to urgent questions facing the nation. The Western reaction to this remarkable resurgence of religion in Russia has been mixed. All observers welcome the fact that free inquiry about religion and free religious worship have been restored in the Russian Federation. At the same time, many are concerned about the xenophobic tendencies that have accompanied the religious revival in Russia and that became especially evident after the liberal forces suffered a defeat in the December 1993 parliamentary election. Calls to restore the great Russian empire sounded by the winners brought to mind the old slogan, "Moscow, the Third Rome," that had spurred Muscovy in the 16th-17th centuries to expand its dominion over neighboring countries. The situation is further exacerbated by a few Archbishops and Metropolitans who exhort the Russian people to bring the orthodox, unchanging faith -- *Pravoslavie* -- to the world.

But Western evangelicals who flock to Russia hoping to save it from itself find themselves in an awkward position. Ironically, they act as a missionary force that tries to sever Russian Orthodoxy from its traditional moorings and in the process could inadvertently transform the present religious revival into yet another victory for secularism. Just as their well-meaning counterparts are intent on building capitalism in Russia (a project no less heroic than that of building communism), Western religionists are determined to bring the reformation to a country that missed its chance at religious reform in the sixteenth century. But the Russians have seen all this before. Was not the Bolshevik Revolution a drive to impose Western enlightenment on the dark East and to replace its backward mores with the imported prescriptions for universal happiness?

While we cannot -- and should not -- avoid passing a judgment about the path that the religious revival has taken in Russia, we need to resist the temptation of imposing our ready-made schemes on a vastly different country without doing justice to its unique religious culture. It would be prudent to defer our judgment until we had a chance to examine the origins of *Pravoslavie* and the role it played in the nation's history, including the transformation that the Orthodox faith and church

institutions underwent during the Soviet era.

The term "religious culture" refers here not only to the life of the Russian Orthodox Church -- its religious corpus, worship rituals, and organizational principles, but also to a wider range of social practices that bear the imprint of Russian Orthodoxy. Russian religious culture has left its mark on every cultural domain in the nation. Its pervasiveness has much to do with the fact that the Russian Orthodox Church had been the favored religious organization in the land from at least the tenth century on. Adopted as the official faith of all Russias, Eastern Christianity remained inexorably tied to the state. When the state faltered under invasion and foreign control, the Church continued to nurture a sense of nationhood for Russians, preventing society from splintering and disintegrating. When the state regained its strength, the Church lent its considerable legitimizing power to the government and the state's imperial expansion. Hence, the strong historical bond that was formed between Russianness as an ethnic or national identity and Russian Orthodoxy as a religious affiliation.

By certain Western Christian (e.g., evangelical Protestant) standards, membership in a church is realized through regular participation and overt commitment to the church's values and goals. The Russian Orthodox Church adopts a far broader perspective on membership. One gains membership in the Russian Orthodox Church first and foremost through baptism performed at birth and only secondarily through participation in religious worship. The latter could be very sporadic without affecting the person's standing as an Orthodox faithful. Barring explicit evidence to the contrary, one's membership in the Orthodox Church was presumed to be established if one was born Russian. This applied not only to Orthodox Christians accepting the Church's authority but also to the so-called "old-believers" -- religious sectarians who refused to honor the church's innovations in liturgy and swore to uphold the old faith in the face of excommunication and persecution from the official church.

The contiguity between the boundaries of ethnicity and religion in Russia had important implications for other religious confessions, be this Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Jewish, or Buddhist. All those espousing non-Orthodox beliefs (*inovertsy*) were hard pressed to maintain their national identity as Russians and to act in a manner at least outwardly consistent with certain Orthodox ideas about propriety, authority, and loyalty. The right wing within Orthodoxy frequently saw conspiracies by the non-Orthodox, especially Jews, Masons and Catholics, as great threats to Mother Russia herself. Hence, such *inovertsy* experienced themselves and were perceived by others as not fully Russian -- a stigma they continue to carry

today.

In this century, the communist authorities worked hard to stamp out religious beliefs and replace old notions about Russian nationhood with the internationalist identity deemed proper for Soviet citizens. However, the old religious demarcation lines have not been erased completely. The atheist state professed by Stalin could not escape completely the formative influence of Russian Orthodoxy. Its vestiges shone through the public rituals and were clearly visible in the communist craving for political monopoly, cultural orthodoxy, and sanctimonious rigorism.

How did Orthodox customs manage to survive in atheistic Soviet society? To understand this phenomenon I want to invoke Clifford Geertz's concept of "spiritual afterimages" which refers to "reflections, reverberations, projections" of religious experience in daily life. [1] Formed in an earlier era, such reflections, reverberations, and projections often resurface at a later point in the nation's history as moral imperatives and sentiments that continue to guide national development. These imperatives may lack the clarity and purpose that distinguished the original precepts, but they leave a distinct mark on successive generations, on the country's political, social, and economic practices. During periods of religious revival, spiritual afterimages regain much of their original vitality, sometimes suppressing secular social forms and spurring powerful fundamentalist movements.

Along these lines we should see the current religious renaissance in Russia -- the increased church attendance, the desire to learn about the ancient saints, the longing for the wonders wrought by the holy people in the distant past, the renewed pilgrimage to holy places like Valaam (the monastery complex at the north end of Lake Ladoga) and Sarov (the home of St. Serafim). Through these practices, the spiritual afterimages of Russian history are revitalized and reincorporated into the nation's psyche. Besides these obvious stirrings, there are more subtle ways in which religious culture affects, and in turn is affected by, the developments in other domains of Russian culture. This confluence is not always benign. Given the historical precedents, we have to wonder if the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church will once again be used to legitimize the state's imperial ambitions, if the Church is ready to make concerted efforts to regain its spiritual autonomy, to encourage the growth of democratic political culture, to facilitate the transition to a market economy, to serve as a unifying force in these times of trouble. Such are weighty issues that have direct bearing on the future of Russian civilization. I cannot pretend to have answers to all the relevant questions, but I hope that the following discussion will clarify the stakes that Russian

society has in these issues and shed some light on the future of Russian Orthodoxy.

The Origins of Russian Religious Culture

In 1988, the Russian Orthodox Church marked its first millennium. The festivities commemorated the time when Grand Prince Vladimir committed himself and his nation to Eastern Christianity, making it the official faith of ancient Rus. Vladimir did not seem to meet much opposition to conversion from the population, but it would be a mistake to conclude that conversion was always voluntary. The vestiges of ancient folk religion survived for centuries in Russia, suggesting that it was deeply established in the lands of Rus. The chronicles and legends record many instances when severe force had to be used by both Vladimir and his lieutenants. Novgorod's conversion in particular was accompanied by a great deal of violence, and 100 years later everyone in the city, except the clergy and the nobility, remained pagans and not Christians. [2]

The paganism of Rus was weakly institutionalized -- there were no priests, temples, regular forms of worship, or a complex mythology -- but it seemed to have resonated deeply in people's hearts. As was generally the case with the Christianization of pagan nations, the new religion became more palatable through syncretism. Thus, "Perun the god of thunder becomes Elijah, with his chariot of fire; Veles becomes St. Blaise, and is still the patron of cattle." [3] As Fedotov [4] pointed out, the Christian cult of Mary was blended by ancient Rus with the Mother Earth and the female goddesses cult, one revolving around birth and the other governing individual destiny, so that Mary was cast as the mother of all mankind in Russian Orthodoxy. That is to say, when Christianity came to Rus and the Divine Motherhood cult was transferred to center on Theotokos ("Mother of God"), the old pagan mythology continued to evolve in the new Christian context.

Local cults multiplied in response to this syncretism, and for the first few centuries after "conversion," the religion of Rus was in effect a "double faith," with Christian ritual and ceremony overlaying pagan holidays and festivals. [5] It took about six centuries for Christian piety to sink roots in the Russian people's heart, but once it did, it emerged in a stark form of severe ritual observance, constant crossing of oneself, genuflections, long night services, and the like. [6] At first, only the upper class had any clear idea about Christianity. The ruling class's religious knowledge remained insular because the clergy, drawn primarily from Constantinople, often did not speak Russian and communicated chiefly with the elite. Those

Russians deeply involved in religious life sought to emulate, however unsuccessfully, the extreme asceticism of the Eastern Christian monastics, which further distanced them from the population.

Over the next few centuries, the level of piety among the Russian clergy went down, as it absorbed more native Russians, lost its penchant for asceticism, and gradually switched to serving the ritual needs of the population. Whether or not anyone understood the ritual was not an issue any more. The noted Russian historian, Paul Miliukov, pointed out that the clergy stratum became rather illiterate at this time (which is why many Church historians decried this period as that of decline in the Church). Just as the clergy began to lose its cultural and educational edge, the population as a whole noticeably increased its level of Christian observance. By the fifteenth or sixteenth century, the clergy and the people converged on a middle ground, reaching the level of religious consciousness not deep enough to satisfy the ascetics but considerably loftier than the one common at the earlier "double faith" stage.

It was the magic significance of the rite which became the cause and condition of its popularity [consistent with the old folk cult]. Therefore the rite served also as a middle course upon which met the upper and lower strata of Russian faith: the former gradually losing the true conception of the contents, the latter gradually gaining an approximate understanding of the form. [7]

During this first 600 years of Christian influence, three major political developments had great significance for the fate of religion in Russia : the steady decline of Constantinople, the conquest of Rus by the Mongols, and the shift of the cultural-political center of Rus from Kiev to Moscow .

Since Rus had allied itself with Byzantine Christianity centered in Constantinople, it was bound to feel the effects of Byzantium 's steady political decline. In 1453, the Turks finally captured Constantinople. Greek influence was not strong enough to smooth out the coarseness of Russian civilization before the thirteenth century, when the Tartars spread their yoke over Russia, drastically reducing its contacts with the Byzantines. Nevertheless, the Byzantine tradition and church administration left their distinct marks on Russia . This heritage of Eastern Christianity comes to the fore in the Church's subservience to state authority, a theme which acquired its very Russian overtones during the next 600 years. The second major legacy of Constantinople was the notion that the Greek Church was the only true church, all other Christian churches having fallen to heresy or corruption. [8] Constantinople continued to be the reference

template for the Russian Church for many more years, but by the mid-fifteenth century it lost whatever formal control it had over the Russian Church. The failure to unify the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity at the Council of Florence sealed the transformation of the Russian Orthodox Church into an autocephalic religious body.

The choice of Eastern Christianity as a model for ancient Russia had a profound impact on the Russian Church, its spirituality and the culture that it fostered. First, there is the forcefully uprooted paganism present in the syncretic elements and manifest in the magical conception of the rites of the Church. However sincere and devout the Russian Christian, there is a sense in which he or she is living an unstable faith that could any moment devolve into untamed pagan practices. This might be part of the reason why the Russian Orthodox Church has always been so adamant about the eternal verities of the faith and the absolute truth it claims to hold in every religious sense. This persistent claim may reflect the need to control the undisciplined pagan within. Hence, doctrinal rigidity and inflexibility in ritual practice are part of Russian religious culture.

Second, Constantinople's claim that it is the only true successor to the ancient Christian Church, the claim that denigrated the Western Christian tradition, undercut the diversity within the Russian Church. Even minor doctrinal or ritual disagreement among the faithful was feared as inviting a schism. Christian movements outside the Orthodox Church could only be judged as heresy, thus subject to repression. Virtually no diversity in religious perspective or practice could be accommodated. Intolerance of dissent, therefore, could be listed as another distinct characteristic of Russian religious culture.

Third, central importance in Eastern Christianity is accorded to the principle that the church must be unequivocally subordinated to the state. This precept was consistent with the Byzantine principle of symphonia, symbolizing the ultimate harmony of religion and government. As the Patriarch of Constantinople was required to submit to the Byzantine Emperor, so the Metropolitan and later Patriarch of Russia was to submit to the Tsar. The Eastern Churches were all built around a national conception of church. There was no central authority like the Catholic Pope, but there was a strong authority structure in each national church, which maintained respectful and conciliar relations with the other national churches of the Eastern communion. The head of state had to confirm -- and sometimes directly appointed -- the head bishop for a national church. The church and state leaders were to represent for their people the spiritual unity and truth of the one true church; therefore, there could

be no major disagreement or separation between them. This principle produced the church subordinated to political authorities, a condition firmly established in Russia at least from the time of Peter I through the communist period. In more general terms, this practice informed a culture in which a discourse about political, economic or social issues could easily acquire an extra-mundane significance and generate a quasi-religious zeal. This propensity to raise ideological stakes, to treat routine differences as if they pertained to sacred matters would become typical of Russian culture in general and Russian religious culture in particular.

Finally, there was the sharp opposition to the West that reflected the split of the Christian church into Eastern and Western churches. When the Western European Middle Ages exploded into Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment, the wall between East and West kept these great social upheavals from infecting Russia . And when the shock waves from these momentous developments finally reached Russia , their effect was only partial, often distorted, and sometimes the opposite of what transpired in the West. Thus, when Peter I imported Western European innovations in secular and religious governance to Russia -- most notably, the senate for the state and the synod for the church -- they were turned into the instruments of greater authoritarian control rather than broader popular participation. The state's dominion over the church is still among the most acute problems facing Russian Orthodoxy.

It would be a mistake to view Russian religious culture in negative terms, to judge it exclusively by the extent to which it approximates Western beliefs and practices. Nurtured in the cradle of Eastern Christianity, Russian religious culture emerged extremely rich in its spiritual values and aesthetics. It produced artistic works that continue to inspire us today. It had its share of saints and religious workers who spurred the faithful to keep the nation together when its breakdown seemed imminent. At the same time, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that its spirituality was flawed by the state which harnessed Orthodoxy for its imperial purposes, that *Pravoslavie* did not always provide moral guidance to the faithful in their everyday lives, that it failed to explore the interfaces between religious spirituality and personal freedom implicit in the Christian faith. These paradigmatic features of Russian religious culture were further reenforced during the subsequent periods of the national expansion under the Tsars and the communists.

National Expansion and Orthodox Culture

By the end of the fifteenth century, ancient Rus had been transformed into

the sovereign state of Muscovy. Although there were still the neighboring states of Crimea, Astrakhan, and Kazan, which threatened the Russian state, the Tartar domination with its cultural and political insularity came to an end after the Golden Horde was defeated by Ivan III in 1480. With Constantinople vanquished by the Turks and the Pravoslavie coming into its own, the links with Russia's old benefactor were now only symbolic. Even though the Patriarch of Constantinople reinstated communion with Moscow and repudiated the Council of Florence after 1453 (the move had been motivated largely by the vain hope of military aid from Rome), the Greek Church had irreversibly lost its prestige in Moscow's eyes.

Nevertheless, the idea of Greek Christianity as the only true religion had taken deep root, and Muscovy saw itself, after the seeming self-betrayal and ignominious demise of Constantinople, as the last representative of the true faith. Popular piety at the time consisted chiefly in formal adherence to ritual and the magical notion of rite reflecting the pagan legacy. Very little room was left for the spiritual dimension of the Christian faith. Authority in the Church was now vested in an indigenous hierarchy. The lower clergy remained largely illiterate, while the upper clergy and hierarchs were preoccupied with pleasing the princes who held the power of appointment and removal. When there was no more Byzantine Emperor to control the appointment of the Metropolitan, the job quite naturally devolved onto the Grand Prince, soon to be called Tsar.

At this juncture, political aspirations and accomplishments merged with religious ideology to produce a peculiar national imagery captured in the heady slogan: "Moscow, the Third Rome." Its express function was to symbolize Muscovy's direct succession from the great apostolic see. Rome, it was reasoned, had fallen to the papal heresy and corruption, and was succeeded by Constantinople. Now the same diseases had subdued fair Byzantium. Was not its conquest by the heathen Turks proof of God's wrath at its heinous departure from the orthodox faith of the Apostles and Holy Councils? And who else but Muscovy matched in dignity and orthodoxy the prior supreme sees? Given its cultural and religious background, these ideas made good sense to 15th and 16th century Russians. Such ideas furnished fertile grounds on which political absolutism could flourish. Absolutism in politics had as its natural counterpart a status quoism in popular piety, a kind of religious formalism that replaced Christian spirituality and subordinated religious authority to state imperatives. Now all dissension could be nipped in the bud and ruthlessly expunged by a sacredly legitimized state power. And since the Tsar was sanctified by Church authority, any political opposition could

easily be interpreted as apostasy or heresy.

[Thus the Russian Church] was now left for the first time face to face with the formidable power of Muscovite absolutism, with neither Constantinople nor Sarai to defend its ancient privileges against possible encroachments by the grand dukes [of Muscovy]. The Church chose the road of submission and threw its influence to the support of the ambitions of the Moscow dynasty. [9]

The removal of three metropolitans from their posts during the 16th century signaled the dynasty's willingness to exercise its powers as a divinely-appointed authority. [10] That religious and state powers fully merged became obvious when the Church canonized Prince Vladimir who turned Russia into a Christian state and the Russian state into a Church-anointed power. Forever after, the religious afterimages embedded in the Russian faithfuls' psyche reminded them of the state's supremacy in all spiritual matters. Through the period of expansion following the defeat of the Tartars, the Church added new saints who likewise elevated state authority in the spiritual world of the faithful Orthodox believer. Many princes and tsars were canonized as saints, and especially important were those who served as warriors preserving the integrity of the Russian nation. Whatever their personal learning and holiness, Dmitry Donskoy, Alexandr Nevsky, and St. Sergius of Radonezh (who counselled Dmitry Donskoy and blessed his troops as they went to battle) distinguished themselves as actors who aided Russia's military and political expansion.

Under the reigns of Ivan III (1462-1505) and Vasily III (1505-1533), a reconsolidated Rus made its debut upon the diplomatic stage of Europe as it expanded westward into the lands controlled by Lithuania. Contacts were established with the Holy Roman Empire , the Pope, France, Denmark, and other countries of Western Europe, as well as with Muscovy 's immediate neighbors, Poland , Lithuania, Sweden, Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. [11] Under Ivan IV (1533-1584), also known as "Ivan the Terrible" or "the Dread," Russian hegemony expanded southward to the Caspian Sea, including much of the older Tartar lands. Now, the Russian ruler could claim control as far as the Arctic Ocean in the North. Clearly, this was a time of great political success for Russia , which extended into the field of religion: Job, the Metropolitan of Moscow, was consecrated Patriarch of Moscow and all Russias in 1589 by the Constantinopolitan Patriarch Jeremy. This act, which confirmed the separation of the Russian Church from Constantinople , must have buoyed the Russian psyche, for "the Russian Church felt ashamed to be under the authority [at least technically] of a subject of the sultan." [12] Kluchevsky

attributes this consecration and the psychological boost it gave to the nation largely to political, rather than religious, developments.

Towards the opening of the seventeenth century that community [of Rus] was thoroughly permeated with religious self-confidence, but a self-confidence which was fostered, not by the religious, but by the political, progress of Orthodox Rus, as well as by the political misfortunes of the Orthodox East. [13]

From a religious point of view, the only blemish on *Pravoslavie's* supremacy in the Orthodox communion was that the Moscow Patriarchate ranked fifth in the formalized hierarchy of Eastern Christianity, after the ancient Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, though before the older Patriarchate of Serbia. [14] Russia's assertion of its religious superiority and its insistence on being the only universal church were not without serious drawbacks, however.

As soon as Orthodox Rus proclaimed herself the sole possessor of Christian faith, that means of correction [of local deviation by universal Christianity] became lost to her, since, once it had declared itself to be the Church Universal, the Russian Church community could not very well permit any extraneous examination of its beliefs and rites. [15]

This effectively arrested the development of Russian Orthodox religion at the point where the Church Universal doctrine commenced, i.e., in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Thus, the grandson was obligated only to believe and practice as his grandfather did. [16] Ivan IV's strict formalism left a strong impression on the Church of his time, [17] and the pattern of strict outward piety (ritual, crossings, genuflections, etc.) became fully established as in the Russian Orthodoxy under Tsar Alexis (1645-1676), whose police measures forced it upon a previously lax and often indifferent population. [18]

In fact, under the first Romanov Tsars, Michael (1613-1645) and Alexis, "The Church . . . was more than ever subservient to the wishes of the Kremlin." [19] Florinsky contends that in trying to cope with the post-"Time of Troubles" political unrest and the contemporaneous enserfment of Russian peasantry, Michael and Alexis established a "totalitarian state" in which the church was deeply implicated. In particular, the vast ecclesiastical landholdings tied the Church to pro-serfdom policies. "In the man hunt for fugitive serfs, which was one of the distressing characteristics of this period [seventeenth century], ecclesiastical dignitaries and the monasteries vied with the lay landlords both in

savagery and in resourcefulness." [20]

The reign of Alexis was marked by one of the most important events in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, the "Great Schism" of the Old Believers. This rupture, which shattered the unity of the Church, was not the first expression of dissent in religious matters. Russia got its tastes of religious fissure beforehand with the movements of the Strigolniki, the Judaizers, and the Volga Hermits. The religious ferment in the Polish areas in the sixteenth century especially reminded the Russians that they were also subject to non-indigenous religious traditions. In addition, residents of the larger cities saw Protestant and Catholic traders and diplomats, and, beginning with the reign of Michael (1613-1645), Westerners brought their own faiths along when they were invited to modernize the military and related economy. However, foreigners lived in segregated areas, thus reducing the impact of their cultures on local communities. There were important consequences of the imported and dissenting religions, but the problem of diversity came to a head only in the Old Believer schism. [21]

This schism tells us a great deal about the nature of Russian Orthodoxy. The split occurred in reaction to reforms implemented by Patriarch Nikon. What did Nikon want to change? Looking at the concrete reforms, the modernized Westerner is struck by their apparent insignificance to overall faith. The reforms centered on local practices which had become customary in Russia and acquired an official sanction. The questions at issue were which icons to use and when, how to spell the name "Jesus," how many "alleluias" to say, how many wafers to use in a mass, fingers to extend while crossing oneself, etc. -- matters pertaining to external observance of rite and requiring no alteration of dogma. [22]

The reaction to such seemingly innocuous reforms, however, was virulent. Old Believers contended that the things Nikon wanted to change were essential to salvation and thus immutable. For its part, the Russian Church hierarchy countered that the Old Believers had too narrow a mind-set to distinguish the essential from the superficial and accidental. However, the most important consequence of the Nikon reform was not for theology or Church practice but for Church-state relations and, less directly, for the possible opening to Western influence on Russian society and culture. The Nikon reforms "impinged upon the most sensitive chord in the attunement of the Russian Church community -- namely, upon its national self-complacency in ecclesiastical matters." [23] The schism splintered the Church community and weakened its political voice, allowing secular power to emerge as a sole arbiter in religious disputes. Because many of its most avid believers went into schism, the Church was left chiefly with

the "lukewarm" and indifferent in religious matters. This led to greater reliance on the state, police, and army to enforce the faith.

The council that condemned both Nikon and the schismatics seemed to have been animated by a spirit of special service to the Tsar, some delegates candidly stating their wish to please him. Patriarchal authority vis-a-vis the Tsar was greatly diminished. Furthermore, a major decision of the council was to eliminate the parish election of priests which had been traditional in Russia, yielding to the bishops the task of assigning priests to parishes. With the state virtually dictating episcopal appointments, state control over the Church grew at the grassroots level as well. Thus, the council's main outcome "was to establish the clear subordination of church to state by flooding the church bureaucracy with priests who were, in effect, state appointed." [24] In sum, the schism reenforced the Church's subservience to the state and seeded more sanctity to the state authorities. [25]

Seen across the one thousand years of Russian Church history, however, the Great Schism testified to the growing strength of popular Christian sensibilities. Even in their confused religiosity, the masses were finally identified with the Christian church. The Old Believers took the extreme path, often being pushed to suffering and martyrdom by the oppressive practices of the Church and the State. However, the plight of Old Believers dramatized the fact that the broader populace in Russia had been finally Christianized. Though there were to be some important religious developments for the elite, the faith of the common person was established at its general level for the next two hundred years. And while the Old Believers found themselves repeatedly at the core of peasant revolts, the regularity with which such revolts were crushed testified to the impracticality of popular movements in the face of the overwhelming state power. That pattern lasted into the twentieth century. The state and church reorganization carried out by Peter I settled the Church subordination to the state for the remainder of the period of the Russian Empire. First refusing to appoint a new Patriarch upon the death of Hadrian in 1700, then replacing the Patriarchate itself with the Holy Synod in 1721, the Emperor took total control over the Church into his own hands. Appointments to the Holy Synod and the synod's agenda were supervised by a lay officer, the Over Procurator, who was himself an appointee and servant of the Emperor. Consequently, until the Revolution of February 1917, the Church structure was an arm of the government bureaucracy and the popular faith languished in its seventeenth century form.

In the two centuries between Peter's reign and 1917, two other developments took place that had implications for the modern religious culture. First is the appearance of a small population of Protestant and some Catholic believers on Russian soil. Found among German and other foreign peasant farmers imported by Catherine II to foster efficiency in agriculture, these faiths slowly began to mix with indigenous sectarians and Orthodox believers, offering them a glimpse of alternative religious cultures. Facing strong constraints against growth, including (especially in the mid-nineteenth century) legal and police barriers against proselytizing, these tiny groups began to breathe and act a touch freer in the early twentieth century following legal reforms in 1903 and 1905. Still, at no point did they pose a significant threat to the established order.

Another interesting development goes back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when the elite showed new willingness to explore the frontiers of faith and engage in a serious discussion about the indigenous religious culture. The reign of Alexander I held some precursors, but Nicholas I closed off most avenues for innovation, even as its harsh rigidity provoked a revolt among the intelligentsia that was finally ready and willing to confront Western European ideas on their own merit. In the second half of the nineteenth century the clash of the Slavophiles and Westernizers was in full swing, with some intellectuals moving toward full secularization and others, especially toward the end of the 19th century, increasingly drawn to their Christian roots. I cannot dwell on this richly nuanced era of philosophical and theological revival. Let me just note the relative liberality that marked the reign of Alexander II and that provided a hospitable environment for a creative inquiry into religious matters. Had historical circumstances gone in other directions, this flourishing of religious discourse might have served as a launching pad for a true reformation in Russian Christianity. The Slavophile position had in itself currents of illiberality, but the arguments of the intellectuals of the era had begun to grapple with the most negative of these in a constructive way. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the philosophical and theological renewal clashed with the extreme nationalist, anti-semitic and xenophobic forces of the "Black Hundreds", which legitimized the pogroms and reveled in the struggle against all sorts of conspiratorial enemies of Russia. [26] Too often, churchmen were heard in support of the scapegoating of Jews by the Tsars and the assertions of special Russian privilege in a multiethnic empire and multinational world. Other things being equal, the renewal might have won out against such forces. Instead, Russia slid into the disorganization and revolts that engulfed the European continent in the wake of the First World War. And when the communists took power, the Church's dependence on the state

proved exceedingly costly. The state triumphant was the state which bound the Church in chains and left the religious institution without the energy and resources to fend off perhaps the most devastating secularizing force in history -- Marxism-Leninism.

Religion Under Soviet Rule

Among the features of communist society that continuously fascinated Western observers was an ambitious Soviet policy aimed at transforming the human personality. Soviet ideology mandated that the "new Soviet person" be created from the raw materials of Russian citizenry. [27] The builder of communism was to be peace-loving, internationalist, patriotic, law-abiding, collectivistic, hard working, and -- militantly atheist.

To promote atheism and stamp out "religious superstitions" among its citizens the state authorities and the Communist Party established a comprehensive educational program -- *ateisticheskoe vospitanie*, a term usually translated as "atheist upbringing." The Russian word *vospitanie*, for which there is no exact equivalent in English, refers to the general blueprints for character formation contrived by the Soviet authorities. [28] As conceived and carried out by the communist party experts, an atheist upbringing was not a simple educational program, although it was included in the school curricula and the pedagogical propaganda for the general public. More than that, *ateisticheskoe vospitanie* spurred a multi-faceted effort across the lifespan to nurture atheism, to turn it into the way of thinking for every Soviet citizen.

Normally, socialization is designed to inculcate some new knowledge or skill in the fledgling generation. Atheism, by contrast, is not so much a new knowledge to be imparted as an old belief to be expunged. Since religious knowledge of some sort is generally widespread, pursuing atheist upbringing in the U.S.S.R. was similar to trying to create a vacuum. The ultimate Soviet Marxist aim was to develop a purified environment where the particles of religious faith were so rarified that the vacuum in the religious area could become self-sustaining. In the ideological imagery, such a situation would represent a pure environment where the full character development of the new communist person could take place unhindered. Soviet atheist upbringing, therefore, was not simply the obverse of religious socialization in the West. The forces working against atheism were no less entrenched in Soviet Russia than, say, in the United States, where organized atheism and atheist convictions have been historically weak in both numbers and popular support. Routing popular

religiosity in the U.S.S.R., therefore, was a truly daunting task.

Furthermore, while atheism is not inconsistent with the secularizing trends set in motion by urbanization, industrialization, and modernization, [29]Soviet ideological interpretation was unique in its stated agenda of speeding up and deepening general secularization, the latter being construed as a precondition for the emergence of a well-rounded personality. An atheist upbringing, consequently, went far beyond attempts to neutralize religion, relegate it to a private corner of the individual's spiritual life; it implied a coherent anti-religious "worldview" and an appropriate agenda for action without which Soviet society could not reach its ultimate -- communist -- developmental stage.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, an atheist upbringing in the Soviet Union differed from religious socialization in the West insofar as it was a planned effort organized and orchestrated by the Soviet state and mandatory for every segment of the Soviet population. In other words, it was state policy and, as we shall see, politics. Thus, even in its basic form, "scientific atheism" propagated by Soviet ideologues fundamentally diverged from the largely voluntaristic and diverse activities carried out in the West under the banners of parochial education, proselytization, and evangelization.

Political factors. State atheism varied in its nature, focus, and intensity over the course of Soviet history. This shifting policy meant that succeeding generations did not experience the atheist program in the same way, that the program had varying impact on Soviet citizens. We can count three major antireligious campaigns and one period of dramatic let up in anti-religious zeal in the pre-Gorbachev period of Soviet history. [30] The first attack on religion came immediately after the October Revolution of 1917. Its primary targets were the Orthodox Church and the Muslim establishment; its immediate aim -- to sap the sources of real and potential counter-revolution. By the mid 20s, a modus operandi for religious activities, albeit much more limited and controlled than before the Revolution, had been established. This rather shaky status quo was disrupted with a crackdown on religious institutions during the "forced collectivization" (1928-1933) when many churches and religious establishments were closed, most significant religious leaders imprisoned, and religious activity in the country reduced to a bare minimum. This campaign was followed by a period of severe restrictions of all religious activities during the 30s.

As World War II broke out, however, the Party leaders realized the

Church's potential as a cradle of patriotic sentiments and dramatically reversed their stance on religion. Although Stalinist police closely supervised the reinvigorated religious groups to ensure that the religious revival would not get out of hand, relative peace prevailed in state-church relations from 1943 until Stalin's death in 1953. This period ended when the Khrushchev regime set in motion a new antireligious campaign fully comparable to the one that rocked the country at the beginning of the 30s. Subsequently, with the demise of Khrushchev in 1964, the campaign was modulated. The Brezhnev era ushered in some new openings for the private practice of religion and for official religious organizations, although pressures continued against religious dissidents and those who would seek to expand the sphere of religious activities into evangelization, religious education for children, and church expansion.

In contrast to problems of military security and national economic development, Soviet state atheism was a relatively minor policy issue. According to Bociurkiw [31], the fluctuations in religious policy largely reflected factors outside the religious sphere, such as nationality, peasant, industrial or military policy. A closer look at these factors suggests that Soviet state atheism was largely political in its nature and influence upon the population. There were many factors extraneous to religion proper which affected religious policy and thus altered the impact of state atheism upon the people.

Social and Institutional Factors. An atheist upbringing was shaped by and, in turn, shaped many social circumstances that had a bearing on antireligious socialization patterns. Important in this respect is to distinguish between the individual and collectivist aspects of socialization:

Relative to the individual, socialization means all those processes through which the individual in interaction with the environment and with himself develops relatively enduring patterns of behavior which enable him to take part in societal life and in certain cases, to participate in its change. Relative to the collectivity, socialization indicates the differentiated, and under certain conditions contradictory, interaction of all those societal institutions which express the economical, political and cultural conceptions of the task of caring for and educating children, who are ultimately individuals with identities. [32]

Central in this insight is that socialization involves institutional interactions which may be contradictory at times. The potential for "contradictory" socialization is something that we should acknowledge from the start. Anyone who visited the U.S.S.R. could have sensed these contradictions in

the atheist upbringing of Soviet citizens. The Soviet propaganda's manifest message was unambiguous: religion was to be stamped out as a vestige of the past impeding progress toward the future society envisioned by Marx, Engels, and Lenin. However, latent messages conveyed by the same propaganda were rather confusing to Soviet citizens. For example, the state-sponsored movement to salvage and restore national monuments and artistic works extended to certain religious artifacts. It did not escape notice at home and abroad that the Soviet authorities adopted an onion dome of the Orthodox Church as the nation's aesthetic emblem.

In a similarly contradictory way, Soviets celebrated the events and heroes closely aligned with the nation's religious history. One case in point -- the state-sponsored festivities surrounding the inauguration of the monument to Prince Vladimir, long ago canonized by the Church and now holding aloft the very same cross that once topped the Novgorod monument dedicated to 1000 years of Russia. Similarly, the communist authorities honored the Russian icon with its resplendent Christian imagery -- by far the best-known form of visual art in Russia -- as a national aesthetic treasure. Literary works by Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and lesser writers continued to feed religious themes to Soviet readers. Through such diverse channels religious symbols, myths, and institutional memories were preserved in the nation whose leaders dedicated themselves to atheism. Thus, the authorities themselves kept religious sentiments alive by their inconsistent actions.

In these and many other ways, the institutional context of Soviet atheist socialization remained highly schizophrenic, causing problems for atheistic propaganda. While pedagogical institutions doggedly pursued *ateisticheskoe vospitanie*, other institutional spheres acted at cross-purpose. Literature and the arts proved particularly recalcitrant in this respect, their practitioners unable and unwilling to ignore the religious and mystical well-springs of earlier creativity. Special mention deserves also *babushka* -- old grandmother, the basic source of primary bonding in Russia, the kind which social psychologists find the most effective in shaping personal character in its formative stages. [33] Undaunted by official propaganda, *babushka* crossed herself, went to church, told her grandchildren old tales, and in the long run quietly undid what endless lectures and required readings tried to achieve through formal atheist upbringing. Soviet authorities were well aware of this menacing presence. In 1966, one V. G. Shtiuka wrote:

The study of the religiousness of the population shows that religio-cultic

activities which have solidly rooted themselves in everyday life and have become traditions of family life are the most tenacious. Precisely here remain the most broad channels for the penetration of religious ideology and religious worldview into the people's consciousness. [34]

In the landmark studies of displaced persons from Russia that were carried out following World War II, the Harvard Project researchers made a special effort to assess the impact that Soviet socialization had on various social domains, including the religious sphere. Inkeles and Bauer [35] reported that the emigres experienced conflict in socialization related to traditional values like religion. Some (especially people from peasant and working class backgrounds) intimated that the public atheist education led to clashes at home, with parents and grandparents often looking askance at the atheistic beliefs children acquired at school.

To assess the impact that atheistic education had on Soviet citizens we need to take a closer look at the educational practices insofar as they entail what Ernest Q. Campbell [36] calls social control imperative and socialization objective. [37] The former refers to *vospitanie* as it endeavors to squelch religious impulses and relies on punishments for religious behavior and attitudes. The latter involves building the free atheist character, i.e., rewarding atheist and antireligious behavior and attitudes. Some aspects of atheist upbringing seem to mix negative and positive elements of socialization. Both punishment and reward factors are evident when it comes to the legitimation problem that established authorities face in their anti-religious propaganda. Rebellion or less dramatic disregard for authority may lead to punishment, but acceptance and recognition of the official messages may provide some direct rewards. Let us review each major aspect of atheist upbringing -- building legitimacy, socialization objectives, and social control requirements.

The Problem of Legitimacy. To legitimize itself in the public mind, the state (government, party) can not rely exclusively on force; it must socialize the populace into believing that its cause is a righteous one. Thus, all children, future adult citizens, must learn to think that the state knows the best, acts in everybody's interests, and can do the job of improving social conditions in an efficient manner. Up to a point, the state can count on loyalty of its citizens simply because it holds power and carries out routine tasks without which life would be difficult. The state's legitimacy has to strike deeper roots, however, if it is to be based on any other foundation than force, and that means suppressing alternative sources of legitimacy, most notably, the belief that governments rule by the grace of God and require divine consent. The Soviet version of "civics

class," therefore, had to absorb atheistic education designed to clear up "old religious prejudices" and make room for the doctrine that props up the communist government.

More than that, Soviet educators sought to coopt religious sentiments by creating quasi-ritual and ceremonial activities organized into so-called "new socialist traditions." [38] Here is a list of common Soviet institutions and rites sanctioned by the state:

(1) Sometime after World War II, Wedding Palaces sprang to life, where a secular marriage ceremony was conducted in which newlyweds dedicated themselves and their future children to building communism and cultivating communist habits and beliefs. To inject a patriotic element into marriage, Soviet couples were encouraged to visit local war memorials in conjunction with their marriages.

(2) Secular funerals replaced appropriate religious ceremonies, with the deceased celebrated for their contribution to the socialist state and the survivors pledging to continue their patriotic deeds.

(3) Elaborate "rites of passage" solemnized such occasions as starting school, graduations, entering the workforce, joining the Octobrists, Pioneers, the young Communist League (Komsomol), acquiring identity papers (internal passport), etc.

(4) The old religious holidays (like Christmas and Easter) were replaced with New Year celebrations, May 1 demonstrations, the Bolshevik Revolution Anniversary Parade, Lenin's birthday festivities, etc.

The success of these "new traditions" varied widely, but they seemed to attract considerable popular participation. It is not clear whether they effectively replaced comparable religious rites and ceremonies, but they certainly helped cement the emotional bond between citizens and the state. To the extent that such socialist rituals turned into public habits, they enhanced the state's legitimacy. Most certainly, they strengthened other messages the state sought to convey to its citizens, including those with an expressly antireligious content. By providing a positive emotional bond with the state, which itself promoted atheistic and antireligious behaviors and attitudes, the new ceremonies and celebrations helped engrain atheism in the person's self-identity. Being religious and at the same time enjoying socialist rites would have created a psychological dissonance. We know from many studies in social psychology that it is difficult to maintain such inconsistencies for long periods without

consequences that are damaging to the person.

Socialization objectives. The atheistic socialization agenda included a wide range of positive incentives. Proper behavior and attitudes were reenforced by legitimate authority and thus carried a positive emotional charge. Atheistic socialization had as its ultimate goal what Soviet writers called "a scientific atheistic worldview," which included the following elements:

(1) Strong scientific training awaited all students, starting from the earliest grades. Science was always taught as the indubitable and entirely sufficient way of understanding the world that left no room for alternative orientations. All other perspectives, most notably religion, were said to be incompatible with science and distorting of reality.

(2) A special emphasis was placed on the notion that humans make their own futures. There were no supernatural forces or divine entities which had any relation to the world. In Marxian terms, science was the surest basis for building the future because it recognized the true nature of the world.

(3) Atheistic socialization required teaching about the history of freethought and atheism, as well as about "religious obscurantism" that undermined the progress of science.

(4) Atheism had to have its "positive heroes" -- Charles Darwin, Galileo, Copernicus, and others. The abundant literature on such characters served an important socialization goal of creating "reference idols" to encourage the youth in particular to emulate atheistic values. [39]

(5) Movies and newspapers, television and radio, literature and painting -- all forms of mass culture had to be upgraded in content, so as to woo the population away from religious spectacles. For instance, during the Easter holidays the state would show especially popular programs on TV and keep movie theaters open into the late hours to keep the populace from attending all night Easter services.

(6) Atheist propaganda was carried out by a sprawling set of agencies and organizations, such as the Museum of Religion and Atheism and Knowledge Society, [40] which printed pamphlets and books, offered public lectures and presentations.

Through all these socializing institutions and practices the authorities

sought to provide models of atheist behavior and attitudes for average Soviet citizens, to turn them into "good atheists" intolerant of *religioznoe mrakobesie* (religious obscurantism). But the same outcomes could be, and sometimes had to be, accomplished through other means, like punishments and costs inflicted on the believers to discourage them from practicing proscribed behavior.

Social Control Imperatives. Soviet believers who evaded the socialization efforts mounted by the state had to bear excessive costs for their religious activities. The state did everything it could to "overcome" religion peaceably, to make it "wither away," but when its "constructive" efforts failed, it was ready to deploy a vast array of social control devices to stamp out religious customs. Here are some of the more important social control venues favored by the Soviet state:

- (1) Forbidding formal religious education for children, that is, any group classes, Sunday schools, etc.
- (2) Hindering the participation of children in religious activities by pressuring and intimidating clergy, parents, and children themselves (usually in school).
- (3) Controlling baptism rites, i.e., requiring a formal "registration" and a "permit" for a baptism ceremony.
- (4) Ridiculing or criticizing believers in the public press.
- (5) Intentionally and actively seeking out believers and attempting to "re-educate" them. School teachers played a particularly important role in this regard, as did Pioneer and Komsomol cadres, Party and trade union activists at the workplace. Adults could also be force into one-on-one sessions with atheist activists.
- (6) Publishing and disseminating antireligious propaganda through literature, lectures, newspaper articles, radio, and television programs. The Knowledge Society has to be singled out here for its relentless efforts on behalf of "scientific atheism," though the trade unions, party cells, atheist clubs, and antireligious museums did not lag far behind.
- (7) Manipulating religious leaders so as to limit their personal influence and ability to organize and disseminate religious influence.
- (8) Limiting the prospects for appointment and job advancement for

religious believers. Since most high level positions required party membership, believers were naturally excluded from advancement to such levels. In some cases, believers were denied routine pay increases and promotions because of their "backward views." Though this was not universal practice, it encouraged believers to be less visibly active religiously or hide their faith altogether, and it intimidated those who were not active from becoming so.

In these and perhaps other ways, the Soviet state barred children from sympathetic exposure to religion and punished those who defied the state and sought to exercise their nominal constitutional rights. Needless to say, children who passed through this elaborate system of antireligious propaganda were less likely to become religious adults, while those who persisted in their religious beliefs and practices could expect their life options to be severely curtailed by the state.

The Fate of Religion in the Post-Soviet Era

The atheist upbringing in Soviet society was fraught with many problems, and as time revealed, had little resonance among the general population. However, it had been undertaken in the context of the Russian religious culture, and as such, was bound to have reverberated throughout society. We can recall that *Pravoslavie* or Orthodoxy was imposed upon the pagan population from above and never fully replaced the ancient religious customs with the new forms of spirituality and spiritual discipline. Cultural development nearly stopped at the point where Christian rituals were implanted in everyday consciousness without transforming its spiritual content. The Orthodox Church tended to equate religiosity with ritual. No attempt was ever made by the Church to foster a religiously literate population. In fact, for a long time, Russian Orthodoxy eschewed general literacy as a worthy goal. Even less so was the religious establishment in Russia committed to a critical inquiry into its spiritual moorings, to instilling an open-minded attitude toward religious practices among its participants. A kind of religious renaissance that the intellectual elite experienced before the Revolution of 1917 came to a grinding halt after the Bolsheviks came to power and made it all but impossible to convert this movement into a popular religious renaissance. The communists' attack on the Church exhausted its leadership and sealed its subservient status in a relationship that harkens back to the Byzantine principle of *symphonia*. Dogmatism, religious formalism, intolerance to dissent -- some of the salient features of the Russian religious culture -- were further reenforced by the autocratic communist practices. With religious leaders and intellectuals effectively silenced, the common faithful had few

means of preserving anything more than a flawed memory of Orthodoxy along with the sentimental attachment to the beauty of Russian Orthodox liturgy. By the end of the Soviet era, Russians were a religiously malformed people, who sustained heavy damage, both individually and institutionally, from the decades of party-sponsored atheism overlain upon centuries of religious submission to autocracy.

While Orthodoxy is prone to celebrate its martyrs above all saints, nobody is denying the blessings that religious freedom gave to the believers in the mid-80s. Religious freedom had arrived, first, surreptitiously, as the state lapsed in its efforts to enforce antireligious laws, then more openly, beginning with the decision to release religious prisoners of conscience in 1986-87. From that point on, believers faced fewer problems registering their congregations. Liberalization gained momentum after the 1988 festivities surrounding the thousand years of Russian Orthodoxy. This glorious event opened up auspiciously with General Secretary Gorbachev granting an audience to the Patriarch and chief bishops. About the same time, drafts of new laws on "freedom of conscience and religious organizations" reached the public. After extended public discussion, final versions thereof were adopted by both the U.S.S.R. and the Russian Republic in October 1990. These laws eliminated the primary means by which the Soviet government waged its war on religion since the end of the 1920s and finally permitted -- for the first time in over fifty years -- what most people elsewhere in the world would consider normal religious worship. [41] The Orthodox and other religious believers in the USSR were just getting adapted to the new circumstances when the whole state structure of the Soviet Union collapsed in late 1991.

Seldom does a religious institution find itself in such a truly historic circumstance as that which the Russian Church faces today. The changes engulfing Russia have portents not only for its citizens but for the whole world. A vigorous, decisive, democratic church might wield great influence on the direction of those important changes. Such a church would possess a social ethic conducive to democratic ideology and free market entrepreneurship. It would spearhead a debate about society's values and goals, as well as spell out its own agenda in the various arenas of policy planning. It would exercise its spiritual influence on the population and shape the spiritual identity of the newly emerging autonomous nation. To paraphrase Richard John Neuhaus, a Protestant theologian, such a church should be a visible presence in the public square. Has the Russian Orthodox Church established a permanent residence there?

Physically, the Russian Orthodox Church is quickly re-establishing itself on

the town square. Since 1988, when Gorbachev and the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church met for the first time, the number of congregations and operating churches has burgeoned. According to one source, this number nearly doubled between 1985 and 1991, going from 6,806 to approximately 12,000 [42] . However, the costs of this expansion have been extremely high. Without many outlets for its resources, the Russian Church had grown used to being relatively well off under the Soviets. Now, the Church has been essentially bankrupted by its rapid expansion. We should bear in mind that institutions are real and organized societal beings, that they are in conflict and competition for the hearts of the people. So far, the state has been a big winner in its competition with the Russian Church. The question now is whether the religious institution has the means to mount a new drive to better counter-balance over-etatization in society.

The Church's bankruptcy is apparent not only in monetary terms. The Church's spiritual and theological resources are stretched to the limit, as well. First, there are not enough clergy to serve all the new parishes. Second, the Church does not have the ability to compensate adequately those who are serving. Third, to satisfy the growing demand for clergy, priests work excessive hours, with very little time left for new initiatives or even simple reflection. Furthermore, the Church has yet to address fully and effectively (which is not easy to do under the present trying circumstances) the serious issue of the theological preparation of the clergy. As in the past, the Church has stressed the liturgical preparation of its clerics over their intellectual or spiritual preparations. Recognizing that the people of the parishes want someone to provide the sacraments, baptize, marry, and bury them, the Church has responded by enlarging seminary classes without the requisite increase in faculty and staff. New teaching resources are sorely missing; there is a tendency to fall back on the nineteenth century and earlier precedents. Very little constructive energy has been expended to find the meeting ground between *Pravoslavie* and twentieth century religious experience. In other words, while the church may be re-occupying the public square physically -- by breaking into the open, reaching out to the public, reclaiming its property once confiscated by the state -- it has yet to occupy the square spiritually, as a social force to reckon with in the giant reconstruction now facing the nation.

We cannot be too harsh in our judgment, though, for the problems facing the Russian Orthodox Church are enormous, indeed. The devout Russian Orthodox believer needs first and foremost a "spiritual father"; he needs to restore the historical bond with a priest or monk with whom he has a

special relationship of trust and confidence. Alas, the clergy today are too overburdened with the ritual services to provide inspiration, spiritual guidance, and a clear vision of the future to everyone. But we need to remind ourselves that Russia is not the only place where religious institutions show signs of exhaustion. Richard John Neuhaus expressed his deep concerns about the disappearance of religious values and symbols from public discourse in America in the 80s [43] . We can hardly expect that such values and symbols could spring to life overnight under the extreme conditions in today's Russia. Moreover, we have to be concerned about the abuse of religious rhetoric by the leaders of nativist, ultra-conservative movements. Numerous right wing political and nationalist groups have risen up in Russia since the onset of Perestroika, some of them tracing their roots back to pre-revolutionary movements. Some of the leaders of such groups have begun utilizing religious language in their calls for a return of Russia to her "greater destiny", and there are noteworthy proponents among the clergy and hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church who appear to be supporters. Traditional Russian Orthodox anti-semitism has not been bridled on the extreme wings, and it supports the reappearance in bookstalls of the scurrilous Protocols of the Elders of Zion and other hate literature. While Patriarch Alexii II has denied anti-semitism in Church affairs, his administration has not mounted a direct attack on this problem. Without church leadership in this regard, Pamyat and similar nationalist-patriotic groupings have pursued their dark agendas with the support of extremist churchmen who experience no censure from their spiritual authorities. [44]

In the legal arena itself, the Church has decided to be silent. Several major churchmen were elected to the Gorbachev and then Russian Federation Parliament, including the Patriarch, the most powerful bishops, and a number of priests. Yet last year, the Patriarch ruled that clergy were no longer permitted to run for such offices. When Father Gleb Yakunin defied the decree, he was defrocked and publicly humiliated by the Patriarch. Ironically, Yakunin had been at odds with the Church hierarchy for nearly all his adult life. In 1991, he revealed some KGB records (since sealed) that indicated the close cooperation between several key bishops and the Soviet secret police. In 1993, from his seat in the Russian Parliament, Fr. Yakunin vigorously opposed the legislation on religious affairs sponsored by the Russian Orthodox Church. The law would have reinstated registration for all religious groups and organizations, limited the activities of foreign missionaries in Russia, and restored the Russian Orthodox Church's privileged position in the land. The manner in which the Patriarchate treated Fr. Yakunin indicates its unwillingness to engage in debate over its own position in Russian society, its freedom to stamp

out dissent among its ranks, its right to limit alternative forms of religious expression. This stance showed no tolerance for diversity, nor did it encourage constructive debate with its opponents inside and outside the Church. Dissenting views were handled in a sadly familiar way: exclusion, condemnation, excommunication.

Only in the areas of direct interest to the Church has the latter taken an active role in the political process. Otherwise, as the run-up to the December 1993 elections demonstrated, the Church authorities failed to connect their faith and their politics. No sense of moral obligation seemed to inform the clergy's politics, which is conspicuous for its absence in the seminaries, where no attempt is currently under way to initiate a coherent political discussion. This public square was naked indeed. The predominant impulse was to escape from the tough political fray into the comforting spiritual ether of the liturgy. Perhaps these developments will take time to unfold, but a religious culture that could sustain them is yet to take root. The cultural history I sketched above does not bode well for the Church's action in the public arena, certainly not in the immediate future.

There are some rays of hope, however. A tiny minority of Orthodox did join Protestant and Catholic dissenters in movements of protest in the 60s, 70s and 80s; the dissidents of the 90s challenge the Church to lay out a new path through Russian nationalism or secular democratic institutions that meets the current needs and fills the spiritual vacuum left by the collapse of Marxist ideology. Gleb Yakunin and his colleagues among Christian democrats are trying to include religious values and ideals in the public debates about Russia's future. Priests and lay activists here and there are embarking on programs of direct involvement in socio-political life through community or educational initiatives.

Another promising sign is the widespread Sunday School movement that could foster a religious literacy previously unknown among the Russian Orthodox. It could also encourage a religious voluntarism that offers a healthy antidote to excessive hierarchical control.

Another bit of evidence that some believers in Russia are rising to the occasion and meeting current challenges is the spread of charitable projects enlivening churches around the country. Still in its infancy, the movement to set up special services for the elderly, the imprisoned, the infirm, and the impoverished may invigorate Russian Orthodoxy as a whole. Together with international organizations and services, it may help

spread a new social ethic of responsibility.

Finally, there are some signs that the crusty Church hierarchy is not totally inflexible. The Patriarchate itself sponsored a major interfaith conference in June 1994 dedicated to the search for solutions to interethnic and other conflicts on the territory of the former Soviet Union. It was noteworthy that representatives of all major confessions on former Soviet territory were invited and included among the delegates. An ecumenical spirit concerning the solution of these conflicts was strongly expressed by the conferees; such cooperative efforts may bear fruits even in the more directly religious sphere itself. This conference was particularly important in that it broke the mold of the Communist past, when discussions were limited to restricted topics, and the Russian churchmen were compelled to keep public statements in line with Party doctrine. This time, conversations in the halls and hotel rooms were frank, and disputes were publicly aired in ways not thought possible before the last few years.

In the meantime, the Church establishment tends to revert to ancient patterns, seeking to maintain or reestablish its privileged status in Russian society. It is particularly incensed with the non-Orthodox religious groups engaged in a major push to convert Russians to a different view, to offer the population a new way in the context of religious freedom. Seeing the troops of the Western evangelistic crusade gathered in stadiums in prayer, the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy launched its own campaign to put up barriers between the spiritual invaders and the Russian people. The Summer of 1993 saw a fascinating legislative battle waged in Moscow in which Orthodox spiritual discipline was at issue. The Church hierarchy sought to construct a wall between the missionaries and the Russians, to keep the missionaries at bay, to keep the Russian spiritual menu clear of unsafe (though savory) contaminants like Western religion. Had it not been for the confrontation between President Yeltsin and the Parliament in early October, the legislation limiting the access of Western evangelicals to Russia might now be on the books. Yeltsin had opposed this legislation on several grounds but might not have been able to completely reject it in the end. The Church's determination to limit religious freedom is facing great criticism from democrats inside Russia as well as external advocates of individualistic human rights.

The path ahead is a tortuous one. Old elements must be purged, to be sure, but the bedrock of the tradition cannot be abandoned. The cultural transformation required is vast; it may be excruciatingly painful, given that *Pravoslavie* faces its reconstruction exhausted by the Communist era,

and now further drained by the huge costs of energy, time, and money required for rebuilding its crumbling infrastructure. While thousands of church buildings have been returned to the Church, most of them are in need of extensive and costly repair; many are, in the words of one bishop, "simply ruins" that must be totally reconstructed. There is an acute shortage of clergy, so the Church has to focus on the quick training of ritual specialists. And yet, somehow, the Church must develop the broader pastoral, theological, and philosophical concerns that could fill the public's needs the most. Can the Church find the resources to serve the great spiritual needs of the liberated population? Or will other aspirants to the status of religious supplier to Russia become more successful in fulfilling these yearnings, thus leading the transformation of Russian religious culture away from its historical Orthodox roots?

Experience in other countries suggests that, if general religious freedom persists, Russia is likely to become a great deal more diverse in its religious culture. While Orthodoxy recoups its strengths, other "religious entrepreneurs" will win a significant share of the religious market in Russia. Still, the daunting question persists: will the Orthodox Church continue to stress the form, encourage nativistic elements in the government, and deny the newer groups access to the population? Stated differently, will the Church put nationalistic goals and church-state unity above service to the spiritual needs of the population?

One element that is affecting the Russian religious scene these days as never before is international religious culture. Historically, Russia was insulated from the outside religious currents. Now, it cannot afford to be completely isolated. Though the Russian Orthodox Church has grown weary of ecumenical efforts, this international element gives one hope that it will continue to evolve in order to serve better its members' spiritual needs. Global culture may provide some of the innovations that will stimulate the broader revival of religion in Russia. The mature post-communist Russia that one day will emerge after this present period of massive reconstruction will not simply ape Western society, as so many outsiders who put their entire stock in capitalist economics insist. We cannot say which shape the Russian civilization will take in the future, but we can venture a guess that it will reflect both the nation's historical religious afterimages and its present religious experience that whittles away at the old religious culture and broadens the horizons of Russian Orthodoxy.

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