

**CULTURAL HISTORY OF MODERN RUSSIA**  
**Religion in Modern Russian History**  
Supplementary Documents

## **I. An Overview for the Course**

*The essay below, written for the forthcoming Oxford Handbook of Modern Russian History, attempts to address the role of religion in Russia over the last three centuries or so. As such, it serves as a useful introduction to at least some of the issues that we will address in this course. The article is notable for its attempt to address all of Russia's various religions, and thus to set the issue of religion in a larger framework concerned with the problem of imperial rule in Russia.*

### **Religion in Modern Russian History**

Long neglected as a subject of serious scholarly inquiry in the field of Russian history, religion has recently come to occupy a prominent place in course offerings and research agendas. Indeed, scholars' willingness to seek religion in Russian history has revealed its pervasive presence in politics, culture, law, philosophy, architecture, and social organization. At least until 1917, political authority in Russia was legitimated in fundamentally religious terms. Of course secular justifications for the autocracy were also posited - - the persona of the ruler, the prosperity of his subjects, Russia's standing in international affairs - - but the principle of divinely sanctioned political authority remained central to the autocracy's self-presentation. Even in contemporary Russia, the post-Soviet ideological vacuum has allowed churchmen at times to figure prominently in the sanctioning of political acts. Furthermore, despite changes resulting from the state-imposed bureaucratization under the tsarist autocracy and the destructive impact of Soviet policies, religious institutions have outlasted two political regimes and have thus been among the most durable over the course of the last three centuries. Nor should the rise of the national idea in the nineteenth century and its centrality in the Soviet period obscure the fact that state management of Russia's diversity for most of the last three centuries has relied heavily on confessional institutions and categories, just as religious modes of self-identification remained central to many of the empire's subjects well into the twentieth century. Religious provisions were thus at the foundation of certain areas of Russian law, while churches and clergies fulfilled

important tasks of state administration. Finally, religious outlooks structured people's conceptions of community - - both locally and more broadly - - and informed many of their actions. In a word, religion certainly qualifies as a 'fundamental' of Russian history.

Part of the challenge of studying religion involves the more basic task of locating it. Religion entailed a combination of institutions and hierarchies, formal theology, popular practices, and communal organization. It was practiced in temples and theological academies, but also in shrines and chapels, as well as in fields, forests, bathhouses, and steppes. Indeed, our assessment should perhaps begin from the proposition that, historically, religion has not been something discrete from other realms of human activity, and that such a separation is primarily a modern artifact. Thus while we should be attentive to the appearance, over time, of a realm of concerns that may justifiably be labeled 'spiritual,' this essay nonetheless accentuates the deep entanglement of the religious with activities and concerns that we might generally be inclined to regard as 'secular.' The Soviet period, it is true, witnessed a stark separation of church and state and the relegation of spiritual concerns to a corner of life more restricted than in most other countries of secularizing Europe. Even so, communists adopted certain religiously inspired modes of self-presentation and, under Stalin, reinstated at least a degree of the status previously enjoyed by religious institutions under the old regime. And if some seventy years of official atheism substantially secularized Soviet society, most observers have been struck by the religious revival of the post-Soviet years. More difficult is the task of assessing the accuracy of images of 'revival' and contemporary invocations of 'tradition,' in light of the undeniably transformative effect of the Soviet experience. Indeed, this essay emphasizes the dynamic and changing character of religiosity in Russia over three centuries, based on the straightforward proposition that history matters.

### **Russia: Orthodox and Diverse**

Both the prominence of Orthodox Christianity and the remarkable religious diversity were central facts of Russian history. From the formal 'baptism of Rus'' under prince Vladimir in 988 until the collapse of the Romanov regime in 1917, Orthodoxy was a central attribute of Russian politics, society, and culture. Initially under Byzantine tutelage, the Russian church gradually attained greater autonomy, finally becoming an independent and equal member of the

international Orthodox community with the creation of the Moscow patriarchate in 1589 (though nominal subordination to the ecumenical patriarchs continued). The process of Christianization was of course slow, but eventually almost all eastern Slavs were brought into the Orthodox fold, and this process extended also to many of the Finnic tribes under Muscovite rule. Even after extensive imperial expansion into non-Orthodox regions in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, a commanding majority of Russia's population - - some 70 percent by the 1897 census - - were Orthodox Christians. Given both this numerical predominance and the church's historical role in the consolidation of the tsarist autocracy, the Law Digest's formal definition of Orthodoxy as the 'ruling and predominant faith' of the empire in 1832 merely gave explicit formulation to what had long been the case.

The adherence of so many of the tsar's subjects to a single faith undoubtedly served to unify the expansive territories of the Muscovite and imperial state. Yet Orthodoxy in the East-Slavic world was also beset by significant internal cleavages. On the one hand, the Orthodox ecumene of Kievan Rus' was fundamentally fractured by the thirteenth century - - the formal ecclesiastical division into Muscovite and Ruthenian churches came in 1458 - - with its constituent parts experiencing very different fates. The northeastern territories of Rus' eventually came under the jurisdiction of the metropolitanate in Moscow, which made common cause with the Muscovite grand prince from the 1320s. The church here developed in comparative isolation from broader European trends and was accordingly concerned above all with defining authentic Orthodox belief and practice with reference to indigenous 'heresy' and dissent. In contrast, the western portions of Kievan Rus' were eventually incorporated into Poland-Lithuania, and here the struggle against Roman and Greek Catholicism became the central fact of life. The tsarist regime's reunion of these two Orthodox worlds by the end of the eighteenth century could scarcely erase the effects of the previous half-millennium. On the other hand, within Muscovy itself reformers' aspirations to define orthopraxy more stringently in the 1650s - - and also to assert more centralized ecclesiastical control over local church life - - produced a profound schism in the Orthodox community. The determined defenders of traditional and local practices, eventually labeled the 'Old Believers,' refused to accept the official church's innovations, in some cases resorting to mass suicide or resettlement to remote corners of the realm. This schism produced a profound crisis within the church and weakened that institution internally, leaving it

more vulnerable to the bureaucratic interventions of Peter the Great.<sup>1</sup> Old Believers continue to populate the Russian religious landscape even today.

Until the ‘imperial turn,’ scholars tended not only to treat Russia as a strictly Orthodox country, but also to construe Orthodoxy as an exclusively Russian phenomenon. More recent scholarship has begun to address non-Russian forms of Orthodoxy - - for example, among convert communities in the Volga and Baltic regions and in Siberia - - and to explore the full range of religious traditions that were practiced in Russia and the USSR. Within its borders Russia included practitioners of numerous Christian confessions, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, shamanism, and animism. In particular regions of Russia these non-Orthodox believers represented large minorities or even outright majorities. Even if certain regions - - e.g., central Russia and Turkestan - - exhibited considerable religious homogeneity, the multi-confessional composition of Russia certainly remains one of its most noteworthy attributes. In general, this diversity increased over time, as most of tsarist Russia's territorial acquisitions after the seventeenth century involved either non-Orthodox populations (Finland, Poland, the south Caucasus, and Central Asia) or Orthodox populations with their own distinct traditions (Bessarabia, Georgia, and Ukraine). There was also growing spiritual innovation. As some Russian subjects became agnostics or atheists, others either embraced new religions from abroad (the Baptist faith, Seventh-Day Adventism, Methodism, etc.) or themselves produced novel religious teachings (for example, Burkhanism in the Altai region and Mariavitism among Polish Catholics). Even contemporary Russia, reduced roughly to the borders of its seventeenth-century Muscovite predecessor, is far from religiously homogeneous. Its 1997 law on religious associations explicitly sanctions four ‘traditional’ religions in Russia - - Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism - - while many other confessions remain active, despite certain legal disabilities. This diversity places limits on our ability to generalize about ‘religion’ in Russia, since the relative emphasis of orthodoxy and orthopraxy varies among religions, and many seemingly neutral analytical concepts - - clergy, house of prayer, even believer - - are not so

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<sup>1</sup> The most important recent work on the schism is Georg Michels, *At War with the Church: Religious Dissent in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). For a nice overview of the Muscovite and Ruthenian churches in the early modern period, see Robert O. Crummey, ‘Eastern Orthodoxy in Russia and Ukraine in the Age of the Counter-Reformation,’ in the *Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 5: *Eastern Christianity*, ed. Michael Angold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 302-324.

well-suited to non-Christian traditions and may be applied only with caveats.<sup>2</sup> The rescuing of such peculiarities of religious experience from the standardizing language of imperial Russian and Soviet bureaucratic sources (and, frequently, scholarly analysis) represents one of the most important tasks of scholarship for the future.

None of these religions was either monolithic or static over time. Among Muslims there were Sunnis and Shias; Sufis and modernist reformers (jadids); nomadic communities with few institutional accoutrements of Islam, as well as sedentary communities with dazzling mosques and venerable establishments of Islamic learning. Protestantism encompassed the staid Lutheranism of the Baltic German elite, the Calvinist remnants of the Polish Reformation, and the pietist enthusiasm and evangelical fervor of Hernhutters and Baptists. From the mid-eighteenth century, Jewish communities experienced conflict between an emergent Hasidism and its opponents (the mitnagdim), while Karaites sought increasingly to distance themselves from (other) Jews. Catholics in Russia spoke various languages (Polish, Lithuanian, Belorussian, German, and Armenian), and employed two distinct rites. Russia's two major Buddhist populations - - Kalmyks and Buriats - - lived thousands of kilometers apart and had distinct religious practices. Orthodoxy itself encompassed an astonishing range of orientations - - from the official church, through various degrees of dissenting Old Belief, to splinter groups such as Dukhobors, Molokans, and Skoptsy.

We should also register a number of substantial shifts in Russia's religious landscape over the last three centuries. At different times large numbers of non-Orthodox believers were brought into the Orthodox fold, usually through a combination of coercion, material incentives, and bureaucratic engineering. Thus, hundreds of thousands of people in the Volga region were baptized into Orthodoxy in the mid-eighteenth century, while tens of thousands of Latvians, Estonians, and Belorussians abandoned Lutheranism or Catholicism for Orthodoxy in the 1840s and 1860s. The latter, in particular, were part of a general effort by state and Orthodox Church to effectuate a cultural reclamation of Orthodox eastern Slavs who had entered communion with Rome under Polish rule. The coercive and bureaucratic 'reunions' of Greek Catholics (Uniates) with Orthodoxy from the late eighteenth to the mid twentieth century were part of this same process. Resettlement similarly altered the balance of religious communities in particular locales.

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<sup>2</sup> For an interesting consideration of this issue with respect to Islam, see Devin Deweese, 'Islam and the Legacy of Sovietology: A Review Essay on Yaacov Ro'i's *Islam in the Soviet Union*,' *Journal of Islamic Studies* 13.3 (2002), 298-330.

German-speaking colonists in the Volga region, New Russia and the South Caucasus created pockets of western Christianity in the century between 1750 and 1850. By choice or through exile, many Orthodox sectarians found new homes in the South Caucasus from 1830. Even before the end of serfdom, the eastward movement of Slavic peasants created an Orthodox presence among Muslim nomads in the Kazakh steppe and eventually Turkestan. The Caucasus also saw both an in-migration of Christian Armenians and an out-migration - - by some accounts, a forced expulsion - - of at least half a million Muslims up to the 1860s. Nineteenth-century Ukraine experienced a remarkable religious 'reformation' that established Evangelical Protestantism as a central feature of Ukrainian religious life in imperial Russia, the USSR, and independent Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> Twentieth-century cleansings eliminated the influential Catholic minority from Russia's western borderlands and decimated the Jewish presence there as well. In short, even as many communities and locales remained unalterably linked to particular religious traditions over the centuries, there was also a distinct dynamism to these affiliations over the same period.

In this light, it should come as no surprise that interaction and mutual influence were central features in Russian religious history. The bureaucratization and confessionalization of Orthodoxy in Petrine Russia are incomprehensible without reference to the Catholic Counter-Reformation and to the Ukrainian churchmen whose Orthodox response set the agenda for church reform in Russia for much of the eighteenth century. Indeed, many developments in Orthodoxy - - for example those pertaining to education, clerical training, and translation - - were responses to challenges that the church perceived from its rivals, above all Catholicism and Islam. The appearance of radical Protestant sects in Ukraine was likewise intimately related to the presence of German colonists in the region, even though distinctly Slavic forms of Protestantism eventually emerged. New modes of Islamic thought, most notably the reformism of the *jadids*, were a product of the colonial context in which Russian Muslims found themselves in late-imperial Russia. In short, the different religions of Russia must be understood in the context of mutual interaction between practitioners of neighboring spiritual traditions.

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<sup>3</sup> On this Ukrainian reformation, see Sergei I. Zhuk, *Russia's Lost Reformation: Peasants, Millennialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine, 1830-1917* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2004).

## **The State and Religious Institutions**

In the case of virtually all religious groups, the practice of religion (if not its content) was shaped significantly by its relation to state power. In this regard, the case of Orthodoxy was crucial and paradigmatic for Russia's other religions. Whether church-state relations at any point truly reflected the Byzantine ideal of 'symphony,' by the seventeenth century the autocracy had attained substantial power over the church. Still more significant changes came under Peter the Great, who sought to construct a well-ordered state on the basis of prevailing European cameralist principles. Most famously Peter refused to appoint a successor when Orthodox Patriarch Adrian died in 1700 and replaced the patriarchate with a collegial body known as the Most Holy Governing Synod in 1721. This synod was outfitted a year later with a lay procurator who initially served as liaison with the sovereign but increasingly acquired the trappings of ministerial authority. The synod's structure and functions, as well as a host of other issues pertaining to clergy, were outlined in a new statute known as the Spiritual Regulation. With some modifications, this model - - a collegial body defined by legal statute operating under procuratorial oversight - - persisted until 1917, when the Orthodox patriarchate was reinstated just after the Bolsheviks seized power.

In time, and with some allowance for theological differences, this model was also applied to Russia's non-Orthodox faiths. Comparatively little was done for most of the eighteenth century, while the state was still focused primarily on its relationship with Orthodoxy. But by the reign of Catherine the Great (1762-1796) several factors fostered the state's more direct implication in the affairs of non-Orthodox faiths. The acquisition of new territories from Poland rendered imperative the assertion of some state control over the affairs of Roman and Greek Catholics. Having exploited the presence of so-called religious 'dissidents' (Lutheran and Orthodox) in Poland in order to interfere in that country's internal affairs, Catherine was well aware of the potential dangers of this diversity for her own country. This experience had also involved dealings with the papacy and had endowed the empress with an astute recognition of the need to block Rome's pretensions over her new subjects. Further eastward, Orthodox missionary campaigns, having secured the baptism of only a small segment of the Muslim population of the Volga region, had nonetheless provoked unrest to a degree that convinced imperial officials of the need for an accommodation with Islam. Guided by a combination of cameralist theories of statecraft and Enlightenment conceptions of religious toleration, the

imperial government came to recognize the utility of non-Orthodox religions as sources of order and stability. The logical course of action was for the state to become a patron of those religions.<sup>4</sup>

This was a drawn-out process, extending from the 1760s until the 1850s. In most cases the state established collegial bodies for the non-Orthodox religions, while usually also creating a procurator or its equivalent to ensure the execution of imperial statutes modeled at least in part on Orthodox Spiritual Regulation of 1721. Roman Catholics acquired a comparable statute already in 1769, while most of the other religions received similar enactments in a spurt of legislative production under interior minister Dmitrii Bludov in the 1830s. A milestone in this process of institutional construction was the creation of the Central Directorate for the Religious Affairs of the Foreign Confessions in 1810 (a department of the interior ministry from 1832), which unified the administration of all non-Orthodox faiths in a single agency.<sup>5</sup> Not all populations received state-sanctioned assemblies or statutes, and for others their appearance came quite late. In some cases these institutions struggled to attain legitimacy in the eyes of the populations that they administered - - something that was true even for the Orthodox Holy Synod.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, if we consider the institutional and legal arrangements that did exist and couple them with an imperial conception of religious toleration that simultaneously guaranteed the preeminence of Orthodoxy and proscribed "political" manifestations of spirituality, then we may discern a tsarist analogue to Soviet nationalities policy, one that took religious confession as the suitable basis for institutionalizing and managing cultural diversity.

The revolution of 1917 fundamentally altered the relationship of religion to state power and also produced major schisms within Orthodoxy. By the early 1920s the Bolsheviks had decided to back progressive elements in the Orthodox clergy who were prepared to recognize Soviet power - - the 'renovationists' - - on the assumption that this would actually facilitate the church's destruction. The resistance of the laity to this so-called "Living Church" and fears that the creation of a Soviet Church might actually succeed drove the Bolsheviks to rescind their support in the mid-1920s, though renovationism was formally abolished only in 1946.<sup>7</sup> Another

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<sup>4</sup> Aspects of this process are described in A. S. Riazhev, 'Prosveshchennoe dukhovenstvo pri Ekaterine II,' *Voprosy istorii* 9 (2004), 43-57; and Robert Crews, 'Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-Century Russia,' *American Historical Review* 108.1 (2003), 50-83.

<sup>5</sup> On the creation of this institution, see Elena A. Vishlenkova, *Zabotias' o dushakh poddannyykh: Religioznaia politika v Rossii v pervoi chetverti XIX veka* (Saratov: Izdatel'stvo Saratovskogo Universiteta, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Viktor Zhivov, *Iz terkovnoi istorii vremen Petra Velikogo* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> A comprehensive account of renovationism is provided by Edward E. Roslof in *Red Priests: Renovationism, Russian Orthodoxy, and Revolution, 1905-1946* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

schism appeared in 1927 when Metropolitan Sergii, the *locum tenens* after Patriarch Tikhon's death in 1925, issued a statement of loyalty famously recognizing the USSR as 'our civil motherland, whose joys are our joys and whose setbacks are our setbacks.'<sup>8</sup> The schism produced by this statement proved long-lasting and profoundly shaped the organization of the Orthodox Church outside of the USSR, though the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad finally reestablished canonical ties with the Moscow Patriarchate in 2007. Dissent from the official patriarchal church on account of its submission to Soviet authority remained an important trend in Orthodox religious life after World War II.

On the whole, religious institutions in the Soviet period involved both an appropriation and a repudiation of the tsarist legacy. If in tsarist Russia religion played a crucial role both administratively and ideologically, the USSR was militantly atheistic and assaulted religion with unparalleled aggression in the late 1920s and 1930s. By the late 1930s the Orthodox Church in the USSR - - at least institutionally - - stood on the brink of destruction, and most other religions were only slightly better off. But political challenges growing out of the wartime conjuncture compelled the Soviet government to legitimize the country's religions once again in 1943. The state bodies created for their oversight - - a council for Orthodox affairs and one for all the other religions - - bear a certain functional resemblance to their tsarist predecessors.<sup>9</sup> Like the tsarist regime, the USSR established four Muslim spiritual directorates and resisted their consolidation into a single umbrella organization for Muslims throughout the country. Armenians and Lutherans also received institutions broadly comparable to their tsarist counterparts, and though this was not the case for Catholics, now even Evangelicals and Baptists received a council as well. The 'reunion' of Greek Catholics in western Ukraine and Subcarpathia with Orthodoxy in 1946-1949 may also be regarded in terms of institutional (and ideological) continuities across the two regimes, although a specifically Soviet aversion to Catholicism also had its place.

The Orthodox Church has had especially close connections with state power in Russia both before and after the Soviet period, but the implications of this have been complex. On the one hand, the Church benefited immensely from state patronage. Orthodoxy enjoyed the status of

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<sup>8</sup> Cited in Zoe Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia after Communism* (London: Routledge, 2005), 45.

<sup>9</sup> On these developments, see T. A. Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years*, ed. and trans. by Edward Roslof (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002); and M. V. Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' pri Staline i Khrushcheve* (Moscow: Krutitskoe Patriarshee Podvor'e, 2000).

the 'ruling and predominant' faith in the Russian Empire, which conferred numerous concrete privileges in the realms of mixed marriage, conversion, state funding, and censorship. Even after substantial religious reforms in 1905, the Orthodox Church continued to enjoy a monopoly on the right of proselytism. More recently, the ties between state and Orthodox Church have served to hinder the activities of those religions not recognized as 'traditional' to Russia, in particular evangelical Protestant groups. In some analyses the 1997 law on religious associations constitutes a triumph of an exclusivist Orthodox view on the country's proper spiritual life and sits uneasily with liberal provisions in the constitution of 1993. Even in the Soviet period, the Moscow Patriarchate could count on the state's support in opposing Ukrainian autocephaly (which had existed briefly in the 1920s), though not Georgian autocephaly, which Stalin compelled the Moscow patriarchate to recognize just after its own reconstitution in 1943. It now emerges that there was also significant collaboration between church dignitaries and the KGB. On the other hand, the Orthodox Church was the first to endure the secular state's heavy bureaucratizing intervention and was probably transformed more thoroughly than any other religious institution as a result. Thus, for example, while Russians decisively lost their patriarch in 1721, Armenians were able to retain their catholicos throughout the imperial period. Recent scholarship contests the proposition that the church became merely a 'handmaiden of the state,'<sup>10</sup> but Orthodoxy was probably the least independent of Russia's religions. And precisely because the Orthodox Church represented one of the most important pillars of the tsarist autocracy before 1917, it became the principal target of the Soviet anti-religious onslaught, suffering an institutional and intellectual destruction arguably greater than that experienced by other religions.

It is perhaps most important to emphasize the common experiences of Orthodox and non-Orthodox religions in Russian history. Non-Orthodox faiths certainly faced more restrictions, making religious toleration in Russia a decidedly conditional affair. But *all* of the recognized religions of imperial Russia became state institutions and enjoyed elements of state protection and patronage, while also enduring the state's interference in their affairs. And they all were both decimated by the anti-religious campaigns and reinstated during World War II - - though the rehabilitations of Catholicism and Judaism seem to have been more limited. In short, the legacies

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<sup>10</sup> This position was originally formulated by Gregory Freeze, 'Handmaiden of the State? The Church in Imperial Russia Reconsidered,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 30.1 (1985): 82-102.

of Orthodoxy's privileging in the tsarist order were complex and need to be placed in a larger comparative framework.

### **Local Infrastructures and Wider Worlds**

However important the various patriarchs, synods, and directorates just discussed, local religious infrastructures were rather more important in framing most people's experience with religion. For many believers the most important institution was the parish (for the Christian confessions) or, more generally, the local community, which was frequently imagined in sacral terms. In part for administrative purposes, each subject in imperial Russia was in effect ascribed to a particular parish, whose 'cleric' (priest, mullah, rabbi, etc.) was charged with keeping state records of birth, marriage, and death. To a degree, such assignments imposed Christian forms of organization on non-Christian faiths, which were traditionally more fluid in their structure and lacked a clergy with exclusive authority to perform religious rites. Even the Orthodox parish did not have clear juridical definition in Russia, but it nonetheless represented a basis for believers' imagining of an ecclesial community and a terrain for lay activity in church affairs.<sup>11</sup> For Muslims the mosque community (*mahalla*), often corresponding to a single settlement, served as the unit that hired an imam and constructed a mosque.<sup>12</sup> All religions in Russia - - including Orthodoxy - - endured the state's efforts to eliminate 'superfluous' parishes and thus to guarantee a basic level of material support for local servitors. Given the communal character of religious observance for most of Russia's faiths, these local sacral communities were the main institutions through which religion was experienced.

Religious servitors also played central roles for different communities. The government's proclivity to regard all religious specialists as 'clergies' masks considerable diversity in the functions of priests, pastors, rabbis and lamas. While some were essential to the performance of rites, others, such as the Islamic ulema, included merely those with a certain level of religious knowledge.<sup>13</sup> State rabbis and spiritual (unofficial) ones played different, and not always

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<sup>11</sup> On this issue, see especially Vera Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> See the discussion in Allen J. Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions in Imperial Russia: The Islamic World of Novouzensk District and the Kazakh Inner Horde, 1780-1910* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions*, 99-160; Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 99-109; M. N. Farkhshatov, 'Musul'manskoe dukhovenstvo,' *Islam na territorii byvshei Rossiiskoi Imperii: Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, vol. 2, ed. S. M. Prozorov (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 1999), 67-72.

complementary roles in Jewish society.<sup>14</sup> Relations of servitors with the local population were complicated by the obligation of the latter to support the former materially, though after 1841 (in the empire proper) and 1865 (in the Kingdom of Poland) the state provided salaries to Catholic clergy paid for by the revenues of secularized ecclesiastical lands. Local communities usually had varying degrees of control over the appointment of servitors, with the mahalla able to hire an imam once he passed a state exam, and the Orthodox largely dependent on bishops for the appointment of priests. The status rights of different servitors also varied considerably. Only the Orthodox and Armenian clergy eventually constituted a coherent clerical estate with identical status rights across the entire hierarchy. Indeed, the caste-like character of the Orthodox clergy in Russia was a target for church reform in 1869 designed to open other professions to clerical sons.<sup>15</sup> Status rights for other Christian servitors were somewhat more conditional, and neither for Protestants nor for Roman Catholics did the clergy constitute a hereditary estate. Finally, though referred to often as ‘clergy,’ non-Christian servitors were explicitly denied the status of clerical estates with collective status rights, and the privileges they enjoyed were based entirely on their actual service.<sup>16</sup>

Monastic institutions were also central to several of Russia’s religions. Orthodox monasteries - - and in particular convents - - experienced a remarkable renaissance in the nineteenth century after the profoundly disruptive secularization of church properties in 1764. This process involved a certain democratization and even peasantization of monastic life, whereby those who previously could not contemplate entering a monastery began to do so in much greater numbers. Through adaptation to changing circumstances, Orthodox monasteries once again became crucial spiritual resources in the lives of both their inhabitants and laypeople near and far. This very success created new challenges, however, and intense discussion of reform measures in the early twentieth century achieved little before the Bolsheviks, drawing on earlier Enlightenment assumptions about the socially irrelevant character of monastic life, decimated Orthodox monasteries.<sup>17</sup> Monasticism was of course not unique to Orthodoxy, even if

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<sup>14</sup> See ChaeRan Freeze, *Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> This is an important theme in Gregory L. Freeze, *The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth Century Russia: Crisis, Reform, Counter-Reform* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). The Armenian clerical estate was opened a year later, in 1870.

<sup>16</sup> *Svod zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, vol. IX (1842), art. 457 (footnote).

<sup>17</sup> Scott Kentworthy, ‘The Revival of Monasticism in Modern Russia: The Trinity-Sergius Lavra, 1825-1921’ (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2002); William Wagner, ‘The Transformation of Female Orthodox Monasticism in

Islam, Judaism and the Protestant confessions had no comparable institutions. Until 'reunion,' the Uniate Basilian monasteries were central to maintaining the confessional specificity of Greek Catholicism, especially in relation to Orthodoxy. Catholic and Buddhist monastic institutions played crucial, if understudied, roles in the spiritual life of Russian subjects, though both faced not only the state's general desire to limit monasticism (which applied equally to Orthodoxy), but also its fears about its political significance in sensitive border regions. Strikingly, of over 500 Catholic monasteries in the 1830s, by the government's own account all but 22 had been closed by the early twentieth century. Efforts to prevent the proliferation of datsans were likewise a prominent feature of the autocracy's dealings with Buddhism.

Most religions also maintained a network or hierarchy of educational institutions, both for the instruction of laypeople and for the preparation of new clerics. Even Russian Islamophobes praised Muslims for their impressive system of maktabas and medreses, and a number of the latter acquired great renown and drew Muslim students from far and wide. Lutherans, too, placed great emphasis on schooling, and maintained an impressive theological faculty at Dorpat University, the only institution in Russia that trained and examined Protestant pastors. The Armenian Church entered into a stark confrontation with the government in the 1880s in order to defend its network of parish schools from state control. Given their great respect for learning in the Torah, Jews typically sent their sons to elementary school (*heder*), and some later attended a rabbinical academy (*yeshivot*). (The state also established two rabbinic seminaries for Jews in 1847, though these enjoyed only limited success.) Although Orthodox clergy had long been involved in primary education, it was only in 1884 that the Orthodox Church established its own network of parish schools. Much older were the Orthodox seminaries, generally one in each diocese, and the four spiritual academies - - in Moscow, Kiev, St. Petersburg and Kazan - - the first two dating to the seventeenth century. These institutions taught many subjects, but in all cases religion remained central to the curriculum. They transmitted religious knowledge to the next generation and also produced new scholarship in theology, religious history, and - - in Kazan - - orientalism.

The effects of Soviet anti-religious campaigns were especially great for this local infrastructure. Countless churches and mosques were physically destroyed or converted into

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Nizhnii Novgorod Province, 1764-1929, in Comparative Perspective,' *Journal of Modern History* 78 (2006), 793-845.

schools and warehouses. Virtually all monastic institutions, Christian and Buddhist, were shut down by the 1930s. Education was made the exclusive preserve of the secular state, while religious subjects were eliminated from the curriculum. The institutions that trained new clergy were destroyed, as were the means through which Islamic knowledge was produced and transmitted. No doubt, religious belief survived these assaults, and certain practices were perpetuated in new forms, without the original structures that had originally sustained them. Monastic life, for example, could be adopted without the existence of monastery walls, just as a prayer gathering could occur in a forest clearing. But clearly religious life in these conditions could continue only in a highly attenuated form. Perhaps most importantly, the moral and ethical values of Russia's different religions could now no longer be held in public, and religion increasingly became synonymous with custom and tradition - - a curious artifact, but hardly something that could inform answers to the burning questions of the day.<sup>18</sup>

Even as the local community was the central site and the entity through which religion was most directly experienced, many if not most believers maintained a conception of a larger religious community to which they belonged. Miracle-working icons, canonizations, particular shrines, and mythical stories of conversion and communal origin could unite Christian believers or Muslims across tremendous distance in a single sacral space. Renowned medreses and yeshiva could likewise fortify the common identity of far-flung Muslims and Jews, while for Catholics and Armenians the prestige of the pope and the catholicos unified dispersed communities. In Orthodoxy, the macro-ecclesial visions of sacred community that focused on the episcopacy and the larger church virtually always coexisted - - at times uneasily - - with micro-ecclesial visions focused on the local parish.<sup>19</sup> In some cases broader conceptions of community were fostered or maintained by the spiritual institutions established by the tsarist state - - for example, the Orenburg Assembly for Muslims of the Volga-Ural region. Even dispersed pagan communities occasionally organized large-scale ritual sacrifices drawing participants from several provinces.

Imagined religious communities often transcended the borders of the Russian state. The adherents of different faiths accordingly maintained contact with coreligionists abroad, who in turn followed events within Russia and sometimes sought to intervene on their behalf. Clerical

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<sup>18</sup> This point is made most forcefully with respect to Islam by Adeeb Khalid in *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> This theme is important for Shevzov in *Russian Orthodoxy*, and also for Chris J. Chulos in *Converging Worlds: Religion and Community in Peasant Russia, 1861-1917* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003).

personnel were often recruited from abroad, for example for German colonists in the Russian south, or for Uniates in the Kingdom of Poland in the 1860s-70s. Pilgrimage often took Russian subjects to religious sites far beyond the empire's borders - - to Mecca, Urga, Rome, and Jerusalem - - just as several sites within Russia, such as Echmiadzin and Częstochowa, drew pilgrims from abroad. In some cases spiritual authority transcended state boundaries. Catholics sought to maintain open lines of communication with the papacy, and if the Soviet government rejected virtually all papal claims until Perestroika, the imperial government was compelled by its own investments in non-Orthodox religious authority to accept some of them. The Armenian catholicos, a Russian subject from 1828, also claimed spiritual authority over all Armenians of the Apostolic confession and had contacts with communities from the Russian interior to India, Persia, the Ottoman Empire, and even the USA. Particularly in the Soviet years, the history of east-Slavic Orthodoxy transpired partially in Yugoslavia, Poland, western Europe and North America, where clerical training, theological study and publishing could continue in the ways that were impossible in the USSR. After World War II, even the Soviet government allowed religious leaders within the USSR to establish (limited and carefully controlled) contacts with coreligionists abroad in order to promote a positive propaganda image for the country. The international dimensions of religion in Russian history represent an area ripe for further investigation.

### **Lived Religion and Modernity**

The persistence of religious practice among many Soviet citizens and the sometimes intense resistance to the Soviet anti-religious campaigns are intelligible only in terms of a piety that was not utterly dependent on formal institutions for its existence and perpetuation. This is not to posit a 'popular' religion that was perpetually at odds with formal hierarchies. It is true that hierarchies and the laity were not always in complete agreement, and at least from the mid-seventeenth century the official church sought to extirpate 'superstition' and unauthorized forms of veneration - - that is, to monopolize the sacred - - in part by combating local beliefs in miracles, apparitions, demons, etc.<sup>20</sup> But the existence of such tensions should not lead us to reify an

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<sup>20</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century these efforts were being fashioned into a more positive campaign of popular religious instruction. See A. S. Lavrov, *Kolodvstvo i religii v Rossii, 1700—1740 gg.* (Moscow: Drevlekhranilishche, 2000); and Gregory L. Freeze, 'Institutionizing Piety: The Church and Popular Religion,

opposition between ‘popular’ and ‘official,’ and to ignore the ways in which ‘the church’ was a conception that incorporated both. For Judaism and Islam, the distinction between ‘official’ and ‘popular’ is even more misleading, as there was no hierarchy that could claim to possess the definitive and correct version of the religion in question. The Lutheran conception of ‘the priesthood of all believers’ likewise complicated the issue considerably for Protestants. Moreover, the very designation ‘popular’ assumes a mode of religiosity distinct to lower classes, supposedly not shared by either elites or by priests, pastors, rabbis, mullahs, or lamas. This proposition at the very least warrants empirical demonstration, and the most recent research suggests that in many cases it is false.<sup>21</sup>

The issue, then, is to identify the diverse ways in which believers ‘unite their disparate selves into a body of faithful’<sup>22</sup> - - one that could exhibit a certain continuity over time and could adapt to changing - - at times rapidly changing - - circumstances. This could entail a range of practices, such as the veneration of icons or Muslim shrines; the singing of hymns and the reading of spiritual literature; the erection of churches, chapels, mosques, and roadside crosses; fasting and feasting; the ritual sacrifice of livestock in sacred groves; participation in the liturgy; burial rites and the maintenance of cemeteries; and so on. Many of these practices required or were at least facilitated by the presence of clerical elites, who contributed significantly to their form and content. In other cases, such elites were not essential, and the practice could retain its meaning and efficacy even in their absence. Likewise, disagreements over these issues could divide communities and cause strife among their members. But they also played a central role in uniting believers and in sharpening distinctions between them and those of other faiths. These core elements in the fabric of local life have only begun to be studied seriously, and much more for Orthodoxy than for other faiths.

Many of these practices proved remarkably adaptable to change and fundamentally compatible with modernity. Urbanization generated new forms of social activism among Orthodox clerics and laypeople - - it was after all an Orthodox priest, Father Gapon, who led

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1750-1850,’ in *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire*, ed. Jane Burbank and David Ransel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 210-249.

<sup>21</sup> For thoughtful consideration, see John-Paul Himka and Andriy Zayarnyuk, eds., *Letters from Heaven: Popular Religion in Russia and Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy*, 195.

workers to the palace square on Bloody Sunday (January, 1905).<sup>23</sup> Steamships and railroads facilitated access to far-flung pilgrimage destinations - - from Solovki on the White Sea to Mecca in the Arabian deserts - - and new opportunities for those destinations to generate income. The advent of print created new possibilities for the dissemination of devotional literature, while the growth of literacy created new readers more willing and able to engage more consciously with their faith. By the end of the nineteenth century, the charismatic Orthodox cleric John of Kronshtadt attained celebrity status that would scarcely have been conceivable a century earlier, in part through the modern media of newspapers and postcards.<sup>24</sup> Both the Jewish Haskalah and, somewhat later, jadidism among Muslims were also quintessentially modern phenomena. The Mari pagan reform movement Kugu Sorta self-consciously presented its faith at the Kazan Scientific and Industrial Exhibition of 1890, and Baptists made gramophone records of sermons and music. Communists in the 1920s were annoyed by Christian sectarians' 'conscious emulation of Bolshevik codes and rituals in order to compete with them.'<sup>25</sup> Many religions also managed to (re)mold themselves as national institutions as ethnic distinctions became more politically salient than confessional ones.

No doubt, secularization represented an important dimension of an emerging Russian modernity by the late nineteenth century. A scientific worldview had begun to displace religious outlooks among educated Russians, and there is also evidence of growing disengagement from religion among the emerging working class. But recent scholarship also makes clear that secularization was merely one outcome in the encounter between religion and modernity. Intensive and creative religious mobilization was another. Frustrated by the perceived simplicity of materialism, some educated Russians at the turn of the century sought to return to the church. The famous 'Religious-Philosophical Meetings' in St. Petersburg (1901-1903) demonstrate that leading intellectuals and Orthodox clerics were eager to reconcile the church with the desire among the educated for spiritual meaning in life. Religious conceptions were also prominent in modern Russian philosophy. Already in the 1840s the Slavophiles Aleksei Khomiakov and Ivan Kireevskii drew substantially on religious ideas in developing the idea of *sobornost'* and in

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<sup>23</sup> Jennifer Hedda, *His Kingdom Come: Orthodox Pastorship and Social Activism in Revolutionary Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Nadia Kizenko, *A Prodigal Saint: Father John of Kronshtadt and the Russian People* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Visions and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 121.

articulating a compelling (if perhaps also utopian) philosophical alternative to western rationalism. In the 1870s and 1880s Russia's greatest philosopher, Vladimir Solov'ev, elaborated a natural theology that extolled the powers of human reason to fathom divine reality. Lev Tolstoy and Fëdor Doestoevsky meanwhile engaged religious themes in fiction. These diverse efforts laid the foundation for a revolt against the reigning positivism at the century's end. By that time, many erstwhile positivists, most famously the so-called legal Marxists, had embraced idealism and were developing a highly original body of liberal thought that was situated on the boundary between philosophy and theology. Religion even made its way into Marxism itself. Some radicals like Sergei Bulgakov abandoned Marxism in favor of religious philosophy, but others, such as Alexander Bogdanov and Anatolii Lunacharskii, sought to construct an enchanted Marxism known as God-Building, which would invest revolution with a religious spirit of passion and a promise of deliverance from evil.<sup>26</sup> Despite Lenin's impatience with such exercises, Marxism-Leninism in Soviet Russia betrayed certain religious elements and orientations in its public presentation and dissemination, not least of all in the saint-like cult of Lenin himself after his death in 1924. The Bolsheviks also introduced a series of quasi-religious rituals such as red weddings and octobringings (revolutionary christenings) that were modeled on Orthodox counterparts, and as late as the 1960s the communist party felt compelled to introduce greater elements of ritual and cosmology into the rites of passage of modern Soviet life.

There are numerous other, more subtle ways in which religious outlooks shaped people's perceptions and informed their actions over the last three centuries in Russia. The teachings of Mennonites, Dukhobors, and certain other religious groups forbade participation in the armed forces and/or the swearing of oaths, just as religious values were central to the activities of Old Believers in trade and commerce. Charity was often provided through religious institutions and rooted in specifically spiritual motivations, even in the case of ostensibly secular philanthropic associations. The outlooks of and orientations of the Orthodox *popovichi* (priests' sons), who played an unusually important role in the Russian intelligentsia, were deeply informed by the social values and the religious upbringing of the clerical estate.<sup>27</sup> In a similar way, spiritual images, tropes, and narratives - - crucifixion, martyrdom, salvation, and sacred truth - - occupied

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<sup>26</sup> On these issues, see *ibid.* and Catherine Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> Laurie Manchester, *Holy Fathers, Secular Sons: Clergy, Intelligentsia, and the Modern Self in Revolutionary Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008).

a prominent place in the imagination of many worker-poets, even when they were avowedly secular Marxists.<sup>28</sup> The Tatar Bolshevik Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev advocated circumspection in campaigning against Islam because he perceived that religion was so closely intertwined with virtually all aspects of life, with no distinction between secular and sacred.

Finally, we should note the deployment of religion in ceremonial, political ritual, and legitimation. Muscovy elaborated a set of powerful traditions and images involving clerical participation and religious reference in ceremony. Peter the Great has often been represented as a secularizing tsar who mocked religion in his Most Comical and All-Drunken Council, but perceptive inquiries have discerned an extensive religious knowledge that informed Peter's efforts to assert his charisma - - in the original, religious sense of divine grace.<sup>29</sup> It is true that in the eighteenth century the triumphal entry displaced the religious procession as the central public ritual of the monarchy, and ecclesiastical ritual underwent militarization at court. But religious ritual, at least in a revised form, continued to play a significant part in court culture throughout the imperial period, and Peter's successors reinstated a range of the religious ceremonies that he himself had sought to abandon.<sup>30</sup> The court of Peter himself, and later that of his wife the Empress Catherine I (1725-27), mobilized the cult of her name-day saint, Catherine of Alexandria, to legitimize the coronation and reign of that improbable sovereign (she was originally an illiterate non-Orthodox Baltic peasant woman, and Peter's second wife), and in doing so provided a sound foundation for the very principle of female rule, so critical to eighteenth-century Russian politics.<sup>31</sup> Religious ritual also occupied a prominent place under Empress Elizabeth (1741-1762), a pious Orthodox believer, and under the more skeptical Catherine II, who was nonetheless anxious to legitimize the rule of a foreign usurper by advertising her Orthodoxy. It should be stressed that throughout the imperial period, the coronation was a church service, with a complete and elaborate liturgy that took place in the consecrated space of the Dormition Cathedral in the Moscow Kremlin. One can scarcely deny the gradual secularization of court culture over the *longue durée*, and the regime's

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<sup>28</sup> Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

<sup>29</sup> Ernest A. Zitser, *The Transfigured Kingdom: Sacred Parody and Charismatic Authority at the Court of Peter the Great* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>30</sup> Simon Dixon 'Religious Ritual at the Eighteenth-Century Russian Court,' in *Monarchy and Religion: The Transformation of Royal Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 217-248.

<sup>31</sup> Gary Marker, *Imperial Saint: The Cult of St. Catherine and the Dawn of Female Rule in Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007).

counterproductive effort to refurbish religious bonds between tsar and people through the canonization of Serafim of Sarov in 1903 perhaps shows that there were distinct limits to the possibilities of the monarchy's resacralization by the early twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> But we would do well to contemplate the degree to which that secularization was conditional and partial.

Religion scarcely plays the role in Russian today that it did at the start of the eighteenth century. Nor is religion the same thing now that it was then. But this brief excursion has demonstrated, it is hoped, the extent to which religion had a pervasive presence in modern Russian history. Given its ruling status under the old regime and the sheer numbers of its adherents, Orthodoxy has enjoyed an especially prominent place in Russian history, something that is reflected quite clearly in the historiography. But Russia's non-Orthodox religions have been equally important for those admittedly smaller communities and have been implicated in Russian politics, both internal and external, in profound ways. The most interesting and insightful research in the future, in my view, will seek to situate Orthodox and non-Orthodox experience in a single analytical plane and to contemplate further the implication of spirituality and religious institutions in various aspects of modern Russian history.

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<sup>32</sup> Gregory Freeze, 'Subversive Piety: Religion and the Political Crisis of Late Imperial Russia,' *Journal of Modern History* 68 (1996): 308-50.

## II. The Christianization of Rus' (988)

*One of the most vital sources for the early history of the Eastern Slavs is The Tale of Bygone Years, also known as the Russian Primary Chronicle. The Chronicle was compiled between 1037 and 1118 by monks at the Kievan Caves Monastery. The earliest existing copy of the text dates to 1377. The Primary Chronicle, like other medieval records in East Slavic history, is a mixture of religious writings, legend, fact, and fiction. Such a blend is clearly evident in the account below, which describes the process by which Christianity was adopted as the official state religion of Rus' by Prince Vladimir (980-1015) in the year 988. The people of Rus' had already had some contact with Christianity before Vladimir's reign. For example princess Olga, the wife of an earlier pagan prince of the Rus', converted to Christianity several decades before her grandson Vladimir's conversion. But it was only with Vladimir that Christianity became the religion of state. Whatever the historical accuracy of the account that the Primary Chronicle provides, it is precisely this legend that entered the consciousness of generations of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians.*

[The year] 987: Vladimir summoned together his vassals and the city elders, and said to them: "Behold, the Bulgars came before me urging me to accept their religion. Then came the Germans and praised their own faith; and after them came the Jews. Finally the Greeks appeared, criticizing all other faiths but commanding their own, and they spoke at length, telling the history of the whole world from its beginning. Their words were artful, and it was wondrous to listen and pleasant to hear them. They preach the existence of another world. 'Whoever adopts our religion and then dies shall arise and live forever. But whosoever embraces another faith, shall be consumed with fire in the next world.' What is your opinion on this subject, and what do you answer?" The vassals and the elders replied: "You know, O Prince, that no man condemns his own possessions, but praises them instead. If you desire to make certain, you have servants at your disposal. Send them to inquire about the ritual of each and how he worships God. " Their counsel pleased the prince and all the people, so that they chose good and wise men to the number of ten, and directed them to go first among the Bulgars and inspect their faith. The emissaries went their way, and when they arrived at their destination they beheld the disgraceful actions of the Bulgars and their worship in the mosque; then they returned to their own country. Vladimir then instructed them to go likewise among the Germans, and examine their faith, and finally to visit the Greeks. They thus went into Germany, and after viewing the German ceremonial, they proceeded to Constantinople where they appeared before the emperor. He inquired on what mission they had come, and they reported to him all that had occurred. When the emperor heard their words, he rejoiced, and did them great honor on that very day.

On the morrow, the emperor sent a message to the patriarch to inform him that a Russian delegation had arrived to examine the Greek faith, and directed him to prepare the church and the clergy, and to array himself in his sacerdotal robes, so that the Russians might behold the glory of the God of the Greeks. When the patriarch received these commands, he bade the clergy assemble, and they performed the customary rites. They burned incense, and the choirs sang hymns. The emperor accompanied the Russians to the church, and placed them in a wide space, calling their attention to the beauty of the edifice, the chanting, and the offices of the archpriest and the ministry of the deacons, while he explained to them the worship of his God. The Russians were astonished, and in their wonder praised the Greek ceremonial. Then the Emperors

Basil and Constantine invited the envoys to their presence, and said, "Go hence to your native country," and thus dismissed them with valuable presents and great honor. Thus they returned to their own country, and the prince called together his vassals and the elders. Vladimir then announced the return of the envoys who had been sent out, and suggested that their report be heard. He thus commanded them to speak out before his vassals. The envoys reported: "When we journeyed among the Bulgars, we beheld how they worship in their temple, called a mosque, while they stand ungirt. The Bulgarian bows, sits down, looks hither and thither like one possessed, and there is no happiness among them, but instead only sorrow and a dreadful stench. Their religion is not good. Then we went among the Germans, and saw them performing many ceremonies in their temples; but we beheld no glory there. Then we went on to Greece, and the Greeks led us to the edifices where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We know only that God dwells there among men, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations. For we cannot forget that beauty. Every man, after tasting something sweet, is afterward unwilling to accept that which is bitter, and therefore we cannot dwell longer here." Then the vassals spoke and said, "If the Greek faith were evil, it would not have been adopted by your grandmother Olga, who was wiser than all other men." Vladimir then inquired where they should all accept baptism, and they replied that the decision rested with him.

After a year had passed, in 988, Vladimir marched with an armed force against Kherson, a Greek city.... Vladimir and his retinue entered the city, and he sent messages to the Emperors Basil and Constantine, saying: "Behold, I have captured your glorious city. I have also heard that you have an unwed sister. Unless you give her to me to wife, I shall deal with your own city as I have with Kherson." When the emperors heard this message, they were troubled, and replied: "It is not meet for Christians to give in marriage to pagans. If you are baptized, you shall have her to wife, inherit the kingdom of God, and be our companion in the faith. Unless you do so, however, we cannot give you our sister in marriage." When Vladimir learned their response, he directed the envoys of the emperors to report to the latter that he was willing to accept baptism, having already given some study to their religion, and that the Greek faith and ritual, as described by the emissaries sent to examine it, had pleased him well. When the emperors heard this report, they rejoiced, and persuaded their sister Anna to consent to the match. They then requested Vladimir to submit to baptism before they should send their sister to him, but Vladimir desired that the princess should herself bring priests to baptize him. The emperors complied with his request, and sent forth their sister, accompanied by some dignitaries and priests. Anna, however, departed with reluctance. "It is as if I were setting out into captivity," she lamented; "better were it for me to die here." But her brothers protested: "Through your agency God turns the Russian land to repentance, and you will relieve Greece from the danger of grievous war. Do you not see how much evil the Russians have already brought upon the Greeks? If you do not set out, they may bring on us the same misfortunes." It was thus that they overcame her hesitation only with great difficulty. The princess embarked upon a ship, and after tearfully embracing her kinfolk, she set forth across the sea and arrived at Kherson. The natives came forth to greet her, and conducted her into the city, where they settled her in the palace.

By divine agency, Vladimir was suffering at that moment from a disease of the eyes, and could see nothing, being in great distress. The princess declared to him that if he desired to be relieved of this disease, he should be baptized with all speed, otherwise it could not be cured. When

Vladimir heard her message, he said, "If this proves true, then of a surety is the God of the Christians great," and gave order that he should be baptized. The Bishop of Kherson, together with the princess's priests, after announcing the tidings, baptized Vladimir, and as the bishop laid his hand upon him, he straightway received his sight. Upon experiencing this miraculous cure, Vladimir glorified God, saying, "I have now perceived the one true God." When his followers beheld this miracle, many of them were also baptized.

Vladimir was baptized in the Church of St. Basil, which stands at Kherson upon a square in the centre of the city, where the Khersonians trade. The palace of Vladimir stands beside this church to this day, and the palace of the princess is behind the altar. After his baptism, Vladimir took the princess in marriage. Those who do not know the truth say he was baptised in Kiev, while others assert this event took place in Vasiliev, while still others mention other places....

Hereupon Vladimir took the princess and Anastasius and the priests of Kherson, together with the relics of St. Clement and of Phoebus his disciple, and selected also sacred vessels and images for the service. In Kherson he thus founded a church on the mound which had been heaped up in the midst of the city with the earth removed from his embankment; this church is standing at the present day. Vladimir also found and appropriated two bronze statues and four bronze horses, which now stand behind the Church of the Holy Virgin, and which the ignorant think are made of marble. As a wedding present for the princess, he gave Kherson over to the Greeks again, and then departed for Kiev.

When the prince arrived at his capital, he directed that the idols should be overthrown and that some should be cut to pieces and others burned with fire. He thus ordered that Perun [a pagan idol] should be bound to a horse's tail and dragged along Borichev to the river. He appointed twelve men to beat the idol with sticks, not because he thought the wood was sensitive, but to affront the demon who had deceived man in this guise, that he might receive chastisement at the hands of men. Great art thou, O Lord, and marvelous are thy works! Yesterday he was honored of men, but today held in derision. While the idol was being dragged along the stream to the Dnepr, the unbelievers wept over it, for they had not yet received holy baptism. After they had thus dragged the idol along, they cast it into the Dnepr. But Vladimir had given this injunction: "If it halts anywhere, then push it out from the bank, until it goes over the falls. Then let it loose." His command was duly obeyed....

Thereafter Vladimir sent heralds throughout the whole city to proclaim that if any inhabitant, rich or poor, did not betake himself to the river, he would risk the prince's displeasure. Men the people heard these words, they wept for joy, and exclaimed in their enthusiasm, "If this were not good, the prince and his boyars would not have accepted it." On the morrow the prince went forth to the Dnepr with the priests of the princess and those from Kherson, and a countless multitude assembled. They all went into the water: some stood up to their necks, others to their breasts, the younger near the bank, some of them holding children in their arms, while the adults waded farther out. The priests stood by and offered prayers. There was joy in heaven and upon earth to behold so many souls saved....

When the people were baptised, they returned each to his own abode. Vladimir, rejoicing that he and his subjects now knew God himself, ... ordained that churches should be built and

established where pagan idols had previously stood. He thus founded the Church of St. Basil on the hill where the idol of Perun and the other images had been set, and where the prince and the people had offered their sacrifices. He began to found churches and to assign priests throughout the cities, and to invite the people to accept baptism in all the cities and towns....

Source: *Povest' vremennykh let* (The Russian Primary Chronicle)

### III. The Spiritual Regulation of Peter the Great (1721)

*A crucial moment in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church came during the reign of Peter the Great (1682-1725). Peter's church reform had several different dimensions, but the most important concerned the replacement of the Church's patriarchate with a new collegial body, known initially as the Spiritual College and later as the Holy Synod. When the last Patriarch, Adrian, died in 1700, Peter did not appoint a successor, leaving that position unoccupied for two decades. In 1721 Peter issued his famous Spiritual Regulation, written primarily by Bishop of Pskov Feofan Prokopovich. The Regulation formally established the Spiritual College and defined its competence. Some of the implications of this reform will be taken up when we discuss the debate on church and state in Russia. The text below is taken from the first part of the Regulation, which asserts the superiority of collegial or conciliar (that is, collective) rule over rule by a single Patriarch. This innovation generated some opposition among churchmen and also became an object of clerical criticism later in the imperial period. Even so, a new Patriarch was elected only in 1917, after the tsarist regime had collapsed.*

#### THE MANIFESTO OF 25 JANUARY 1725

Among the many cares derived from the obligation of our God-given authority concerning the reform of our nation and of other states subject to us, we have given consideration also to the clergy. Perceiving in it much disorder and great deficiency in its affairs, we have experienced in our conscience a not unfounded fear that we may appear ungrateful to the All-High if, having received from him so much good success in reforming not only the military class but likewise the civil service, we should neglect the reform also of the ecclesiastical estate. And when He, the impartial Judge, asks from us a reckoning concerning this great commission entrusted to us by Him, let us not be without reply. Wherefore, following the example of former pious kings who, as in the Old, so in the New Testament, undertook to care for the reform of the clergy and envisaged no better means fir that than a conciliar administration... , we do establish the Spiritual College, that is, a spiritual conciliar administration, which, in accordance with the following Regulation, shall govern all spiritual activities within the All-Russian Church...

#### THE REGULATION OR STATUTE OF THE SPIRITUAL COLLEGE

##### PART. I. WHAT THE SPIRITUAL COLLEGE IS, AND WHAT THE IMPORTANT REASONS FOR SUCH AN ADMINISTRATION ARE

And administrative college is nothing more than an administrative assembly in which certain matters are subject to the administration not of a single person but of many who are qualified therefor and are authorized by sovereign authority....

Let no one suppose that this administration is unsuitable and that it would be better for one person to direct the spiritual affairs of the whole commonalty, as some bishops autonomously govern the affairs of separate countries or of eparchies. Here are proposed cogent reasons

showing that this permanent conciliar administration, like a perpetual synod or Sanhedrin, is more adequate and better than the administration by a single individual, the more so in a monarchy, such as is our Russian State.

1. In the first place, truth is to be found more certainly by conciliar concurrence than through one individual. There is an ancient Greek proverb: Later thoughts are wiser than first. Moreover, many minds pondering a single issue will be wiser than one....

2. As with certainty of understanding, so also the force of a decision concerning an issue is of importance here, for a conciliar verdict tends toward greater assurance and obedience than the ukase [decree] of a single person. The authority of monarchs, whom God himself commands to obey out of conscience, is autocratic. Nevertheless they have their advisors, not only for the sake of a better quest after truth, but so that willful persons may not be able falsely to allege that a monarch commands this or that more through his own power and or whim rather than through judgment of truth. How much more, then, is this so in ecclesiastical administration, where they government is not monarchical and the administrators are commended that they shall not rule the clergy....

3. This is an especially compelling reason: When an administrative college is under the Sovereign Monarch and has been established by the Monarch, it is evident here that the college is not some faction, constituted through secret association for the sake of its own interests, but individuals assembled for the general welfare by the command of the Autocrat and under his scrutiny, jointly with others.

4. It is also important that, in an administration by a single person, there often occurs a prolongation and interruption of affairs because of unavoidable exigencies arising from the administrator, or because of infirmity or illness. And when he passes away, then matters completely come to a halt. It is different with a conciliar administration: should one member not be in attendance, even if he be the most important person, the others carry on the function, and work progresses in an uninterrupted flow.

5. It is of great benefit that, in such a college, there is not to be found room for partiality, insidiousness, and corrupt judgment. For how is it possible that there could gather together persons in defense of a guilty party, or in condemnation of an innocent party, where, if there is one among them who is partial toward, or inflamed against, the individual being judged, still, some other member, and yet a third member, and the rest are free of wrath and partiality? How, indeed, can bribery prevail where work is accomplished not through authority, but on the basis of sound and essential principles and when one is apprehensive of another in that his venality maybe revealed (if he does not show an adequate reason for his opinion)? ...

6. Likewise a college has in itself the freest spirit for justice. It is not as though a single administrator were to fear the wrath of the powerful, for to search out grounds against many, and especially against persons of different stations, is not so easy as against a single person.

7. This is highly significant: the fatherland need have no fear of revolts and disturbances from a conciliar administration such as proceed from a single, independent ecclesiastical administrator.

For the common people do not understand how the spiritual authority is distinguishable from the autocratic; but marveling at the dignity and glory of the Highest pastor, they imagine that such an administrator is a second Sovereign, a power equal to that of the Autocrat, or even greater than he, and that the pastoral office is another, and a better, sovereign authority....

For such evil in a conciliar spiritual administration there is no room. Since here, even as regards the president himself, there is no great glory dazzling the people, since there is no excessive splendor or pageantry, since there is no vainglory surrounding him, flatterers cannot exalt him with extravagant praise. Whatever good is done by such an administration is impossible to be attributed to the president alone. The very name "president" is not lofty, for it does not mean anything more than chairman....

8. There will accrue also this benefit to the Church and to the state from a conciliar administration: in it, not only any one of the members, but even the president or chairman, himself, shall be subject to the judgment of his peers, that is, to that selfsame college, if he manifestly errs in something....

9. Finally, such a conciliar administration will form something like a school of ecclesiastical administration... [T]hose who are among the most qualified persons among the colleagues, or associates, will be worthy to ascend to the dignity of the episcopate. And thus, in Russia, with God's help, coarseness will soon fall away from the clergy, and the very best can be hoped for....

*The Spiritual Regulation of Peter the Great*, ed. and trans. Alexander V. Muller, (Seattle, 1972).