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Russian Religion: Its Evolution Through Revolution

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THE prevalent conception concerning the Russian Orthodox Church, and the clergy and religion in general, like many other ideas about Russia, has been not only grossly inaccurate but positively grotesque. Fostered by Communist propaganda designed to justify the militant atheism of Communist rulers and their cruel persecution of religious faiths during the Revolution, these ideas picture the Russian Orthodox religion as a primitive potpourri compounded of ignorance, prejudice and superstition, decked out in Oriental ritualism; the clergy as a mongrel breed of magicians, witch doctors, prestidigitators and exploiters; and the cultural role of the Church as that of an "opiate of the people's mind" whose primary social function was to assist the autocratic Czarist regime to exploit the masses and keep them in subjection. In addition, it is claimed that the Orthodox Church, in co-operation with the government, ruthlessly suppressed all other religions. Imbued with such notions, large circles outside Russia, including even part of the Christian clergy, have felt that the Communist antireligious policy was not without justification.

It is hardly necessary to point out the underlying fallacies. The actual character and the sociocultural role of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as the true position of other faiths in Russia, may be summarized as follows:

1. Owing to the rather intimate contacts of the Slavic tribes with Byzantium and Bulgaria, Christianity began to penetrate Russia as early as the ninth and tenth centuries.

2. Its influence became so strong that in due course it became the official, or state religion. This step, however, was not taken hastily. An investigation and comparison of the relative merits of the Jewish, Mohammedan and "Latin" religions was made, and only after a thoroughgoing examination of each of them was the Byzantine-Bulgarian form of Christianity finally adopted.

3. The Greek form of Christianity was at that time not yet sharply differentiated either theologically or formally from the "Latin" form, whose seat was at Rome. Dogmatic differences were then of secondary

importance, the principal issues being psychosocial factors and rivalry for administrative supremacy. Constantinople, or Byzantium, was the chief heir of Greco-Roman culture; one of the foremost centers of Christianity in the world; the seat of virtually the most powerful empire in Christendom, far surpassing at that time in the fields of the fine arts, science, philosophy, law, and so forth. Moreover, the Byzantine religion had emerged from the "Iconoclastic" struggle as a sound and virile faith. Russia's choice was both comprehensible and sensible from many standpoints. It gave pagan Russia a fully developed form of Christianity. It introduced well-educated Greek priests, missionaries, *et cetera*, who constituted Russia's first religious teachers and clergy. Byzantium supplied, moreover, the artists, architects, and other craftsmen essential for the erection and decoration of churches and the building of ecclesiastical schools, hospitals, orphanages, almshouses and similar institutions. Again, Byzantium furnished learned scribes who translated or transcribed the most important existing religious books, including the Scriptures and the *Nomokanon*, or Byzantine code of canon law.

4. Owing to the rapid diffusion of Byzantine Christianity (which was destined gradually to be Russianized, by imperceptible degrees), it became one of the basic forces in the historical development of the Russian government, society and culture and an integral part of the psychology of the Russian people, which can hardly be conceived of apart from its influence. Its power is typically illustrated by the striking transformation which it wrought in the personality of Prince (or "Saint") Vladimir, who introduced it, and in that of his immediate successors. Extremely sensual, violent and belligerent by nature, after his conversion he became so gentle that, heeding the biblical injunction, "Thou shalt not kill," he hesitated to punish even criminals. In the spirit of Christian charity he gave his "goods to feed the poor." He built churches, orphan asylums and ecclesiastical schools. The notable law code, "Russian Truth" (*Russkaia Pravda*), enacted by his successor, Prince Jaroslav the Wise (1016-1054), abolished capital punishment and torture for all crimes, replacing these penalties with monetary fines. The next distinguished prince, Vladimir Monomach (1113-1125), both in his way of life and in his "Testament" bequeathed to his successors, reveals the profound metamorphosis of a pagan Norse warrior into a meek and lowly follower of the Nazarene. "Have the fear of God in your hearts and perform incessantly the work of charity—this is the foundation of everything good." "Don't forswear your oath." "Do not

permit the strong to harm the weak." "Do not kill either the innocent or the guilty, not even if the guilty deserve the death penalty." "When you and your troops are traveling through the Russian lands, do not allow your guard or your retinue to exploit and oppress the population; wherever you stop, give food and drink to all who ask for them." "Get up early, before the sunrise; pray to God; and then sit down with your companions to deliberate on the state affairs and to render justice." One can hardly imagine a greater contrast to the pre-Christian pagan warrior!

Early Russian Christianity expressed itself not only in preaching and divine service, but in a fundamental reshaping of the character of the people, their institutions, and their culture. It was responsible for the establishment of Russia's first schools; it produced the first law codes; introduced courts for judgment of the clergy as well as of the people in ethical and religious matters; it improved family life and raised the general standard of morality; it fostered charitable institutions and a system of social service; it opposed and ameliorated slavery and serfdom; it shaped the hierarchical principle of social stratification and differentiation; it translated and circulated the first books; it initiated the fine arts; and it laid the foundations of Russian philosophy and *Weltanschauung*. In a word, its religious, ethical, social and cultural impact was overwhelming.

5. Throughout the entire subsequent history of Russia, the Christian Church has been particularly salutary and helpful in the tragic crises when the independence or the very existence of the nation has been at stake, as during the Tatar invasions; the incursions of Turks, Poles, Swedes and Teutons; the assaults of Napoleon and Hitler's legions; and the grave periods of internal anarchy, such as the "Times of Trouble" at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Without the ministrations of the Church it is doubtful whether Russia could have managed to survive certain of these crises.

In view of the manifold and vital functions performed by the Russian Orthodox religion, it has probably played a more important role than any branch of the Christian Church in most of the European countries. In its absence the structure of Russian society and culture would have been as inchoate and incomprehensible as that of medieval Europe without Roman Catholicism. Hence the absurdity of the conception of the Russian ecclesiastical system as a burden artificially imposed upon the people.

This identification of the state religion with the national soul explains the exclusive value attached to it in Russia's social and cultural life up

to the Revolution and its gradually increasing value since the close of the destructive phase of the Revolution. Russia has hardly known the principle of racial, or ethnic discrimination. If groups such as the Jews, Poles or pagans have been discriminated against, this has been due not to their race or nationality but to their *religion;* and as soon as they have accepted Russian Orthodox Christianity, all limitations upon their rights and privileges have automatically ceased.

This accounts also for the somewhat privileged position allotted to the Russian Orthodox religion (in contradistinction especially to sects) before the beginning of the twentieth century. It did not differ sharply from the pre-eminence of the Anglican Church among the various other religious denominations of England; and it was certainly less striking than the exclusive sway exercised by the dominant church faction in colonial Massachusetts. All the Christian denominations, as well as Judaism, Mohammedanism and many pagan religions, were tolerated and openly carried on their respective activities. Moreover, it was the state which actually paid the greater part of the salaries of the Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy. The only sects that were prohibited were those regarded as antisocial, such as the Khlysty, whose revivals were attended by sexual orgies or, the Skoptzy, whose practices involves the mutilation of the genitalia. It was but natural that the government should have encouraged conversion to the Orthodox faith. But insofar as conversion to other religions was hindered by legal methods, it was inhibited only indirectly, in the sense that a convert forfeited certain of the privileges he had enjoyed as a member of the Orthodox Church. Such discriminations as existed (for the most part *de facto* rather than legal) were eventually abolished by the constitution and reforms of 1906 and the following years.

Finally, the record of the Russian state Church is far freer from the guilt of large-scale religious wars and persecutions than that of the Roman Catholic Church and of some of the Protestant denominations (notably the Calvinists). In its treatment of "heretics" and unbelievers it exhibits nothing comparable to the cruelty of the Inquisition, the ruthless wars against the Albigensians and Huguenots or the massacre of St. Bartholomew.

Apart from the coercive measures employed by the Kiev government after its adoption of Christianity, virtually the sole historical example of serious religious dissension relates to the sharp clash between the so-called "Old Believers" and the "Nikonians," during the reign of Czar Alexei Mikhailovitch (1645-1676). The reforms carried out by the Patriarch

Nikon—concerning such matters as the correct text of the Scriptures, the proper spelling of the name of Jesus, the representation of the Cross with four or eight arms, the increase in the authority of the Patriarch at the expense of that of the Czar, and so forth—encountered stubborn resistance. This opposition led in several instances to persecution of the "Old Believers" at the hands of the state. But, despite its acuteness, this clash was merely an *internal* dispute—not a struggle between Russian and non-Russian forms of Christianity.

Taken in its theological, philosophical, moral and social aspects, the Russian Orthodox religion differs from Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in many ways; but none of these differences affords a proper basis for regarding the Russian type of Christianity as inferior to any of the other important Christian denominations.

Theologically and ritually it is similar to the "High Church" wing of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Theologically, the main difference between Eastern Christianity and Roman Catholicism relates to the famous term *filioque* in the Roman Catholic Credo—that is, the question whether the Holy Ghost emanates from God the Father only, as the Eastern Church contends, or from God the Son also (*filioque*), as is held by the Roman Catholic Church. This difference, as is well known, was one of the principal bones of contention responsible for the final cleavage of Christianity (in 1054) into its Eastern and Western branches.

In its spirit and philosophy the Russian Orthodox Church occupies an intermediate position between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. It is, of course, very difficult to give in a few words an authentic picture of the "soul" of any great religion. But the essential differences may be summed up as follows: The Russian religion is less dogmatic and authoritarian than Roman Catholicism, but more so than Protestantism. The hierarchical principle in the Russian Church is more fully developed than in most of the Protestant denominations, but less so than in the Church of Rome. The Russian Patriarch has never possessed as much authority as the Pope; and he has never claimed either supremacy over the other patriarchs or infallibility as does the Pope. The Russian Patriarch has been simply *primus inter pares* among the high prelates of the Russian Church. To eminent Russian thinkers like Dostoevsky, Roman Catholicism, as a religio-political system, appeared as a marvelous mechanism that had forfeited, to a large extent, the vital spirit of Jesus. Protestantism, *per contra*, impressed them as essentially a protest against Catholicism—a neg-

ative phenomenon that could neither thrive nor even continue to exist in the absence of the object of its protest. In his "Three Ideas" and in the "Legend of the Great Inquisitor" in his *Brothers Karamazoff*, Dostoevsky develops a striking picture of the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Russian churches. The Russian Church, he feels, occupies a middle position. It is much less of a mechanism than the Church of Rome, and much less deeply imbued with a spirit of protest than the Protestant denominations. Similarly, it is less formal than the Catholic system and more formal than Protestantism. It gives wider latitude to human reason, experience and intuition in religion and ethics than Catholicism, but less than many Protestant denominations. It does not require unconditional and unquestioning acceptance of the dicta of the church authorities, thus permitting a much larger margin of autonomy than does Roman Catholicism for the searching mind of the believer; neither does it leave the whole matter to the reason or inspiration of the individual, as do certain Protestant denominations. It is more intimate and warmhearted, less coldly rational and authoritarian than Catholicism, but less "anarchic" and "spontaneously revivalistic" than Protestantism. It strongly stresses the free, spontaneous, all-embracing love of God to man and of man to God, rather than unquestioning obedience to the dicta of authority, as in Roman Catholicism and Calvinism, or the utilitarian freedom characteristic of most Protestant sects.

According to Dostoevsky, Catholicism made three primary forces the very foundation of its teaching and existence, namely, authority, mystery (or dogma) and miracles. And by means of considerable exaggerations, he and other notable Russian religious thinkers bring out several significant differences between the Russian, Roman Catholic and Protestant types of "religious soul." The principle of Caesarism has certainly found far less authentic expression in the Russian ecclesiastical system than in Roman Catholicism or Calvinism. The same is true of the principle of blind obedience to dogma or that of empirical utilitarianism in the field of religion.

In its spirit and philosophy the Russian Orthodox Church is much closer to the Eastern Church Fathers, such as Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Basil, Pseudo-Dionysius and Saint John Chrysostom, than to Saint Augustine; and it finds among Western religious thinkers a closer affinity to Johannus Scotus Erigena and Saint Francis of Assisi than to Saint Thomas Aquinas or Calvin, or to Pope Leo the Great, Pope Gregory IX and similar distinguished organizers of the Church of Rome. Its spirit of mysticism has been as strong as that of Roman Catholicism, and even stronger than

that of Protestantism; but this spirit has exhibited more in informal and hence more diverse and unorthodox patterns than that of Western Catholicism.

These points of divergence between the Russian religion and other types of Christianity suffice to show that the former is in no sense more primitive, superstitious or obscurantist than the latter. The intermediate position which the Russian religion occupies between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in itself argues against such an assumption. Avoiding the two extremes, it has impressed many thoughtful minds as being more balanced and harmonious than either Roman Catholicism or Protestantism. When one studies both its past and its comparatively recent theological and philosophical works, one is forced to admit that in their own way they are as profound as the foremost contributions of Roman Catholic and Protestant theological and philosophical thought.

Hierarchically the Russian Church was originally subordinated to the Byzantine Church, being under the jurisdiction of its Patriarch. In a comparatively short time, however, it became actually and then legally independent of this jurisdiction. The Russian Patriarch, *elected* by the authorized representatives of the Russian religion, became its head. At no time in its history was it subject to the control of the Roman Catholic See.

The administrative and guiding role of the Russian Patriarch was a powerful one, and most of the patriarchs discharged their duties faithfully and to good effect, especially during periods of acute crisis. Such names as those of Abbotts Theodosy Petchersky, Sergius Radonejsky, Abram Palytzyn, Dionysius and the patriarchs Hermogen, Peter, Alexis, Thomas and Philipp, are stamped indelibly upon the pages of Russian history. The pre-Patriarchal and Patriarchal epochs were, on the whole, heroic, creative and democratic. Directly and indirectly the Church was a genuine *Corpus Mysticum*. Its leaders and clerical personnel were recruited from all classes of the population. The hierarchy was democratic in spirit, closely united with the people, and largely elective—a true *sobor*, or religious collective entity. Thus it was no less democratic and no more autocratic than the other Christian religions of the West.

Unfortunately, the reforms of Peter the Great terminated the Patriarchy (in 1721) and considerably curtailed the independence and the creative role of the Church. Like other "enlightened monarchical reformers," he sought to eliminate all rivalry between the Church and the State, and all efforts to block the reforms initiated by the government—in a word,

to destroy all independence of church policy. Hence he abolished the Patriarchy, replacing it with a collective *Synod*, an ecclesiastical college composed of metropolitans and bishops, as the supreme church authority, and appointing a High Procurator as his personal representative for the supervision of the Synod and the co-ordination of the Synod's policies with those of the government. The objective results of these ill-advised reforms were, among others, a certain loss of independence in connection with the judicial, social and economic functions of the Church; the bureaucratization of its administrative apparatus; the subordination of the hierarchy to the Czarist government; a decrease in the spontaneous collectivity of the Church (at least in the upper strata of the hierarchy), and the replacement of democratic principles by autocratic ones in the selection of the hierarchs and other leaders and in ecclesiastical functions in general. The vital creative unity of the Church in its upper ranks was supplanted by the official machinery so vigorously denounced by Dostoevsky.

But, while Peter's reforms radically changed the administrative mechanism in the upper strata, they did not fundamentally alter the basic character of the Russian religion; the religious aspirations, attitudes and beliefs of the people, or the functions of the rank and file of the clergy. These continued to function essentially as they had done before. The Church continued to stand by the people throughout the darkest periods of Russian history, such as those of the domination of the state by German cliques, the Napoleonic invasion, and the like. Similarly the people stood by the Church. Peter's reforms accordingly failed to sever the ties that bound the nation and the Church into a single unity.

If notable changes occurred in the period from 1721 to 1917, they were due not so much to the aforesaid reforms as to the general change of sociocultural conditions in Russia as in other parts of Europe, and to the altered mentality of some of the Russian classes. This change in the "cultural climate" led to a decrease of religious-mindedness on the part of the educated classes; a notable decline of the prestige of the Church among certain sections of the population; a weakening of the spiritual leadership of the Church; a slackening and bureaucratization of religious functions in the case of some of the priests and prelates, and a general decline in the creative role of the Church. The "subserviency of the Russian Church to Czardom" was by no means as widespread and serious as its calumniators have claimed.

Especially acute was the decline of religious feeling among the educated

classes. The more revolutionary element became open disbelievers and outright atheists, equally inimical to Christianity and to non-Christian faiths. A similar spirit of irreligiousness—marked by greater vulgarity—invaded other classes, notably the urban population. Though the bulk of the peasantry remained outwardly religious, their piety became merely a ritualistic affair. The living spirit of religion everywhere was withering. During the second half of the nineteenth century this process gained added momentum, continuing up to 1917. Hence it will be seen that the anti-religious trend was not initiated by the Revolution but existed long before it.

One of the first acts of the Revolution in March, 1917, was the proclamation by the Provisional Government (headed by Prince Lvov and then by Kerensky) of complete freedom of religion. Simultaneously the Church and the nation seized the opportunity to divest the Church of its subservience to the government, first introduced by the reforms of Peter the Great; to re-establish the Patriarchy at the place of the bureaucratic Synod; to eliminate all the undesirable traits that it had acquired, and to restore the heroic and truly creative role it had played before the reforms of Peter the Great. In the summer of 1917 an all-Russian Sobor (or Congress) of the duly elected representatives of all the faithful was held in Moscow and unanimously voted these and many other reforms. The Metropolitan Tikhon, a former representative of the Russian Church in the United States, was elected as Patriarch. The revival of religion and the Church began to proceed apace. If the Church had only been granted a few years for the consummation of this promising renaissance, there is hardly any doubt that a new creative and heroic religious epoch would have been ushered in.

Unfortunately, the Communist revolution attempted by every means to destroy religion in general, and the Russian Orthodox system in particular. Its murderous attacks were launched precisely at a time when the Russian Church had become as free and democratic as possible. The Communist government from the beginning declared for freedom of conscience but definitely restricted freedom of religion. In the name of militant atheism, it branded all religion as "an opiate of the people's mind" and embarked upon a pitiless and brutal persecution directed particularly against the Orthodox Church. Church buildings and other ecclesiastical property (including even gold, silver and valuable ritual objects) were seized by the government on the general ground of nationalization of all but personal property. Many churches were compulsory closed, being converted into

Communist clubs, warehouses, and so on. It was forbidden to give religious instruction to any group of persons with the exception of instruction in the family, where the number of those receiving such instruction must not exceed three. Even this was frowned upon and not infrequently penalized. During the years when the barest means of subsistence could be obtained only through ration cards, the clergy either were given no cards at all or were allotted a minimum ration sufficient only to prevent their "forgetting how bread smells" (the wording of Zinoviev, then a big Communist boss, later "purged" and liquidated). Furthermore, religious ceremonies could not be performed outside church buildings. Finally, more than a thousand of the clergy and religious-minded civilians were summarily arrested and executed. Hypocritically, the official reason given for the execution was "counterrevolutionary activities." But the falsity of the official subterfuge is all too clear. Several of my colleagues at the University of Petrograd and several of my friends and acquaintances were executed merely because of their active participation in religious activities: they had not the remotest connection with any real counterrevolutionary work. Exact statistics of these victims are not available; for during the destructive period of the Revolution, executions were conducted on such a large scale (about five hundred thousand were slain) that nobody bothered to record the number. The victims included at least twenty-eight bishops and twelve hundred and nineteen priests, to say nothing of the thousands of humbler believers who were imprisoned, sent to concentration camps, or condemned to hard labor and thus doomed to slow death.

Consider the children and other relatives of religious-minded persons, particularly those of the clergy who were discriminated against for "the sins of their fathers." Add to this the loss of civil and political rights suffered by the faithful. Consider, further, the atheistic propaganda, conducted by influential Communist leaders, officially sanctioned and financed, denouncing God, Christ, the Virgin and all the basic values of religion in the most unrestrained and frequently virulent and indecent terms. Under the threat of drastic punishment, such propaganda and other activities could not be openly opposed; no counterpropaganda or other resistance was tolerated.

Overtaking the Church at the moment of its revival and reconstruction, this persecution, rivalling almost any known to history, together with measures directed to the same end, exerted temporarily a profound influence. The younger generation, virtually deprived of religious instruction,

grew up either actively irreligious or at least wholly indifferent to religion. Many an adult, in the face of threatened punishment and the loss of certain privileges, lost much of his religious zeal. The Church itself split into several factions, including the "New Churchmen" (or Novo-Zerkovnik) who became subservient henchmen of the Communist government, and factions radically opposed to the government (these factions, of course, could openly exist only abroad, among the Russian exiles). The Patriarch Tikhon, as a prisoner of the Communist government, could exert no unifying power. But the chief problem was that the government refused to recognize the Church administrative body of Patriarch Tikhon which he desired to set up after the "Living Church" had usurped the Patriarch's chancery while he was in prison. He was under strict surveillance, unable either to move about freely or to publish anything not sanctioned by the Soviet authorities. In 1925 he died. His successor, Bishop Peter, was soon arrested and banished to Siberia. His successor, in turn, Bishop (and then Metropolitan) Sergius, adopted a policy of collaboration, within decent limits, with the Communist regime. Such a policy naturally proved wholly ineffective during the first phase of the Revolution, leading to a loss of prestige of the acting Patriarch among many groups of believers; to the formal repudiation of his authority by a number of the hierarchy, both in Russia and abroad; to the administrative separation of several Russian churches abroad from the existing Russian Patriarchy; and to similar results.

The unity of the Russian Church was thus finally broken. Its hierarchical structure was split up into a number of factions. For the time being, it had ceased to constitute a single *Corpus Mysticum*.

Every serious investigator of profound revolutions is aware that they destroy only those institutions, values and trends that were already moribund, while those that are fundamentally sound invariably survive the negative phase, in a purified and ennobled form. Their power, indeed, is so irresistible that the revolution is ultimately compelled to recognize and sanction them, even going so far as to pretend that, instead of having sought to oppose them, it has consistently endeavored to preserve and cherish them. This is precisely what has happened with many basic institutions and values during the postdestructive phase of the Russian revolution. Among them is the Russian religious system.

During the nineteen thirties a gradual, almost imperceptible change became evident in the field of the Russian Church and religion and in the policy of the government vis-à-vis these institutions. In the first place,

those who had retained their faith, as well as those newly converted from their erstwhile position as atheists, were animated by a religious ardor of singular intensity. Their religious sense transcended the comparatively low level of routine ritualism and inherited custom and soared to exalted heights, envisaging a union with God and His eternal values unblemished by any mundane motives. As such it became an utterly fearless and irresistible force, taking complete possession of the body and soul of the believer.

This transformation occurred in many different classes. The intelligentsia, hitherto perhaps more atheistic or agnostic than that of any other country, became more acutely religious-minded. University professors and representatives of other professions who had scarcely ever delivered a sermon prior to the Revolution now frequently felt impelled to preach to church congregations. The former agnostic or atheistic and hostile attitude toward religion largely disappeared. The cases of S. Bulgakoff and N. Berdyaev, professors of political economy at the University of Moscow, are typical. They were among the few intellectuals who constituted the first notable Russian Marxians and introduced Marxism into Russia. During the Revolution, Bulgakoff was ordained as a priest and became the head of the Russian Theological Institute in Paris; and Berdiaieff became an eminent religious thinker and philosopher. A similar religious transformation manifested itself among the peasantry and other classes, including even a section of the Communist party itself. An impartial observer who attended the church services during these years, if he had been familiar with the atmosphere prevalent before the Revolution, would have been amazed by the intensity of the religious fervor displayed by the congregation. A sensitive observer could not have failed to detect an atmosphere akin to that which probably prevailed in the early Christian catacombs—a spirit of unbounded religious aspiration, devotion and faith in God, and of willingness, if necessary, to die for one's faith.

In some this metamorphosis assumed the form of mysticism and gnosticism, in the truest sense of the terms. In the majority of cases it assumed the guise of devotion to the Russian Orthodox religion in a purified and highly spiritualized form. Some of the latter adhered to the ritual and other traditional ceremonials, regularly attending the church services and submitting to the administrative guidance of the Moscow Patriarchy, its acting head, and the other ecclesiastical authorities. Others, more concerned with inner, subjective values, regarded the ritual as something

secondary—as a means rather than an end—and hence tended somewhat to ignore the externals of the Orthodox faith. These distinctions are made in order to emphasize the fact that *the magnitude of the religious revival in question cannot be properly apprehended solely on the basis of attendance upon church services and of the official records of the number of believers.*

A similar renaissance made itself felt within the ranks of the priesthood and the hierarchy. The weaker personalities—those who were earning their livelihood as officials of the Church Department and were afraid of incurring disfranchisement and like penalties—were gradually weeded out during the fiery ordeal of the Revolution. Preferring to play safe by courting the favor of the ruling class, they forswore the priesthood and became "seculars," loyally subservient to the Communist authorities. Only those who were true servants of God, putting their spiritual duties above all other considerations, remained within the ranks of the clergy. Purified and transfigured by the tragic ordeal through which they and their country had passed, they have measured up to the most exalted standards of religious and ethical leadership, and have thus gained added authority and prestige in the eyes of all the faithful whom they so devotedly and wholeheartedly serve. This process of revival of religiosity in its various forms is very modest, as yet, and far from being widely spread. Nevertheless it took place and is bound to grow.

Revitalized both within the ranks of the clergy and in the hearts of the people, religion naturally began to exert an ever-increasing influence upon the nation and the government. Firmly entrenched in power, and with the Church relegated exclusively to religious functions, the government eventually lost its hysterical paranoic disposition to detect on every hand evidences of sinister "counterrevolutionary" activities. This led to an abatement of its policy of persecution. Faced with the paramount task of social reconstruction, it came to perceive the need for actual co-operation with the Church. Coercive police measures, so effective for purposes of suppression, were discovered to be wholly inadequate for rebuilding the family; educating the masses; inculcating honesty, social-mindedness and altruism; developing the arts and sciences, economics and politics. Finally, when the imminence of war became apparent, and it was necessary to arouse a popular sense of loyalty, heroic courage and readiness for supreme sacrifice, the co-operation of the forces of religion became even more imperative. Although not many were prepared to fight and die for either Stalin or

the Communist party, the rank and file were willing, as always, to sacrifice themselves for the *fatherland* and its basic historical values. For a part of the population among these fundamental values were religion and the Church. As in previous crises, these institutions could be counted on to inculcate a spirit of loyalty, courage and sacrifice.

Under such circumstances the religious policy of the government was bound to be progressively transformed, manifesting first an attitude of increasing tolerance and then an open recognition of the positive values of the religious groups as a patriotic force. This included lavish praise for the services of such leaders as Prince ("Saint") Alexander Nevsky and the various patriarchs, bishops, abbots and priests who had helped to create Russia, and to organize resistance to the enemy in the darkest hours of foreign invasion.

This shift of policy reacted, in turn, upon the religious renaissance itself. With the decline of the Communist persecution, many who had been cowed by repression began to return to the fold of the Church. Many religious customs, including the observance of Christmas and Easter, were restored; Sunday and holy days were increasingly observed; and church attendance mounted, even among members of the Communist party. Atheistic propaganda abated and soon almost reached the vanishing point. At present its organizations are virtually disbanded, its publications have largely ceased to function, and it is surmised that it no longer derives any appreciable funds from the government treasury.

The invasion of the country by Hitler's legions gave an enormous impetus to this religious revival. Contrary to his expectations, the Nazi attack served merely to weld Russians of all factions and creeds into an indivisible unity—a single entity unconditionally resolved to fight for Russia's freedom and independence. No sooner was the first assault launched than the Church and its leaders called upon the citizenry to rally to the support of the fatherland. To this challenge the faithful responded without stint, contributing money and valuables, food, clothing and almost anything they possessed to the defense of the country. Parishioners and priests alike joined the armed forces, loyally co-operating with the government.

It would, of course, be incorrect to assume that the trend in question has already reached its culmination. The covert attitude of the Soviet authorities toward religion is probably still one of hostility, suspicion or, at least, indifference. Nevertheless, a minimum of religious freedom has

been achieved; and this will undoubtedly steadily increase, regardless of the ideology of the political regime. Meanwhile the government itself, impelled by the pressure of powerful historical forces, will inevitably assume an attitude of growing friendliness toward and co-operation with the various religious organizations of the nation.

To summarize. After the long prerevolutionary period of gradual decline, followed by the tragic disintegration incident to the first phase of the Revolution, the Russian religious system began rapidly to revive, purified, sublimated, ennobled and revitalized by the fiery ordeal of the crisis through which it had passed. It is now potentially as strong as that of any country—probably stronger than in many—possessing immense latent resources of faith and moral power.

In conclusion, it may be said that, all in all, the Russian religion and Church throughout the centuries have been virtually as democratic as any comparable religious system in the world. At the present time they are again becoming free, more and more exempt from control by the state and shorn of the last vestiges of the dead weight of bureaucracy.

Editor's Note: This article is to appear as a chapter in Doctor Sorokin's new book, *Russia and the United States,* which is scheduled for publication by E. P. Dutton and Company, January, 1944.