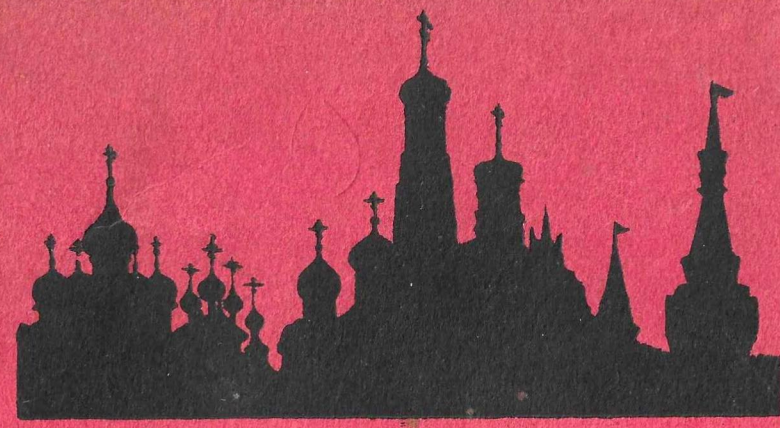

Moscow The Third Rome

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BY

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LONDON
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE
NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

First published . . 1937
Second Edition . . 1938
Reprinted . . . 1941
Reprinted . . . 1942

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN

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THROUGHOUT this book the expression Rome does not refer to the Roman Catholic Church, but to the spirit of Imperial Rome.

INTRODUCTION

THE ENIGMA OF THE RUSSIAN CHURCH

" Moscow the Third Rome " is a title which means little to an English reader. It would probably suggest to him some obscure legend of early Russian history, hardly to be connected with the modern problems of Russian life. And yet there are probably few subjects which have more direct bearing on the development of Russian religion, and on the destiny of the nation, than the belief in Moscow as the Third and last Rome, the successor and spiritual heir of Rome and Constantinople.

Russia has always been little understood by other countries. Her religion, art and culture remained practically unknown until almost the end of the nineteenth century, when the attention of other nations was first directed to her literature through the writings of such men as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, who opened the door to the realm of Russian thoughts and ideas. Gradually Russian music, drama, and in particular Russian ballet, have become appreciated, and have taken a prominent place in the artistic life of Europe and America.

The Revolution which overthrew the Imperial power in 1917 marked an epoch, not only in the history of Russia herself, but also in her relations with other countries, for since then the attention of the world has been focussed on her social and economical problems.

The Communist experiment in Russia has provoked literature embracing all aspects of the country's life, political, religious, social, economic and artistic, and it is

therefore to be expected that a wider knowledge of her history should be the possession of educated men and women. These expectations have not, however, been justified, and Russia still remains an enigma to the outside world. The prolific amount of information now obtainable is of such a contradictory nature that it only serves to add to the mystery in which the country is shrouded.

One of the main reasons for this confusion is the lack of knowledge of the history of the Russian Church, for just as it is utterly impossible to understand the present situation in Germany without a study of Luther and his part in the growth of Germanic culture, as the United States of America will remain a mystery to those without knowledge of the Puritan tradition of the first Anglo-Saxon settlers, as the England of today will be quite incomprehensible to those in ignorance of its Reformation and of Nonconformity, so will Russia never be really understood until the history of its Church and the character of its Christian traditions are fully grasped and comprehended.

The failure to take into account a factor of such primary importance would be inexplicable were it not for the singularity of the reasons which have caused it. These reasons are of a widely divergent nature, but they are all rooted in the misleading conviction that the Russian Church has always lacked any originality of approach to the Christian Faith, and has been nothing more than a mere copy of the Byzantine Church. This opinion was as widespread among Russian as among non-Russian scholars, and only of late years has its error been corrected in the works of leading Russian theologians and Church historians.*

* The works of Prince E. Trubetzkoy and Professors N. Berdyaev, S Bulgakov, A. Kartashev and G. Fedotov are particularly important from this point of view.

Although a full understanding of this attitude would demand a wider discussion of the history of Russian Christianity than is within the scope of this book, yet some explanation of it can be given here.

The failure of Russian theologians to realise the originality of the Russian Church was due to the breach in the cultural development of the nation caused by the great schism of the seventeenth century and by the forcible westernisation of the country which immediately followed it. The official school of Russian theology was forced, in its opposition to the excessive nationalism and religious exclusiveness of its bitter enemies, the Old Believers, to over-emphasise the unity of the Greek and Russian Christian traditions. This tendency of the official theology was accentuated by the adoption of Western scholasticism as the basis of the religious teaching given in the Russian theological colleges. Thus the Russian ecclesiastical leaders of the nineteenth century overlooked the fact that their Church held a singular position among other Christian bodies, her approach to religion being neither Greek nor Latin. Although Russia was Christianised by the Greeks, and her Church has always remained in communion with the rest of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, she has always followed her own path, interpreting for herself the common traditions of Christianity. Indeed, the Greek and the Russian approaches to Christianity are in some points no less divergent than those of the Greek and Latin. Russian Christianity has always been absorbed in problems which are outside the province of Hellenistic interest, and the Russians have never been able to follow those trends of thought which make particular appeal to the genius of the Greek nation. This was, however, persistently denied by the official school of Russian theology, which was accustomed

to believe that the teaching of the Church should be confined to two classical interpretations, the Latin and the Greek, and was therefore shocked at the bold statements of the lay theologians of the Slavophil School,* who were the first to proclaim that the Russian Church followed neither of these traditions.

The radically minded " Intelligentsia " of Russia was even more opposed to that teaching, for it was working for the destruction of every form of national particularism in order to bring Russia into line with the rest of Europe. The Slavophil insistence upon the originality of Russian Christianity seemed to them to be only another impediment to the realisation of International Fellowship, in which all national, cultural and religious differences would be broken down.

Thus we have in Russia a national Church with special features which distinguish it from both the Eastern and Western Churches, and yet unable openly to express these differences or to interpret truly its own history because both its official theologians and the educated class were unwilling to recognise its distinctive and particular character. If we add to this psychological attitude of Russian historians the fact that the study of Russian Church history was severely controlled and censured by the Imperial Government before the Revolution, and is now strictly forbidden by the Communist rulers of Russia, we shall then fully realise the causes which have prevented a full understanding of Russian Church history in the country itself.†

If such obstacles hindered the study by Russian scholars of their Church history, even greater difficulties would

* Khomiakov, Samarin and Soloviev.

† There is not a single book, either in Russian or any other language, which gives an up-to-date history of the Russian Church.

confront any non-Russian historian. Primarily there were few inducements to undertake such a study, for the Russian Church has always been singularly isolated from the rest of Christianity, and there have been hardly any points in her history at which she has been brought into close touch with the life of the Western Churches.

Besides this, the sources of information are scanty and not easily accessible, the language in which all documents were written being neither Greek nor Latin, but the old Slavonic. Moreover, since Russian Christianity found its most natural expression in art rather than in theological writings,* its study required a very novel approach and the use of such unfamiliar material (such as Ikons and Church music) as put it almost completely outside the range of even the most enterprising and keen students.

And yet in spite of all these difficulties there is today a real need for the study of Russian Christianity, not only because the nation has become too important a factor in the political, social and artistic life of the world to allow her religious background to be neglected, but also because she now occupies a crucial position in the world-wide conflict between the Christian and the Totalitarian conceptions of life which presents one of the most vital problems of our modern history. The Church of Russia is now exposed to the bitter attack of the militant atheists, and the understanding of the spiritual and physical pressure brought against it by the omnipotent State, and of its consequences, is of vital significance to all those concerned for the future of Christianity.

And yet such an understanding is impossible without knowledge of the past history of the Russian Church; for the confusion which surrounds the persecution of Chris-

* A most illuminating book on this subject is *The Philosophy in Colours*, by Prince E. Trubetzkoy (Moscow, 1915).

tians in Russia is a direct result of false ideas as to the character of Russian religious life before the Revolution. The present persecution is sometimes even represented as a severe but justified punishment inflicted upon a corrupt and superstitious Church, and the Communists are even depicted as fanatical but zealous reformers.

Such a misleading conception robs Russian Christians of the sympathy and help which they so sorely need, and at the same time prevents other Christians from applying to their own Church life the results of the Russian experiment. The Communists have been the first to make the attempt to eradicate the belief in God and the immortality and freedom of human personality, and the heroic resistance of Russian Christians to the Communist attack is not only one of the most significant events of our time, but is also one of the most glorious pages in the annals of Christian history.

The Russian Church, like every historic body, has had, and will have, many failures and shortcomings, but one of the most tragic consequences of isolation is that of ascribing to her sins which she has never committed and virtues which she has never possessed. It is one of the most striking paradoxes of the twentieth century that in an age of wireless and air-lines to all parts of the world this Church of many million people inhabiting northern Europe and Asia is still a body so little known that almost any fantastic account of her is believed, and may be accepted as the basis of the policy of other nations. The study of Russian Christianity is one of the tasks of our time, urgently needed both in and outside Russian circles.

This book does not pretend to be in any way a complete introduction to this subject. It deals with only one aspect of Russian Christianity, but one which reveals many

original features of the Russian approach to religion. Its contents were first delivered as a course of public lectures at King's College, London, under the auspices of the School of Slavonic Studies, and were published in *The Church Quarterly Review* in a series of articles.* The author will consider his task achieved if this book destroys some prejudices and misconceptions in the minds of his readers, and strengthens their desire to know more of the Church which occupies such a momentous position in the struggle between those who deny and those who assert the existence of God.

* July, 1935; January, 1936; July, 1936; January, 1938.

CHAPTER I

FROM KIEV TO MOSCOW
(988–1480)

THE Russian State originated in the ninth century as the result of the amalgamation of various Slavonic and Finnish tribes, but its leaders from the first belonged to neither of these races. They were Scandinavian Vikings who had obtained control over the main waterways leading from the Black to the Baltic Seas, from Constantinople to Scandinavia. The Russians and Finns were obliged to recognise the Vikings' rule, and soon they had to follow the example of their masters, who were converted to Christianity in the second part of the tenth century. The decisive event was the baptism, in 988, of Prince Vladimir of Kiev (980-1015). This prince christianised the great mass of his people, in particular the inhabitants of the leading cities of his principality, Kiev in the south, and Novgorod in the north.

There are few authentic records which throw any light upon the attitude of the people to this change of religion. It seems that the population received only a very superficial instruction from the priests whom Vladimir brought into the country from the Byzantine Empire. The Russians were baptised in large numbers in the rivers and streams, and in some places plainly under pressure from Vladimir's envoys. But in spite of this the opposition seems to have been small and spasmodic. The large majority of the Slavs rejected paganism without great resentment and easily accepted Christianity, while the

Finns showed much greater resistance and their conversion to Christianity took much longer. The new religion was so easily received by the Russians that the Church preserves the names of few other evangelists except Vladimir himself, who was in this rôle canonised in the twelfth century.

It is difficult to decide the exact reasons for Vladimir's determination to christianise his country, though it is possible that to a large extent he was influenced by the desire to bring Russia into closer relations with Europe and its essentially Christian civilisation. The geographical position of Russia brought it into frequent commercial contacts with both Byzantium and Scandinavia. The difference of religion, however, hindered closer co-operation between Russia and her more cultured neighbours. The conversion of the country was probably only a question of time, but Vladimir's place in the history of Russia is of unique importance, for he determined the future of the nation by associating it with the Eastern and not with the Latin type of Christianity. The Russian chronicle preserves a very picturesque legend explaining Vladimir's choice. According to this legend, Vladimir sent envoys to study all the forms of religion; they reported that there was nothing so beautiful on earth as the services at St. Sophia in Constantinople, and consequently Vladimir chose the religion of the Byzantine Empire.

This legend unquestionably contains a real symbolical truth. The approach to religion through beauty is one of the most striking features of Russian spirituality, and even if the æsthetic appeal had no direct influence upon Vladimir, yet it made the Russians ardent supporters of Eastern orthodoxy.

Thus the Church of Constantinople became the Mother

Church of Russia, and a strict mother she proved to be. At the end of the tenth century Byzantine Christianity was already well past the most creative period of its history, and was engaged in the controversy with Rome which absorbed the larger part of its energies. In the course of this struggle freedom of Church life was sacrificed, and was replaced by a rigid system of uniformity. The doctrine, worship, and ecclesiastical discipline which Russia received from the Greeks was fixed, and fixed for ever. There was no place for further growth or development, nor did Byzantium recognise that the newly converted nation could bring any fresh contribution to the life of the Church. Russia adopted the Byzantine ideal of immobility, and it never dared to question it. But it had received too real and vital a vision of Christianity to remain a passive follower of Byzantium. Unconsciously, the Russians were from the beginning interpreting in their own way the Christian message, though they continued to believe that they were reproducing the Byzantine pattern which they thought to have Divine sanction.

The most important feature of the Russian Church, which differentiated it from both the Greek and Latin Churches, was the use of the Slavonic language in its worship. From the Greeks the Russians received a form of Church life which was fixed in every detail, but from the very beginning they had heard the gospel and worshipped God in their own Slavonic tongue, and this fact made possible the peculiar development of the Russian nation.

Of the many important consequences of this use of the vernacular, only a few can be mentioned here. The first was that the spiritual isolation of Russia was maintained in spite of its conversion to Christianity. It must be remembered that almost up to the eighteenth century a knowledge of either Greek or Latin was absolutely

essential as the key to the storehouse of European culture; theology, philosophy, and science were confined nearly exclusively to these two languages. Russians, with a few exceptions, knew neither of them, which meant that they remained outside the main stream of Christian learning, unable to make use of its achievements or contribute to its development. Their studies were restricted to the limited number of sacred books translated into Slavonic, and they were driven back on their own national resources.

Plato and Aristotle, Cicero and Virgil, the men whose writings inspired the minds of other Christians, remained unknown in Russia. The mentality of the Russians was not shaped along rational lines, and they never acquired the art of dialectic. The artistic and intuitive aspect of religion made the strongest and most natural appeal to them, and they found it easier to express their ideas and ideals through art, especially in its pictorial aspect, than by speech or the written word. Thus it is not surprising that Russian Christianity remained a sealed book to those accustomed to the philosophical atmosphere of the classical tradition.

It is indeed only of recent years that the power and originality of the Russian Christian culture has been realised by Russian scholars themselves; they were previously unaware that the creative mind of their nation was expressed rather through the beauty of the Ikons than in theological treatises. It was not until the Westernisation of the country in the eighteenth century that the Russian nation became merged in the European civilisation with its classical foundations, and the Russian theology of a scholastic type was born, but even then only a small section of the country was affected; the majority of the people remained in the æsthetic atmosphere

of ancient Russia until the Communist Revolution in 1917. The Russia of the Middle Ages was nurtured not on a Latin grammar or Greek philosophy, but on a Slavonic psalter, and this fact had the most far-reaching consequences for the history of the nation.

Another result of the use of the Slavonic tongue was the absence of clericalism in the Russian Church.

In the West every cleric knew Latin, and this language gave him access to those sources of knowledge which were beyond the reach of the layman. In consequence the clerical order became a body apart, superior to the laity. The clergy were at the same time the teachers of Christianity and the exponents of Latin culture with its strong sense of order, discipline and obedience; they were as much the secular as the spiritual leaders of the nation.

This clericalism was entirely alien to the Russian Church. The learning of its bishops and priests was open to every layman who could read. The clergy never formed a ruling class, and they remained for the most part at the same cultural level as their flock. In Russia it was the "saint" and not the "priest" who was the leader of the Church. This peculiarity gave greater scope for spontaneity and for the prophetic element within the Church, but it tended to an undervaluation of the virtues of discipline and order.

Thus, while the Western Church was engaged in the pursuit of learning and was working out an elaborate system of hierarchical discipline, the Church of Russia was advancing along a very different path. It showed no great interest in learning, nor in the legal and institutional aspects of Church life, and it produced few outstanding prelates. It remained throughout its history a body concerned primarily with the worship of God and the perfection of the Christian life. It is typical that in Russia

the most popular translations from the Greek Fathers were those dealing with the problems of conduct and moral perfection. Doctrinal theology made little appeal to the people, but in the longing for holiness, in the search for the Christian answer to the problems of life, in the sense of beauty in worship, the Russian Church reached such a high level that it was able to make a distinct contribution to the Christian world. The striking beauty of the Church services is in particular directly due to the use of the vernacular, which enabled the artistic genius of the Russian nation to express itself fully in its worship.

The third consequence of the use of the Slavonic was that in translation some of the most familiar Christian terms received an unusual and individual interpretation. It will probably never be certain whether Cyril and Methodius, the great apostles of the Slavonic nations,* or some of their disciples, are responsible for the Christian vocabulary of the Slavonic languages. In either case we can but marvel at the boldness and inspiration of those who were responsible for this work. The translators acted more as prophets than as scholars; they were not afraid to replace literal translations of the Greek words by terms which seemed best to express the inner meaning of Christianity. Thus, for example, the words "martyrdom," "priesthood," "baptism," "orthodoxy," "catholicity," were translated in such a way as to emphasise ideas not brought out in either the Greek or Latin languages. For instance, "to be baptised" meant in Slavonic not "to be immersed," as in other languages, but "to be crucified," to accept one's cross of suffering and renunciation, and to achieve through it regeneration,

* Cyril (died in 869) and Methodius (died in 885) were two Greek brothers who founded the first Slavonic-speaking Church in Moravia.

resurrection and immortality; all Christians were therefore "cross-bearing people." The word "orthodoxy" was translated by "true glorification," the "Orthodox Church" being that which glorified God in the right spirit. "Catholicity" was rendered by "Sobornost," a word which cannot be adequately translated into any Western language. It means togetherness, wholeness, communality; it emphasises a oneness, but without uniformity or loss of individuality. The "Catholic Church," according to the Slavonic interpretation, means a symphonic Church which forms a harmonious unity out of the diverse gifts of its different members; like a well-conducted orchestra it produces one harmony, although each musician plays his own part on his particular instrument.

Thus Russian Christianity has from the very beginning possessed certain characteristics which distinguished it from the rest of the Catholic Church. Its Bible and its creed were those of the other Christian Churches, and its worship and ecclesiastical discipline were an exact copy of the Byzantine pattern, but the interpretation of the universal formulas was an individual Russian one.

There is no better example of the peculiarly Russian approach to Christianity than the story of the first two saints canonised by the Russian Church. They were two young princes, Boris and Gleb, the sons of Vladimir of Kiev. In 1015 they were murdered by their elder brother Svjatopolk, who wished to make himself the sole ruler of Russia. Such political murders in a ruling family were by no means uncommon in those times, but there were in this instance certain circumstances which made an enduring impression upon the minds of the Russian people. Boris was on his way back from a military expedition against a nomadic tribe of Polovtsi when he heard of his father's death and of his brother's intention to

murder him. Svjatopolk had already sent a strong detachment against Boris, but the latter had the full support of his men, who were ready to defend their prince. Boris, however, refused their service and declared that he would not lead them into a fratricidal struggle. He made it clear that, being a Christian, he wished to follow Christ's example and preferred to be slain, like Him, as an innocent victim, rather than cause bloodshed in his own defence. Since Boris could not be shaken in his resolve, he was eventually abandoned by his guard and killed by Svjatopolk's men. His younger brother Gleb perished later in similar circumstances.

The story of the princes' death and of their refusal to use arms in self-defence deeply stirred the nation. This is proved by the existence of three contemporary biographies of Boris and Gleb. They show also a diversity of opinion as to the merit of their voluntary self-sacrifice. The Greek hierarchy and those who were associated with it disapproved, but this was not the verdict of popular feeling, for great veneration was shown to the memory of the princes, who were regarded as the first saints of the Russian Church. So strong was this feeling that in 1020, only five years after their death, the Greek Metropolitan of Kiev was obliged to sanction their canonisation. Another biographer of these saints relates, however, that as late as 1072 another Metropolitan of Kiev, also a Greek, still felt doubts about the sanctity of the brothers. His hesitation was legitimate, and popular sentiment must have been exceptionally strong to overcome the resistance of the Greek hierarchy. For Boris and Gleb could not be fitted into any of the three traditional classes of Christian saints known to the Byzantine Church—that is, martyrs, ascetics, or bishop-theologians. According to their biography they feared death, they bitterly lamented

their tragic destiny, and yet they were convinced that as Christians they had to follow Christ's example. His innocent suffering and voluntary death inspired them. They were neither heroes nor martyrs, but "passion bearers," as they were afterwards called by the Russian people. Their sacrifice had no precedent in the history of the Church; it might appear unreasonable, even foolish, but it reveals such an integral acceptance of Christianity, such a determination to reject violence, such a deep penetration into the redeeming mystery of innocent suffering, that these two princes have rightly become the first saints of Russia, the very incarnation of its peculiar interpretation of Christianity. It is significant that the main ideas brought forward by the great Russian philosophers and writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are the further development of those which we find in the story of the two brothers. Many events took place in Russia between the eleventh and twentieth centuries. Russian culture, Russian language, and even Russian nationality were changed, but the life and death of the first Russian saints makes the same appeal to the nation. The story contained a prophetic vision of the character of the Russian Church and of its message to the world. To become a "passion-bearer," to be an innocent victim, slain for Christ's sake, to refuse the use of violence even in the face of death, these were the implications of Christianity which produced the deepest impression upon the newly converted Russians, and this influence has not been destroyed by succeeding centuries, but has penetrated further into the soul of the nation with the advance of its spiritual maturity.

No less significant is the life of the second saint canonised by the Russian Church. This was Theodosius (d. 1074), canonised in 1108, but locally he was already

venerated as early as 1091, when his relics were transferred to the main church of his monastery. He was the father of Russian monasticism and founder of the famous Kiev-Petcherskaja Lavra, the leading monastery of pre-Tartar Russia. Theodosius was not the first monk to choose the steep cliffs of the River Dnieper, near Kiev, as his retreat. He was following the example of Antonius, who had already settled there. But although Antonius introduced monastic life into Russia, it was Theodosius who most impressed the imagination of the Russian Christians and realised their ideal of the religious life. We have his life written by Nestor, a monk of the same community, who was almost a contemporary with the saint. Nestor was the first hagiologist of the Russian Church, and he naturally applied the standards which he found in the East. He was inspired by the lives of the great abbots of Egypt, Palestine and Mount Athos, and in part his biography of Theodosius is a reproduction of these. Nestor wished above all to show that the first holy abbot of Russia was in no way inferior or different to his great Eastern predecessors, and yet, in spite of this, he reveals several original features in Theodosius' character which help us to restore a very vivid portrait of the saint.

Theodosius was the only son of well-to-do parents. He showed from an early age a desire for the monastic life, but for some time he was kept from it by the opposition of his mother. What is striking in the story of his life while he was still at home is that he attempted to join his father's serfs in their work in the field, to wear their clothes and share their degradation. This form of asceticism had no precedent in the history of the Eastern Church, for it emphasised, not the extreme mortification of the flesh, which was so pronounced in the biographies

of the great Eastern saints, but the social implications of Christianity—the brotherhood and equality of men, and the desire for self-identification with the despised and oppressed. When Theodosius' mother sharply rebuked him for the shame he was bringing upon their family, the young man answered her in the following way: "Listen, mother, I pray thee. Our Lord Jesus Christ humbled Himself and underwent degradation, and so gave us an example which we ought to follow." The Russian boy of the eleventh century saw an aspect of the Incarnation which remained unnoticed by the other more civilised Christian nations. Later on, when Theodosius was the abbot of his famous monastery, the man whose advice and counsel was sought by all the princes and leading men, he still continued to undertake those duties which were considered by the brethren as the lowest and most socially degrading.

Another original feature of Theodosius' monasticism was his active participation in the social and political life of the country. Theodosius was not afraid of the world and its claims, and his monastery was open to all who needed help or advice. Rich and poor alike were his welcome guests, and he built special houses where he could accommodate the sick and destitute. Nor was his concern only for those who came to seek him out. If he heard of an unjust or dishonest action done by those in power, even by the prince himself, he would seek out and rebuke the offender, even in the palace. He established the tradition by which the monasteries of Russia became the centres of penitence and spiritual guidance for the laity, places where every Christian could get counsel and help.

Theodosius' ideal of monasticism was inspired by his understanding of the social implications of the Incarna-

tion. His driving power was compassionate love for all those who suffered from injustice, and who were in pain and trouble. The same Theodosius who was so bold in dealing with the princes and nobles was most meek and gentle with those who were in need of his aid. His rule over his large community was also based on personal example rather than upon strict discipline. This typically Russian neglect of order was the cause of the rapid decline of the spiritual life of his community, for his successors proved unable to maintain the high standard of freedom and love which he had set before them.

The lives of Theodosius and of Boris and Gleb, though in the main so dissimilar, have one element in common—the desire to fulfil the practical implications of their religion. The Russian converts were faced by the problems of Christian conduct, and they were inspired by the vision of an integral Christian life, in which there is no compromise with the ideal of perfect love, in which every form of compulsion is rejected, and every decision made in the light of Christ's example. It is important to remember that this Russian attitude to Christianity was not shared or encouraged by the Greeks; on the contrary, it was either misunderstood or disapproved. Boris and Gleb were canonised very reluctantly by the Greek Metropolitans of Kiev, nor could Theodosius have found in the lives of the Eastern saints many precedents for his conduct. And there is another illustration of this point in the Russian chronicle. Vladimir, when he became a Christian, began to feel that he had no right to condemn to death robbers, or even murderers, for he believed this to be incompatible with the law of Christian love. But the Greek bishops appealed to examples from the Old Testament and from the history of the Roman Empire, and insisted that it was the duty of a Christian

prince to punish the wicked. Vladimir reluctantly consented, but his doubts show which elements of Christianity made the strongest appeal to him.

The Russians displayed much spontaneity and vigour in their approach to their new religion, but they lacked organising power. There was little stability in their endeavours, advances were too often followed by retrogression, and their love of freedom was liable to degenerate into anarchy and slackness. Very similar characteristics were to be found in the life of the nation as a whole. The first, the so-called Kiev, period of Russian history was one of rapid and brilliant development. Commerce prospered; art flourished; Russian princes intermarried with the royal houses of France, England, Hungary and Poland. Russia seemed to be becoming more and more an integral part of Christian Europe. But all these achievements were counterbalanced, and to a large extent nullified, by the lack of political stability. The endless quarrels between the princes and the absence of any definite rules regulating their relation to the independent city councils gradually undermined the strength of the country. Russia's weakness encouraged the nomadic tribes to redouble their raids, thus ruining both commerce and agriculture in the more fertile but less protected plains of Southern Russia. The twelfth century saw the gradual decline of Kiev and its neighbouring cities. The population began gradually to shift towards the north-east, where the thick forests and swamps afforded a greater security. Spiritual decline accompanied this political and social disturbance, and the twelfth century produced few saints to be compared with Theodosius and some of his disciples.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century the first period of Russian history, that in which it was most

closely connected with the rest of Europe, was brought to an abrupt end by the invasion of the Tartars. The Tartars had lived for centuries as a nomadic people in Mongolia. But they were stirred suddenly to attempt world-wide conquest by a chief named Genghis Khan (1155-1227). They swept over the whole of Asia and part of Europe, ruining cities and laying waste the lands. China and Central Asia, Turkestan, Persia, Russia and Poland, were all ravaged by these horsemen, all suffered the same defeat and had to acknowledge the sovereignty of the great Mongolian Khans. The advance guards of the Tartars appeared on the steppes of Southern Russia in 1223.* In the first battle the coalition of the Russian princes was completely defeated, but the Tartars unexpectedly withdrew into the unknown depths of Asia, and Russia was left to hope that they would never appear again. Yet in 1237 the Tartar hordes came back to Russia, and by the end of 1240 the work of destruction was complete. All the cities, with the exception of Novgorod and Pskov, were burned down, the villages pillaged, the people slain or carried away as slaves. Wherever the Tartars passed, only ruins were left.

Russia was not, however, entirely annihilated. She survived, but she had to undergo the most profound transformation. The Russia of Kiev, of small independent principalities, of busy commercial cities, the Russia of the steppes which was a bridge country between Byzantium and Scandinavia disappeared. There was

* The Russian chronicler records in the following manner the sudden appearance and disappearance of the Tartar advance guard in the south of Russia: "The same year, for our sins, unknown tribes came. No one knows who they are, whence they came, nor what their language is, nor of what race and faith they are, but they call themselves 'Tartars.' God alone knows who they are, and whence they came."

born a new and Asiatic Russia, lost in the dense forests and swamps of the north, poor, scattered, uncivilised, cut off from Europe, but reaching towards the unexplored plains and wildernesses of Asia.

There were two main reasons why Russia was able to survive the Tartar invasions. One was that for more than a century there had been a gradual migration of the Russian population from the steppes of the south-west to the forests of the north-east. This helped to save at least a part of the population, for the Tartars destroyed almost completely the inhabitants of Southern Russia, but they could not do so in the north, where the forests and marshes afforded a natural protection. The second reason was that the Tartars, although without mercy for the people they conquered, revered the Divine power under every form of religion, and they therefore granted privilege and protection to the clergy of the Church as soon as the work of conquest was achieved. Thus a part of the old Russian people survived, and they retained their Church, in which were the seeds of a spiritual revival that was eventually to restore them to independence.

The nation, however, was so fundamentally changed that it might be said that post-Tartar Russia was scarcely the same country. Racially it was affected by the admixture of Finnish and Mongolian blood, its cultural and economic development was directed along new lines, and politically also it was basically reorganised.

Russia ceased to be a country engaged in trade and centred in cities; it became predominantly agricultural, with a population scattered in little villages. This change considerably altered the mentality of the people. Moreover, they were now completely cut off from Europe and brought into close relations with Asia. Whereas Russia before the Tartar invasion had formed the extreme

north-eastern wing of Christendom, she became after the disaster a western outpost of the great Eastern Empire, and her princes were obliged to undertake long and perilous journeys to the headquarters of the Mongol Khans, where they met envoys from China, India and Persia.

In spite of all these changes the nation preserved its continuity, and this was due chiefly to the Russian Church, the strongest link with the past. The Church, although severely shaken by the Tartar invasion, was able to stand against its storm, and give the defeated nation strength to bear the burden of the Tartar yoke and a trust in the ultimate victory of Christianity over the formidable power of the nomadic invaders. This Church, however, which saved the country from disintegration, also underwent a radical spiritual revolution, and that was probably the most significant event of this decisive period of Russian history.

The Russian Church of the Kiev period was the youngest daughter Church of the great Œcumenical See of Constantinople. The city of Constantine, the second Rome, had been to the Russians the capital of the world, the mother city of all Christians, the centre of learning, piety, and apostolic tradition. Kiev was only a small and insignificant satellite reflecting the glory and power of the great Imperial city. But the Russian Church, which was gradually emerging from the ruins left by the Tartar invasions, was destined to occupy a new place in the life of the Eastern Christians. Its new centre was eventually fixed in a city lying amidst the forests of the north, and called by the Finnish name "Moskva." It was first chosen as an ecclesiastical centre,* the seat of its Metro-

* The Metropolitans, who still bore the title of Kiev, had no fixed abode after the Tartar invasion, for most of the cities were in ruins. One of them, Peter, paid very frequent visits to Moscow; he died there in 1326 and was buried there. His successor, Theognost, decided to settle in Moscow, and thus this city became the centre of the religious and later on of the national life of the country.

politan, and it was only much later that it became the political capital of the country. The period which saw the decline of Constantinople, ending in its fall in 1453, saw also the rise of Moscow's importance. The sacking of the Imperial city by the Turks almost coincided with the proclamation of Russia's independence of the Tartar yoke by the Prince of Moscow, John the third, in 1480.

Thus when the light of the Christian East, the Imperial city of Constantinople, was overshadowed, the Church of Christ was not left without protection. Another city and another kingdom were raised from their previous humiliation and restored to power and freedom. Moscow, the new capital of the resurrected Russia, was the only important city left in Eastern Christendom which was ruled by a Christian prince, in which the Christians were unmolested and Divine worship could be carried on undisturbed.

Russia was no longer a metropolitan province, but she was the heir and successor of Byzantium. Moscow was not another daughter to Constantinople, but the new mother city of all the Eastern Christians; she was to become the third and the last Rome.

CHAPTER II

THE TRIUMPH OF MOSCOW (1480–1598)

THE fifteenth century and the first part of the sixteenth, so important in the development of modern Europe, were equally decisive in the history of Eastern Christendom. In the West, the hundred years between 1450 and 1550 made a complete break with the past and created a new Europe sharply divided into two hostile religious camps. In the East this period was one of transition from the Byzantine to the Russian Empire, from Constantinople to Moscow, from the second to the third Rome. But whereas the Reformation is one of the best studied subjects, the religious and political changes which occurred almost simultaneously in the East have been passed over almost in silence.

The fall of Constantinople in 1453 was one of the greatest catastrophes of history. It stopped for centuries the cultural development of the near East, it retarded the advance of Christian civilisation, it also affected the normal intercourse between Asia and Europe, which has not yet been restored to its full degree. The Byzantine Empire formed a natural bridge between Asia and Europe, where East and West could meet and enrich the life of the other on the basis of mutual respect and equality. This co-operation received its first set-back with the split between the Greco-Roman and Semitic elements in Christianity during the Monophysite controversy of the fifth and sixth centuries. It was further endangered,

first by the advance of the Mohammedans and then by the Crusaders, and was finally ended in 1453. When the contacts were later renewed they took the new form of the colonial domination of the West over the East.

The breach between these two parts of the world brought about by the fall of the Byzantine Empire was, however, not as complete as is usually supposed. Byzantium had an heir and successor in the north. There the Russian Empire continued, although along very different lines, the work of its predecessors of Rome and Constantinople; it became a new link between the East and West, stretching its frontiers from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the North Polar Sea to the borders of China, India, Persia and Turkey, and so uniting once again Europe and Asia.

The growth of every great Empire has been inspired by some dominating ideas. The Russian Empire was founded on the belief that it had received from God the task of defending the true Faith, of continuing the work begun by Constantine the Great and commissioned by him to the Byzantine Empire.

In order to understand how the idea that Moscow is the heir of Constantinople was born we have to remember that the Empire was believed in the East to be, like the Church, an indispensable part of God's plan for the salvation of the human race. Constantinople, the second Rome, was the recognised capital of the Christian Empire, a city especially protected by the Divine grace and selected by God for the maintenance of the Orthodox Faith and worship. Until it had actually happened it would have seemed unbelievable that God should allow this Holy City to be taken by the Turks, its magnificent churches to be profaned, and the relics of the saints and other treasures of Christian piety and art to be destroyed.

This catastrophe, comparable only to the destruction

of Jerusalem or the sack of Rome, required an explanation, and this was found in the apostasy of the Emperor and the Œcumenical Patriarch, both of whom had betrayed the true faith of their fathers in the hope of obtaining military help from the West. At the Council of Florence in 1439 they had entered into communion with the Latins on the basis of the submission of the Orthodox Church to the Papacy.

This explanation of God's wrath provided a moral justification of the fall of Constantinople, but there still remained the problem of how to preserve the Christian revelation without the help of the Empire.

There seemed to be only two alternatives: either this disaster was an omen of the approaching end of the world (which was universally expected in the East in 1492, in the seven thousandth year from the creation of the world according to the Eastern tradition) or the rejection of the Greeks for their faithlessness was only a temporary punishment, and God in His mercy would select another nation which would restore the Empire and eventually deliver the Christians from the oppression of the Mohammedans. The second view was gradually accepted throughout the whole East, especially when the expected end of the world did not take place. This conviction provided a soil on which the belief in Moscow, the third and last Rome, could take vigorous root.

The feeling that the Greeks had betrayed their Orthodoxy, and were therefore punished by God, was particularly strong in the remote Church of Russia, where anti-Latin tendencies were very pronounced. Although the Russian Church had at the beginning shown little interest in the conflict between Rome and Constantinople, and did not take any part in the final breach between them, it gradually learnt to consider the Western Christians as apostates,

and towards the end of the fifteenth century outstripped even the Greeks in their condemnation of all the Western customs and traditions. The Council of Florence was repudiated by the Russian Church, and Isidor, a Greek Metropolitan of Moscow, who was one of the great supporters of "Unia," was after his return from Italy immediately banished from the country.

Canonical relations between Constantinople and Moscow were temporarily suspended, for the Russians were unwilling to be in communion with those who might be already infected with Latin heresy. Thus the Russians came to believe that they were the chosen nation, their orthodoxy and their devotion to the Church being superior to that of their Greek teachers, since they alone remained uncompromisingly hostile to Rome.

This conviction was strengthened by the rapid growth of the principality of Moscow, which coincided with the gradual decline of the Byzantine Empire. Thus at a time when all other Eastern Christians were being forced, one after the other, to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Mohammedans, the Russians won their political independence and their prince acquired the title of "the Autocrat" or "Tsar," which belonged to the Emperor alone. Colour was given to the idea that the Moscow princes were the heirs of the Byzantine Emperors by the marriage between John the Third and Sophia Palæologus, niece of the last Emperor of Constantinople, 1472. After that Russia adopted the Byzantine coat of arms bearing the two-headed eagle.

To the Russians it seemed that, if the Greeks were rejected by God for the betrayal of orthodoxy, they themselves were restored to political independence because of their devotion to the Church. The Russian nation was the last stronghold of the Orthodox Faith,

and would thus inherit all the privileges and duties of the Christian Roman Empire. Its new capital Moscow was to take the place of Constantinople, and was to become the third and last Rome.

This conviction was not born of any one place or person. It sprang up spontaneously in all parts of the Eastern Christendom, and was soon well established both in and outside Russia, being recognised in Greece, in Asia Minor, and among the Slavonic nations of the Balkans. We find its first literary expression in the writings of a monk named Philotheus,* who in his epistle to the Grand Duke Basil the Third (1505-1533) made the following statement: "The first Rome collapsed owing to its heresies, the second Rome fell a victim to the Turks, but a new and third Rome has sprung up in the north, illuminating the whole universe like a sun." The Russian Tsar was, according to Philotheus, the sole head of all the Christians; all the Christian kingdoms were merged in his realm; he was the legitimate heir of the great Roman Emperors. "The first and second Rome have fallen, but the third will stand till the end of history, for it is the last Rome. Moscow has no successor; a fourth Rome is inconceivable."

But if this idea of Russia's special mission was accepted almost at once, it needed longer before it became clear that the Russian message to Christendom had a character of its own, distinct from that of Rome and Constantinople.

Russian Christianity has from the beginning of its history been absorbed in the problem of sanctifying the whole of human life and in perfecting the art of Christian worship. The Russian Church has never been able either to equal the Roman in her vision of unity, order and discipline, or to follow the interest of the Greeks in

* The best study of his life and works, *Philotheus and his Epistles*, is by V. Malinin. Kiev, 1901 (in Russian).

theology, but she has, however, become supreme in the beauty of her worship and in the originality of her approach to the question of Christian conduct.*

Thus in her own spheres the Russian Church was able to bring fresh gifts to the treasury of Christianity, and the unique character of her message justified her belief that Moscow could rank with Rome and Constantinople as one of the spiritual centres of Christendom.

Russia's revival from the onslaught of the Tartar invasion was at first a very slow process, and it was not until the middle of the fourteenth century (a hundred years after the defeat) that signs of recovery became apparent. New life and hope was brought to the humiliated nation by the monks, and in particular by St. Sergius (1314-1392), one of the greatest saints of the Russian Church. It was chiefly his spiritual leadership which changed a defeated people into the builders of a great Empire. The religious and national revival centred in St. Sergius was characterised by the rapid growth of small communities in the remote and almost uninhabited districts of the north and north-east. Those who came under the influence of this movement were not afraid of the hardships of the "northern desert." They were

* A Russian writer of the time of the fall of Constantinople raises the perplexing question as to how the Emperor and Greek bishops could betray the Orthodox Faith in favour of Latin heresy. His main argument against the latter is typically Russian, for it is neither doctrinal nor canonical, but æsthetical. He writes the following:

"What hast thou, O Emperor, seen of worth among the Latins? They do not know how even to venerate the Church of God. They raise their voices as the fools, and their singing is a discordant wail. They have no idea of beauty and reverence in worship, for they strike the trombones, blow the horns, use the organs, wave their hands, trample with their feet, and do many other irreverent and disorderly things which bring joy to the devil."

longing for a life of undisturbed contemplation and were ready to undergo any sacrifice in order to attain it. St. Sergius was one of them; he left all his possessions and began the life of an anchorite in the uninhabited forests some forty miles north of Moscow. After some years of hardship and privation he was joined by several other monks, and in spite of his desire to remain alone he was elected abbot of the monastery of the Holy Trinity, which has since become the sacred centre of Russian religious and national life.

St. Sergius inherited the gift of profound humility so prominent in St. Theodosius, the Father of Russian monasticism (d. 1074). He persistently refused every honour offered to him, rejecting even the call to the Metropolitan seat of Moscow; and he patiently suffered temporary expulsion from his monastery at the hands of rebellious monks who could not endure the poverty and severity of the community life introduced by him. But this man, whom visitors would take for the lowest member of the community, if not for a beggar, was able in the hour of national trial to take upon himself the gravest responsibility, and it was he who encouraged Dmitry, Prince of Moscow (1363-1389), to defy the Tartars in the open field. The decisive battle took place in 1380 on the banks of the River Don. The Russians, after 150 years of submission, were at last victorious. It is one of the paradoxes of Russian history that the political liberation of the country was inspired by one who had left the world and all its responsibilities and given his life entirely to the glorification of the Blessed Trinity.

The greatness of St. Sergius was that he was ready to do justice to the claims of the nation and of ecclesiastical discipline, and at the same time would never allow these claims to compromise his conviction that the essence

of Christian life lies in the holiness and purity of the human heart. In St. Sergius the Russian vision of the Christian life reached its highest point, and he has remained for centuries the ideal which has inspired millions of Russian Christians. But after his death the succeeding generations lost the harmony which he had achieved, and his disciples split into two irreconcilable camps led by the two abbots St. Joseph of Volotsk (1440-1515) and St. Nil of Sorsk (1433-1508).

The external cause of the controversy was the appearance of some judaising heretics among the clergy and laity, first at Novgorod, the western outpost of Russia in that period, and later in Moscow itself. St. Joseph of Volotsk and his followers insisted that heretics were the enemies of God and that a State which tolerated them was liable to Divine punishment. It was, therefore, the duty of a Christian prince to stamp out the seeds of wrong teaching; negligence in these matters would ultimately destroy his kingdom. St. Nil and his disciples took the opposite view. They believed that it was the duty of the Church to pray for the conversion of heretics, but that it ought not to use against them weapons other than example and admonition. They denied the authority of the State in spiritual questions, and they were thus opposed to the trial of heretics by the civil courts. Their attitude would probably seem the most acceptable to many modern Christians, but it was not so in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The great majority of Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, then held most firmly that heretics must be punished by the State. It was one of the peculiarities of the Russian Church that it contained in that time of religious intolerance an influential and brilliant group of men who saw clearly the self-contradiction in condemning a man to torture and death in the name of Jesus Christ.

The following dialogue composed of extracts from the writings of Joseph of Volotsk and Vassian, the disciple of Nil of Sorsk, gives an idea of the convictions underlying the two movements:

JOSEPH. Moses destroyed the tables of the commandments with his hands and severely punished the transgressors of the Law.

VASSIAN. That is true, but when God would have destroyed Israel, after it had worshipped the golden calf, Moses argued with God and said, "If Thou destroyest them, then destroy me first," and God spared Israel.

JOSEPH. I could bring many other examples from the Old Testament of God's approval of the execution of those who transgress the Law.

VASSIAN. They are all from the Old Testament, but we are living under the New, which says: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." If you, Joseph, now order a man to kill his brother who has sinned, you will soon revive the observances of the Sabbath and other Old Testament customs.

JOSEPH. But even Peter punished Simon the Sorcerer through the power of his prayer, and it is the same to kill a heretic by prayer or by hand.

VASSIAN. There is a difference between you, Joseph, and Moses, Peter and Paul. Their prayers were heard by God and He fulfilled their petitions. But why do you not trust your own prayers? Ask God to punish the heretics, and the earth to swallow all the unworthy and sinners. Instead, you rely upon secular power, and try to use it for the punishment of your opponents. The Church ought to receive repentant heretics with open arms. The Son of God came to save sinners.

These extracts explain the ideas which moved the leaders of the Russian Church in the fifteenth century,

and they show us what a deep insight into the spirit of the New Testament had been gained by the disciples of St. Nil.

There was a further dispute which divided the two parties. This was over the right of monks to possess lands and to control the lives of the serfs settled in them. Land was the only stable value in mediæval Russia, and therefore it was the usual form of endowment to the churches. With the lands were transferred extensive rights over the peasants who cultivated them. Nil and his supporters rejected the right of monks to possess lands and serfs, and that is why they were known as the "Non-possessors." They felt the contradiction in the position of a monk who gave up his private property and became, as a member of a collective body, the owner of wider estates and the master of an even larger number of peasants. St. Nil held that the monk could not possess wealth either individually or collectively; he must live on the fruits of his own labour. The Josephians or "The Possessors" insisted that the ownership of lands by the monasteries was a lawful practice approved by the tradition of the Christian Church. They regarded religious communities as the centres of unceasing liturgical prayer, philanthropy and learning, and all these essential features of Church life could be maintained only if the monasteries were properly endowed with lands and serfs to work them. The "Non-possessors" replied to these arguments that poverty is not an insurmountable obstacle to sacred studies, that philanthropy is the duty of the laity, and that the monks ought to help others through their counsel and prayers rather than by alms-giving. Thus the two parties became sharply opposed on the two important practical problems which the Russian Church was facing at the end of the fifteenth century. Such

divergence of opinion was the result of a profound difference in their whole outlook. Both of them were equally absorbed in the problem of the perfect Christian conduct and of the sanctification of the whole life, but they worked them along very different lines.

The Josephian doctrine combined in a unique way elements common to Puritanism and to highly developed Ritualism. They were strongly influenced by the Old Testament conception of life, regulated by the strict observance of ecclesiastical rules and precepts. They believed that the Church possesses an inexhaustible fountain of grace, so varied and so rich as to satisfy every human need. For them the perfect Christian life was one in which every event from the most important to the most insignificant was blessed and sanctified by the prayers and rites of the Church. They paid special attention to the right form of blessing before and after meals, to the proper behaviour in and out of doors; they elaborated a minute code regulating the talk, laughter and dress of Christians. The main stress, however, was laid upon the careful and devotional celebration of Church services. They believed that Church worship, conducted according to the rules of the Fathers, was one of the greatest powers acquired by mankind as the result of the Incarnation. It could cleanse individual and corporate sins, open the gates of heaven, and bring about unity and peace between God and mankind.

One of the remarkable features of this teaching was that the stress of worship and ritual did not give rise to clericalism, for the emphasis was laid not so much upon the Sacraments, the administration of which was reserved to the priests, as upon liturgical prayer. Every member of the Church was encouraged to go straight to this source of eternal life, and every private house was

supposed to possess either a chapel or at least a special corner of a room dedicated to worship, which was conducted by members of the household.

The great importance attributed to " ritualistic piety " meant that the sanctification of the life of the nation depended, according to the Josephians, upon the attitude of the prince to the Church. If he was willing to give his support to it, and especially to patronise the monasteries, the centres of continuous and properly conducted worship, his land would be sanctified and his people would be blessed by God. It was natural, therefore, that the " Possessors " were the supporters of a centralised and strong monarchy, and that they justified in their writings the use of compulsion in religious matters. They were also deeply conscious of the dangers of heresy, and were particularly opposed to those forms of it which criticised Church customs and threw doubts on the necessity or efficacy of liturgical worship. The value of the Josephian party lay in its emphasis on the corporate nature of the Church and the power of prayer, and in the conviction that not only the priests, but all members of the Church should take an active part in the sanctification of life. Its ideal was a well-ordered monastic life centred round worship, and it tried to shape every Russian home according to this pattern, putting the father of the family into the place of the abbot, and endowing him with an absolute power over his wife, children, servants and serfs.*

But if the Josephians possessed a deep insight into the corporate nature of the Church, they failed to appreciate the personal relation between God and the individual soul. They were inclined to underestimate the import-

* This idea was expressed in a book *Domostroy*, composed in the sixteenth century by a priest named Silvester, one of the most brilliant and influential representatives of the party.

ance of the free disposition of the human heart, and that was the cause of their disregard of freedom.

These neglected elements of Christian religion were, however, defended by the opposite party of the "Non-possessors." To them Christianity was the religion of love and freedom. They were essentially New Testament Christians, and the Old Testament ideas made little appeal to them.*

They believed that God does not demand from His people magnificent church buildings and elaborate worship; He requires primarily the holiness and devotion of the human heart. The sanctification of life, according to the "Non-possessors," could be achieved mainly through the purification of the individual soul, and this was the fruit of meditation, chastity, fasting and prayer.

The "Non-possessors" were genuine mystics, and they were also good scholars, but they were little interested in administration and politics, which remained the sphere of the Josephians. Thus the two parties supplemented one another and helped the Russian Church to keep the proper balance between the corporate and individual aspects of its life.

Unfortunately this state of things could not last for long. The points at issue touched the most vital interests

* The survival of the essentially New Testament character in Russian Christianity, even after the Josephians' victory, is well illustrated by the following description of the Russian Church made by Richard Chancellor, who visited Russia during Edward the Sixth's reign. He writes with indignation: "Speak to them of the commandments and they will say, 'They were given to Moses in the Law which Christ hath now abrogated by His precious death and passion, therefore, say they, we observe little or none thereof.' And I do believe them, for if they were examined in their Law and commandments together they would agree but in few points." (Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations, Voyages*, Everyman's Library.)

of the monks, and the Josephians felt that the rich endowments of their monasteries could never be safe so long as the other party was allowed to preach its dangerous doctrine. Attempts to crush out the "Non-possessors" were, however, for a long time without success, and from 1511 to 1522 the See of Moscow itself was occupied by the Metropolitan Varlaam, a supporter of Nil of Sorsk. The position was radically changed when the question of the prince's divorce was brought before the leaders of the Russian Church. Basil the Third (1505-1533), having no children by his first wife, decided to remarry. The "Non-possessors" declared firmly that the divorce was unjustified, since there was no offence on the part of the wife. The Josephians were not so austere; they considered the corporate interests of the nation as more important than the fate of one woman, and they supported the prince, who was a great benefactor of the Church and monasteries. Basil, encouraged by their approval, proceeded to action. He succeeded in placing Daniel, the leader of the Josephians, on the Metropolitan seat of Moscow. Daniel immediately forced Basil's wife to take the veil and remarried the prince (1523). It was an important service to the dynasty, and it had to be rewarded, so Basil, though reluctantly, sided with the Josephians in the internal struggle of the Church. The "Possessors" began an open persecution. Nil of Sorsk was already dead when the campaign started, but his disciples suffered very severely. They were arrested and imprisoned. Many of them perished, and others fled from the country. The campaign lasted from 1525 to 1554, when the last strongholds, the communities hidden in the forests of North-east Russia, were destroyed and their inhabitants scattered. Thus in the middle of the sixteenth century the control of the Russian Church

fell entirely into the hands of the Josephian party. Its victory was the price paid by the prince for his unlawful divorce, and the results of this victory were far-reaching and drastic.

Externally the Josephians led at first both the country and the Church from one success to another, and before the end of the century the obscure principality of Moscow became a great Empire. Internally, however, they were undermining the spiritual vitality of the Russian nation, and prepared the ground for the great schism of the Russian Church in the seventeenth century, which eventually destroyed the Orthodox Tsardom of Moscow.

The first result of the Josephians' victory was a son born to Basil by his second wife, Helen Glinsky. He was called John, and is known as John the Terrible (1533-1584). His reign can be divided into two periods. The first half brought the realisation of the most daring dreams of the Josephians, the second saw the first unmistakable signs of the approaching catastrophe. John was the first Prince of Moscow to associate himself wholeheartedly with the Josephian party. He was a gifted theologian, keenly interested in ecclesiastical matters. He divided his life between the attendance of Church services and the performance of his royal duties. Under his rule the Russian Church held several important councils (1549-1551), at which a number of Russian saints were solemnly canonised, and it was declared that the Russian local customs alone embodied the true tradition of the whole Church. Thus the Russian Church was at last openly proclaimed to be the sole heir of the great Church of the Roman Empire.

This rapid advance in ecclesiastical matters was paralleled by the no less important improvements in the administration of the country. A new legal code was

introduced, local self-government established, the last remnants of feudalism suppressed, and John was solemnly crowned as the Tsar of Russia, the legitimate successor of the Basilevs (1544).

But the greatest of all the achievements was his victory over the Mohammedans. The sixteenth century saw the continuous advance of their conquest of Christian Europe. The last Christian principalities in the Balkans were captured by the Turks in 1514, the Hungarians were defeated in 1526 at the battle of Mokacz. In 1529 the wave of the invaders reached even the walls of Vienna.

But whilst the Christian West was involved in this desperate struggle the young Russian Empire had started its victorious march towards the East. In 1552 the Tartar kingdom of Kazan was conquered by John, which was followed by the conquest of Astrakan in 1556, and in 1582 the Russians began their gradual acquisition of the immense plain of Siberia, ultimately reaching the borders of China and the Pacific Ocean.

Thus was fulfilled the prophetic vision seen in the fifteenth century while Russia still lived under the shadow of the Tartar oppression. The Russian nation was given the opportunity to continue the work of the Roman Empire —to unite in one organic whole the diverse nations of the East and of the West.

But if the first part of John's reign saw advance in all spheres of national and religious life, the second saw the tragic collapse of the high hopes raised by his previous achievements. After the death of his first wife Anastasy Romanov (1560) John lost his mental balance. He became a victim of fears and suspicions. Engrossed in insane sensuality, he married one wife after the other, and started an unmerciful war against the nobility, dividing his kingdom into two parts and making one of them the prey of the

greediness of the other. He continued to spend a large part of his time at monastic services, but the rest of it was given up to orgies of cruelty and immorality which he enjoyed with the members of the special order of "Oprichniki" created by him in 1565.

When John the Terrible died in 1584, Russia was left in a state of moral perplexity and political and economic chaos. She was financially ruined; she had suffered at the hands of the Poles and Swedes, who cut her off from the Baltic Sea and seized her western provinces. Moreover, she was left without a proper heir to the throne, for John during one of his attacks of fury killed his eldest and ablest son. His second son Theodor (1584-1598) was a simpleton unfit to rule his vast and unsettled country, but he was nevertheless proclaimed Tsar of all the Russias. His short reign was, unexpectedly, one of the happiest and the most successful in Russian history.

Although the Tsar himself spent most of his time in prayer and in ringing church bells, the country enjoyed internal peace and continued its expansion. During Theodor's reign there was a gradual advance towards the East, while the South, even the remote kingdom of Georgia, asked the protection of Moscow (1586), so that the Russian influence reached to the frontiers of Persia and Turkey. In the same reign the greatest ambition of the Russian Church was also realised: the Metropolitan of Moscow received the title of the Patriarch, and was solemnly recognised as such by the rest of the Eastern Churches (1589). This act was preceded by long and carefully conducted negotiations and was a masterpiece of ecclesiastical diplomacy. It was not at all easy to obtain this title from the Greeks, and it is significant that the official document explaining the reason for this elevation contains an exposition of the belief in Moscow

as the third Rome, proving that this idea was now accepted by both the Greeks and Russians. The installation charter repeats almost verbatim the epistle of Philotheus. "Because the old Rome has collapsed on account of the heresy of Apollinarius, and the second Rome, which is Constantinople, is now in possession of the godless Turks, thy great kingdom, O pious Tsar, is the third Rome. It surpasses with its devotion everyone else and all other Christian kingdoms are now merged in thy kingdom. Thou art the only Christian Sovereign in the whole world, the master of all the Christians."

Thus at the end of the sixteenth century, in spite of the set-back in the last years of John's reign, the Russian nation at last realised its great vision, and its Church became the Mother Church of all the oppressed and suffering Eastern Christians.

All these successes were gained under the spiritual leadership of the Josephians. This party was the creator of the Moscow Tsardom, an achievement which contrasted happily with many frustrated attempts to erect a true Christian kingdom.

The main feature of the Russian theocracy was a special type of relations between the Church and State. This was distinct equally from the Roman and the Byzantine system. According to the Russian idea, neither Church nor State was to dominate the other; each was supreme in its specific sphere. The logical conclusion of this ideal was the equality of the Tsar and of the Patriarch, who were, so to speak, the two heads of one Christian kingdom. Such a close co-operation could be realised because the frontiers of the State were modified and enlarged so as to satisfy the requirements of the Church. So, for instance, the object of the Moscow Tsardom was held to be the salvation of the people entrusted to its care. Russia

was considered to be a State embracing all the Orthodox Christians to whatsoever nationality they belonged and whose soever subjects they actually were. The Tsar himself was regarded rather as a dignitary of the Church than a secular ruler. His dress was very similar to ecclesiastical vestments, his time-table, including the attendance of all the daily services of the Church, befitted a prelate rather than a King.* Especially striking was the fact that no military uniform was worn by the Moscow Tsar. He was not the head of the army, and the military defence of the country was not his primary duty, as it was for the Kings of the West.

But in spite of all these ecclesiastical elements the Tsar remained only a layman, and he possessed far less authority over the Church than his predecessors, the Byzantine Emperors. He was only her first servant, submitting to all her rules and customs. This was symbolically expressed by the solemn ceremony which took place in Moscow each year on Palm Sunday. On that day the Patriarch, representing Christ going up to the temple, rode in the procession of Church dignitaries on an ass, which was humbly led by the Tsar himself, thus signifying his submission to the Church. But at the same time the Patriarch was not above the Tsar. His interventions in secular matters could only take the form of humble petitions (*pechalovanie*), in which he appealed to the mercy of the monarch, imploring him in the name of Christ either to pardon those persons who had incurred

* Deacon Paul, who accompanied Makary the Patriarch of Antioch on his visit to Russia in 1654-1656, gives a very vivid description of the ceremony of the Moscow court. To his surprise the Imperial banquet was accompanied by the reading of the *Lives of the Saints* (according to the monastic tradition) instead of the customary music. (*The Patriarch and the Tsar*, W. Palmer, vol. ii.)

punishment, or to reform those things which were incompatible with the Christian religion. The Church was the spiritual adviser, the Christian conscience of the State, but where there was disagreement it would never take secular power in her own hands and overrule the Empire. Its strength lay in the readiness of its members to be martyred in defence of the traditions of their Church. Such was the attitude of St. Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow, strangled by the orders of John the Terrible in 1570 for his fearless rebukes of the cruelty of the Tsar.

Such relations between Church and State had its effect upon the whole life of the nation. The Russia of the sixteenth century could be described as one vast religious house obeying the ecclesiastical canons, attending Church services and observing the rules of fasting. The Church precepts were considered to be as binding on each citizen as were the laws of the State. The foreign visitors, including the Orthodox Greeks, were astonished at the length of the Russian Church services and the austerity of the fasts, which were as strictly observed by the Tsar and the nobility as by the simple peasants.*

Seen from this angle, Russia could be called "Holy Russia," the land of unceasing prayer and ascetic exercises. But behind this brilliant façade there were other facts which contradicted these appearances. The long services were little understood by the people; Russia's great piety and love of ritual went side by side with superstition, ignorance and immorality. There was much cruelty

* The same deacon Paul, after describing a service lasting from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., exclaims: "Now what shall we say to these duties, severe enough to turn children's hair grey, so strictly observed by the Emperor, Patriarch, grandees, princesses and ladies, standing upright on their legs from morning till evening? Who would believe that they should thus go beyond the devout anchorites of the desert?" (*The Patriarch and the Tsar*, W. Palmer, vol. ii., p. 107.)

and corruption, especially in the law-courts. Learning was almost non-existent, and most of the clergy had only the book knowledge necessary to enable them to recite the daily services. Even among the bishops there was little education, and ignorance of the simplest facts of the Christian religion was common.*

But the real tragedy of the Russian Church lay not in these evils, but in the impossibility of further progress. The victory of the Josephians was achieved at the cost of the suppression of some vital elements of the Christian religion. The Josephians sacrificed the gift of freedom. They did it in order to impose upon the nation uniformity in worship and religious thought. The consequences of such a loss of spiritual liberty were far-reaching. The Russian Church ceased to think, its growth was stopped, its moral influence shaken, and it became a helpless victim of the arbitrary will of the Russian Tsars. The Josephians were so afraid of diversity of opinion and independent investigation that they checked all discussion of religious matters. They declared the Russian Church to be the final achievement of Christianity. The ideal advocated by them was the careful observance of the rules of the Church, especially in worship and fasting. They were convinced that no further advance of Church life was either necessary or possible. The remaining generations of Christians had only one task left to them—the faithful reproduction of the type of Church life created by their fathers. The firm belief that the Russian people

* The scarcity of books after the Tartar invasion was so great in Russia that every written word was so highly esteemed as to be called "Holy Scriptures." One of the Josephians' accusations against the "Non-possessors" was that the latter made distinction between the Bible and the rest of Christian literature, whilst the former attributed the same authority to the Holy Scriptures and to the *Lives of the Saints* and other often apocryphal writings.

were at the summit of Christian piety implied that all other nations, including the Orthodox Christians of the East, were at a lower level of perfection. It meant that there was nothing to be learnt from them; it meant also that every contact with them could only imperil the achieved perfection, and ought therefore to be avoided as far as possible. The great vision of Russia's universal mission became the source of an extreme national pride, which isolated the country from the rest of the world. Russia reached a state of complacent self-satisfaction which paralysed the vitality of the young nation and made it stagnant, immovable and helpless.

Such a situation, however, could not last long, for there was latent power within the rapidly growing nation. Also Russia was too near to the Western countries and occupied too important a political position to be left in isolation. And so in the next (seventeenth) century the carefully built up edifice of the Moscow Tsardom was shattered by three heavy blows. The first was the social unrest, covering the period known as the "Time of Trouble" (1598-1613), which was caused by the end of the dynasty of the Rurikovich; the second was the religious difficulties which culminated in the great schism of the Russian Church (1653-1667); and the third and the most decisive was the cultural revolution produced by Peter the Great (1682-1725), who with his heavy fist struck down the whole fabric of Russian Orthodox Tsardom and instituted in its place a secularised and Europeanised Empire with a new capital in St. Petersburg.

CHAPTER III

THE FALL OF MOSCOW
(1598-1689)

In the early morning of January 7th, 1598, Theodor Ivanovitch, the Tsar of Russia, passed peacefully away. With his death the House of Rurik, which had ruled the country for seven centuries, came to an end, and for the first time Russia had to face the problem of choosing its monarch.

The end of the dynasty meant a period of unrest for Russia. The country became a prey to political disorder and social revolution, aggravated by the invasions of the Poles, Tartars and Swedes, who used this opportunity for attack upon a once powerful neighbour. Even Moscow fell into the hands of the Poles, and the rest of the country was laid waste by rebellious peasants or bands of foreign adventurers. But at the last moment Russia was saved by the united efforts of the clergy and middle classes, who drove away the foreign invaders, restored order, and elected a new Tsar, a sixteen-year-old boy, Michael Romanov (1613), who was connected, though remotely, with the dynasty of Rurik, since Anastasia, the first wife of John the Terrible, was of the Romanov family.

The country needed above all peace and order, and there was a desire to return to the same state of affairs which had existed in Russia before the "Time of Trouble" (1598-1613). The new dynasty therefore aimed primarily at the revival of the traditions of the Moscow Tsardom of the sixteenth century, and this attempt characterises

the reign of the two first Romanovs, Michael (1613-1645) and Alexis (1645-1676). The genuine piety of these Tsars made them the leaders in the return of the whole nation to the ideal of Holy Russia, the home of undefiled orthodoxy, and the mother of all the Eastern Christians.

If the Russia of the sixteenth century had called herself the successor of the Byzantine Empire, it must be acknowledged that her aspirations had outrun the facts; but in the seventeenth century she became indeed the recognised defender and patron of the Orthodox Christians of less fortunate nations, who looked to Russia for sympathy and material aid. Nor were these disappointed, for one of the outstanding features of Russian life in the seventeenth century was the generous help given to the suffering Christians from other Eastern lands.

The Russia of the seventeenth century received a continuous stream of Greek, Arab and Slavonic Christians. Some had fled from their own countries, leaving all behind, and sought a home in Russia; others came on temporary visits with pomp and a great retinue, with venerated Ikons and relics of the saints, bringing appeals for help. All those who came were welcomed, and those who returned to their own lands did so laden with alms and generous gifts. Thus were spread stories of the piety and generosity of Russia, until Moscow was regarded as the refuge and protector of the whole Christian East, and the Patriarchs of Constantinople began the practice of mentioning the names of the Russian Tsars at those parts of the services where the Byzantine Basileves had been remembered in the time of the Eastern Empire.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century the number of pilgrims was so large that the Government was obliged to impose various restrictions upon them, and tried, though with little success, to stop the too rapid growth

of their numbers. Thus charters were given to certain monasteries and dioceses authorising them to send their representatives to Russia only once in three, five, or even ten years. Officials at the frontiers were required to examine those who came to collect alms and to admit only those who could produce authentic letters of introduction signed by some well-known prelate, but not all these measures could stop the influx.

When the relations between Russia and the other Eastern Christians, which had been broken at the time of the Tartar invasion in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, were renewed on these terms, it was natural that the Eastern Christians should come to regard Russia as their only hope against the Turks, and to look to her to join with them in the fight for liberation. So, for instance, Paisy, Patriarch of Jerusalem, writing to the Tsar Alexis in 1649, said: "The Holy Trinity may help you to acquire the throne of the great Emperor Constantine, your ancestor. Let God help you to deliver the pious nation of the Orthodox Christians from the oppression of the infidels."

But the closer contact between the Easterns and the Russians had not only the positive result of strengthening the feeling of unity and mutual responsibility, it also brought a very complex awareness of their differences, and eventually raised an acute feeling of competition between the two Churches.

The Russian type of piety, with its long and magnificent services, austere fasting and deliberate neglect of secular learning, shocked the Easterns, especially the Greeks, who felt that the Russians stood outside the circle of Hellenic culture, and that, therefore, however much they knew of the external and ritualistic aspects of Church life, they did not understand the subtler and more important

questions of the Christian Faith.* In the writings of Greek visitors in Russia there are frequent complaints that to live among such barbarians is almost equivalent to suicide, for no one except the Russians could stand for several hours at Church services, and remain almost without food during the seven weeks of Lent, and the more experienced Easterns usually advised the newcomers to leave the country before Lent began.

But if the Easterns felt that they had grounds for criticism against the Russian Church, the Russians had no less serious complaints to make against the Easterns. The Eastern Christians of the seventeenth century struck them as singularly devoid of the sense of dignity in worship. The Russians, to their horror, found that the Easterns would turn their backs to the altar during services, play cards, smoke whilst inside churches, and even enter them without taking off their hats.

Their monks and bishops had often a very inadequate knowledge of the order of the services, and made blunders which scandalised the Russians. Even about the orthodoxy of the Easterns they had their suspicions. The latter were unable to have their own printing presses, and all their liturgical and doctrinal books were published in the West, chiefly in Venice. There was an uneasy fear among the Russians that the Roman Catholics were using this opportunity to corrupt the Orthodox literature. The Easterns themselves did not deny such a possibility, and often complained that until the Russians helped them to establish their own printing press in Moscow they would be obliged to use those corrupted books provided

* Metropolitan Neophitos, who visited Moscow in 1628, after his return to the East declared that the Russian religion consisted solely of bell-ringing. (See Prof. N. Kapterev, *The Relations of Russia to the Christian East in the Seventeenth Century*, Sergiev Posad, 1914, in Russian, p. 431.)

for them by the Latins. Moreover, many of their young people who were sent to Rome for training fell under the influence of the Jesuits, and entered, at least temporarily, into communion with the Roman Church.

Lastly, the moral character of the Eastern clergy, including the Patriarchs themselves, was far from being irreproachable.

Two hundred years of slavery to the Turks had left its degrading mark; bribery and intrigue were the recognised methods of administration in the Ottoman Empire, and no one was better trained in them than the hierarchy of the Eastern Church, which controlled both the ecclesiastical and the political life of the subjected people.

The Eastern Christians in their dealing with the Russians used those methods which they had learnt under the Turks, and found endless devices, tricks and frauds by which to extract as much money as possible from their northern protectors. They were not only ready to sell the relics of the most venerated saints and the ancient miracle-working Ikons, but they were also prepared to fabricate these relics and Ikons if the demand exceeded the supply.

In the towns of Moldavia and Ukraine, which were situated along the main road from Constantinople to Moscow, there flourished a unique commerce. There one could buy forged letters of recommendation, an eloquent appeal for alms with the spurious signature of one of the famous Patriarchs, false relics, and imitations of the ancient Ikons—in short everything which could be of use to a visitor to Russia. More than that, one could hire there men who were ready to form the retinue of a prelate, taking the rôle of monks, priests or abbots according to the needs of the alms collector. All these pretenders went to Russia in the train of the Eastern

clergy, received like them rich donations, and paid a portion back to their temporary patrons when they left Russia.

The special register kept by the Russian Government of all the visitors from the East contains many stories of frauds and deceptions at which even the Patriarchs themselves sometimes connived. When, for instance, Patriarch Paisy of Jerusalem visited Moscow in 1649 he recommended to the Russians a monk called Arseny as one of his most learned and devout servants. The Russian Government invited Arseny to remain in Russia and help with the translation of the service books, but it was soon discovered that he was an adventurer who had joined the Patriarch on his journey, and the latter had to confess to deceiving the Russians.

But the discovery of these frauds aroused comparatively little feeling in Russia, and did not check the zeal of the Russians to assist their unfortunate brethren. Their measures of control remained very inefficient till the end of the period, and they never tried to impose any serious test upon those who claimed their sympathy and support. This tolerant attitude was to a large extent due to the Russian conviction that in almsgiving the essential was to give generously in the name of Christ; the responsibility for the proper use of the help received rested entirely upon the one who asked for it, and was no concern of the donor. If a fraud was revealed it was nearly always through the denunciation of some of the Eastern visitors who thought themselves cheated by their colleagues. A typical case of this type is the story of the Archimandrite Jeremiah, who came to Russia in 1623 carrying with him several letters of introduction, one signed by the brethren of the famous monastery of Mount Sinai, the other by Theophanis, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Being denounced

by the other Easterns, he made a complete confession and declared that he was a uniat monk excommunicated by the Orthodox Church, and guilty of many crimes. Another even more astonishing case was revealed in 1628 when Metropolitan Neophitos arrived in Moscow. Received with great honour, he was also denounced by one of his attendants, and proved to be an excommunicated bishop who brought with him as his chaplain a layman who was a Greek merchant and who wanted to visit Russia in order to sell his goods. Among his companions one man was even a Mohammedan, who collected a considerable amount of money in the name of the monastery which he pretended to represent.

But even if the Russians did not wish to impose their authority upon the Eastern Christians, nor to verify the way in which the alms were spent, they could not fail to be impressed by the degradation of the Greeks, who were so obviously abusing the charity offered to them.

Thus the two leading nations of the Orthodox Church, whilst they grew in the realisation of their common interest, had little respect for one another. For the Greeks the Russians were still the barbarians on whom, however, depended their hope of liberation. For the Russians the Easterns, and especially the Greeks, however degraded their present state, were their brethren in distress and the heirs of the great Byzantine Empire.

So long as Russian and Greek each believed in his own ecclesiastical primacy there was inevitably a growth of tension between them which became especially acute in the middle of the seventeenth century.

In 1653 the two Churches came suddenly into an open conflict, and this ended in the overwhelming victory of the Greeks. The Russian defeat was caused by an unexpected schism which split the Russian Church into

two irreconcilable camps at the most crucial moment of its history.

The great schism of the Russian Church, although provoked by an accidental misunderstanding, was, in its consequences, one of the most far-reaching events in Russian ecclesiastical history. In order to understand the origin of the revolt of the Old Believers we must go back to the beginning of the sixteenth century, to the time when the "Josephian party" seized the control of the Russian Church and started the policy which led to its spiritual isolation from the rest of the Eastern Christians. The excessive ritualism of the Josephians, their distrust of learning, their national pride and disregard for personal freedom made the crises within the Russian Church inevitable. The "Time of Trouble" was the first warning to the Josephians that all was not going well in Holy Russia; they were, however, able to restore the country to its previous orthodoxy, and to postpone temporarily the outburst of discontent.

But even the best restoration can never equal the original, and the Russia of the seventeenth century no longer possessed the undisturbed belief of the sixteenth century in its own election and superiority. The "Time of Trouble," when Holy Russia was a helpless prey to the "Latin heretics," the Mohammedans, and its own rebellious children, could not be forgotten.

It became clear that Russia was weaker than her neighbours. Her poor military equipment made her powerless to defend sometimes even her own frontiers, and she constantly needed the help of Western experts. Even in the religious sphere her primacy was questioned by the more learned Greeks. In the seventeenth century the Church of Russia showed signs of decline, preaching had almost completely died out, the bishops were few,

and often selfish and neglectful of their duties, the purity and zeal of monastic life were not the same as in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

There was, moreover, confusion about various ceremonies and rites, and this from time to time produced heated controversy. Even the genuine piety of the people was compromised by the survival of paganism. All these deficiencies were fully recognised by the best men of the nation, such as Stephen Vonifatiev, the chaplain to Tsar Alexis Mikhailovich. This old and wise priest was the finest representative of Russian Christianity. Humble and kind, he was firm and energetic when the circumstances required it; for instance, he succeeded in purging the ceremonies of the Tsar's wedding of every trace of the old heathen traditions, in spite of the protest of the powerful and conservative-minded nobles. In spite of his great influence upon the young monarch he was free from personal ambitions and had no enemies. His aim was to raise the moral level of the country, to improve the standard of the clergy, and to give better education to all classes. This scheme made a strong appeal to a group of ardent and brilliant young priests who formed under his leadership the nucleus of the movement for the renovation of the Russian Church. Its members, Archpriests John Neronov, Avvacum, Longuin, Lazarus, and others, were typical representatives of the Josephian stream of Russian spirituality. They were all convinced of the primacy of Moscow; they believed their country to be the only stronghold of true faith in the world. They never questioned the efficacy of ritualism, and "ritualistic piety" was their ideal of Christian living, but they were nevertheless aware of the need to purify and regenerate Russian Church life. One after another they were transferred to Moscow or to other leading cities,

where they started an energetic and daring campaign for the purging of the spiritual life of the nation. Preaching was revived, services conducted with a new care and reverence, court injustice was boldly rebuked, and the remnants of paganism and popular superstitions vigorously suppressed. The young and energetic priests were not afraid of either the power of the greedy provincial governors or the hatred of the ignorant populace. Several times their houses were burnt down by their enemies, they themselves were more than once in danger as the victims of riots, but their campaign continued unchecked.

In 1652 the aged Patriarch Joseph died and the party of young priests, confident of the moral support of the Tsar, petitioned him privately to promote their beloved leader Stephen to the Patriarchal throne. The choice of the Tsar and his chaplain was fixed, however, on another man, a young and energetic Archbishop of Novgorod, Nikon, who, although not a member of the reforming group, was closely connected with it. Patriarch Nikon is undoubtedly the most striking figure of the whole Russian hierarchy.* The son of humble peasants, he started his career as a parish priest, and by the exceptional power of his personality reached the highest ecclesiastical position, the Patriarchate, at the age of forty-two. A man of inexhaustible physical strength, of noble stature, upright but self-willed, genuinely pious and yet arrogant, he changed the whole course of Russian Church history,

* Dean Stanley in his lectures on the history of the Eastern Church writes: "Nikon is unquestionably the greatest character in the annals of the Russian hierarchy. Through all the obscurity which hangs over him there is yet discernible a genuine human character combining with a wilful barbaric obstinacy, as of an overgrown spoiled child, the caustic humour and the indefatigable energy of a statesman of the extreme West." (Everyman Edition, 1907, p. 327.)

and his place in the life of the country can only be compared to that of Peter the Great, who in many ways strikingly resembled Nikon, both in his gifts and in his limitations.

The election of the new Patriarch took place on July 23rd, 1652, under circumstances which had no precedent in Russian history. Nikon at first firmly refused the offer, and only consented to accept it when the Tsar, the nobles and the bishops, prostrating themselves to the ground, solemnly promised to "keep the commandments of Christ's Holy Gospels, and the canons of the Holy Apostles and the Holy Fathers . . . unchangeable, and to obey the Patriarch as their chief pastor and supreme father."

This declaration, obtained by Nikon from the Tsar and the leaders of the Church and State as the condition of his consent, made clear that the Russian Church had at last a Patriarch who would not be satisfied to remain the mere nominal head of the Church, as were some of his weak predecessors.

Very soon Nikon proved that such expectations were fully justified. The six years of his rule was a time of radical change aimed at two goals: to bring the Russian Church into conformity with the contemporary customs and usages of the four Eastern Patriarchates, and to make the Patriarch of Moscow independent of secular authority.

A few days before the beginning of the Lent of 1653, seven months after his enthronement, Nikon published his first pastoral letter. It contained, among other regulations for worship, the following order: "According to the tradition of the Holy Apostles and the Fathers it behoves you to sign yourselves with three fingers."

Horror and indignation overtook the leading members of the Russian Church when they read this order of their

new Patriarch. Nothing can better express their feeling of dismay than Avvacum's description of his immediate reaction and that of his friends to Nikon's epistle. Avvacum wrote: "We met together to ask counsel. It was as if winter was of a mind to come; our hearts froze, our limbs shook, and a voice came from the Ikons: 'The hour of tribulation has come; it behoves you to suffer and be strong.'"*

Such a violent reaction to a question of the Sign of the Cross needs an explanation. The leaders of the reform party rose to their feet and embarked on a desperate struggle against the omnipotent Patriarch, not because he dared to change the traditional manner of the Russian Sign of the Cross done with two fingers, but because he ordered the Greek one to be used instead of it, declaring that the latter was in accordance with the tradition of the Fathers.

Such was the beginning of Nikon's ritualistic reforms, and the firm refusal of the leading Church people to obey his orders was the origin of the great Russian schism which paralysed the Church for the coming 250 years.

There has been for a long time a widespread misunderstanding about the cause of the Russian schism. The leaders of the Opposition, the so-called "Old Believers," have been accused of extreme narrow-mindedness and bigotry, and they have been represented as the fanatics who preferred to split the Church rather than to alter some minor points in ritual and custom. Such a view is unjustified. The leaders of the Old Believers were the more progressive and radically minded of the clergy and the authors of several important improvements in

* *The Life of the Archpriest Avvacum*, translated by Jane Harrison, 1924, pp. 53-54.

Church worship.* The real reason for their opposition to Nikon was their uncompromising faithfulness to the belief in Moscow the Third Rome. They preferred exile and death to submission to the Patriarch who was forcing the Russian Church to accept the "corrupted" customs of the Greeks, and who, as it seemed to them, yielded the primacy of Moscow to Constantinople.

In order to get a proper understanding of the position of the two parties and of the reason for the intensity of their struggle it is necessary to remember that both Nikon and his opponents were typical representatives of the Josephian school, and that they believed in the extreme importance of ritual, especially of the right form of the Sign of the Cross. Neither of them was able to tolerate the existence of even slightly different rites, and it seemed to them that wherever there were differences between the Greek and Russian traditions one must necessarily be in accordance with Divine will and the other an heretical corruption. This argument was never challenged by the Josephians, and those who doubted it were accused of apostasy and disloyalty to the Church. As to the question of whether the Russians or Greeks had lost the purity of their rites, every Russian knew the answer, and it was that the Greeks were the guilty party. Looking at this problem from the point of view of the Russian of the seventeenth century, there was no difficulty in proving the case. The Moscow Council of 1551 had solemnly declared the superiority of the Russian liturgical customs over the Greek, and threatened with excommunication those who should try to deny it or to corrupt them. The Russian regarded with the utmost respect the decisions of this assembly, and could prove easily

* They were especially opposed to "polyphony" in Church services, which made them shorter, but less intelligible.

their faithful adherence to all the traditions of their fathers. The same thing could hardly be expected from the Greeks, for they were renowned for their carelessness, their books were printed by the Latin heretics, and several of their bishops had been trained in Rome, where they had been forced to renounce their orthodoxy.

The Russians were so accustomed to suspect the Greeks that they even refused to admit them to communion without first testing their orthodoxy most carefully. Their custom was first to send the Greek clerics to a Russian monastery, and only after a trial lasting from one to four weeks were they admitted to communion. Greek merchants on a temporary visit to Moscow were usually refused permission even to enter Russian churches, for the Russians were afraid that they might be either secret Uniats or Mohammedans. In the light of this suspicion it is possible to imagine the effect produced upon the leaders of the Church by Nikon's declaration that whenever the Russians differed from the Greeks the former were always wrong, and the latter always right.*

It was the most aggressive challenge to the Russian Church. To its most devoted members it seemed that in the person of Nikon a determined enemy of Christ and of His Church had seized the high office of the Patriarchate.

The true reasons for Nikon's reforms have to be found in the political situation. The Russia of the second part of the seventeenth century was no longer a country isolated from the rest of the world. Her national and

* The real cause of the divergence of the rites between the Greeks and the Russians was due to the conservatism of the Russian Church, which preserved the traditions of the tenth and eleventh centuries and remained unaware of the evolution of Church worship in Byzantium in the course of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries.

religious interests brought her into close contact with both Poland and Turkey, from which countries pressing appeals for help were continually coming from the persecuted Orthodox Christians.* The Tsar and the leading men of his Council began seriously to contemplate the possibility of military intervention on behalf of their oppressed brothers. It seemed that Russia was called upon to undertake the liberation of the whole Christian East, but she could not do it so long as she guarded jealously her own peculiarities and despised those who did not follow the Russian traditions. If she was to become the political centre of the Orthodox world she had to enlarge her vision and conquer her national pride. Nikon's reforms were urgently needed, but the form under which they were introduced compromised their purpose.

Nikon was an autocrat by nature, a man accustomed to rely upon his own exceptional power of character, and to expect obedience as a duty from others. Convinced by the Tsar of the need for reform, and inspired by the vision of Russia as the leader of the Orthodox peoples, he started his campaign without even the slightest attempt to secure the sympathy and understanding of the other Church leaders. So confident was he of his success, so used to the obedience of the clergy, so imbued with the Josephian faith in the efficacy of coercion, that the first signs of resistance, far from making him doubt the wisdom of his policy, only roused him to apply the most brutal measures against his opposers.

But if Nikon was typical of the wilful Josephian prelate, his opponents were also made of the same stuff,

* The position of Orthodox Christians under the Roman Catholics in Poland was in some respects even worse than under the Mohammedans, for the former pursued a policy of deliberate destruction of the Orthodox Church, whilst the latter merely despised their Christian subjects.

men accustomed to lead others and not be led, firmly convinced of the truth of their position. The cruel punishments inflicted upon the leaders of the Opposition, their exile to the North and Siberia, only inflamed their zeal, and soon the all-powerful Patriarch had to realise that his dispersed and unfrocked enemies were still a formidable power. Their heroism is well illustrated by the following passage from the autobiography of the Archpriest Avvacum, which describes his own and his wife's sufferings in Eastern Siberia: "The country was barbarous, the natives hostile, and we feared to get separated from the others, and yet could not keep up with the horses, for we were a hungry and weary pair; and my poor old woman tramped along, and at last she fell. And I came up, and she, poor soul, complained to me saying: 'How long, Archpriest, are these sufferings to last?' And I replied: 'Markovna, till our death.' And she with a sigh answered: 'So be it, Petrovitch; let us be getting on our way.'"* It was unprecedented in Russian history that the united efforts of State and Church should prove powerless before the opposition of a few priests.

In this hour of crisis Nikon decided to appeal for help to the Easterns, and he invited them to take part in the condemnation of the Opposition. The situation created by this step was unique. Nikon and his opponents were to ask the opinion of the Easterns, who were to appear now, not in the usual rôle of humble petitioners, but as judges. The Eastern prelates gladly seized this opportunity, and gave their whole-hearted support to Nikon, who seemed to them to be even more Greek than they

* *The Life of the Archpriest Avvacum*, p. 80. Avvacum died a martyr's death in 1684, sixty years of age, after nearly thirty years of persecution.

were themselves.* It is necessary, however, to mention here that there were among the Greeks more reasonable prelates who tried to explain that both Russian and Greek customs were legitimate, and could exist side by side. Such, for instance, was the opinion of Paisy, the Patriarch of Constantinople, expressed in his epistle sent to Nikon in 1655, but his wise counsel was drowned in the clamour of the extremists. Makary, the Patriarch of Antioch, was especially prominent in Nikon's campaign against the Old Believers.

Several Councils solemnly recognised the legitimacy of Nikon's reforms.† The leaders of the Old Believers were condemned, and the Patriarch could boast of obtaining his final victory, although at the price of an enforced appeal for the help of the Greeks.

Whilst this struggle was going on Nikon was engaged in another and even more risky adventure: he was attempting to introduce a new type of relation between the Tsar and the Patriarch. According to the Russian ideal the heads of the Church and of the State were equal to one another, and supreme in their own spheres. There was nothing, however, in the constitution or tradition of the country to define the rights and duties of a Patriarch and formulate his relations to the Tsar. As a rule the Patriarch's activities remained strictly confined to the administration of ecclesiastical affairs, and only in exceptional circumstances did he share in the government of the country. Nikon was one of these exceptions. His strong personality soon overshadowed the mild figure of the pious Tsar, and Nikon became another monarch,

* Nikon used to repeat, to the great offence of the Russians, "I am a Russian, and a son of a Russian, but my faith and convictions are Greek."

† In 1654, 1655 and 1656.

using the title of the "Great Lord,"* and performing many of the Imperial duties. His position as second head of the State† was firmly established during the frequent absence of the Tsar from Moscow during the war with Poland (1654-1657).

The position of Nikon was, however, solely due to the personal devotion of the Tsar to his beloved Patriarch, but Nikon wanted to use the opportunity thus given to establish the constitutional independence of the Patriarch on the grounds that the spiritual office was superior to any secular power. Unfortunately, in asserting the independence of the Church Nikon acted with the same disregard for others as in his dealings with the leaders of the Opposition. He was more despotic than the Tsar, he treated the other bishops and clergy as his subjects, and the nobility were bitterly offended when they found that they were required to pay the respect to the son of a peasant that they were accustomed to pay only to the Tsar himself.

Thus, although supreme in Church and State, Nikon's position was precarious, and he found himself surrounded by fear and hate. Towards the end of 1658 Nikon began to be aware of the danger, but instead of making some concessions he committed an irreparable blunder. Feeling the growing irritation of the Tsar, he suddenly left Moscow and retired to one of his monasteries, hoping

* "Great Lord" was the title used by the Tsar alone, but it was taken by Patriarch Philaret, who was the father of, and co-ruler with, Michael Romanov. Nikon began to use it also, and although he claimed to possess Tsar Alexis's approval for so doing, it was very much resented by the court and nobility.

† "The Patriarch's authority is so great that he in a manner divides the Sovereignty with the Great Duke." Thus writes Olearius, who visited Russia in 1654. (W. Palmer, *The Patriarch and the Tsar*, vol. ii., p. 407.)

probably that he would be entreated by the monarch to resume his Patriarchal functions. His expectations were not fulfilled; the nobles and bishops seized this opportunity to avenge themselves against him. In 1667 his overthrow was completed by his solemn degradation.

Nikon's defeat meant more than the fall of one influential prelate. In his person the whole idea of the independence of the Russian Church suffered a disastrous defeat. The great Council of 1667 which condemned Nikon was the scene of an intense struggle round the question of the relations of Church and State. The leaders of the Russian Opposition to the Cæsaro-Papism advocated by the Greeks at this Council were the Metropolitans Paul of Krutitzi and Illarion of Riazan. Although the latter were defeated, yet the final resolution dealing with the relations between Church and State was much more cautiously worded than was first proposed by Paisy Lagarides, the spokesman of the Greeks. The Russian bishops who had sacrificed Nikon, the champion of Church independence, tried in vain to defend the principles for which he stood, but they were easily defeated by the nobles, who employed the skill of those same Eastern prelates who had earlier assisted Nikon in the condemnation of the Old Believers.

One of the most striking consequences of the defeat of Nikon was the downfall of all those who took part in the struggle, no matter to which party they belonged. The first victims were the Old Believers, who were excommunicated by the Council of 1667 and expelled from the Church. This fatal mistake was committed under the pressure of the Eastern Patriarchs, and thus a temporary protest against Nikon's policy was made into a permanent schism which seriously undermined the vitality of the

whole Russian Church.* Their unflinching opposition is one of the most tragic and yet most glorious pages of Russian Church history. Men and women, priests and monks, were ready to testify till death their belief that the Russian Church had received from Christ a special responsibility to preserve the true apostolic tradition, lost by the West, compromised by the Greeks. But the glory of their sacrifice was obscured by the narrow-mindedness of their vision, their national pride and fanaticism. In spite of their courage and zeal they became affected with sectarianism, with all its paralysing consequences upon spiritual growth. Probably no one embodied more completely the power and limitations of this party than Archpriest Avvacum, whose autobiography is the most original document of Russian Church literature. His words addressed to the Patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch, in reply to their admonition to submit to the decision of the Council and accept the tradition of the other Churches, can be taken as the creed of the movement. He says: " O you teachers of Christendom, Rome fell away long ago and lies prostrate, and Poles and other Western Christians fell in the like manner with her, being the enemies of the Christians to the end. But even among you orthodoxy has become parti-coloured, and no wonder if by the violence of the Turkish Mahommet you have become impotent. It is you who henceforth should come to us to be taught. By the gift of God among us there is autocracy. Till the time of Nikon the Apostate, in our Russia under our pious princes and Tsars the Orthodox Faith was pure and undefiled, and in the Church

* The Russian bishops vainly protested against the civil punishment of the Old Believers, but the Greeks insisted upon it, bringing forward examples from Byzantine history, when the Emperors exiled and imprisoned those who had been excommunicated by Church authorities.

was no sedition." For Avvacum the Russian standard of faith and worship possessed a final and universal authority.

The next victim was the great Patriarch himself. The defeat of the Old Believers made his ruin inevitable, for they were the most convinced and courageous members of the Church, ready to defend her freedom against the secular control.

Then came the turn of the Russian bishops who had sacrificed Nikon, hoping to regain their previous independence. Nikon was sent to exile, but the bishops had to pay a heavy price for the betrayal of their Patriarch. They were forced to renounce solemnly the decisions of the Council of 1551, which proclaimed the supremacy of the Russian Church, and to declare that the "errors" which had crept into Russian traditions and worship were due to the lack of supervision of the Greek hierarchy over the Russian episcopate.* They had also to admit that Nikon's ideal of the bishops as independent of the secular power was contrary to the tradition of the Church and the spirit of the canons. Thus the Council of 1667 ended with the triumph of the Greeks and of the Russian nobles over the Russian hierarchy, won through the rivalries and dissensions among the latter.

But the alliance of the Greek prelates and the Russian nobles was neither a success nor a profit to either party. It was soon discovered that the two Eastern Patriarchs who had been acting as judges had no authority, for they had already been dethroned and replaced by others.

* The Russian bishops were obliged to sign the following resolution proposed by the Greeks: "We declare the Council of 1551 to be no Council at all, and its decisions not binding, because the Metropolitan Makary and those with him acted and made their decisions in ignorance, without reason, quite arbitrarily, and without consulting the Œcumenical Patriarch"

The leading Greek, Paisy Lagarides, Metropolitan of Gaza, was, as it was proved later, an ex-Uniat, excommunicated by his own Patriarch, and a person involved in many dishonest deeds. The Greeks had defeated the Russians, but their success was accompanied by such fraud that it was impossible for them to retain any influence over the Russian Church. The Council of 1667 was both the beginning and the end of their domination, and in 1721 the name of the Patriarch of Constantinople ceased to be mentioned in Russian services.

But even the nobles were not able to profit by their victory over the Church, for they obtained it at the cost of compromising the great vision of Moscow the Third Rome. The ideal which had inspired for centuries the life of the nation had gone, and the coalition between the nobility and the Greeks had nothing to offer the nation in its place. Nikon and the Old Believers were men of religious zeal and genuine faith, their opponents were unscrupulous and self-seeking. Their victory left an emptiness in the spiritual life of Russia which was to be filled by an ideal equally abhorrent to the nobles,* the Greeks,† Nikon and the Old Believers. This ideal was that of the westernisation of Russia, inaugurated by Peter the Great (1682-1725) as a violent reaction against the belief in Moscow as the third Rome. Peter wanted to make out of Russia one of those secularised States like the German principalities or Holland, the order and prosperity of which produced a profound impression upon him during his visit

* The Russian conservative-minded nobility was particularly humiliated by Peter the Great, who gave the chief offices of the State to men of humble birth like Menshikov and others, and to foreigners like Lefort and Gordon.

† Patriarch Dositheus of Jerusalem, the spokesman of the Greek Church, sent in vain a number of eloquent epistles to Peter imploring him to stop the westernisation of Russia.

to Europe. He wanted to make her powerful and progressive, and he believed that in order to become the equal of the more civilised countries of the West she must give up her Messianic dreams and her exclusiveness. He made every effort to enforce this change of outlook. He ceased to be the Orthodox Tsar wearing ecclesiastical vestments, and became the military leader of the country, dressed like a German, and taking the foreign title of Emperor. The Patriarchate was abolished (1721), Russian dresses and customs were prohibited and ridiculed, Moscow itself, the holy heart of the country, was forsaken (1703). The Orthodox Tsardom was buried for ever, and the secularised and westernised Empire of St. Petersburg was born in its place.

* The conflict between the leaders of the Russian and of the Eastern Churches described in this chapter did not sever the essential organic unity of these two parts of the Orthodox Church, nor did it affect the debt which the Russian Christians owe to their Greek teachers in Christ. The latter revealed to them the richness of Greek spirituality which has provided a fruitful background for the growth of Russian culture.

CHAPTER IV

PETER THE GREAT AND HIS ECCLESIASTICAL REFORMS

(1689-1725)

PETER THE GREAT was the most outstanding ruler in the history of Russia, and his reign saw momentous changes in all spheres of national life; but the most radical and far-reaching alterations took place in the relations between the Church and the new Empire. The ecclesiastical reforms introduced by Peter the Great were a part of his general scheme for the reorganisation of the country, and like all his other actions they were to a large extent the expressions of his unusual personality, so richly endowed with gifts, and so lamentably suffering from its peculiar failures and limitations.

Peter was a man of dynamic power, capable of smashing by one mighty stroke the customs and institutions which had been considered as the very foundations of national existence. He had also a no less surprising capacity for realising the most daring schemes, which appeared at first to be nothing else than the fruits of his violent imagination. There was something of the modern American in him in his disregard of the past and in his ardent belief in the future. He disliked theories and abstract study, his whole interest was in applied science and technical progress. He desired to see Russia victorious, prosperous, and on an equal footing with the leading nations of Europe.

The Russia of the seventeenth century with its strict piety, exclusiveness and lack of technical knowledge was associated in his mind with his unhappy childhood. He could never forget the horrors of political confusion which followed on the death of his brother Tsar Theodor (1667-1682), when he was left to the mercy of his masterful sister Sophia (Regent 1682-1689). The Moscow Tsardom was for him a system connected with all those whom he had feared and hated as a boy, and he never failed to take an opportunity to humiliate those who represented its traditions. Only in this light can we explain the blasphemous parodies of Church processions, the compulsory shaving of the beards of the nobility, and many other equally arbitrary actions of this great ruler. Probably even his love of military adventure and his overwhelming energy were partly rooted in the same complex of fear from which he once suffered so acutely.

Peter began his reign by building up an efficient army and navy, an action forced upon him by his defeat at the hands of the Turks and Swedes. This task might well seem one of almost superhuman difficulty. Not only were the people totally antipathetic to his policy, but his country was invaded, and he possessed neither money, nor trained men, nor industry for the manufacture of war materials.

And yet through his energy and determination Peter was successful. The Turks and Swedes were defeated, the new westernised army and navy were victorious, and the country emerged from its previous isolation and entered the society of European nations.*

* In the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Russian army marched victoriously across the whole of Europe and won battles even in such remote countries as Italy and Denmark.

All this was achieved by Peter single-handed. Whilst he was conducting the war against the Swedes he simultaneously trained the new army, built up the fleet, reorganised Russia's administration and finance in order to raise new revenues for his military campaigns. It was inevitable that all his reforms were associated in the minds of people with the privations and sufferings of war-time. The industrialisation and westernisation of the country appeared as an evil closely connected with the exacting taxation and the recruiting which almost depopulated the country. The suspicion which the Russian traditionally felt for the West was intensified into positive hatred, and the Emperor had to continue the reorganisation and re-education of the country not only under the adverse circumstances of war-time, but also in the face of determined opposition of the nation. Peter's task was therefore two-fold: he was creating the new Russia and he was fighting the old one. Every institution and every tradition which might be used by his adversaries as an instrument against his reforms had to be swept away and cast out of the new Europeanised Russian Empire.

This attitude of the Emperor's was particularly noticeable in all his dealings with the Church. To Peter it was the stronghold of the old Tsardom of Moscow and the refuge of all those who longed for its restoration. Peter the Great was not an atheist; he enjoyed even singing in the choir and reading the Epistles in the midst of the congregation.* But his attitude towards religion was typical of the absolutist ruler of the eighteenth century. He had a strong sense of duty, he possessed a notion of justice, but he recognised no authority higher than his own will. Peter could respect Christians of genuine

* The epistle is read at every Eucharist in the Eastern Church by a lay reader.

religious life, but he had no sense of the corporate life of the Church, and he refused to admit that the Church was an independent body obeying its own rules and pursuing its own aims as distinct from those of the State.* His whole ecclesiastical policy was inspired therefore by three main concerns: (1) First of all by the fear of the Church. He wished to eliminate any possibility of opposition from it, and therefore aimed at the destruction of all such institutions as the Patriarchate or the Church Councils which could express the independent opinion of the Church. (2) Secondly, he sought to familiarise the Russians with contemporary European civilisation and to use the Church as far as possible as an instrument for this purpose. He therefore favoured those clergy who were willing to help him in this task, and gradually placed them in all the key positions. (3) Thirdly, by his decision to appropriate ecclesiastical revenue for the needs of his army. He confiscated a large proportion of the Church income and carried on a systematic war against the monks,† considering them to be an unproductive element in his country, a class which deprived the army of soldiers and

* One of the most striking manifestations of this spirit was the Imperial order issued in 1722 which demanded under the threat of severe punishment that the priest should reveal to the Government the secrets of confessions in all matters dealing either with the supreme interests of State or with the safety of the Imperial family. This order has never been recognised by the Church and it has not been obeyed by the clergy.

† Being unable to abolish monasteries altogether, Peter tried to limit their activities as far as possible. All the monasteries were obliged to take the old and infirm soldiers as their inmates; people were not allowed to take monastic vows without special authorisation from the Emperor; and every educational and literary activity was strictly forbidden. Even the possession of paper and ink by a monk in his cell was declared to be a legal offence. This shows how much Peter feared the influence which the monasteries exercised over the Russian people.

the State of tax-payers, and supported the spirit of opposition among the people. Peter's ideal was a well-ordered State where all the citizens served the same common cause and faithfully obeyed the orders received from the Monarch, who was the living incorporation of the State's justice and wisdom, the final judge in all matters, both secular and spiritual.

Only towards the end of his reign did Peter the Great have time to embody his ideas in new institutions; most of them were, however, very hurriedly built up, and did not survive their founder. One of them proved, however, to be of exceptional durability, and lasted until the fall of the Empire in 1917. This was the Most Holy Governing Synod with its lay Procurator, the institution which according to Peter's plan was to secure the supremacy of the crown over the Russian Church.

The first step towards the establishment of the new Ecclesiastical order was the Emperor's refusal to allow the election of a new Patriarch after the death of Patriarch Adrian in 1700. Peter appointed the Metropolitan of Riazan, Stephen Yavorsky, as the *locum tenens*, and kept the Church in this suspended state till 1721, when he presented the Russian episcopate with the new constitution. The letter was incorporated in a document called the "Ecclesiastical Reglament," which was composed by Theophanis Prokopovich, the Bishop of Pskov, chief ecclesiastical adviser to the Emperor.

This epoch-making document abolished the office of the Patriarch and introduced in its place a collegiate body, known as the Most Holy Governing Synod.

This new organ had no precedent in the canon law of the Orthodox Church and was copied by the Emperor from the

West.* It was composed of the President (Metropolitan Stephen), two vice-presidents (Archbishop Theodosius of Novgorod, and Theophanis, Bishop of Pskov), and several members who were bishops, monks and priests. They were all elected by the Emperor, all had equal votes, and every decision had to be approved by the majority. Peter called it a permanent Council, but the Synod had nothing in common with the Councils of the Church. It was a collegiate organ, created by the State, controlled by the State, and responsible to the State only; its members were clerics, but they did not represent the Church, for the Church had no voice in their election.

Peter took great care to ensure the complete control of the Crown over the Synod; it was not sufficient for him to impose upon its members an additional oath of allegiance to him in which they declared, "I acknowledge the Monarch of all Russias, our Gracious Lord, to be the Final Judge of this College"; he also appointed as its supervisor a lay official, the Procurator of the Holy Synod, whose rôle was to represent the watchful eye of the Emperor himself, and without whose approval no decision of the Synod could be put into operation.

The lay Procurator, who according to the language of the "Reglament" had to be "an officer, a good man, courageous and able enough to manage the Synodical

* During his first visit to England in 1697 Peter discussed ecclesiastical affairs with William of Orange. It was then that he heard for the first time about the English Establishment with the King as the supreme governor of the Church. In 1712 Peter visited Wittenberg, and in front of Luther's monument said to his courtiers: "This man truly deserves a monument. He attacked most courageously the Pope and his army, for the benefit of his Prince and many other rulers, who were clever enough to use the advantages of Luther's victory." This story shows how much the ecclesiastical reforms in Russia were inspired by Western examples.

affairs," became the central figure of the new institution. Many of the Procurators were actually officers of the army, and the fact that at the head of the Russian Ecclesiastical government for two hundred years stood men possessing the mentality and wearing the uniform of a soldier was the symbol of the new relations between Church and State.

Such was the body which the Russian Church had to accept as its supreme governing organ. Peter with his usual energy secured its recognition by the bishops and abbots of the leading monasteries; they were visited by the Emperor's envoys and their signatures were separately collected. Under the Reglament the choice between banishment and unconditional approval was made clear, and the Russian Episcopate, without a single exception, preferred the latter. Even the Eastern Patriarchs, under the diplomatic pressure of the Russian Ambassador, were obliged to recognise the Holy Synod, this strange creation of the Emperor, as "their beloved brother in Christ."

The official motives for the reform were the greater impartiality and efficiency of an assembly of clergy over the rule of an individual prelate, and the necessity of combating the misleading belief spread among the "simple" people that the Patriarch was the head of an institution independent of the State, and therefore equal to the Emperor. The hope of impartiality and efficiency was frustrated: the Synod has never shown any ability to deal effectively with the Ecclesiastical government; but the danger of confusing the rôle of Emperor and Patriarch was utterly eliminated, for no one could regard the Synod, elected and controlled by the Emperor, as a competitor for his power.

Thus the Russian Church found itself solidly incorporated into a new order on the Western pattern, which made the Emperor an absolute ruler of the country and the final

judge in all secular and spiritual matters. The Church itself received the humble place of a department of the State, one among other departments, controlled by a lay official representing the authority of the Godly Prince. This radical change in the relations between the Church and State was an inevitable consequence of the introduction into Russia of the Western political system, and as long as the bureaucratic Empire of St. Petersburg could last, the Russian Church had to occupy in the life of the nation the place appointed to it by Peter the Great.

One of the main problems raised by these momentous changes is the attitude of the Russian Church to the reform. From an outsider's point of view its passive acquiescence must appear as a great puzzle. The all-powerful Church which dominated the hearts and minds of the Russian people for centuries, the Church which only one hundred years earlier helped to rescue the country from the anarchy of the "Time of Trouble" (1598-1613), and on the eve of Peter's accession to the throne had produced an army of martyrs and confessors, the same Church accepted in silence the drastic reforms which were so boldly inflicted upon it by the arbitrary will of the Emperor. It might seem that the Church of Russia was either already dead at that time or agreeable to the type of alterations introduced by Peter. Such a description of the situation is frequently given, but it is definitely misleading.

The Church of Russia was neither dead nor did it favour the new ecclesiastical order. It was decidedly opposed to it, but for several very important reasons it could not in any way resist the innovations and even had no means of expressing its disapproval. The causes of this paralysis of the Russian Church were deeply rooted in its past history. They were connected with some specific

features of its organisation and especially with the unique position held in it by the Tsars.

The Russian Tsars, although they claimed to be the heirs of the Roman Emperors, were in reality the successors of the Princes of Moscow. The latter had been the landlords of large estates, who ruled over their servants and serfs. They were crafty and able business people, who succeeded in making themselves masters of all the Russian principalities and sole rulers of the country. But the fact that they were no longer the local princes of Moscow but the Tsars of all Russia did not greatly alter their mentality. Neither was the attitude of the people changed, for like their forefathers they considered themselves either free-born servants of the Princes or their serfs, according to the classes to which they belonged.

The absence of Roman legal notions in Russia made the atmosphere of the country very informal; it was still, in spite of the size of the vast Empire, that of one family headed by the Father of the household, the Tsar of Moscow.*

This intimacy of relations between the Tsar and his people was especially pronounced in the affairs of the Church. The Tsar of Russia had no legally established position in it, but he took the most active part in its life. It so happened that all the Tsars of Russia until Peter the Great were not only devout members of the Church, but men whose predominant interests were in ecclasiastical affairs. No Russian could imagine a Tsar who would ever be other than a staunch supporter of Church traditions. The Tsars themselves also felt that their duty was to

* This feeling that the country was one family headed by the Tsar was so deeply rooted that it persisted among the peasants until the twentieth century, up to the very end of the Empire; that is why the Russian Emperor was called "Father-Tsar" by the peasants.

preserve peace and order both in State and Church, and that they were responsible before God for the proper use of their power in these two spheres of Russian life. All the Councils of the Church were therefore convoked by the Tsars, they personally selected members of the clergy who were to sit at its sessions, and they presented to them the questions for deliberation; if the Tsars were dissatisfied with the decision of the Council they simply refused to confirm its acts, and these remained without operation (*e.g.*, the Council of 1649, which was disapproved by Tsar Alexis). The Russian Councils of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were primarily consultative bodies gathered together by the Tsars when the latter wanted to know the Church answer to this or that problem of Christian life.

And yet in spite of all this power the Russian Tsars would have been horrified if anyone had suggested to them that they were the judges or rulers over the Church. They were in their own view nothing else than its faithful and obedient servants. The Church for all the Russians of that period was a Divine institution, a body which lived its own life and obeyed its own rules. The Tsar, like any other individual, could never change anything in its life or teaching without the consent of the other members, but he was responsible for the maintenance of order in the Church and for the application of its eternal precepts to the daily life of the people entrusted to his charge. The Tsars occupied exactly the same place in the life of the nation as a father in an ordinary Russian family, and in that capacity felt that they had to answer before God for the spiritual welfare of the members of their household and had to see that the services were attended, the fasts kept, and Christian instruction duly received.

This attitude was radically different from that of the

Middle Ages in the West, where the hierarchy was identified with the Church, and loyalty and obedience to the Pope was the usual expression of devotion to the Church. In Russia the Church itself as a corporate body was the object of devotion, the hierarchy and the laity had to serve it, each in their own way, but the layman had no hesitation in rebuking or even rejecting a representative of the hierarchy if the latter failed to maintain the tradition of the Church.

The Russian Tsar was not above the hierarchy, and he never failed to show the most striking signs of his profound respect for the grace bestowed upon those in Holy Orders;* on various solemn occasions he publicly expressed his humble submission to the power given to them, but the distinction was always made between the Orders themselves and their holders. Russia and her Tsars obeyed the Orthodox Church, but they expected the same obedience to it from the bishops and the rest of the clergy.

Thus the place of the Tsar in the Russian Church was different both from that of the Byzantine Basilievs and from the Western rulers; it had no precedents, it was not defined either by civil or canon law. It worked out quite satisfactorily as long as Russia was cut off from the rest of Europe, but as soon as it was brought into fellowship with the other Christian nations, and when it met with the rivalries and competitions which were raging there between the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, the insufficiency of the old system became immediately apparent, and it was Peter who took full advantage of the situation.

* There is an interesting letter written by Tsar Alexis (1645-1676) in which he describes to the future Patriarch Nicon how he kissed the feet of Patriarch Joseph (1642-1652) three times when asking his blessing when the latter fell seriously ill. (*The Tsar and the Patriarch; Bogoslovsky Vestnik*, April, 1906).

The main weakness of the Russian situation was that ultimately it relied upon the orthodoxy and piety of the Tsars, and had no defence against any possible attack from that quarter. When clergy or lay people preached a doctrine contrary to the traditional beliefs, then the Church had weapons to combat this danger; but the possibility that the Tsar, the divinely appointed Father of the nation, could ever desert the truth and become the enemy of the Church seemed too remote to necessitate safeguards. Peter's attack came from the quarter which had always been considered as the very stronghold of undefiled Orthodoxy, and that is why both clergy and people were unable to resist openly the policy of the Emperor.

This peculiarly Russian trust in the piety of the Tsars was one of the main reasons for the failure of the Church to defend its independence; the other factor which contributed to their weakness was the character of the Russian Episcopate.

The Russian parishes, with their elected clergy and many charitable organisations attached to them, were very lively centres of Christian life; but the dioceses, in the proper sense of this term, had never been formed in Russia, for the huge regions ruled by the bishops had no organic life and were an artificial creation. The married parish priests were closely associated with their people, but this could not be said about the bishops, who were elected from among the Abbots of the big monasteries.

The Russian Bishops were not only few in number and isolated from the rest of the clergy, but they had even little contact among themselves, for the tremendous distances made this intercourse very difficult. A bishop whose diocese was in Siberia had to spend many months in travel to reach the capital and converse there with his

brethren, and obviously few of them were inclined to spend the whole year in travel for this purpose.

Thus the Russian Episcopate, deficient in inner unity and lacking organic links with its dioceses, was the body which could least hope to protect Church interests. Moreover, just at the time of Peter's reforms it was rent asunder by two rival parties, those of the Ukrainian and Great Russian clergy.

The south-western provinces of Russia, or the Ukraine, were incorporated into the Moscow Tsardom in the second part of the seventeenth century. The renewal of relations between two parts of the Church which had been separated from each other since the fifteenth century was at first difficult.

The Church in Ukraine had lived for more than two hundred years under the rule of the Roman Catholic kings of Poland and Lithuania, and had been engaged in a desperate struggle against the policy of Latinisation, systematically pursued by the Jesuits, who were allied with the powerful Polish nobility. During this struggle it was obliged to use the weapons of its adversaries; almost all its leaders received their training in the Roman Catholic seminaries and as its price had temporarily to renounce their mother—the Orthodox Church—and to become Uniats until they returned to their parishes. The theological schools and literature which were eventually produced by the Orthodox Church in the Ukraine were copied from the Western, and a large breach was inevitably created between the leaders of the Moscow dioceses, who lived in tranquillity and isolation, and the harassed leaders of the Ukrainian dioceses, who were in a constant struggle against the aggressive attack of the Western Christians.

The Church of the Ukraine, united in its resistance

against the West, was, however, divided in its sympathies. A part of the hierarchy saw the main danger in Rome and was prepared to go a considerable distance with the Protestants in their denunciations of the "papist errors"; the other party, although equally opposed to the Roman claims, considered the Protestants to be an even greater evil. Both parties of Kiev theologians were regarded with equal suspicion by the conservative-minded Moscow hierarchy, but after the great schism of 1667 the resistance of the latter was considerably weakened, and Moscow saw an ever-increasing number of monks trained in Kiev who acquired considerable influence in the capital.

Peter very skilfully exploited the antagonism between the Great Russian and the Ukrainian bishops. His policy was to bring gradually all the important ecclesiastical positions into the hands of the Ukrainian clergy, whose careers were entirely made by the Emperor's protection and who had no roots in the provinces of the old Moscow Tsardom. They were not only obedient tools in his hands, but many of them sincerely shared his ideals of enlightenment, and started to preach not so much Christianity as the advantages of education and the dangers of Russian exclusiveness. Eventually Peter realised that among the Ukrainian clergy the most useful to him were those who were inclined towards Protestantism and rationalism, and to these men he entrusted the highest appointments towards the end of his reign. Peter had a real gift for discovering able collaborators, and his favourite bishops were all first-class preachers, men of outstanding intelligence and education. It was more difficult for the Emperor to find good Christians among them, and both Bishop Theophanis Prokopovich and Archbishop Theodosius of Novgorod, his two chief ecclesiastical advisors, lacked many of the Christian virtues. Peter the Great had no illusions about the level of

their moral life, but his own standard was none too high, and their intellectual ability and learning outweighed from his point of view their deficiency in other qualities.*

The failure of the Russian bishops to defend the interests of the Church would not in itself have been enough to paralyse the opposition to the Emperor. The Russian Christians were used to standing up for their traditions without the leadership of their episcopate, as was the case at the time of the ritualistic reforms (1653-1667). This time, however, the situation was so confused that even the most ardent churchmen were uncertain of what action to take. This was due not only to the Emperor's part in the anti-Church campaign, but also to the character of the innovations he introduced.

The members of the Russian Church were taught by their Greek teachers that the essence of Christianity lies in doctrine and that for its defence every Christian ought to lay down his life and if necessary be martyred. To this the Russians added the belief that worship is of the same importance as doctrine—and for the sake of the purity of divine service they were ready to suffer and even to die, as they proved during the controversies of the seventeenth century. But Peter's reforms affected neither doctrine nor worship; they were undermining those parts of Church life the value of which was not altogether ignored by the Russian Christians, but had been considerably neglected by them for the last hundred years.

* There is a typical story that Peter paid a surprise visit to Bishop Theophanis late in the night. He found him in the midst of an exquisite banquet, with a large number of guests. Peter was at first shocked by such worldly behaviour in a bishop who was, as all Eastern bishops, a monk, but when Theophanis welcomed the Emperor with a witty speech, Peter forgot about his indignation and joined the merry company.

The final cause of Peter's success was therefore rooted in the deficiency of the popular conception of the Church, which laid a greater stress upon ritualism and worship than upon a proper relationship between Christians.

The real crux of the situation was that Peter was quite prepared to leave untouched the ritualistic piety so popular among the Russians. He was not interested in reforms of doctrine or worship, his goal was to deprive the Church of its spiritual independence, and to make it one of the departments of the Absolutist State. This was a challenge which had not been foreseen, and neither the clergy nor the people could face it properly.

The Russian Christians felt instinctively that Peter was the enemy of the Church, the name of " antichrist " was the one by which he was known among wide circles of the people, but his destructive work was of such a nature that no mass movement of resistance could be contemplated.

The Russian Church had to solve a new and momentous problem: Is the inner freedom of the Church, its " sobornost " or Catholicity, of equal importance with its doctrine and worship ? Under the leadership of " the Possessors " it had answered this question in the negative, and now it had to reap the fruits of the error. The Christian people of Russia were bewildered; their leaders failed to help them, yet they did not capitulate. Some of them left the Established Church and joined the " Old Believers," whilst those who remained did so in the hope that the Emperor's death would release the Church from captivity, inwardly refusing to accept the legitimacy of the new order.

The persistent, although unorganised, resistance of the

Russian Christians was conducted under most unfavourable circumstances. The Emperor declared that all the opponents of his ecclesiastical reforms were rebels against his Imperial authority, because he claimed that nothing he had done was contrary to Church precepts. His hands were strengthened by the fact that there was a good deal of political dissatisfaction in the country, and it was not difficult to accuse those who protested against Church reforms of subversive action. Many thousands of people perished in this way. Neither their sacrifice, however, nor the stubborn although passive opposition of the main bulk of the Russian people could alter the situation.

Peter the Great won the battle, the Russian Church was defeated and had to submit itself to the unfriendly rule of the new Empire. This victory, unexpected as it might appear, was made inevitable by the events which took place two hundred years ago in the sixteenth century, when the non-possessors were deprived of their share in the government of the Russian Church. It took a long time for the leaders of Russian Christianity to realise all the consequences of their policy, and it took an equally long time for the rulers of the Russian Empire to learn the price of their victory over the Church. For this price was paid only in the twentieth century, when the Empire of St. Petersburg suddenly collapsed. That Empire was doomed to destruction, for having been deprived of the guidance and help of the Christian Church it lost the love and devotion of its citizens.

The Church itself, in spite of its secularisation and officialdom, retained the vestige of its divine glory and continued to be fed at the inexhaustible fountain of grace; but the same Church showed itself a poor companion to the Empire; it failed completely to direct its policy and life.

The lack of free Christian criticism, the inevitable result of the new order, meant that the Russian life had lost its salt; it became putrified and stagnant, and there was no other alternative left to the people except subserviency or revolt.

CHAPTER V

RUSSIA'S RELIGIOUS DESTINY

THE consequences of the reforms of Peter the Great can only be compared with those of the Tartar invasions. Both movements marked a turning point in the history of the nation. In the thirteenth century the Tartar invasions cut off Russia from the rest of Europe and turned its face towards Asia; in the eighteenth century Peter the Great's reforms brought Russia again into the society of the European nations and opened a gulf between the eastern and western elements of its civilisation. In both cases there was a change in mentality, in political and social order, even in language.

There was, however, one fundamental difference between these two revolutions. The Tartar yoke affected equally all classes of Russian society, while the reforms of the eighteenth century touched only its upper strata and left the nation divided between two cultures, each with its own dress and its own language. Peter the Great inaugurated a systematic process of westernisation which thrust European dress, European bureaucracy, and European thought upon the nation, yet behind the new façade there still lived the Russian soul with its old traditions and ideals. The old Russia was not destroyed, but lay hidden under the outer shell of foreign culture.

During the first hundred years after Peter the Great borrowed customs and ideas existed side by side with the native, and no organic fusion seemed possible. But in

the first part of the nineteenth century there came to birth the new Russian culture which, though deeply rooted in the national soil, was yet an offshoot of western civilisation. Russia since the nineteenth century has had two spiritual backgrounds, and the synthesis of the two has created Russia's modern art, and also her literary language, one of the greatest achievements of the nation. A. Pushkin (1799-1837), M. Lermontov (1814-1841), Th. Tutchev (1803-1873), among the poets; N. Gogol (1809-1852), I. Turgeniev (1818-1883), Th. Dostoevsky (1821-1881), Count L. Tolstoy (1828-1910), N. Leskov (1831-1895), among the novelists; A. Ivanov (d. 1858) among the painters; M. Glinka (1804-1857), M. Mussorgsky (1839-1881), P. Tchaikovsky (1840-1895), N. Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) among the musicians, are the best representatives of the westernised and yet genuinely national Russian art.

In the political and religious spheres, however, Russia remained in a state of confusion. Her conservative elements were divided into two groups, the "westernisers" and the "nationalists." Of her more radical elements, some found their inspiration in the socialist and revolutionary movements of Western Europe, while others sought a development along more peculiarly Russian lines.

The group of westernised conservatives formed the ruling class of Russia. It was the least national of all the sections of Russian society; its ideal was the Prussian bureaucracy, and many of its most distinguished members were Germans by birth. They were stubbornly opposed by the national conservatives, who were the largest but politically the least influential group. Composed chiefly of merchants and peasants, the main feature of this party was its profound dislike and suspicion of every manifestation of western civilisation, including such things as European dress and the art of shaving.

The westernised radicals were grouped into various revolutionary, and later socialistic, parties, all aiming at liberal reform on the French pattern. The national radicals were the Slavophils, who, as convinced members of the Church, advocated political and social reforms based on a complete acceptance of the ideal of Christian life.

Such was the complex state of Russian society. The large majority of the people was outspokenly hostile to the Germanised Empire of St. Petersburg, but being divided in its programme and ideals it remained powerless and incapable of any serious action.

The Imperial court at St. Petersburg was much more Prussian than Russian. The Emperors ceased to wear the vestments of the Orthodox monarchs, and they conformed to the same secular character as the other European rulers. But the great majority of the Russian nation, the peasants, remained unaware of this change, and for long they continued to believe that the throne was still occupied by the Orthodox Tsars. This fiction, however, could not last, and when illusion was shattered the fall of the Empire became only a question of time.

To all appearances both the revolutions of 1905 and of 1917 were the result of a clash between the westernised conservatives and westernised radicals in which the bulk of the people remained a passive spectator. Yet, in the end, the fate of Russia was decided, not by the revolutionaries, but by the great patient mass of national conservatives. When in 1917 the westernised liberals obtained a complete victory and inaugurated a democratic order carefully modelled upon the best European pattern, the Russian peasants suddenly rose in passionate revolt and smashed down the whole fabric of western civilisation.

The decisive factor in the second stage of the revolution of 1917 was not the Communist revolt against the temporary liberal Government, but the uprising of the peasants against the educated classes and their western ideals. It was a movement backwards and not forwards, its spirit was national and not international; but because it had no clear programme and no leaders it was doomed to failure, and the victory fell into the hands of a small but well-organised and ably led group of Communists. These were mostly non-Russians by birth and professed the most international ideals alien to the aspiration of the Russian peasants. To understand the revolution it is necessary to realise that its success was due to the temporary alliance of these two opposite movements, one aiming at the establishment of the Communist International, the other at the return to Russia's past. Externally the internationalists were victorious, for the peasant revolution was mercilessly suppressed and several millions of peasants perished in the timber camps during the first five years' plan (1929-1933). Western industrialism was forced upon the nation and Russian traditions and customs were abolished as far as possible; even the word "Russia" was now replaced by the name "The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics." Thus the Communist revolution seemed to be a final stage in the westernisation of Russia, the culmination of the process begun by Peter the Great, a renunciation of Russia's Messianic dreams, and of the belief in Moscow as the third Rome.

Such an interpretation, however, does not take into account other important factors which were at work from the outset, and have been particularly active since 1935, when a return to nationalism was begun by the Soviet Government. The Bolshevist party has been obliged to yield more and more to the pressure of the national

revolution and to make several important concessions to the popular feeling against western civilisation. It is significant that Moscow has again become the capital of the country, and the Kremlin, its sacred heart, has been restored to its position of honour. A Russian peasant, Kalinin, was chosen as the puppet head of the State, and pseudo-Russian dress has been accepted by the leaders of the Communist party. The traditional Moscow policy of friendship towards the Eastern nations has been revived, and the country has acquired once more a mixed European and Asiatic character. From that standpoint the revolution is another step in the realisation of the prophetic vision of the Russian monks in the dark night of the Tartar oppression. For the Communists are only following the path which was pointed out by the Moscow princes, bishops and monks at the end of the fifteenth century. The Third International, which has chosen Moscow as its seat, is strangely in accordance with the prophecy that that city has a message of salvation for both the East and the West, as universally significant as that of Rome or Constantinople. There is a further similarity in that the Third International, like the Moscow Tsardom of the Middle Ages, has as its ideal the perfect community which shall harmonise and elevate the lives of its members.

But though there are important similarities between these two stages of Russian history, there is also one fundamental difference, for the Communists proclaim class war and hatred instead of Christian love, and instead of the worship of God they teach a belief in man and his illimitable power.

At the present Russia's main problem is this: How far can compulsion bring about true progress? In other words, is it right to sacrifice an innocent life for a good cause? But is not this the same question that faced the

"Non-possessors" in the sixteenth century? The Communists have carried to its logical conclusion the teaching of those who opposed the "Non-possessors" and advocated the persecution of the enemies of the Church and State; they have adopted as their fundamental principle the belief in the efficiency of compulsion and have sacrificed millions of human lives to their theory. Thus the "Red Terror" and the timber camps of Soviet Russia are the practical application of those principles which were the centre of the controversy of the sixteenth century.

The Christian belief in the power of love has been challenged as never before by the Communist Russia. She questioned the Christian conviction that hatred and destruction can never secure happiness and peace. In the Church of Russia there has always been an influential stream of thought opposed to the use of violence, and it is more than a coincidence that it is this body which has to meet the attack of atheistic Communism.

This point raises the questions: Has Christianity been defeated in Russia? Has the Church failed? Have its saints been deceived? Has atheism taken the place of faith in God in the minds and hearts of her people?

It is now a very common opinion that whatever the future of Russia it will never return to its mother Church. There exists, in England and elsewhere, a popular picture of the Russian Church as a body corrupted by Erastianism, opposed to education, exploiting the ignorance and superstition of the peasant. The famous Rasputin (d. 1917) is usually put forward as an example of the immorality and greed of its clergy, and it is felt that he sufficiently explains the Communist's disillusionment with Christianity. Foreigners visiting Russia, moreover, were usually struck by the magnificence of the long and elaborate services, the lack of social activity among the clergy, the seeming passiveness of the laity, and the rigid control which the State exercised over the Church through the person of the lay Over-procurator of the Holy Synod. Thus the Russian Church seemed at first sight a body gorgeously attired but spiritually dead, which existed only because the Empire was willing to support it.

Such a picture of Russian Christianity is as fictitious as are the supposed monastic vows of Rasputin. Rasputin himself was actually a married layman, and he can in no way be taken as representative of the Church or its clergy; on the contrary, his mentality was essentially sectarian, since he was closely connected with the Khlysty,* a sect of a Montanist type advocating sexual promiscuity as a means of liberation from the domination of the flesh. It is, however, necessary to go deeper than the question of Rasputin to explain the contradiction between the appearance and reality of Russian Church life.

The Russian Church under the Empire lived in a state of siege. The Germanised bureaucracy of St. Petersburg carefully supervised its every movement, ready to crush out any spontaneous manifestations of religious activity. But the Church, though deprived of the right of self-expression, was rich in life, and found divers subterranean channels through which to maintain its contact with the people. On the surface it produced an impression of uniformity and immobility, but in its depths could be found many vital movements. In particular three streams of thought deserve attention, the first two representing the mentality of the "Possessors," the third that of the "Non-possessors."

To the first group belonged the clergy and laity of Josephian persuasion who remained in the Church after

* It is probable that at one time he actually belonged to it.

the schism of the seventeenth century. The large majority of these disapproved of the westernisation of Russia, but they had neither the power nor the courage to resist. They strove to be loyal to the State and accepted the privileges which were bestowed upon them in return for their conformity in political matters. The Government needed the support of the Church because its authority was ultimately based upon the fiction that the Orthodox Tsardom still existed, and this section of the Josephians was ready to play its rôle in this farce because it was afraid that the downfall of the Empire would mean a victory for anarchy in Church and State. On the attitude of this group alone is based the widespread impression that the Russian Church was the ally of the Empire.

The other section of the Josephian party was, on the other hand, most determinedly opposed to any compromise with the State. It declared that the St. Petersburg Empire was the betrayer of Russia's true vocation, and it held aloof from the official Church, unwilling to recognise the right of the Over-procurators to control religious life. These so-called "Old Believers" had since the seventeenth century formed their own distinct bodies of Russian nonconformity, the majority of them faithfully preserving all the old Orthodox rites and traditions, although refusing to enter into communion with the established Church. Attempts of the Government to break down their opposition were unavailing. On the eve of the revolution of 1917 the Old Believers presented a well-organised, self-governing body headed by their own bishops and numbering more than ten million members.*

The third group represented a quite different stream of

* See P. Miljukov, *Sketches from the History of the Russian Culture*, vol. xi., pp. 154-157, Paris, 1931 (in Russian).

Russian spirituality, the source of which must be traced back to the "Non-possessors," for it claimed freedom and rejected force. This movement was particularly little known to those outside the Russian Church, and yet it embraced its most creative thinkers and some of its greatest saints.

The whole story of the revival of this movement in the nineteenth century and of the process which brought it into contact with western thought is extremely interesting, but here it is only possible to examine cursorily some of its consequences.

The tradition of the "Non-possessors" never disappeared altogether from Russian Church life. In the eighteenth century we find it represented by St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (1724-1783), previously Bishop of Voronezh, and he by no means stands alone. But it was the nineteenth century that saw the real revival of the movement. One of its most powerful manifestations was *Starchestvo*. This was the practice of laymen appealing for spiritual counsel to certain monks known for their piety and wisdom called *Startsi*. The centre of the movement was at Optina Pustin,* a monastery near Tula in Central Russia. The tradition of *Starchestvo* was started there by Father Leonid (d. 1841), the disciple of the famous monk Paisy Velichkovsky, who introduced it into Russian Church life at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The full glory of that way of holiness was, however, revealed by a monk of another monastery, St. Seraphim of Sarov† (1750-1833), one of the greatest saints of the Russian Church.

* Many famous Russian writers and philosophers were influenced by this monastery, among them N. Gogol, Th. Dostoevsky, J. Kirjevsky, C. Leontiev, V. Soloviev, L. Tolstoy, and V. Rosanov. The best-known *Starets* of Optina was Ambrosius (d. 1891).

† *St. Seraphim of Sarov*, translated by A. F. Dobbie-Bateman (S.P.C.K., 1936).

St. Seraphim and the *Startsi* of the Optina Pustin combined in a unique way the contemplative life with the active service of their fellow-Christians. Their humility and love gave them understanding of others and a singular gift for relieving the spiritual needs of those who came to seek their help and advice. A Russian *Starets* fulfilled the prophetic mission of the Church. He was not appointed by a bishop, nor was he elected by the brethren of his community. He was a chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit, responsible only to his calling. It was not infrequent that the conduct of a *Starets* brought him into open conflict with the authorities of Church and State; freed from the ordinary ecclesiastical obligations, he acted and spoke as the true mouthpiece of the Church, for through his humility and love he was identified with the rest of the Christian body.*

Another consequence of the revival of the "Non-possessor" tradition was the birth of the first true Russian theology. Theological schools were started in Russia only in the eighteenth century. As was natural, they were copied from European models, and almost until the middle of the nineteenth century they struggled to work with the ideals borrowed from the West. It is one of the paradoxes of Russian religious history that a layman, a retired officer of the Royal Guard, Alexis Khomiakov (1804-1860), was the first great original theologian of the Russian Church,† the first to formulate in terms of modern

* A description of a *Starets* can be found in the *Brothers Karamazov*, by Dostoevsky, and in the *Way of a Pilgrim*, translated by the Rev. R. M. French (Philip Allan, London, 1931) The succession of *Startsi* continued uninterrupted till the dissolution of the monasteries at the revolution.

† It was J. Samarin who in 1867 made the bold statement that Khomiakov was the great doctor of the Orthodox Church. In his preface to Khomiakov's essay on the Church Samarin wrote (vol. xi., p. xxxvl, Moscow, 1909): "What! Khomiakov, who lived in Moscow, who was our common friend . . . that amusing and witty companion . . . who was latterly accused by newspapers of being an atheist, that retired captain of the cavalry Alexis Khomiakov is the doctor of the Church? Yes, he is that. When calling him by this name I know well that my words will be taken by some as arrogant provocation, by others as the blind partisanship of a disciple; I know all that, but I know also that future generations will be surprised, not at the fact that somebody had the resolution to publish this opinion in 1867 and sign it, but that there was a time when to do so required any degree of audacity." Samarin was right. Khomiakov is now recognised as the exponent of Orthodox theology.

thought the experience of his mother Church. Khomiakov with his friends and disciples formed the Slavophil movement, the aim of which was to explore the political and social forms which would correspond to the traditions of Russian Christianity.* It was a brilliant and highly educated group, the members of which were well acquainted with western thought, and at the same time spiritually rooted in their Church life. They included some of the most interesting thinkers of the nineteenth century, men like J. Kirjevsky (1806-1856), Constantin Aksakov (1817-1860), Ivan Aksakov (1823-1886), Jurij Samarin (1819-1876), A. Koshelev (1806-1883); and later on Constantin Leontiev (1831-1891), N. Danilevsky (1822-1885), Th. Dostoevsky (1821-1881), and V. Soloviev (1853-1900), were associated with this movement. In spite of its high intellectual and spiritual level the movement attracted only a small circle, and it had little effect on the majority of educated Russians. The time was not yet ripe for their message; the Russian intelligentsia in the middle of the nineteenth century was still too much attracted by western civilisation to listen to any appeal to discard a

* The Slavophils' programme was not in all respects in accordance with the teaching of St. Nil of Sorsk, but that it was a part of the true "Non-possessor" heritage was shown by its insistence upon freedom in religion.

European for a genuinely Russian culture. The message of the Slavophils was equally alien to the St. Petersburg conservatives, who feared their insistence upon freedom, and to the westernised radicals, who could not accept their faithfulness to the Church and to Christianity. Their writings failed to change the course of Russian history, and yet, in spite of an unfavourable reception from so large a part of Russian society, they helped to bridge the gulf between the westernised intelligentsia and the Church, which had always remained faithful to its national past. The reconciliation between these two began in the twentieth century, and was completed at the time of the Communist revolution, but the way was prepared in the nineteenth century by the work of the Slavophils.

Such was the inner state of the Russian Church on the eve of the revolution. It is clear that it is impossible to describe it as one of stagnation and passive acceptance of State control. On the contrary, the Church was a living organism keenly aware of the vital problems of Christian life. Its outstanding feature was, as we have seen, not uniformity, but the continuous rivalry of the conflicting streams of spirituality.

It is difficult to estimate the comparative strengths of the various groups within the Russian Church, but it is probable that in the twentieth century a considerable proportion of the priests were leaning towards the "Non-possessors'" position, and were deeply dissatisfied with the conditions of both Church and State. That, at least, was the opinion of the Russian bishops, who, when asked in 1906 by the Holy Synod to give their views on Church reform, declared almost unanimously (61 out of 63) in favour of disestablishment.* The same attitude was

* See my articles: (*a*) "The Russian Episcopate and Church Reform" (*Church Quarterly Review*, April, 1934). (*b*) "The Russian Church Thirty Years Ago" (*Sobornost*, No. 4, 1936). (*c*) "An attempt at Reform within the Russian Church" (*The American Church Monthly*, February, 1936).

taken by the All-Russia Council of 1917-1918, which was the first Council held by the Russian Church since the end of the seventeenth century, and which achieved disestablishment. The Church under the Empire was deprived of freedom of speech, but the occasional raising of the ban shows that the majority of her clergy and laity were out of sympathy with the policy of the St. Petersburg bureaucracy. Many names can be given which show that most of the outstanding priests and theologians of the nineteenth century were in no way obscurantist,* and to these can be added an impressive group of lay theologians who, although they had no official position in the Church, exercised a very considerable influence.†

The Church of Russia, because of her inner dissensions, was never able to resist the oppressive policy of the Empire, but it must be realised that she never consented to secular control and never voluntarily supported acts of persecution. She was essentially the Church of the people. During the years of suffering due to serfdom her clergy did not abandon the peasants, but shared all the horrors of that great national sin. The persecution launched by the Communists in 1918 was directed against

* Th. Bukharev (1824-1871), Professors V. Bolotov (1854-1900), Svetlov, A. Lebedev, Zaozersky, Rozhdestvensky, Nikolsky, Akvilonov, Muretov, Nesmelov, Florensky, A. Gorsky, I. Janishev, Katansky, Bishop Silvester, E. Golubinsky.

† N. Antonov in his interesting book, *The Russian Lay-Theologians* (St. Petersburg, 1912, in Russian), mentions seventy-three outstanding writers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and most of them were in sympathy with the tradition of the "Non-possessors." Especially remarkable among them was N. Fedorov (1828-1903), one of the most original Russian thinkers.

the already disestablished Church, and it was clear from the beginning that it was aimed not only against the Orthodox Church, but against every form of religion, being based on an antagonism to the belief in God and in the immortality of the human soul.* The Communists reproduced here the anti-Christian doctrine of Karl Marx.

It would be premature to predict which side will be taken by the majority of the Russian people in the fierce struggle between the Christians and the militant atheists which has been raging in Russia since the revolution, but its intensity and duration suggest a deep-rooted religious feeling among the people such as even the totalitarian State of the twentieth century may not be able to eradicate.

Whatever the eventual consequences of the clash between the Christian and anti-Christian powers in Russia, it will strengthen and purify the religious life of those who have kept faithful to the Church during these years of trial.

* Statements that the Communists intend to suppress only reactionary forms of Christianity sometimes seem to be given colour by their support of the so-called "Living Church." That schismatic body was a retarded expression of the deep-rooted dissatisfaction of the parish clergy, which had suffered particularly from the bureaucratic control of the State. The programme of the Living Church contained several important reforms advocated long before the revolution by many leading clergy and laymen, but it was badly compromised by the moral character of the leaders of the movement. These were connected with the secret police, which tried to use them as instruments for the further destruction of the Church. This disgraceful association alienated all sincere Christians from the movement and it vanished as quickly as it had sprung up (1922-1926). The Communists, moreover, persecute not only the established Church, but even those Christian bodies which were oppressed under the Empire and were in no way associated with political reaction.

There remain two last questions involved in the study of Moscow as the third Rome which ought to be raised in conclusion:

(1) Why did the Russian Church fail to reconcile the two movements within it?

(2) How far is the Russian Church justified in its belief that it has a message for the rest of Christendom?

The answer to the first question lies in the tragic isolation of the Russian Church.

Russia took a hard and lonely road when it was converted to Christianity. Its geographical remoteness, its extent, its language, kept it isolated from the rest of Christendom. The Tartar invasions and the fall of the Byzantine Empire completed its seclusion. When in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries relations with other Eastern Christians were restored, the latter were in the position of humble solicitors for Russian material help, and thus throughout her history the Russian Church has lacked intercourse with other Churches on the basis of equality and mutual trust. The solitariness of the Russian Church may have given it free scope for original development, but at the same time it prevented it from achieving a fuller maturity. The harmonisation of the two tendencies of Russian Christianity is not impossible, but it presupposes a wide knowledge of the universal tradition of the Church in the light of which the peculiar problems of Russia can acquire their right proportion. The Russian Church never gained this knowledge, and that is the cause of its failure to unify its life, and to find in its twofold nature a source of richness rather than a stumbling-block.

The history of the Russian Church is a warning that no one national Church can ever fulfil itself if it is cut off from the other Christian bodies. The Russian revolution, by scattering many thousands of exiled Christians, has

considerably altered the situation, and it may bring to an end the spiritual isolation of the Russian Church, and thus open a new page in its history.

The second problem, that of the reality of the Russian Messianic mission, is much more complicated, and the answer to it is bound to be influenced by personal feelings and hopes, but an attempt can at least be made to suggest a right approach to it.

During the last five centuries Russia has passed through three different phases. It was first the Holy Orthodox Tsardom of Moscow, the third Rome; then it became the westernised Empire of St. Petersburg, secularised, denying its religious mission, and yet insisting on its political responsibility for the oppressed Eastern Christians; and, lastly, it is now the stronghold of the Third International, hostile to Christianity, but claiming to possess the world-wide message of salvation for all those who suffer social injustice. Such radical and abrupt changes might suggest that Russia has never possessed a real sense of vocation and has been pursuing whatever illusions had attracted the imagination of its rulers.

But such a theory is not supported by a careful study of Russia's history. Through all vicissitudes and changes there is discernible one constant theme, one unchanging vision, dim in the heart of the average Russian, but clear and explicit in the lives of the saints and prophets, and in the works of the artists. The failure of the Russian nation to realise its vision has been due, not to the lack of clear conviction, but to the nature of its calling. When Russia was baptised, she took upon herself the cross (according to the language of the Russian Church) of self-denial and humiliation. The innocent suffering and the voluntary death of the first two Russian saints, Princes Boris and Gleb, foreshadow the whole history of Russian

Christianity, and although the people have tried many times to revolt against it, yet all that is noblest and purest in the life of the nation has always been faithful to this vision. Boris and Gleb, Theodosius, the first abbot of Holy Russia, St. Sergius and his disciples, St. Nil and the "Non-possessors," St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, St. Seraphim of Sarov, the Startsi of Optina, Russian music, literature and painting throughout the centuries all point to the same ideal, all aim at the same ultimate goal, that of a Christian community delivered from hate and fear through the voluntary acceptance of suffering, responding in free obedience to the call of the Holy Ghost, the King of Peace and giver of life.

Russia's prophetic message is that the seductive offer of Rome to use her sword for the building up of Christ's kingdom is a temptation and a foolishness. Two thousand years of Church history has fully proved that the life of a Christian community cannot be based on the Roman principles of force and fear. But no Christian Church has yet dared to dispense with them altogether, and if Russia has any message for the rest of Christendom it can only be that of the Christian victory over the power of Rome. Then, if this were achieved, Moscow, the sacred heart of Holy Russia, could truly be called the third and last Rome. Then the vision of the Russian monks who lived under the dark shadow of the Tartar oppression and the prophetic utterances of the Russian saints, philosophers and poets will be fulfilled. The sacrifices of the Russian martyrs who laid down their lives under the Communists will then be justified, and the whole history of the nation will find its proper meaning.

Every nation, like every individual, is at liberty to follow or to reject its vocation, and Russia too must

choose its destiny. She stands now at the cross-roads. She is free to reject her calling, but if she choose to follow it she has no other message for the rest of the world than the ideal of Christian conduct uncompromised by the use of the Roman sword in the defence of Christ's kingdom.

Printed by offset in Great Britain by Billing and Sons Ltd., Guildford and Esher

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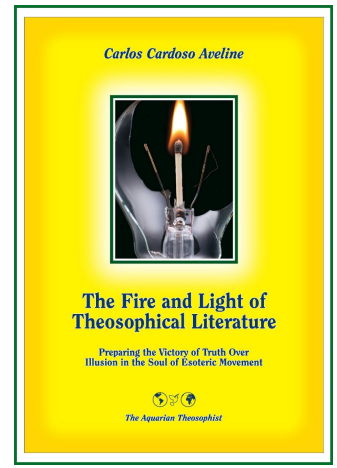

Published in 2013 by **The Aquarian Theosophist**, the volume has 255 pages and can obtained through Amazon Books.

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