

12-1999

Liberation from the Soviet Past: A Reflection on the Possibility of Post-Gulag Theologies

Mikhail Sergeev

University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sergeev, Mikhail (1999) "Liberation from the Soviet Past: A Reflection on the Possibility of Post-Gulag Theologies," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 19: Iss. 6, Article 1.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol19/iss6/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University.

LIBERATION FROM THE SOVIET PAST: A REFLECTION ON THE POSSIBILITY OF POST-GULAG THEOLOGIES¹

by Mikhail Sergeev

Mikhail Sergeev recently completed his doctorate in Russian religious philosophy at Temple University in Philadelphia and now teaches history of religions plus modern art and literature at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia.

Introduction

The notion of "liberation theology" when applied to Russia and Russian experience in the 20th century has quite a specific connotation. In the so-called "third world" countries, liberation theology represents a broad ideological and social movement the goal of which is to struggle against different forms of oppression. Thus, liberation theologians fight against the oppressive influence of national and, most importantly, international or global capitalist networks. In this respect the experiment of Soviet Russia is unique, for it embodied one form of ideological opposition to the spread and globalization of the capitalist system as well. In fact, it was an opposition which managed to become a real threat to capitalism and survived more than seventy years of social practice.

In contrast to liberation theology, the Soviet ideology was essentially anti-religious and aimed at achieving the ultimate "liberation," namely, the freedom from God. Accordingly, it was based on a series of dogmas which pretended to scientifically explain and control life in its totality. As a result, the "death of God" led to spiritual degradation of the people, while plans for total regulation brought the country into chaos and absurdity.

¹A short version of this paper was presented at the annual meetings of the Mid-Atlantic Region of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in March 1997 in Wilmington, Delaware, and at the Eastern International Region of the AAR in April 1997 in Buffalo, New York.

In August 1991 the Soviet Union finally disappeared as a political entity from the world map. Yet it continues a phantom existence in the minds of its former citizens. A difficult task which Russia faces in this post-Soviet phase of its history is the inner liberation from the clinging shadows of the still recent Soviet past. Russians cannot go on as if the horrors of the Gulag never happened. To this nation, once again at the crossroads of history, there is a deep need to understand and redeem the genocide against its own people, which took tens of millions of lives in less than a century. Post-Gulag liberation theology which comes out of facing the problem may well set the nation on a new course. The question is whether this liberation from the Soviet experience will bring with it integration into the international community or whether it will preserve and even reinforce 20th century Russian opposition to global capitalism.

The Orthodox Church Under Soviet Rule

The collapse of the Soviet Union, among other things, manifested the impossibility of the communist ideology continuing to cement the edifice of the immense atheist empire. The corrosion of communist doctrine appeared complete and irrevocable. It was natural, then, to suppose that Russia would return to its traditional and main confession, Orthodox Christianity. It has to be said, however, that the Russian Orthodox Church itself in the course of the twentieth century has gone through significant transformations.²

²Two books summarize the history of the Russian Orthodox Church in the 20th century. The first, *A Long Walk to Church: A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy*, written by Nathaniel Davis (Westview Press: Boulder, 1995), is a secular investigation of Russian Church history since the communist revolution of 1917. The second by a Canadian historian of Russian descent, an Orthodox Christian himself, Dimitry Pospelovsky available in English since 1984, was recently translated and published in Russian as *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov' v XX veke*. Moscow: Respublika, 1995. Both works include data from the archives on the history of the Church which was kept secret during Soviet times.

In the beginning of the century the Russian Orthodox Church which since the times of Peter the Great was held under strict state control, made an effort at renewal and separation from secular authorities. The movement to achieve this autonomy, however, was not crowned with success.³ On the contrary, the First World War, the collapse of monarchical rule in Russia, and the October revolution of 1917 and the civil war that followed, brought the unreformed Orthodox Church into a crisis of truly Biblical proportions.

The fundamental problem which faced Orthodox leaders then was their relationship to the newly created and openly atheistic Soviet state. The Church Council (*Pomestnyi Sobor*) of 1917-1918, which re-established the Patriarchal Church government and elected its first Patriarch, Tikhon, was not even able to complete its work because of the repression against the Church. To the movement for its revitalization the Bolsheviks responded by nationalizing the Church's land, buildings and institutions of learning, and by demoralizing Orthodox believers with the militant atheist propaganda.

In the face of the growing tension between the Orthodox Church and the emerging atheist state, the decisions of the Council were aimed at "political neutrality" toward secular authorities. Through the urging of the Patriarch, the Church did not take sides with either the "reds" or the "whites," but appealed to both camps to repent and stop the bloody civil war. The Soviet government in its turn increased its attacks on the Church. As the Canadian historian, Dimitry Pospelovsky, writes in his book, *The Russian Orthodox Church in the 20th Century*:

During the years 1918-1920 at least twenty-eight bishops were murdered, thousands of priests were either put into prisons or murdered as well; and the number of lay people who paid with their lives for the defense of the Church interests or simply for their faith, according to available sources, comprised twelve thousand.⁴

³For an elaborate discussion of the movement toward Church renewal see, James W. Cunningham, *A Vanquished Hope. The Movement for Church Renewal in Russia, 1905-1906*. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981.

⁴Pospelovsky, *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov'*, p.54. Here and later--unless otherwise stated--translations from the Russian are made by the author of the paper.

When it became clear to the rulers that in spite of all repression the popularity and influence of the Church among Russians had not decreased, they attempted to split it from within. For this purpose the Soviet leaders supported the alternative reform movement, *obnovlenchestvo*, which might easily have destroyed the Patriarchal Church in these troubled times. The members of *obnovlenchestvo* expressed their backing of the regime and glorified the socialist idea as the manifestation of social justice. At the same time they accused the Patriarch of taking a reactionary stand and they created a network of alternative and independent parishes.

Confronted with the internal conflicts and the worsened relations with the authorities, and blackmailed by open threats to exterminate the Church, the next Patriarch, Sergii, in 1927 was practically forced to follow the example of *obnovlenchestvo* and to make a declaration of loyalty to the Soviet regime. However, even this highly unpopular, collaborationist measure did not save the Orthodox Church from new waves of repressions. The thirties brought the culmination of the anti-religious terror aimed at "a massive liquidation of all religious institutions... almost achieved" by 1939.⁵ In the same years the "number of priests [serving] in the original territory of the Soviet Union decreased by 95%" as well.⁶

The Orthodox Church might well have been completely destroyed if the Second World War had not begun. In the face of Hitler's invasion and the confusion in the Soviet leadership, the repressed Church immediately raised its voice appealing to Russian patriotic feelings. By 1943, at the peak of the war, Stalin made a decision to formally reestablish the Church under the total control of the Party. In the post-war years the legalized Church was allowed to perform its ecclesiastical functions and even to grow administratively. In exchange for its survival, the Church played the

⁵Ibid., 164.

⁶Ibid., p.169.

humiliating role of dependent, puppet-like institution, a "living symbol" of the fictitious religious freedom in the USSR.⁷

⁷The situation of the Russian Orthodox Church was quite ambiguous then, as well as in the 60s and 70s. See, for example, an article by Michael Bourdeaux, "The Russian Church, Religious Liberty and the World Council of Churches" published in the journal *Religion, State and Society* (formerly *Religion in Communist Lands*), Vol. 13, No.1, Spring 1985, which discusses the issue of religious freedom in the light of the relations between the ROC and the World Council of Churches.

During the early 60s, in the Krushchev era, the Orthodox Church suffered another wave of repression. It turned out to be, however, the last major attempt of the communist rulers to overthrow Orthodox religion and to prevent its apparently coming resurrection. Already in the late 60s-early 70s the mood for Christian Orthodox revival was in the air. The changes began from within the Church itself.⁸ One aspect of the new movement was connected with religious freedom and ecumenism. Another indication of the growing influence of Orthodoxy was the revived interest in pre-revolutionary culture and national roots in general.

The alliance of religion and nationalism, although potentially dangerous, seemed natural in light of the long suppression of national cultures in all of the Soviet Republics for the sake of an artificial "proletarian internationalism." In Russia the religious agitation reached its acme, perhaps, in 1988 with the celebration of a thousand years of Christianity in the country. The Soviet regime was at that time already in its death-agony. Only three years later, after its final collapse, the Orthodox Church found itself facing the new challenge of leading a Russian national revival after seventy years of Communist rule.

Heritage of the Emigration

While the Orthodox Church was preoccupied simply with its survival and remained in a morally vulnerable position in Soviet Russia, those Orthodox believers who were either exiled from the country or managed to emigrate, observed the unfolding of Russia's tragedy from outside. The representatives of this first wave of spiritual emigration formed the Russian Orthodox Church in Exile and created a series of oppositional journals and publishing enterprises. The most important, perhaps, were the religious-philosophical journal *Put' (The Way)* and the YMCA Press Publishing House, both headed by the famous Russian emigre philosopher, Nikolai Berdiaev.

⁸More on this in: Fr. Michael Aksionov Meerson, "The Russian Orthodox Church 1965-1980," *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 9, Nos. 3-4, Autumn 1981.

The task which stood before the authors of this free Orthodox press was to comprehend -- using the title of one of Berdiaev's book -- *The Origin and Meaning of Russian Communism*, and based on that analysis to forecast the future of Russia. Russian communism was understood by these religious thinkers not just as a social or political disaster, but rather, as a national spiritual catastrophe, an internal disease which spread to other nations. As believers they also argued that God gave power to communists for the purpose of punishing Russia and the whole world for its sins. In order to recover from communism Russia thus had to repent and to renew the foundations of national life.

This position was most consistently formulated, perhaps, in Nikolai Berdiaev's book about communism. Berdiaev develops here his general thesis about communism being a pseudo-religion, a national curse which may be overcome only by intense spiritual healing from the inside. Communism, he writes, "wants to be the religion which comes to replace Christianity; it pretends to respond to the religious quest of the human soul, to provide the meaning of life."⁹ In an earlier essay, "Meditation on the Russian Revolution," Berdiaev adds that "Bolshevism was a perverted, turned-inside-out realization of the Russian idea."¹⁰ He notes also what, in his opinion, constitutes a remarkable aspect of the "Russian idea." He says that "a Russian religious person understands that in the face of God the European bourgeois is not better than the Russian communist."¹¹

⁹Nikolai Berdiaev. *Istoki i smysl russkogo kommunizma [Origin and Meaning of Russian Communism]*. [Reprint copy of the 1955 edition by YMCA Press]. Moscow: "Nauka," 1990, p.129.

¹⁰Nikolai Berdiaev. "Razmyshleniia o russkoi revolutsii." *Novoe srednevekov'e. Razmyshlenie o sud'be rossii i evropy [The New Middle Ages. Meditation on the Destiny of Russia and Europe]*. Moscow: Phoenix--KhDS-Press, 1991, p.38.

¹¹Ibid., p.51.

This controversial statement displays Berdiaev's deep conviction that the future liberation of his motherland from communism has little to do with Russia embracing the ideal of capitalist democracy. Berdiaev defends this position which, we should mention in passing, was quite common in the Russian emigre circles, by going to the extreme. He is not only criticizing Western-style democratic societies, but attacks the very idea of democracy and dissociates it from the religious ground of human existence.

His argumentation is twofold. First, Berdiaev argues, democracy as a rule of the majority has a formal character, ignores the very content of the people's will, and, therefore, is indifferent to truth. By idolizing the collective will of a nation and trusting only a mechanical counting of votes, contemporary democracy "is tolerant because it is indifferent, because it has lost faith in truth, is impotent to choose truth."¹² Second, it represents a secular organization of social life while all societies established on sacred principles, on the contrary, have not been democratic. This mutual repulsion of democratic and sacred principles is natural because, as Berdiaev points out, "Truth is sacred and society which is based on truth cannot be an exclusively secular society."¹³

The recognition of a religious dimension in communism and the need for a Russian spiritual revival which will exclude the establishment of a secular democracy was expressed in different and less absolutist forms by many of Berdiaev's colleagues. A Russian emigre philosopher and political leader, Ivan Il'in, for example, who did not reject democracy in general, thought nevertheless that in Russia's 20th century case this form of government is categorically contra-indicated. "Democracy may be appropriate, expedient and politically justified in some states," he wrote, "and may be completely unfit, really fatal, in others." And when considering the future of

¹²Nikolai Berdiaev. "Demokratiia, sotsializm i teokratiia" ["Democracy, Socialism and Theocracy"]. *Novoe srednevekov'e*, p.63.

¹³Ibid., p.63.

post-communist Russia Il'in, a monarchist, reasonably asked his readers: wouldn't it be "madness and betrayal to demand [then] a 'democratic republic' in Russia?!"¹⁴

¹⁴Ivan Il'in *Nashi zadachi: istoricheskaia sud'ba i budushee rossii* [*Our Tasks: Historical Fate and Future of Russia*]. Moscow: MP "Rarog," 1992, Vol.I, p.270.

The powerful voice of those emigrants who opposed the democratic choice for Russia was moderated by a second camp of adherents to democratic ideals. Nikolai Losskii, for example, was among these rare Russian thinkers who not only supported democracy, but tied this support to his religious-philosophical views. Losskii was a defender of organic philosophy which presupposes the monarchical order of the world. He thought that the world as a system united by the Cosmic Substance, Sophia, is composed of the infinite multitude of sub-systems governed by other substances. Thus, a nation, for instance, is united and moved by the nation's soul.

This ontological monarchism, as Losskii noted, however, has little to do with monarchism as a political system. The authoritarian monarch does not express the soul of the nation any better than the democratically elected president. On the contrary, in the course of the growing complexity of social life, the unity of the state is achieved more securely by the dispersion of power and by a constitutional limitation of the absolute power of the monarch. Finally, neither monarchy nor democracy, in Losskii's opinion, is unconditionally perfect. In some circumstances the latter is preferable; under other conditions people should embrace the former. The choice depends upon what system of government can best balance the united will of the nation with the rights and development of its members.¹⁵

A stronger and more uncompromising case for democracy in the Orthodox Christian context was made by Georgii Fedotov in his article "Foundations of Christian Democracy." The importance of Fedotov's approach consists of analyzing the idea or substance of democracy which he derives, not from the Ancient Greek or Roman civilizations, but from the heritage of the Old Testament.

¹⁵Nikolai Losskii elaborates on these issues in his articles "Organicheskoe stroenie obschestva i demokratii" ["Organic Structure of Society and Democracy"], *Sovremennye Zapiski*, 1925, Vol. 25; "V zaschitu demokratii" ["In Defense of Democracy"], 1926, Vol. 27.

Thus, he contrasts monarchy as the hereditary power described in the *Book of Kings* to the power of charismatic popular leaders depicted in the *Book of Judges*. The informal authority of the Judges constitutes, in Fedotov's view, the root of popular religious democracy, for he thinks that the "meaning and vocation of democracy [consists of] liberation of a personal charisma of power."¹⁶ A true Christian democracy, hence, brings with it the spirit of *sobornost'* or religious counciliarity when the "whole nation (Israel) and each citizen--the carrier of the kingdomly priesthood--and the leaders promoted by the people" become the vehicle for the disclosure of this charisma.¹⁷

After Communism: Christian Democracy

The fall of the Soviet Empire came unexpectedly for the Russian Orthodox Church, which was still too weakened and distrusted by its collaboration with communists to immediately fill the social and ideological gaps appearing in the Soviet ruins.¹⁸ As the beginning of the 90s showed, the heritage of the Orthodox thought in emigration, definitely anti-communist but often anti-democratic as well, also did not prove a tremendous help in building a successful Christian democratic movement in post-Soviet Russia.

¹⁶Georgii Fedotov "Osnovy khristianskoi demokratii" ["Foundations of Christian Democracy"] *Polnoe sobranie statei [Full Collection of Articles]*. Vol.III Paris: YMCA-Press, p.139.

¹⁷Ibid., p.140.

¹⁸For a discussion of the Church attitude toward the coup of 1991 which preceded the dissolution of the Soviet Union, see: Yevgenii Polyakov "The Activities of the Moscow Patriarchate during 1991" in *Religion, State and Society*, Vol.22, No.2, 1994, pp.145-163.

While the Orthodox Church officially dissociated itself from any political orientation, there appeared many parties which used Christian ideals in their political programs to rebuild Russian civil society. One of the most significant among such groups was the Russian Christian Democratic Movement established in April 1990. At first this movement seemed to have the highest potential in the horizon of Russian politics for its intention to combine the elements of Christianity, democracy and nationalism into one unified ideological platform. In the course of its evolution, however, the nationalistic-patriotic drive outweighed the other two aspects of the program. As a result, the movement suffered from serious splits and gradually moved to the periphery of Russian political life.¹⁹ This metamorphosis from Christian democracy to state patriotism was not accidental and most certainly was dictated by the general logic of post-communist politics in Russia. It is characteristic that none of the other Christian Democratic parties were able to get to the top of the Russian political arena either.

This general failure of Christian democracy in post-Soviet Russia may be attributed to different social and political factors. But a crucial role, in my view, was played by the absence of a well-developed ideology which would interpret the Soviet experience from a Christian perspective and at the same time unite people on the basis of Orthodox democratic values. The lack of such an ideological system is also recognized by some of the Christian democratic leaders.

¹⁹For more information on the establishment of the Russian Christian Democratic Movement see two articles by Richard Sakwa, "Christian Democracy in Russia" and "Christian Democracy and Civil Society in Russia," published in *Religion, State and Society*, Vol.20, No.2, 1992, pp.135-201 (with a documentary appendix), and Vol.22, No.3, 1994, pp.273-305.

One of the founders of an association called A Christian Alternative to Russian Fascism, Sergei Lezov, in his article, "The National Idea and Christianity" examines the perspectives of future post-Gulag theology in the light of the rethinking of Western Christian identity after Auschwitz: "Our century will go down in history," he writes, "as the age of the *gulag* and of Auschwitz,"²⁰ and he proposes to learn from the Western theological attempts to reshape post-war Christianity. Lezov himself sees this lesson in the "post-Auschwitz theology" which most importantly "has renounced any dependence on national values and traditions [and] has relativized its own claim to be privy to absolute truth."²¹ Orthodoxy, he argues, is in similar urgent need of an understanding arising from reflections on why in 1917 the country was not saved by churches where services were taking place, in other words to understand why Russian Orthodoxy was bankrupt in the face of Bolshevism, why the Russian Orthodox Church was not equal to the challenge of taking on the spiritual leadership of the nation.²²

Lezov's thesis is echoed by another contemporary Orthodox thinker, Fr. Veniamin Novik. "The most important question (Russia) faces today," he writes in an article "Russia--Between Past and Future," "is the question of how the Russian catastrophe of this century was possible."²³ The author evidently grasps the depth of this question, but remains silent about the answer. As Alexander Shchipkov points out in his short essay on the social implications of Christian teaching, the Orthodox Church

has worked out no social doctrines, and our Christian Democrats therefore have nothing to build on. Nobody in Russia has made any

²⁰Sergei Lezov "The National Idea and Christianity" [This article first appeared in Russian under the title "Natsional'naia ideia i khristianstvo" in the journal *Oktiabr'* no.10 (1990), pp.148-160], *Religion, State and Society*, Vol.20, No.1 (1992), p.29.

²¹Ibid., p.39.

²²Ibid., p.46.

²³Fr. Veniamin Novik. "Russia--Between Past and Future" [This article "Rossiia - mezhdushchym i budushchym" appeared in Russian in *Stolitsa*, no.46-47, 1991, pp.72-75.] (Trans. Kathy Carter). *Religion, State and Society*, Vol.22, No.2 (1994), pp.183, 188.

real attempt to provide a theological justification for Christian politics.²⁴

Conservative Trend in Orthodoxy

While the pro-democratic forces in the Orthodox world are still looking for a viable synthesis of the post-communist "Russian idea" with contemporary forms of Christianity, the opposing conservative camp seems already to have formulated its version of post-Gulag Orthodox Christian theology. The author of this ideological approach was Metropolitan Ioann, now deceased.

²⁴Aleksandr Shchipkov. "Some Observations on Orthodoxy and Christian Democracy." (Trans. Emma Watkins). *Religion, State and Society*. Vol.22, No.3 (1994), p.306.

Metropolitan Ioann developed his views in a series of books and in interviews published by the newspaper *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (*Soviet Russia*), a remarkable symbol of the post-Soviet alliance between neo-communist and conservative-patriotic Orthodox circles. As the Metropolitan's press-secretary, Konstantin Dushenov, pointed out in an article which appeared in *Sovetskaia Rossiia* in memory of the deceased Church hierarch, the Metropolitan became a bond which linked contemporary Russia to its centuries-old historical and religious tradition (by having been able to) formulate an integral, detailed and historically justified ideology of Russian national-religious revival.²⁵

According to Metropolitan Ioann's doctrine, the religious revival in Russia must begin with a clear understanding that Soviet atheism was a diabolic temptation imposed upon Holy Russia by the degradating West. Russia paid a horrible price for overcoming this intellectual and spiritual infection originated by a secular Western Jew, Karl Marx. However, communism is just one in a series of measures taken by the leaders who act behind the scenes to destroy Russia and Orthodox spirituality.

Another step in the same direction is made by these "plotters" through the implantation of the foreign democratic political system into Russian soil. In the Metropolitan's opinion, the future national revival of Russia will have nothing to do with democracy, which leads but to the degradation of morals and the demolition of traditional Russian statehood. Konstantin Dushenov reaffirms this question of principle in another article "A Not-Complicated Truth" in which he analyzes the ideological "antagonism of Orthodoxy and democracy."²⁶

²⁵Konstantin Dushenov. "Prorok" ["The Prophet"]. *Sovietskaia Rossiia*, No.50, April 30, 1996.

²⁶This "not complicated truth," according to Dushenov, consists of a simple fact that the "democrat is the enemy of the Church." See: Konstantin Dushenov, "A Not Complicated Truth," *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, No.56, May 18, 1996.

However, neither the Soviet, nor even the recent democratic form of the trap uncover the true source of the anti-Russian conspiracy, teaches the Metropolitan Ioann. In the heart of the struggle lies an irreconcilable difference between two religions, Judaism and true (Orthodox) Christianity. "The spiritual principles of both sides," the Metropolitan writes, "are completely opposite and antagonistic...From the Christian perspective Judaism has no positive religious content," he continues, because since the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, a "militant anti-Christianity becomes the foundation of Judaism."

The opposition between Judaism and Christianity can be directly applied to the relationship between two peoples, the Jews and the Russians, both of which are characterized by a clear messianism. However, as the Metropolitan develops his thesis, this national chosenness is different:

[An] Orthodox understanding of its chosenness is the understanding of its responsibility to **serve its neighbor**. A chosenness of a Jew is chosenness to dominate over the surrounding people.²⁷

After such openly anti-Semitic statements the Metropolitan warns his readers about the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" and the "global Masonic conspiracy"...

It is remarkable that this highly controversial, national-messianic religious thought at present compromises with a revived communism. Neo-communists simply ally with any movement which would enable them to regain mass popularity. Orthodox Christianity appears an ideal partner for such a strategy, and the neo-communist leader, Gennadii Ziuganov, made rhetorical appeals to the Orthodox people and quoted the Church Fathers in his recent campaign speeches.²⁸

Conservative Orthodox Christians, in their turn, declare that they are against communism of any sort, but will make a temporary alliance with neo-communists to further the sacred goal of national salvation and revival. However, there is a deeper

²⁷The Metropolitan Ioann. "Tvortsy kataklizmov" ["Creators of Cataclisms"]. *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, No.32, March 22, 1994.

²⁸See, for example, an article by Vladimir Iliushenko "Kakaya tserkov' nuzhna Ziuganovu?" ["What Church Does Ziuganov Need?"]. *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, No.23, June 5, 1996.

common ground, in my view, between the two programs. A purely atheistic communism and an Orthodox religious nationalism share a mutual thirst for an enemy and an appeal to national-messianic consciousness. The distinction is that while communism struggles against the international bourgeoisie and builds an earthly paradise for its followers, Orthodox nationalism opposes the global community and promises a reward in heaven for the believers.

Conclusions

It is often assumed that the main danger of communist doctrine consists of its atheism. When purified of an anti-religious drive, some say, it still retains the advantages of its social teaching. Others, on the contrary, insist that the socialist project itself failed, as compared to the capitalist democratic systems. As I see the problem, however, the substance of the Soviet experience lies neither in the social sphere, nor even in the domain of religion, but first of all in the spirit of disunity and war which prevailed in the communist countries, as opposed to the spirit of integration and peace.

This spirit of disunity may appear under the slogan of socialism and democracy, under atheism as well as religion. To overcome the Soviet past for Russia, therefore, would mean, in my view, not just to formally switch from one to the other, but to break away from the tradition of enmity toward the rest of the world. A development of a post-Gulag theology, faithful to the Christian spirit of love, accordingly, will help in and mark the accomplishment of such a liberation.

The years which have passed since the fall of the Soviet Empire have demonstrated that this will not be an easy task. Both Christian camps considered in this paper, namely, those who believe in a Western-style democracy and those who ardently deny the West, are apparently stuck within countless divisions and lack a unifying principle. It may well happen that a belief in the salvific power of the Christian religion and democratic values is just a dogmatic prejudice itself. In this case a true future post-Gulag theology will be neither Christian, nor democratic. At any rate, the country is in desperate need of a new identity. The identity crisis in contemporary post-communist Russia is so pressing that President Yeltsin recently

appealed to his aides and to the Russian people to search for a new ideology. The next ten to twenty years will show what course post-Soviet Russia will have finally taken.

