

## A Contradictory and Multifaceted Relationship: Russian Orthodoxy and 1917

Andrea Graziosi's paper repeatedly stresses the need for consideration of 1917 as plural rather than singular. This is a point of paramount importance, as the event itself was indeed plural and so are its representations and interpretations. Increasingly predominant in the literature of the last thirty years on the history of the Soviet Union and its initial event, this view frees the Russian Revolution from ideological interpretations and teleological visions, and restores it to the realm of history with all the ambivalence, stickiness, many-sidedness, and subtle nuances of historical processes.<sup>1</sup>

Recognition of the religious dimension as an integral part of the history of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union is unquestionably one of the factors that have done most to endow our understanding of 1917 and the following 74 years of Bolshevik experimentation with greater complexity. The parallel tendency of religious historians and contemporary historians to regard events in the world of religion as separate from the other political, social, cultural, economic, and geopolitical processes of history worked for a long time to prevent due consideration of their mutual interaction. In the case of Soviet Russia, the avowed atheism of the Bolsheviks and the declared aim of eliminating religion from Soviet society has not infrequently fostered the—sometimes unconscious—internalization by historians of communist rhetoric and the dismissal of every phenomenon of religious life as nothing other than a "*perezhitok*

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<sup>1</sup> Vitalij V. Tichonov, Sergej V. Žuravlev, *Sto let izučeniya revoljucii: istoriografičeskie tradicii i sovremennost'*, in *Rossijskaja revoljucija 1917 goda: vlast', obščestvo, kul'tura*, Ed. Jurij A. Petrov, volume 1, Moskva, ROSSPEN, 2017, pp. 26-65. See also: *State of the Field: 1917 on the Eve of the Centenary*, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 16/4 (2015), pp. 733-797; *Cahiers du monde russe*, 58/1-2 (2017), entitled: *1917. Historiographie, dynamiques révolutionnaires et mémoires contestées*; *Slavic Review*, 3 (2017), entitled: *1917-2017: The Russian Revolution a Hundred Years Later*.

*proshlogo*" or hangover from the past with no bearing on the course of history. In actual fact, however, the Bolshevik leadership always paid great attention to religion in all its phases of government and saw it primarily as a threat rather than an irrelevance, contrary to the claims of its own propaganda.<sup>2</sup>

The history of 1917 and of the Soviet Union are also religious in the sense that the religious factor constitutes one of the threads in the historical warp and weft of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet experience.<sup>3</sup> Graziosi's reference to this fundamental dimension of a plural 1917 is therefore than more opportune.

I shall confine myself to some observations regarding the world of Orthodoxy. While this viewpoint certainly cannot be taken as an exhaustive picture of how all the different faiths experienced and interpreted 1917 in a multiconfessional reality like the Russian Empire, the Orthodox Church was by far the most important in terms of the number of believers and structures, the role it played in the state and society, its contribution to the development of the imperial ideologies, and the breadth and vitality of its connections with the intellectual world.<sup>4</sup>

The ideas and interpretations developed during 1917 and the next few years within Orthodoxy and the cultural spheres more or less close to it constitute a set of representations and judgments that have not failed to influence the views of the revolution and its inheritance developed by the Church during the Soviet regime and over the last few decades in the new Russia. 1917 triggered a series of developments within Orthodoxy that made the religious

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<sup>2</sup> Adriano Roccucci, *Stalin e il patriarca. Chiesa ortodossa e potere sovietico. 1917-1958*, Torino, Einaudi, 2011 (russian edition: *Stalin i patriarch. Pravoslavnaja cerkov' i sovetskaja vlast' 1917-1958*, Moskva, ROSSPEN, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Aleksandr Agadžanjan, *Religija i Russkaja Revoljucija: javnye i nejavnye vzaimosvjazi. Na poljach odnoj konferencii, Gosudarstvo, Religija, Cerkov'*, 36/1 (2018), pp. 336-347.

<sup>4</sup> Gregory L. Freeze, *Handmaiden of the State? The Church in Imperial Russia Reconsidered*, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 36 (1985), pp. 82-102; Sergej L. Firsov, *Russkaja Cerkov' nakanune peremen (konec 1890-ch-1918 gg.)*, Moskva, Kul'turnyj centr "Duchovnaja Biblioteka", 2002.

panorama of revolutionary Russia extremely effervescent. It can hardly be maintained that the processes under way in the Orthodox world were marginal in a predominantly rural society closely bound up with religious life and points of reference. The years just before 1917 were indeed characterized by a variegated spiritual ferment that manifested itself in a proliferation of sects, theosophical societies, various movements of rebirth and reform active in the Orthodox Church, for which the events of 1905 served as a catalyst, a series of cultural trends (from symbolism to philosophical-religious groups), and the spread of religious expectations among workers in recently industrialized areas.<sup>5</sup>

February 1917 was not a preliminary stage for the Orthodox world but a definitive break with the now defunct imperial system. The Church found itself bereft of what had been its ideal framework of reference, one grounded on the sacralization of the Orthodox monarch, anointed by the Church with its blessing at the moment of his coronation. The end of Tsarist Russia meant the end of the Constantinian model inspired, at least ideally, by the Byzantine doctrine of the symphony of church and state, albeit with the "Protestant" reform whereby Peter I introduced the synodal system based on submission of the former to the latter and abolished the patriarchate.<sup>6</sup> The end of the monarchy was a traumatic event that caused confusion in the ranks of the Orthodox clergy and faithful, although the Holy Synod didn't make any efforts to

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<sup>5</sup> Nicolas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century*, New York, Harper & Row, 1963; James W. Cunningham, *A Vanquished Hope: The Movement for Church Renewal in Russia, 1905-1906*, New York, Saint Vladimir Seminary Press, 1981; Maria Carlson, *No Religion Higher Than Truth: A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia 1875-1922*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1993; Chris J. Chulos, *Converging Worlds: Religion and Community in Peasant Russia, 1861-1917*, DeKalb, IL, Northern Illinois University Press, 2003; Vera Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the eve of Revolution*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2004; Jennifer Hedda, *His Kingdom Come. Orthodox Pastorship and Social Activism in Revolutionary Russia*, DeKalb, IL, Northern Illinois University Press, 2008; Irina V. Voroncova, *Russkaja religiozno-filosofskaja mysl' v načale XX veka*, Moskva, Izdatel'stvo PSTGU, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Dmitrij V. Pospelovskij, *Russkaja pravoslavnaja cerkov' v XX veke*, Moskva, Respublika, 1995, p. 18.

support the monarchy.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, however, it generated processes of renewal in ecclesiastical life long awaited by many and therefore enthusiasm as well. A wave of “democratic” feeling swept through the ecclesiastical structures. The bishops, including former protégés of Rasputin, were stripped of office and new ones were elected by assemblies of priests and lay members of the Church.<sup>8</sup> Above all, the Church was able to summon its first council since 1664, which met in Moscow in August 1917, something Nicholas II had refused to allow after 1905 despite its repeated requests. In short, almost 200 years after the intervention of Peter the Great, the Church regained its freedom and was able to reinstate organs of government in accordance with canon law. The Council reestablished the patriarchate and elected Tikhon (Bellavin) patriarch of Moscow.<sup>9</sup> This is a key event of 1917 but one that has often been overlooked due to understandable concentration on the political events of the Russian Revolution, even though the interaction between religious dynamics and political processes is in any case an important element of the events in question.

For the Orthodox world, interpreting 1917 and the course of events has meant assessing the impact of an epoch-making transformation of the religious horizon and of the relations between the power structure, society, and religion. 1917, the year of revolutions, marked the beginning of a new era for the Orthodox Church. As pointed out by the Russian émigré

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<sup>7</sup> *Rossijskoe duhovenstvo i sverženie monarchii v 1917 godu (Materialy i archivnye dokumenty po istorii Russkoj pravoslavnoj cerkvi)*, Ed. Michail A. Babkin, Moskva, Indrik, 2006; Michail A. Babkin, *Svjaščenstvo i Carstvo (Rossija, načalo XX v.-1918 g.). Issledovanija i materialy*, Moskva, Indrik, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Pavel G. Rogoznyj, *Cerkovnaja revoljucija 1917 goda (Vysšee duhovenstvo Rossijskoj Cerkvi v bor'be za vlast' v eparchijach posle Fevral'skoj revoljucii)*, Sankt-Peterburg, Liki Rossii, 2008. See also: Sergej L. Firsov, *Revoljucija 1917 goda i popytki "demokratizacii" Russkoj Cerkvi*, *Cerkovno-istoričeskij vestnik*, 6-7 (2000), pp. 196-208; Edward E. Roslof, *Red Priests: Renovationism, Russian Orthodoxy, and Revolution, 1905-1946*, Bloomington, Ind, Indiana University Press, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Hyacinthe Destivelle, *Le concile de Moscou (1917-1918): la création des institutions conciliaires de l'Église orthodoxe russe*, Paris, Cerf, 2006; Vladimir M. Lavrov, Vjačeslav V. Lobanov, Irina V. Lobanova, Aleksandr V. Mazyrin, *Ierarchija Russkoj Pravoslavnoj cerkvi, patriaršestvo i gosudarstvo v revoljucionnuju epochu*, Moskva, Russkaja Panorama, 2008.

theologian Alexander Schmemmann, the Constantinian era was over.<sup>10</sup> Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov, a leading figure in philosophical-religious circles early in the century and one of the intellectuals expelled from the Soviet Union, wrote in an article of 1924 in *The Slavonic Review* that the ecclesiastical consequences of the Revolution had had an impact unparalleled in Russian history.<sup>11</sup> They were the consequences of a catastrophe, namely the downfall of the monarchy and the ensuing “Babylonian captivity” of the Russian people beneath the yoke of atheism. The events generated by the Revolution were interpreted with the aid of biblical and theological concepts referring to the idea of evil and the work of devils. It should be pointed out that Bulgakov, who had become an Orthodox priest in 1918, was not a conservative monarchist but an intellectual whose path took him from Legal Marxism at the beginning of the century to philosophical-religious thought and then the Orthodox religion. Moreover, he was highly critical of the relationship with the Tsarist regime and the “arbitrary and oppressive tyranny” it exercised over Orthodoxy. Identification with the regime meant that the Revolution was a catastrophe for the Church. While the collapse of the monarchy was not in itself to be regretted, for Orthodoxy monarchy was not only a political form but the expression of the ideal of theocracy, of a sacred power, in some sense an emanation of the Church itself. The Constantinian era ended in 1453 for Byzantium but in February–March 1917 for the Russian Orthodox Church, a turning point marked by the downfall of the Tsarist autocracy. Its collapse, Bulgakov concluded, meant the end of an aim pursued by the Church since the time of Constantine, namely the establishment of an Orthodox theocracy.

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<sup>10</sup> Aleksandr Schmemmann, *Istoričeskij put' pravoslavija*, Moskva, Palomnik, 1993 (1 ed. New York, Izdatel'stvo imeni Čechova, 1954), p. 341.

<sup>11</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Old and the New: A Study in Russian Religion*, *The Slavonic Review*, 2/6 (1924), pp. 487-513.

The Orthodox representations and interpretations of 1917 were by no means uniform. It was a year that saw the overlapping and interweaving of diversified processes, emotions, phases, and perspectives: from the feeling of being "orphaned" by the Tsar's demise to enthusiasm for regained freedom; from the mobilization of intellectual energies to develop a broad program of reforms during the Council to the impact of October and above all the events in Moscow. As is known, the latter were particularly bloody and marked the onset of a battle for the symbolic and sacral space of the ancient capital between Bolsheviks and Orthodox believers, the Russian Church and Soviet power.

In short, the interpretations and representations of 1917 developed by the Orthodox world are manifold because they reflect a complex set of interwoven processes triggered by the revolutions of February and October. The common frame of reference for the different readings of 1917 was established, however, by the antireligious policies implemented by the Bolshevik regime from the very outset, which led in the 1920s and '30s to a wave of bloody persecution.<sup>12</sup> Directed initially against Orthodoxy and Catholicism and then gradually expanded to encompass all the religious communities, these policies and persecution had the substantially uniform effect of generating an exclusively negative idea of 1917 in all the spheres targeted. This did not fail to join up with the antirevolutionary schools of thought present in the religious cultural sphere ever since the French Revolution. It was not an exclusively ideological judgment, however, but one grounded primarily on the factual basis of the evident cost of the antireligious persecution. The

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<sup>12</sup> Valerij A. Alekseev, *Šturm nebes otmenjaetsja? Kritičeskie očerki po istorii bor'by s religiej v SSSR*, Moskva, Izdatel'skij centr "Rossija Molodaja", 1992; Arto Luukkanen, *The Party of Unbelief. The Religious Policy of the Bolshevik Party, 1917-1929*, Helsinki, SHS, 1994; Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless*, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1998; Anatolij N. Kaševarov, *Pravoslavnaja Rossijskaja Cerkov' i sovetskoe gosudarstvo (1917-1922)*, Moskva, Izdatel'stvo Krutickogo podvor'ja-Obščestvo ljubitelej cerkovnoj istorii, 2005; Michail I. Odincov, *Russkaja pravoslavnaja cerkov' nakanune i v epochu stalinskogo socializma 1917-1953 gg.*, Moskva, ROSSPEN, 2014.

persecution of religious communities has long been one of the paramount criteria on which the Soviet experience and its initial event are judged. The 1920s and '30s saw repeated protests on the part of the world's religious leaders and especially in the sphere of Christianity, from Pope Pius XI to the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>13</sup> As is known, American public opinion has shown particular sensitivity on this point.

Like Nikolai Alexandrovich Berdyaev, believers who experienced the traumatic impact of Bolshevik violence saw 1917 and Bolshevism as despicable and the Russian Revolution as a plunge into an abyss. The latter is a recurrent concept in the essays written between April and July 1918 for the anthology *Iz glubiny* (From the Depths) by intellectuals of the Russian philosophical-religious movement led by Berdyaev, Bulgakov, Pyotr Berngardovich Struve and Semyon Lyudvigovich Frank.<sup>14</sup> The judgment of the Russian Orthodox Church is reflected in the anathema issued by the Patriarch Tikhon against the Bolsheviks.<sup>15</sup>

As Graziosi rightly observes, 1917 was multiple not least because it was an imperial phenomenon. In the vast space of the Empire, the political and social motivations of the Revolution intersected with demands for national independence opposed by forces determined to prevent any fragmentation of that space, first and foremost the Bolshevik government, in the name of designs of a substantially imperial nature. Nor was this dynamic wholly extraneous to the Orthodox Church, torn in its complex structure between movements of ecclesiastical separatism on a national basis and centripetal reactions in defense of ecclesial unity in continuity with the imperial legacy. During the debate on reinstatement of the patriarchate at the Council

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<sup>13</sup> Laura Pettinaroli, *La politique russe du Saint-Siège (1905-1939)*, Roma, École française de Rome, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Sergej A. Askol'dov et al., *Iz glubiny*, Moskva, Russkaja Mysl', 1918.

<sup>15</sup> *Akty Svjatejšego Tichona, Patriarcha Moskovskogo i vseja Rossii, pozdnejšie dokumenty i perepiska o kanoničeskom preemstve vysšej cerkovnoj vlasti 1917-1943*, Ed. Michail E. Gubonin, Moskva, Izdatel'stvo PSTBI, 1994, pp. 82-85. See also Vladimir V. Lobanov, *Patriarch Tichon i sovetskaja vlast' (1917-1925 gg.)*, Moskva, Russkaja panorama, 2008.

in October 1917, the conviction was widespread among delegates that the end of the monarchy and divisions within the army left the patriarchate as the only institution capable of encapsulating the unity of the Russian people. Such ideas were clearly stated by Evgenii Nikolaevitch Troubetzkoy: «A living representative of national life is needed in times of collapse [...] a representative of national unity. This question is indisputably important at the present moment. How will the war end? Entire regions with an Orthodox population may be detached from the body of the state, in which case the power of the patriarch will extend beyond the borders of the state and keep the idea of national and religious unity alive in the minds and hearts of those in the detached regions».<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, the events in Petrograd gave rise to movements of ecclesiastical separatism on a national basis in the Orthodox worlds of Ukraine and Georgia. Graziosi has pointed out the central role of the Ukrainian question «in all of the key turning points of Soviet history, both in its own right and as the linchpin of the national question».<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the influence of Ukraine is no less important in the history of the Orthodox Church and its relations with the Soviet state. The ecclesiastical aspect is indeed a factor of primary importance in the Ukrainian question itself. An urgent Ukrainian question arose within the Orthodox Church immediately after the revolution of February 1917, when views in favor of a “Ukrainization” of the Church emerged in some ecclesiastical circles. These trends corresponded to the analogous thrusts of a political character out of which the independent Ukrainian state was born. In Ukraine, the Revolution of 1917 was a phenomenon of primarily national content also in the

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<sup>16</sup> *Dejanija Svjaščennogo Sobora Pravoslavnoj Rossijskoj Cerkvi 1917-1918 gg.*, vol. II, Moskva, Izdanie Novospasskogo Monastyrja, 1994 (I ed. Petrograd”, Izdanie Sobornago Soveta, 1918), 28, 19-10-1917, p. 308.

<sup>17</sup> Andrea Graziosi, *Collectivisation, révoltes paysannes et politiques gouvernementales à travers les rapports du GPU d’Ukraine de février-mars 1930*, *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 3 (1994), p. 438.



ecclesiastical field.<sup>18</sup> While the major questions on the agenda of Russian Orthodoxy, which principally regarded reform of the Church, were by no means absent from the debate in Ukraine, they were interwoven with the themes of the lively and sometimes heated debate between supporters of the unity of the Russian Church and supporters of Ukrainian autocephaly. This gave rise to diversified combinations of positions whose primary criterion of distinction was national despite the whole variety of nuances.

Even though the Metropolitan Vladimir (Bogoyavlensky) of Kiev was the first bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church to fall victim to Bolshevik violence on January 25, 1918, in Ukraine the antireligious offensive of the communist power structure, which was not in full control of Ukrainian territory during the civil war, did not become systematic until 1921. The attention of Ukrainian Orthodoxy was not focused on the clash with Bolshevik power at that time. Even after the execution of Vladimir, the primary question of the heated debate regarded the procedures to be adopted in electing his successor and the part to be played by the metropolitan of Kiev in relation to Moscow and Ukrainian Orthodoxy. In short, the key issue was the status of the Church in Ukraine.

Autonomy within the Russian Church was approved in July 1918 by the Council of the Ukrainian Church, convened in January, and recognized at the Council of Moscow in September the same year. In the spring of 1920, during the Polish occupation of Kiev, the birth of an autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church was proclaimed by a number of parishes gathered

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<sup>18</sup> Simona Merlo, *All'ombra delle cupole d'oro. La Chiesa di Kiev da Nicola II a Stalin (1905-1939)*, Milano, Guerini e Associati, 2005, pp. 151-294. See also Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, *The Church and the Ukrainian Revolution: The Central Rada Period*, in *The Ukraine, 1917-1921: A Study in Revolution*, Ed. Taras Hunczak, Cambridge, Ma, Harvard University Press, 1977, pp. 220-246; Vasyl' Ul'janovskij, Bohdan Andrusyšin, *Cerkva v Ukrajin's'kij Deržavi 1917-1920 rr.*, 3 voll., Kiev, Lybid', 1997.

together in an ecclesiastical council.<sup>19</sup> This created a split within Ukrainian Orthodoxy, which largely remained, however, in communion with Moscow. The autocephalous Church was recognized by the Soviet government in accordance with its strategy of weakening the patriarchal Church by supporting every kind of division within it. The first council of the autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church, held in Kiev in October 1921, was attended by none of the Orthodox bishops of Ukraine, who were unwilling to sever their canonical ties with Moscow. The autocephalous clergy then proceeded upon the episcopal ordination of their leader, Vasyl Lypkivskyy, which was devoid of canonical validity because the consecration was not administered by bishops but by priests.<sup>20</sup> The autocephalous Church did not escape repression, however. Its leaders were involved in the trial of the imaginary Union for the Liberation of Ukraine in 1929–30 and its self-dissolution was decided upon in January 1930 at an extraordinary council convened and orchestrated by the OGPU.<sup>21</sup>

Together with language, Orthodoxy constituted a fundamental element of national identity in Georgia.<sup>22</sup> The abolition of the autocephalous Georgian Orthodox Church in 1811 and the institution of a Georgian exarchate within the framework of the Russian Church was a key step in the imperial strategy of assimilation subsequent to the incorporation of Georgia into the

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<sup>19</sup> Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, *The Autocephalous Church Movement in Ukraine: the Formative Stage (1917-1921)*, *The Ukrainian Quarterly*, XVI (1960), pp. 211-223.

<sup>20</sup> *Peršyj Vseukrajins'kyj Pravoslavnyj Cerkovnyj Sobor UAPC. 14-30 žovtnja 1921 roku. Dokumenty i materialy*, Kyjiv-L'viv, Instytut ukrajins'koji archeografiji ta džereloznavstva im. M.S. Hruševs'kogo NAN Ukrajinu, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, 1920-30: A Case Study in Religious Modernization*, in *Religion and Modernization in the Soviet Union*, Ed. Dennis J. Dunn, Boulder, Co, Westview Press, 1977, pp. 310-347.

<sup>22</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington, Ind, Indiana University Press, 1994 (1 ed. London. I.B. Tauris, 1988); Nikolas K. Gvosdev, *Imperial Policies and Perspectives towards Georgia, 1760-1819*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 2000.

Empire.<sup>23</sup> As an inevitable result of this, determination to reinstate the lost independence pervaded Georgian Orthodoxy and clearly emerged as early as the revolution of 1905, followed by years of great tension between Russians and Georgians that involved the ecclesiastical spheres and led in 1908 to the assassination of the Exarch of Georgia Nikon (Sofiiskii). The Georgian clergy immediately seized the opportunity offered by the events of February 1917 to proclaim the reinstatement of autocephaly on 12 March. This was confirmed by the Council of the Georgian Church in September and the new Georgian patriarch Kirion (Sadzaglishvili) was consecrated on October 1, 1917. This led to a rift in the ecclesiastical communion with the Russian Church, which was not healed until 1943 within the framework of the change in Stalin's religious policy. The Georgian Church had in the meantime been subjected to a violent Soviet antireligious policy as from 1921, after the Red Army put an end to the Republic of Georgia and instituted the Soviet Republic.<sup>24</sup>

In short, the Orthodox 1917 also saw a clash in the ecclesial sphere between designs and demands of an "imperial" and a "national" character. The Russian Orthodox Church, the soul of the imperial consciousness of Tsarist Russia, constituted a factor of unification of the disintegrating imperial space, an objective that converged paradoxically with the parallel aim pursued by its Bolshevik persecutors. Though thwarted by the violent antireligious policy adopted during the 1920s and '30s, this convergence of aims was partially realized in 1943 with the new religious policy introduced by Stalin at the height of World War II.

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<sup>23</sup> Nikolas K. Gvosdev, *The Russian Empire and the Georgian Orthodox Church in the First Decade of Imperial Rule*, *Central Asian Survey*, 14/3 (1995), pp. 407-423; Paul Werth, *Georgian Autocephaly and the Ethnic Fragmentation of Orthodoxy*, *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, 23 (2006), pp. 74-100.

<sup>24</sup> *Witness through troubled times. A History of the Georgian Orthodox Church from 1811 to the Present*, Eds. Tamara Grdzeliidze, Martin George and Lukas Visser, London, Bennett and Bloom, 2006; Simona Merlo, *Russia e Georgia. Ortodossia, dinamiche imperiali e identità nazionale (1801-1991)*, Milano, Guerini e Associati, 2010.

The history of Orthodoxy during the 70-year Soviet period is contradictory in many respects, an interweaving of persecution, resistance, collaboration with the regime, emigration, anti-communist opposition outside the Soviet Union and strategies for survival inside. As a result, people who condemned 1917 as the origin of persecution sometimes chose in different circumstances to pass over the Bolshevik violence and repression of believers in silence due to the need to ensure the survival of Orthodox communities under the Soviet regime, thus generating controversy and bitter conflict within the Orthodox world itself. The Moscow Patriarchate, during the soviet period especially after 1943 until 1990, joined in the governmental ceremonies for the anniversaries of the October Revolution: articles devoted to the changes triggered by the Revolution were published in *Zhurnal Moskovskoj Patriarkhii*, the journal of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the main church hierarchs attended official receptions. It was part of the rules of the complex and slippery play of the relationships between the Soviet State and the Russian Orthodox Church. In spite of the ambiguities of a history of suffering and collaboration, the memory and wounds of persecution live on in the fibers of Russian Orthodoxy, kept alive by the Orthodox diaspora and above all by the Orthodox Church outside Russia with its intransigent, hardline conservatism and anticommunism.<sup>25</sup>

The awareness of antireligious repression became a common heritage of the Russian Orthodox world at the end of the Soviet period and the memory of the martyrs (and therefore of their persecutors, the other half of an indivisible whole) is regarded as the cornerstone of the

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<sup>25</sup> Georg Seide, *Geschichte der Russischen Orthodoxen Kirche im Ausland von der Gründung bis die Gegenwart*, Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1983; A Kostrjukov, *Russkaja Zarubežnaja Cerkov' v pervoj polovine 1920-ch godov. Organizacija cerkovnogo upravljenja v emigracii*, Moskva, Izdatel'stvo PSTGU, 2007; Michail V. Škarovskij, *Istorija ruskoj cerkovnoj emigracii*, Sankt-Peterburg, Aletejja, 2009.

“rebirth” of the Orthodox Church in present-day Russia.<sup>26</sup> Different considerations apply to the Ukrainian context, where the national question has predominated in Orthodoxy also in the post-Soviet period, giving rise to divisions and conflict over the thorny issue of autocephaly. This has monopolized ecclesial debate and interpretation of the past, partially overshadowing the memory of Soviet persecution and its martyrs. In Russia too, the relationship of Orthodoxy with the Soviet past is by no means unequivocal. There are fringes of the variegated Orthodox world—albeit not as widespread or authoritative as they sometimes appear in the media—that have rehabilitated Stalin, who is seen by part of public opinion as the leader to victory in World War II, thus engendering a growing reluctance to attack him too openly over the last decade. There is also the legacy of postwar coexistence. The question of the persecutions and therefore of the persecutors (Lenin and Stalin), with the consequent negative judgment on 1917, has not been passed over, however, and hundreds upon hundreds of martyrs have been canonized. As Graziosi recalls in his paper, a significant event in this connection was the inauguration in May 2017, in the presence of Putin, of a large church dedicated to the new martyrs and erected close to the Lubyanka by Bishop Tikhon (Shevkunov), often indicated as very close to the Russian president.

The reference to 1917 in the centenary year was in any case an opportunity for the Russian Church to address the whole variety of ways in which the events of that year affected Orthodoxy. During 2017, the particular emphasis laid on the historical importance of the restoration of the patriarchate, whose anniversary was celebrated with particular solemnity, was also accompanied by explicit reference to the Russian Revolution as the source of persecution

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<sup>26</sup> Karin Hyldal Christensen, *The Making of the New Martyrs of Russia: Soviet Repression in Orthodox Memory*, London, Routledge, 2017.

and repression: in June 1917 a conference dedicated to the centenary of the beginning of the “epoch of persecution against the Russian Orthodox Church” took place in the Council Hall of the cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, with the participation of the patriarch Kirill.<sup>27</sup> For no small number of people, 1917 is closely bound up with the legacy of the council summoned in the same year and continued until September 1918, whose decisions and spirit are points of reference for the tormented renewal of the Russian Church.<sup>28</sup> For others, 1917 means above all the downfall of the Orthodox monarchy and the end of the often-idealized world of prerevolutionary Russia. In this case, however, 1917 is closely connected with 1918 and the assassination of the Tsar and his family at Ekaterinburg, the centenary of which was solemnly celebrated by the Church but largely overlooked by the state.<sup>29</sup> In short, the legacy of 1917 constitutes a prism through which we can look with no simplification at the complex history of Orthodoxy and its relations with Soviet Russian society in the 20th century and at the sometimes-contradictory tribulations of the Orthodox Church in Russia today.<sup>30</sup>

Another aspect that I would like to address regards a reading of 1917 as something religious in its own way or in any case deeply imbued with feelings of a religious nature. Graziosi appears to offer some indications in this sense, pointing out the “appeal of an apocalyptic, terrible revolution, felt by many intellectuals and revolutionaries” and asserting that “1917 was an

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<sup>27</sup> *Materialy cerkovno-naučnoj konferencii “100-letie načala epochi gonenij na Russkiju Pravoslavnuju Cerkov”*, Moskva, Izdatel’stvo Moskovskoj Patriarchii, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> *Sobor i sobornost’: K stoletiju načala novoj epochi*, Ed. Anton V. Anaškin, Moskva, Izdatel’stvo PSTGU, 2018..

<sup>29</sup> Ksenija Lučenko, *Meždu vlast’ju i carebožiem. Kak RPC otmetila 100-letie rasstrela carskoj sem’i*, Moskovskij Centr Carnegie, 26/07/2018, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/76921> . See also Mikhail Suslov, *The Genealogy of the Idea of Monarchy in Post-Soviet Political Discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church*, *State, Religion and Church*, 3/1 (2016), pp. 27-62.

<sup>30</sup> Sergej G. Antonenko, *Obraz revoljucii 1917 goda v konfessional’nom pole smyslov*, in *Revoljucija-100: rekonstrukcija jubileja*, Ed. Gennadij A. Bordjugov, Moskva, AIRO-XXI, 2017, pp. 204-244; Margarete Zimmermann, *Never Again! Remembering October 1917 in the Contemporary Russian Orthodox Church*, *Scando-Slavica*, 64/1 (2018), pp. 95-106.

omen of the apocalypse." It was indeed in terms of religious and spiritual turmoil that Patriarch Tikhon and other leaders of the Orthodox Church interpreted the Revolution. There was unquestionably an apocalyptic spirit running through various sections of Russian society during the revolutionary period, as attested by Vasily Vasilievich Rozanov's *Apokalipsis nashego vremeni* (*The Apocalypse of Our Time*), written between 1917 and 1918.<sup>31</sup> Konstantin Fyodorovich Yuon's painting *Novaja planeta* (*The New Planet*, 1921), significantly chosen as the cover illustration for the catalogue of the centennial exhibition *Revolution: Russian Art 1917-1932* held in London, also expresses this feeling and a messianic vision of the Revolution that is not unambivalent.<sup>32</sup> As rightly pointed out by Mark D. Steinberg among others, the revolutions of 1917 fueled a religious feeling rooted in the broad and complex movement for spiritual rebirth of the late 19th and early 20th century. These tendencies acted both by stimulating traditional or heterodox forms of religious life and by fostering support for a revolutionary cause that took on features of a religious character. The attitude of the people was to view revolutionary politics and culture in religious terms.<sup>33</sup>

It is above all Boris Ivanovich Kolonitsky that has pointed out the role of symbols and rituals in the culture and mobilization of the masses during the Revolution. It was during the "Red Easter" of 1917 that the traditional greeting of the Orthodox faithful became "Christ is risen. Long live the Republic."<sup>34</sup> According to Kolonitsky, the awareness of the masses was political only on the surface and politics essentially became an ideological surrogate of religion. There

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<sup>31</sup> Vasilij V. Rozanov, *Apokalipsis našego vremeni*, Sergiev Posad, Sklad izd. M.S. Elova, 1917-1918.

<sup>32</sup> *Revolution: Russian Art 1917-1932*, London, Royal Academy of Arts, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925*, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 2002, pp. 250-252.

<sup>34</sup> Boris I. Kolonickij, *Simvoly vlasti i bor'ba za vlast': K izučeniju političeskoj kul'tury rossijskoj revoljucii 1917 goda*, Sankt-Peterburg, Dmitrij Bulanin, 2001, p. 78. See also Orlando Figes, Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917*, New Haven, Ct, Yale University Press, 1999.

was a religious atmosphere pervading the Russian Revolution. The expectation of a cathartic transition to be attained in the revolutionary palingenesis was deeply rooted in the prerevolutionary society.<sup>35</sup> The collapse of the old world was accompanied by the affirmation of a new faith. Perhaps the most eloquent and best-known literary expression of this is Alexander Blok's poem *Dvenádtset* (*The Twelve*). Maximilian Voloshin, one of the early 20th-century intellectuals most deeply aware of the "religious" nature of Russian atheism, acutely described the Bolshevik revolution as nothing other than "a religious pathology."<sup>36</sup> Conceived and perceived as the vanguard of the modern era, Bolshevism was imbued with a deep undercurrent of religion belonging to the long period of Russian history. The repertoire of metaphors and beliefs on which the Soviet leaders drew was made up to no small extent of material whose vocabulary and grammar were in many respects those of traditional Orthodox symbolism. This cultural heritage of a religious nature helped to shape the Soviet power structure and its relationship with Russian society.<sup>37</sup>

From the very outset, the Bolsheviks never concealed their intention to monopolize the sphere of the sacred. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to replace the Orthodox Church in the historical task of the sacralization of politics, the symbolic mapping of public space, and the interpretation of history and time. With respect to the religious communities and especially the Russian Orthodox Church, the only true obstacle to the monopolization of the sacred sphere, the ideological "incompatibility" of Bolshevism and religion manifested itself as a battle

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<sup>35</sup> Arthur J. Klinghoffer, *Red Apocalypse: The Religions Evolution of Soviet Communism*, Lanham, Md, University Press of America, 1996; Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia*, Pittsburgh, Pa, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Georges Nivat, Aspects religieux de l'athée russe, *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, 29/3-4 (1988), p. 424.

<sup>37</sup> Robert C. Williams, Orthodoxy and eschatology in Post-Bolshevik Culture, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 2/1 (2001), pp. 81-86.



against religion fought with particular zeal. The history of Soviet Russia, above all between 1917 and 1939, saw an authentic war of symbols waged by the Bolsheviks with particular implacability against the Orthodox Church within the framework of broader antireligious persecution. What was at stake was control over the sphere of the sacred. The question of the relations between power, religion and the sacred—whose crucial importance for the political dynamics of Russia is still evident today—constitutes one of the key elements of 1917.<sup>38</sup> While we have no intention of reopening the broad and complex debate on political religion, about which so much has been written, consideration of this religious dimension of 1917, and therefore of Bolshevism and the Soviet experiment as a whole, which faded in the last few decades of existence of the USSR, raises a by no means negligible question for any real understanding of the history of the power structure and its relations with society in Russia through the 20th century and up to the present. This is an issue that will require historians of the contemporary era to undertake necessary and fruitful long-term consideration of the phenomena concerned.<sup>39</sup>

There is just one last point to mention in conclusion. Graziosi points out how the view of 1917 in the 1930s under Stalin took on a new twist: “the true meaning of the revolution, was now the preservation of the Russian state tradition, and state continuity, of which Stalin started to present himself as the savior. This implied the rediscovery of some of that state’s traditions and heroes, great tsars included.” The continuity of the Russian state and of Russian history in general unquestionably constitutes another contradictory point of contact between the Orthodox interpretation of 1917 and the one developed in spheres that can be traced back to

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<sup>38</sup> Glennys Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia. Religious Activists in the Village*, University Park, Pa, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997; William B. Husband, “*Godless Communists*”. *Atheism and Society in Soviet Russia 1917-1932*, DeKalb, Il, Northern Illinois University Press, 2000.

<sup>39</sup> Erik van Ree, Stalinist Ritual and Belief System: Reflections on “Political Religion”, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 17/2-3 (2016), pp. 143-161.

the vast and varied field of Russian nationalism and statism as manifested in Stalinist and Soviet Russia as well as the post-communist Russia of the last two decades. A sense of the historical continuity of the Russian state even under the Soviet regime was in fact also to be found in the severely persecuted and beleaguered Orthodox world during World War II. Defense of the homeland under attack was then accompanied in the last few years of fighting and the early postwar period by the resumption of long-term geopolitical visions on the part of Stalin, whose objectives corresponded in many cases also to the traditional expectations of the Orthodox Church.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, however, the rift opened by the Revolution with the ensuing Bolshevik persecution could not be fitted into the framework of continuity. During the 1990s and early 2000s, some of the Orthodox intellectuals least inclined to accept any vision of Russian history including the Soviet experience developed a lively debate on the continuity of the power structure in Russia and proposed the restoration of a succession in legal, historical and cultural terms with prerevolutionary Russia, seen as the cornerstone of authentic rebirth.<sup>41</sup> The unresolved and dramatically ambiguous question of the paradigm of the continuity of the Russian state, often referred to in ecclesiastical discourse, has also resulted in the complicated, contradictory, and multifaceted relationship of the complex Orthodox world with 1917 and its consequences in all their multiplicity.

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<sup>40</sup> Steven Merritt Miner, *Stalin's Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945*, Chapel Hill, N.C.-London, University of North Carolina Press, 2003; Rocucci, *Stalin e il patriarca*; Daniela Kalkandjieva, *The Russian Orthodox Church, 1917-1948. From Decline to Resurrection*, Abingdon-New York, Routledge, 2015. See also Anna Dickinson, A Marriage of Convenience? Domestic and Foreign Policy Reasons for the 1943 Soviet Church-State "Concordat", *Religion, State & Society*, 4 (2000), pp. 337-346.

<sup>41</sup> Michail G. Šepulo (Ed.), *Preemstvennost' i vozroždenie Rossii. Sbornik statej*, Moskva, Posev, 2001.