

RUSSIA'S SPIRITUAL WILDERNESS

Freedom Cannot Take Root Without Moral Renewal

BARBARA VON DER HEYDT

Three years after the exhilarating collapse of centralized Communism, Russia still has a long way to go before it will be a free and democratic country. Even optimists claim the country borders on the ungovernable. Democratic reformers are paralyzed by division into competing factions in the parliament. The old *nomenklatura* still have a chokehold on the country; they have new business cards, but they are still in power.

While there has been enormous liberalization in elections, religious freedom, and privatization, there is still no rule of law, no clear definition of property rights, and in much of the country no real democracy. Bureaucratization is actually worse than it was under the Communists.

MAFIA IN THE "WILD EAST"

Russian society has largely disintegrated to a Hobbesian rule. Organized crime touches at least half of all economic transactions. Criminals are in collusion with the old KGB and Communist Party structures, comprising a multi-level network known as the mafia. Some segments specialize in forging documents, reconnaissance, executions, or illegal currency transactions; others traffic in drugs and weapons. Competing gangs battle each other in shootouts, giving today's Russia its "Wild East" character. Those who refuse to do business with the mafia may discover their kiosk burned down the next day, a car bomb waiting for them, or an assassin's bullet.

Confiscatory tax rates have not only stunted entrepreneurial impulses, they serve as a serious inducement to tax evasion and collusion with the mafia. Businesses pay at least 55 percent of net income, and can incur rates as high as 120 percent. Members of law enforcement and tax collection agencies are paid off to collaborate, making an extremely effective net for coercing cooperation. A contract for mafia protection is cheaper and more reliable than counting on the corrupt police or the choked courts for justice. Mafia fees have become a normal price of doing business. But, "once you are in, the only way to end the relationship is to die," as one Russian put it baldly.

Faced with chaos bordering on anarchy, a quarter of Russia's voters chose ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's party in the last election. He appealed to their frustration at the economic disintegration following

Communism's collapse, as well as their yearning for respected status abroad. Alexander Solzhenitsyn has called Zhirinovskiy "an evil caricature of a Russian patriot." His fisticuffs in parliament, bullyboy blustering, and threats to nuke enemies amuse Russians used to grey politicians.

But Zhirinovskiy is not to be dismissed as merely a buffoon. Diplomatic sources and analysts from Russia, Germany and America have confirmed that Zhirinovskiy did not simply appear like a comet on Russia's political horizon. In the last days of the Gorbachev era, substantial sums of money were reportedly funneled to establish his party as a new political home in the event that the communist structure would collapse. Indeed it did, and the allegations since of KGB funding refuse to go away. "Zhirinovskiy was a KGB creature from the very outset," claims an official from Russia's Ministry of the Interior. Collaborating with the KGB are the old military-industrial complex, the core of directors of state-owned companies, and segments of the army, who have thrown their support behind Zhirinovskiy to regain their old power.

PROMISING SIGNS

Even if, as observers predict, Zhirinovskiy's personal popularity drops sharply, his fascist ideology has deep roots in the Russian population. Fascism's appeal, however, may diminish in the light of promising signs on Russia's economic horizon. Inflation, which threatened to escalate into hyperinflation, has been tamed to a monthly rate below 10 percent this July and August, down from last year's monthly high of 35 percent, defusing some of the more dangerous political volatility. Voucher privatization has put 60 percent of industry into private hands over the past two years. An entrepreneurial class is beginning to emerge, comprised of not only glitzy "New Russians," but also a growing middle-class with innovative ideas and a willingness to work. Whereas half the Russians were below the subsistence level last year, only one third are now.

The private sector is undoubtedly greater than the statistics indicate, as much of its activity is unreported. A

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three-tier economy has evolved; a ruble economy, a dollar economy, and a barter economy. Progress has been made in capital markets, which have increased two-fold in the past two years. The real purchasing power of average Russians is increasing: A consumer basket that cost 90 percent of average monthly income in January 1992 cost only 26 percent last December. The market of 150 million Russians who have a pent-up demand for imported goods like food, clothes, and electronics, is attractive to foreign suppliers.

Yet progress is stalled because the old communist structures are still largely running the country. They were corrupt then, and still are. This fact has derailed many of the well-intended attempts at enterprise and aid, which have disappeared into black holes. J. Michael Waller reports that the former KGB is at the core of much organized crime. They have extensive contacts, experience, and substantial funds procured in the breakup of the old empire. Westerners have unwittingly pursued them; the Russian newspaper *Golos* reported that 80 percent of the joint ventures involve former KGB officers.

Many westerners are bitter because business deals and efforts to provide humanitarian aid have been derailed by corruption. There are many honest people, asserts Russian Orthodox priest Father George Tchistiakov, but "It's a mistake to go to the people at the top, a mistake many westerners have made. The people there are mostly holdovers from the communist structures. You have to go to the middle to find honest people—not the head of a hospital, but directly to a doctor, not to the Academy of Sciences, but directly to a scientist." Success is dependent upon the integrity of the partners.

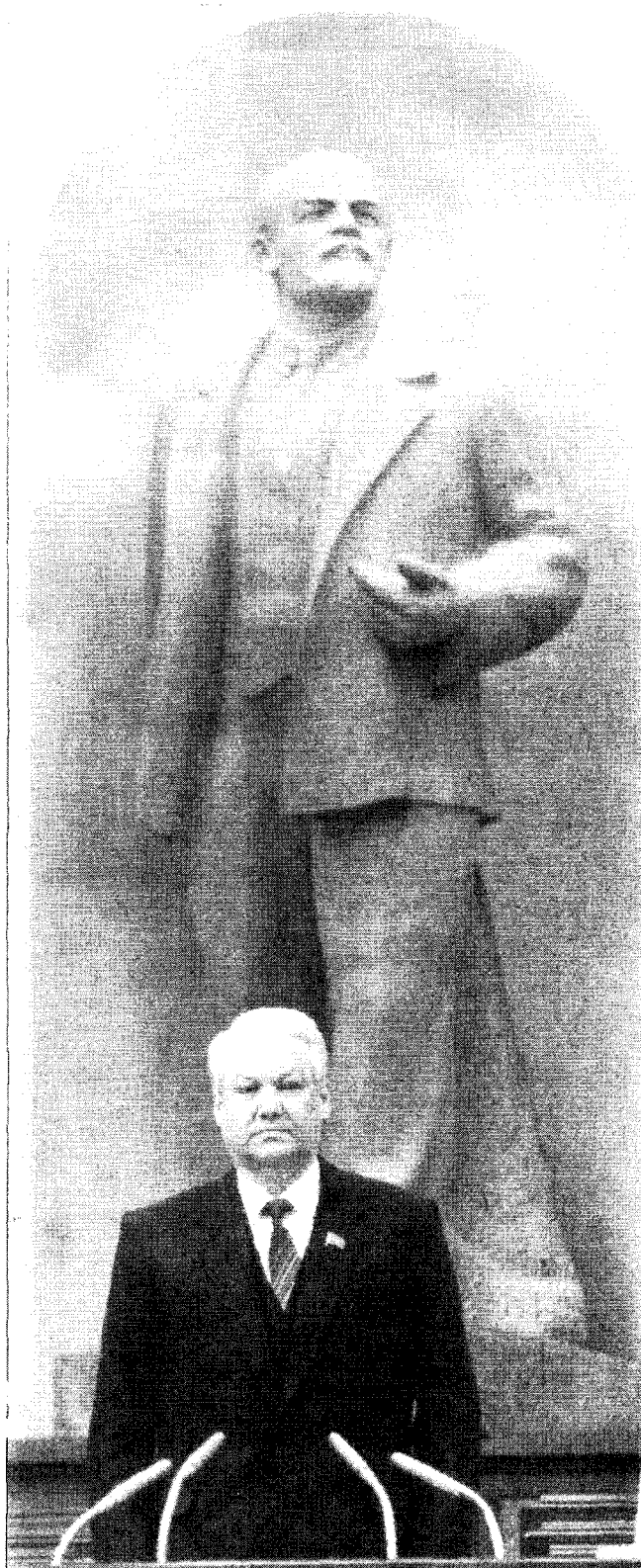
A MORAL VACUUM

The political and economic reformers in Russia have failed to link arms with groups favoring moral renewal. Until they can make a common cause, their efforts will flounder. Americans have discovered that cooperation between social and economic conservatives is needed to come to power. This is even more true in Russia, where moral needs have overwhelmed the country, but failed to find a place on the political agenda.

The legacy of the collapse of Communism is a moral vacuum, say Russians virtually in unison. "What fills it will determine the future of Russia," says Russian Orthodox priest Alexander Borisov. Vitaly Zhurkin, director of the Institute of Europe, claims the biggest danger to Russia is "the collapse of the moral internal basis within the nation." "The moral problem is the main problem," concurs Vagan Gevorgian of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Whether or not the nation can build a new edifice based on democratic principles and a market economy will depend on whether it rests on a foundation of morality. If not, many Russians say prospects for lasting political and economic regeneration in their country are doubtful.

Mikhail Tarusin of the Public Opinion Foundation asserts that the institution of "democracy is not a source of value. It is only an outward form which can be used for good or evil. Hitler came to power democratically, and so could Zhirinovsky. If we don't have the moral tradition, we have no future."

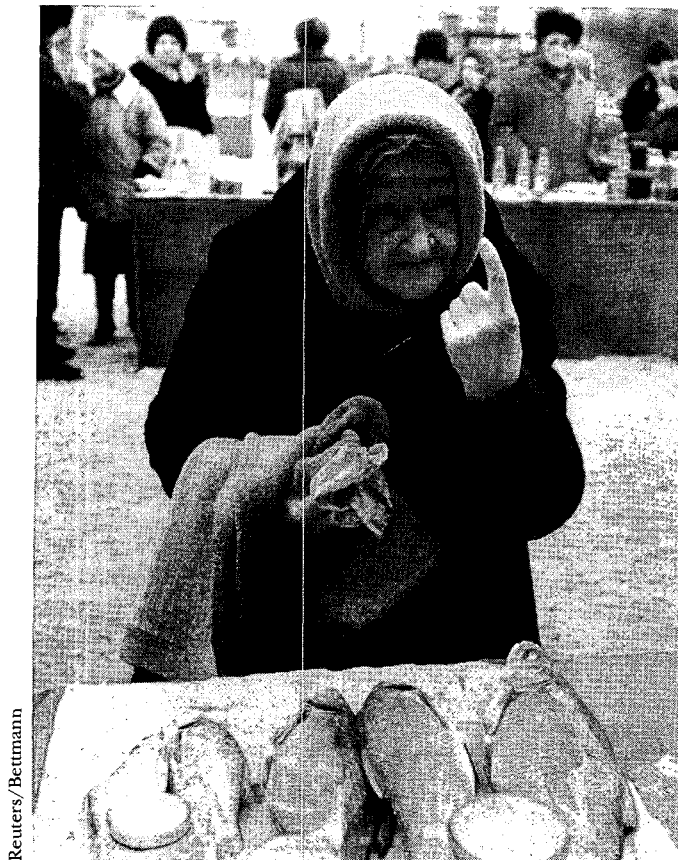
The character of the citizens determines the character



Russian President Boris Yeltsin addressing the Russian parliament. Russia still has a long way to go before it will be a free and democratic country.

Reuters/Bettmann

of a free country. Edmund Burke observed that those who are not governed from within must be governed from without. No laws can create good citizens or a good society. The institutions of democracy and a market econ-



Reuters/Bettmann

Bartering at a Moscow flea market. Economic liberalization has stalled because political and economic reformers have failed to link arms with groups favoring moral renewal.

omy, now planted in Russia, were first planted together in an experiment on American soil which had been prepared by centuries of development in Western civilization. As Russell Kirk eloquently explained in *The Roots of American Order*, the concepts of democracy from Greece, of civic virtue from Rome, and redemption and higher law embodied in Judeo-Christian teaching, merged with Anglo-Saxon common law, property rights and a market economy. These are all part of the intellectual and moral heritage which made the unique American flowering possible.

But it was always understood by the American Founding Fathers that the moral law written in the heart and the code of law written by a nation must be in harmony with a higher law. They are interdependent, just as freedom and responsibility must always be yoked together. Vaclav Havel underscored the point in his address July 4, in Philadelphia: "The Declaration of Independence... states that the Creator gave man the right to liberty. It seems man can realize that liberty only if he does not forget the One who endowed him with it."

THE CULTURE OF THE LIE

In order for the institutions of democracy and a market economy to flourish, moral virtues which make their practice fruitful must also flourish. Only then can people live productively and responsibly in freedom. This is true of every free country, and these virtues must be engen-

dered in Russia. Vladimir V. Ryakhovsky, president of the Christian Legal Center in Russia, makes the central point: "Neither social nor economic renewal can take place without spiritual renewal. It is all based on one foundation."

Communism's legacy is a poison in the character of its subjects. Living 70 years in what Alexander Solzhenitsyn called "the culture of the lie" has left a dark mark on the soul of the nation. Vaclav Havel addressed this in his New Year's speech of 1990: "The worst thing is that we are living in a decayed moral environment. We have become morally ill because we have become accustomed to saying one thing and thinking another.... None of us is merely a victim of it because all of us together helped to create it." It resulted in what George Weigel has identified as "a kind of moral schizophrenia," a line running down the center of each person. What one said depended on the circumstances or the person at hand. The moral and psychological poison of Communism still makes its former subjects ill, and they will take a long time to heal.

LAW OF THE JUNGLE

Evidence of the moral crisis in Russia abounds. Criminal activity exploded once Communism collapsed. According to Evgueni Volk, director of The Heritage Foundation's Moscow office, 2 million crimes were reported last year, including 25,000 assassinations and half a million thefts. Reportedly, 250 cars are stolen daily in Moscow alone. Murders have increased by more than half since handguns have become available. Juvenile crime has increased by 300 percent. Since the privatization of apartments, 13,000 people have been killed by gangs who duped victims into signing documents transferring their property rights after their death. And probably only a fraction of actual crime is reported.

Under Communism people were restrained by the iron fist; with its removal, "now we have an undistorted picture of what our society is like," observes Alexander Tichonenko, General Director of the Uran Nuclear Society, who also represents Prison Fellowship International in Russia. He claims that at least 1 million prisoners are in detention facilities in Russia now, including 240,000 who have not been tried or convicted. More are being added each month. They can face a wait of two to four years in detention facilities so severely overfilled that prisoners in cramped cells can only sleep, stand, or sit alternating in three shifts.

However, Valery Orlov, the Deputy Director of the Russian prison system, claims that the wave of crime may have peaked last year. He contends that people who have never been taught that they are personally responsible for their actions have no inner compass to prohibit uncivilized behavior. The communist vision offered a "moral code and a strong state structure that kept order. Now that those have been destroyed, there's a moral vacuum. In a law abiding person, there is something holy. If it is absent, he turns to robbery, crime, violence, and murder, mainly for material gains. Such a person doesn't feel responsible for his own actions."

"The law of the jungle prevails" in the economy, says Michael Dmitriev, a brilliant 33-year-old economic advisor to Yegor Gaidar and a former St. Petersburg legislator,

now joining Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs's new institute. He observes that illegal or immoral business transactions are not punished by ostracism or by the courts. Lying is a part of the fabric of society. "The moral crisis is profound," says Dmitriev. "The economic problems are not a crisis. Give us 10 years and we'll be a normal country. But the moral crisis is far more serious."

People who could never trust, who had reason to suspect everyone, including family members who might be reporting on them, find it difficult to trust today. Fear of being open was not paranoid, it was necessary for survival. People who for years were denied the opportunity to make decisions find it hard to choose. Initiative was not only discouraged, it was penalized. Now those who have never experienced risk-taking find it uncomfortable. Decades of dependency on the state monolith have bred passivity: decades of collectivism have dulled the sense of individual responsibility. Alexander Zaichenko, president of the Association for Christians in Business, put it this way: "Before, there was no perception of personal moral values.... We had group responsibility but personal irresponsibility."

While a few people have become wealthy by seizing the moment, most are significantly worse off materially than before the collapse of Communism. Many workers are unemployed, others have not been paid for months. Envy is common, and there is a widespread belief that wealth can only be accumulated at the expense of another, an impression sadly confirmed by the success of the most rapacious and least scrupulous. Many people throughout the former communist empire yearn for the old security of the "nanny state." Their subsistence was meager but certain. They had a job, a low-rent place to live, and cradle-to-grave security. The children of Communism have discovered that they are now free to fly, but also to fall.

A LETHAL LEGACY

The alarming disarray in Russian culture has lethal consequences. Mortality rose 20 percent in Russia last year; there were twice as many deaths as births. Entire segments of the health system have collapsed; patients die after operations because of the lack of bandages and antiseptics. Doctors claim they could save 60 percent of their patients if they had the needed medicine. More than half of Russia's deaths were due to non-natural causes; murders have increased by 60 percent. Alcoholism is rampant, and it kills increasingly. Russia has the highest abortion rate in the world—last year 3.3 million, or two abortions for each live birth. It is not unusual for a Russian woman to have had seven abortions, which they view as a means of birth control. Many women die when abortions are botched.

Although pensioners live at the edge of subsistence, there is a disproportionate rise of deaths among men of working age, according to the Fernand Braudel Institute of World Economics. Ella Pamfilova resigned in January as Minister for Social Protection, protesting that she "had been prevented from disclosing the 'suicide epidemic' among fathers unable to support their young families." Unclaimed corpses are stacked in morgues because relatives cannot afford the cost of a burial, which is more than

a month's wages.

The country has been ravaged by mismanagement of resources, which has laid at least half of the former Soviet Union's cultivated soil fallow. Entire villages have been forced to resettle because they have become uninhabitable. The Chernobyl disaster is one which may well be repeated; poorly repaired nuclear power plants are ticking time bombs. Georgetown University demographer Murray Feshbach has concluded that more than 100 cities containing a population of 70 million people live in "atmospheric pollution that exceeds safe levels by a factor of five or more." Three-quarters of the water is contaminated. Feshbach reports that Moscow doctors claim one-fifth of all illness in Russia is attributable to pollution. Not only have trees, rivers, and fields been ravaged; poisoning of the water and food supply have been so acute in some regions that even mother's milk became toxic.

SPIRITUAL HUNGER

In the collapse of Communism and the chaos since, a great spiritual hunger has been unleashed. Those who are picking their way through the rubble now are hungry for permanent things. There have been widespread conversions, particularly among younger people; some call it a genuine revival of major magnitude. Churches are full

THE LEGACY OF THE COLLAPSE OF COMMUNISM IS A MORAL VACUUM.

and clergy are in short supply. But people who have been denied all spiritual teaching for generations are easy prey for the sects that have descended on the streets. Such nontraditional religions as the Unification Church, the Hare Krishna, and the Church of Scientology, in addition to sorcerers, occultists, Satan worshippers, faith healers, psychic spoon benders, hypnotists and every manner of exotic apparition on the spiritual spectrum are present in full force. Just as a starving man will eat anything on a smorgasbord, some gullible Russians have discovered too late that some of these spiritual fruits will make them sick.

Unfortunately, the Russian Orthodox Church is poorly prepared to meet the spiritual hunger. Troubled by the past collusion of its highest church hierarchy with the old communist structure, it has yet to strip even the known KGB collaborators of their church functions. Moreover, there are strains of virulent nationalism and anti-semitism in segments of the church which are anything but signs of spiritual health. In the Russian Orthodox hierarchy, there is a clear hostility to religious pluralism.

The Russian Orthodox Church has collaborated with the powers that be since the times of the czars. A Cheka document dated 1921, unearthed in KGB archives, spells out the objective to "corrupt the Church from within." The means are spelled out unblushingly: naming people of weak character to positions of authority, manipulating them through coercion, blocking those less cooperative or moving them to the hinterlands. There were many who chose prison or death rather than compromise: Forty thousand Orthodox clergy were killed under the Com-



Nobel-prize winning author Alexander Solzhenitsyn returning to Russia after 20 years in exile. Solzhenitsyn has long claimed that the ills suffered by Russia have come "because men forgot God."

munists. Those who remained claim they made accommodations to survive. Arguably not everyone is born to be a martyr.

The Russian Orthodox Church abroad has delivered blistering criticism of the compromised hierarchy in Russia, who coolly reply that it is easy to criticize from a comfortable armchair in the safety of the West. There is no acknowledgment of the need for repentance. But the farther one goes from the patriarchal hierarchy, and the closer to individual parishioners and priests, the greater the thirst for purification and moral revival among the Orthodox.

"MEN FORGOT GOD"

Repentance is the precondition for renewal, claims Solzhenitsyn. As he writes in *From Under the Rubble*, "Only through the repentance of a multitude of people can the air and the soil of Russia be cleansed so that a new, healthy national life can grow up. We cannot raise a clean crop on a false, unsound, obdurate soil." Shortly after Communism collapsed, General Nikolai Stolyarov, who was named by Gorbachev as vice-chairman of the KGB after the attempted coup of 1991, met with a group of visiting westerners. Philip Yancey reports that Stolyarov surprised

them by saying, "Political questions cannot be decided until there is sincere repentance, a return to faith by the people. That is the cross I must bear.... There can be no perestroika apart from repentance. The time has come to repent of that past. We have broken the Ten Commandments, and for this we pay today." The Americans hearing such a statement in the halls of the KGB were thunderstruck.

Solzhenitsyn has long claimed that the ills suffered by Russia have come "because men forgot God." The experiment of Communism was unique, the first attempt to fully eradicate God. Marxist ideology was not casually agnostic, but aggressively atheistic. It was a false religion, promising the perfected state of man, but stripped of transcendence. Because the battle was also a metaphysical one, as George Weigel, Timothy Garton Ash, and others have noted, resistance to Communism had to come from the realm of the spirit. Many people who resisted Communism did so for reasons of personal faith. Many sacrificed their chances for education and their careers; others went to prison. Untold numbers of the faithful died among the 60 million who lost their lives under Communism. Among those who survived were the leaders of the moral revolution which conquered Communism.

A moral and spiritual revolution preceded the political one throughout the entire East bloc, with a handful of courageous resisters leading the way. Beginning in Poland, then in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and elsewhere, a tiny remnant rooted in morality formed the basis of resistance movements which swelled, ultimately toppling the Berlin Wall. The collapse of the Soviet Union was not far behind as a moral, spiritual, and political earthquake rocked the entire continent. Today these resisters are the moral leaders of their countries, although only in Poland and the Czech Republic have they become major political leaders as well. In Russia, former dissidents are rare in positions of political power.

THE NATION'S CONSCIENCE

With the return of Alexander Solzhenitsyn to his homeland, some have placed great hope in his power to galvanize a moral revival in Russia. He has clearly stated he has no political ambitions, although he is being courted assiduously by various groups. Since his trumpeted arrival in Vladivostok, the reviews from his countrymen, as reported by the international press, have been mixed. Aleksandr A. Alyokhin, a 30-year-old merchant marine, said "If such people as Solzhenitsyn return to Russia, there is hope for its renewal, the renewal of its spiritual life." But Gavril Popov, former mayor of Moscow remarked, "He has come back a little too late." Journalist Grigori Amelin of the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* groused, "Who needs Solzhenitsyn? No one," dismissing "the return of a living relic to the mausoleum of all the Russias."

Solzhenitsyn's books encouraged the moral fortitude of a generation. Valery Borschov was one man riveted by his words. "Solzhenitsyn's letter of 1974 made a great impression on me. He claimed if you want to live out the commandment not to lie, it demands sacrifice." Borschov paid the price of conflict with the KGB, which assaulted him physically. As a matter of conscience, he left his position as a writer for one of Russia's most influential

newspapers, painting bridges in Siberia and working in construction to survive. The former dissident has since been elected to the Duma, where he is now Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Religion and Charity, and one of the leaders of the Russian Christian Democratic Union. He is one of the rare exceptions, both a moral and a political leader. Borschov was there in Vladivostok to greet Solzhenitsyn on his arrival. But in contrast to Borschov, whose life was transformed by Solzhenitsyn's writing, many young Russians today do not know his books. Solzhenitsyn is apparently more widely known and respected in the West, a prophet not honored by all in his own country. But his voice is the greatest, perhaps the only one, capable of speaking as the nation's conscience.

MORAL RENEWERS

Father Alexander Men, who has been called the C.S. Lewis of Russia, is a major figure on the intellectual and spiritual landscape of Russia. A brilliant Christian apologist, his 10 books are in the opinion of some Russians a powerful tool for sparking moral renewal. This Russian Orthodox priest, the friend of Andrei Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, with a powerful intellect and a devoted following, shaped a generation of Russians spiritually. He was murdered with an axe, the Russian symbol of vengeance, on September 9, 1990, as perhaps the most recent Russian martyr. While his murder has still not been solved, some attribute it to a collaboration between the KGB and reactionary strains of the church opposed to his ecumenism or to his Jewish heritage. Mikhail Men, his son, has been elected to the Moscow Region Duma, its parliament, and continues in the legacy of his father's work.

Alexander Borisov is another Russian Orthodox priest who holds potential for kindling moral renewal in his country. The godson of Alexander Men, he is a biologist who turned to theology at age 33. He was blocked from ordination as a priest in the Russian Orthodox Church for 16 years for refusing to collaborate with the KGB. As a man of proven integrity, he was elected to the Moscow City Council in the first free elections in 1990. During the attempted coup of 1991, he was one of the resisters who went directly to the soldiers surrounding the building of Parliament and begged them not to obey orders to shoot. Beyond his parish responsibilities, Borisov is the president of the Bible Society in Russia and heads the Alexander Men Foundation. He does weekly radio broadcasts on moral and religious issues that are reaching nearly one million listeners. One popular program features live calls, with listeners posing questions on faith they were never permitted to ask before.

Many of Borisov's parishioners, under the leadership of Father George Tchistiakov, work with the Russian Children's Hospital in Moscow. Children and their parents come there from all over the former Soviet Union for highly specialized treatment, including blood diseases or kidney transplants, and must remain sometimes for several years. Parents are forced to take over the feeding and much of the care of the young patients, because in the wake of collapsed funding, the hospital cannot provide such services. Some parents cannot either. The parishioners adopt these families as their own, and virtually

live among them.

This commitment is significant, not only for this parish, but for the country as a whole. Today there are increasing numbers of Christians in Russia who are reinvigorating the tradition of *miloserdie*, or mercy, by putting their faith into practice. They are entering hospitals to tend the children of Chernobyl. They are feeding the homeless in soup kitchens, as does former prisoner of conscience Alexander Ogorodnikov in Moscow. They are filling some of the gaping holes left in caring for the weakest in a country where the state no longer can. Russia is discovering private solutions are both necessary and possible.

REACHING OUT

Under the Communists, manifestations of living one's faith were limited to merely attending worship service. Charity and visitation of hospitals and prisons were forbidden and punishable. Some Christians, particularly Baptists, engaged in such activities anyway, risking fines or worse consequences. But such acts lie outside the Russian Orthodox tradition. As Mikhail Tarusin explained it, "We were used to the tradition to go to the church, but not to the tradition that the church goes out to the people." Now an outreach ministry is beginning, and may invigorate the Russian Orthodox Church at the grass-roots level. These small but important actions are the roots of a civil society.

Valery Orlov, Deputy Director of the Russian Prisons, was among initiators who invited Christians to make visi-

A MORAL AND SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION PRECEDED THE POLITICAL ONE THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE EAST BLOC, WITH A HANDFUL OF COURAGEOUS RESISTERS LEADING THE WAY.

tations in the prisons in the Gorbachev era, even before the law was changed in 1992 to permit such visits. Faced with an explosion in crime, desperately overcrowded facilities, and troubling recidivism, Orlov hoped the churches could somehow help. He has personally visited prison converts since and concluded, "I am sure they will not break the law when they are out. It's a pity there are very few of them."

There are a multiplicity of efforts to reinvigorate Russian society intellectually and ethically. Some 200 private educational institutions have sprung up in the past three years. New textbooks which incorporate moral teachings are being written for the entire Russian school system in a major project headed by Alexander Abramov. But western funds are still needed to print the books. Teachers are being invited into the schools to teach courses to children on morality. Award-winning television programming produced by "Freedom Channel-Persona," a group headed by former dissident Mikhail Kazachkov, stresses the moral foundation of a democracy.

Alexander Zaichenko is an economist and former advisor to Gorbachev who now heads the Association for Christians in Business. He is also co-founding the Russian-American Christian University in cooperation with the Coalition of Christian Colleges in the United States. Zaichenko sponsors seminars to teach skills to entrepreneurs, test them to determine their abilities, and advise them on how to start a business. His program has trained 1,000 applicants in the past year, half of whom succeeded in starting an enterprise, creating 2,000 new jobs. But the seminars also include a moral component, according to Zaichenko: "We tell them they must rely on good relations based on eternal moral values."

Zaichenko believes that "privatization will help build new moral and ethical standards, reinforcing the integrating factors in political life." As he puts it, "The first time a person has the chance to become an owner, it undermines the old slave mentality. When he has his own property, he acknowledges the need to care for the property of others. He experiences personal responsibility, and from that a sense of morality, and ultimately the Creator." Banks are more willing to lend to these entrepreneurs because the moral component is more likely to make them a reliable client.

Anatoly Pchelintsev is a dynamic 40-year-old lawyer and Lieutenant Colonel in the Army who founded an association for Christians in the military in 1991 called Faith and Courage. During the attempted coup of August 1991, he went to the parliament building to defend Russia's fledgling democracy, defying orders of his superiors.

THE SPIRITUAL FORTITUDE PRODUCED IN THE CRUCIBLE OF COMMUNISM IS LUMINOUS.

Having left the Army last November, he founded the Christian Legal Center. Pchelintsev, with his legal partners Vladimir Ryakhovsky and Sergej V. Tjurin, serve as consultants to the Duma, drafting new laws on freedom of conscience and religious issues. Their legal center defends victims of the abuse of religious and human rights throughout Russia. They have been deluged with pleas for help.

RENEWERS UNDER ATTACK

Sergei Kovalyov, a former dissident close to Sakharov and editor of the *samizdat* "Chronicle of Current Events," is a widely respected champion of morality and human rights and serves in Yeltsin's administration. Former dissident Valery Borschov, together with Vitaly Savitsky, heads the Russian Christian Democrat Union, which focuses on the need for civic virtue as well as reform policy. Joining them in the Duma is Gleb Yakunin, a Russian Orthodox priest who spent eight years in prison for documenting persecution of Christians under the Communists. Such political figures claim the moral high ground.

Unfortunately, Russians actively working for moral renewal in their country are in conflict with elements of

the old guard. Alexander Zaichenko has been denied a passport to travel abroad twice this past year, and cannot leave the country. He was told that the KGB had blocked his application. Last October Anatoly Pchelintsev was placed under house arrest during the showdown between Yeltsin and the old Communists, to prevent his lending support to the reformers. He was threatened with a dishonorable discharge from the Army. In July, Father Alexander Borisov was attacked in the Moscow newspaper *Literaturnaya Rossiya* for making Catholic literature available among the offerings of his church, a move apparently intended to prod the Patriarch to take action against him. Other priests attacked similarly have been banished to the provinces as recently as February. Father Gleb Yakunin, who was elected to the Supreme Soviet in 1990, defied the Patriarch's new ban on clergy holding elected office, choosing to remain in the Duma. Yakunin was stripped of his clerical responsibilities last November.

There is not yet a broad coalition of figures committed to political reform who also have a vision of the necessity for moral renewal. These people are the exceptions. But until Russia's market reformers recognize the need to make moral renewal a part of their agenda, their efforts are doomed to fail. Without cultural regeneration, neither economic nor political reform will take root and bear fruit. Western advisors transferring democracy and the market economy without addressing the need for moral regeneration are just as short-sighted. Mikhail Dmitriev claims, "The people who make the reforms are more concerned with institutional changes, arguing that they will create a more friendly environment for moral changes." But moral and political change must be simultaneous.

RESISTING WESTERNIZATION

Despite his own agnosticism, Dmitriev claims that the only way to reform Russia, which he calls a "profoundly atheistic society," is to restore Christian values. But he makes the point that Orthodox values are pre-Reformation values, which are counter to markets and capitalism, condemning the accumulation of wealth and forbidding the taking of interest. "The Reformation never reached Russia, and this is the attitude which controls their attitudes to economic behavior. Orthodox values are not compatible with real market values." As reformers move ahead in the transition, some significant elements of the Russian Orthodox Church perceive a loss of Russian national identity in the westernizing reforms, and therefore oppose them. Dmitriev concludes Russia needs an infusion of Protestantism into Orthodox thinking on the market.

However, there is a great deal of resistance to westernization of Russia, not only in Russian Orthodox circles. Russian moral renewers believe they will succeed only if they can successfully appeal to the older virtues of Russian society, rather than trying to become a copy of the West. Mikhail Dmitriev makes the point that "Russians lost their national identity. The best way to restore ethical identity is to urge a return to the Russian tradition." It is embodied at its best in the literature of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Dmitriev contends, "We need to find a more organic Russian version accepted by the Russians, based on natu-

ral law, civil virtue, and a return to national pride and public responsibility." This point may rankle some westerners, but it is repeated by many Russians. Western attempts to help have not always taken this attitude into account.

CELLS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

There are few Russians who form a bridge from the moral renewers in the private sector to the political world in their country, and to their counterparts in the West. What's more, many of the potential renewers do not know one another. In the course of helping newly-founded private organizations to obtain registration, Anatoly Pchelintsev has discovered cells of a civil society in Russia: Some 15 new associations have sprung up for Christians in business, in medicine, in the military, among farmers, students, and educators. There are more than 100 fledgling groups dealing with public policy, consumer information, and citizens initiatives.

From the West, nearly 700 church and parachurch organizations are trying to help the former Soviet Union, as are numerous government and private efforts. But for the most part, these people have no knowledge of each other or one another's work. Networking in the western sense is virtually nonexistent in Russia. What's more, there is animosity among Russians of differing persuasions and skepticism of the political world on the part of many people of faith. A mentality which quickly branded "enemies" before still does.


Just as The Heritage Foundation has created a network, the Resource Bank, in which some 400 American conservative organizations share ideas and strategies, so too Russian democrats need a structure for cooperation between groups that understand the need for moral renewal as well as political reform. What the West can do is support these people and find others like them, and equip and enable them to do their work better. Contacts and opportunities for cooperation are needed as much as funding. The material needs of the country are so overwhelming that humanitarian aid alone can never meet them. The root causes have to be addressed, and Russians need to be equipped to manage their own resources and lives. Investments in human capital, training programs, higher education, and help toward self-help are most likely to yield long-term benefits. If the West supports healthy indigenous efforts and encourages self-reliance, renewers like these could prove to be the critical mass in revitalizing the moral landscape of Russia.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn has long cherished the notion



The Russian Orthodox Church is in a poor position to meet the Russian people's spiritual hunger. The Church has yet to strip even known KGB collaborators of their church functions.

of a self-sacrificing elite, not based on birth, wealth, or power, but on one's spiritual state. Those who survived Communism with their integrity intact are this spiritual elite. The spiritual fortitude produced in the crucible of Communism is luminous. The people possessing it are individual candles on an otherwise dark landscape. Just as a single candle causes much darkness to recede, so can a small number of moral renewers light the way for a free Russia to emerge from the wreckage of collapsed Communism with a new character.

As daunting as the economic and political tasks are, reforming the character of the nation's soul is far harder yet. But in the absence of such a moral transformation, there can be no lasting economic or political reform. The destruction of the Russian soul was so devastating that it will take years for the country to find its compass. A free and stable Russia cannot emerge immediately. Indeed, it may take more than a generation. The children of Israel wandered 40 years in the wilderness, unlearning the traits of slavery in Egypt before entering the Promised Land. Russians may be entering their wilderness years in their exodus from the slavery of Communism. 

REEL POLITIK

Great Conservative Cinema

MICHAEL SMITH

Few institutions exert more influence over American popular culture than the wildly successful Hollywood dream factory. At the same time, many fret over the collapsing moral standards in our culture and accuse the film industry of being a relentless repeat offender. Earthquakes, mudslides, fires, riots, O.J. and Ford Broncos—can anything good come out of Southern California and its cinema empire?

The answer is a robust “Yes.” There is still much to be admired in our movie-going society, films that challenge us to excellence, inspire us to heroism, shame our consciences, and stir us toward a life-engaging faith.

The following viewer’s guide reflects some of the best classic and contemporary titles available, films that typify the traditional values of faith, family, and freedom. The guide is selective: You’ll find films that 1) you have not seen before, or 2) that you have not seen since the advent of microwave popcorn, or 3) that you may not have considered from the, well, unique perspective of our reviews. We welcome your suggestions; write and let us know your own favorites.

ACHIEVEMENT

Relying on role models, moral courage, or faith, these *bildungsromans* have—at their core—characters determined to succeed despite vast opposition.

ELEPHANT MAN This haunting and beautiful film from director David Lynch portrays a doctor’s (Anthony Hopkins) dogged efforts to rescue a disfigured man from the life of circus freak. But it exposes so much more: the narrowness of elitist values, the human spirit transformed through adversity, and the sustaining power of faith. By the time John Hurt’s Elephant Man recites the 23rd Psalm, your heart is in your throat. A masterpiece on almost every level.

MAN WITHOUT A FACE A mysterious, disfigured recluse (Mel Gibson) becomes an unlikely mentor to a fatherless boy who wants to be a pilot but lacks the discipline and motivation. Together, the two discover the value of friendship and learn to sacrifice, compromise, and mature. Gibson’s directorial debut works best at the male-bonding level, providing thoughtful entertainment.

MY LEFT FOOT With the help of family, a perceptive therapist, and his irrepressible will, cerebral palsy victim Christy Brown reminds us that human achievement has more to do with heart than it does with circumstances. Christy, played by Daniel Day-Lewis in an Oscar-winning performance, is nearly completely debilitated at birth and quickly labeled hopelessly uneducable. But Christy has a good left foot, and he uses it to paint, write, and otherwise give expression to his brilliant mind. Revealed through flashbacks, the film touchingly leads to a surprise and triumphant ending.

AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN The Navy tames a working-class playboy. Richard Gere stars as a symbol of American youth and independence (with motorcycle, of course) who learns to be a team player, with a little help both from his drill master and his girlfriend. The military routine marries his raw determination to self-discipline, duty, honor, and, by film’s end, domestication. A dramatic display of the great forces that challenge a youth to grow into manhood.

THE RIGHT STUFF A look at NASA’s fly-boys, whose eyes were fixed ultimately on the moon. The Mercury astronauts fight to keep control of their spacecrafts and their personal lives as scientists and the media threaten to reduce them to lab monkeys. In Chuck Yeager—“the best pilot anyone had ever seen”—we witness most clearly the unique American blending of competitiveness, guts, and Yankee ingenuity.

ROCKY “It doesn’t matter if I lose this fight. All I want to do is go the distance,” says Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone), an underground Philadelphia boxer who gets a shot at the title. Rocky is the big lug everybody loves, who visits pet stores and tries to be a role model for the kids, as best as a loan shark’s goon can. While opponent Apollo Creed and the media exploit the event, Rocky trains alone, refusing to get caught up in anything but the task before him. He goes the distance, becoming a larger-than-life inspiration to American film.

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